

Brewing a Mayflower Pale Ale

By Tom Solomon and Tom Waterton; additional photos from Steve Haskey

Brewing is a creative art that has had a real resurgence in both Europe and North America over the last couple of decades.

Once seen as a fairly obscure hobby practiced by students after cheap booze or by bearded old men, the homebrew scene is now fizzing with popularity, with plenty of websites, magazines, clubs, and brewing competitions catering to the growing number of homebrewers.

Like most other craft activities enjoyed in the Western world today, people don't tend to brew primarily for economic reasons or for convenience; they do it in large part for the love of it. As with other crafts, what appeals

to many is the satisfaction of understanding the processes involved and in having made something of quality yourself.

Brewing in Britain was already well established when the Romans arrived in 54 BC and has been an important part of the culture in Britain ever since. Before the sterilization of drinking water, small beer (which had a very low alcohol content) was consumed by all members of the family at mealtimes as it was known to be safer than drinking the water.



For centuries, all English villages typically had three common features: a church, a village shop, and a pub. (A survey in 1577 found there was a pub for every 187 people in England and Wales!) And the social side of brewing continues to this day.

When you brew, it's rarely just for yourself: most homebrewers we know love to share their creations with friends, family, and work colleagues.

As this year marks the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower's

pioneering voyage from England to the New World, we decided to get together and go on our own small voyage of discovery and make a commemorative brew. And we thought we'd share our experiment with all of you.

Living in Southampton, England, which is where the Mayflower originally set sail from, and working for a large American company, we recognize the significance of this historic voyage, which first connected the Old World to the New World of America.



Mayflowers

Admittedly, the early English puritans might not have been known as great beer guzzlers, but what we did discover is that the fruit of the hawthorn tree (which grows natively throughout the UK and is used in some ales, wines, gins, and brandies) is commonly known as “the mayflower”.

So, one lunchtime back in October, we left the studio to walk around the Hursley grounds to forage for some mayflowers.

Our recipe



Malts

Maris Otter, CaraRed, CaraBelge, and wheat malt

Hops

Chinook and Cascade

Other

Water (known as liquor), yeast, and hawthorn berries

“I like my water with barley and hops”

Following the foragers’ code, we picked only what we intended to use, leaving plenty for the Hursley animals and birds.

We then sat down to design a “Mayflower Pale Ale” recipe. A quick bit of research taught us that hawthorn berries have a mild, peppery flavor, so we were careful not to add too many other competing flavors.

We decided to use Cascade hops (the signature hop used in American pale ales), which would provide some citrus and spice flavors as well as Chinook hops (a European/American cross breed), which should add some further spice and pine notes.

We then plumped for a traditional English ale yeast (Safale S-04).



In essence, beer is made by soaking barley in water until enzymes are activated, which turn the grains' starches into sugars. Hops are then used to add bitterness and flavor. Finally, yeast is added to ferment the brew.

Our process

Prep

First, we got all of the equipment out and heated up 27 liters of water to 65°C.

Mashing

We then added the malt to the pot and insulated it to maintain temperature. The sweet infusion of malts in the liquor prior to fermentation is known as wort. The sugars are what get turned into alcohol during fermentation.

Sparging

To get as much malty goodness as possible out of the grains, after the boil we hung the grain bag over the pan and poured liquid from the pot back through the bag.

The boil

We added the initial hops (Chinook) to the wort and kept them on a rolling boil. After 45 mins, we added Cascade hops. Hops added earlier in the process provide bitterness; hops added later provide aroma.



Transfer to the brew bin

After a further 15 mins, we let the wort cool then siphoned it from the pot into the brew bin. When the wort was down to 20°C, we added the yeast.

Dry hopping

One week later, we added some more hops and the hawthorn berries. This is known as dry hopping and is done at this late stage to get as much of the fruity flavors (and not more bitterness) from the hops and berries.



Studio tasting event

In all, our brew spent 2 weeks in the brew bin, fermenting away. We then bottled it and waited a further 4 weeks for it to condition further. But then came the most exciting part of all: time to crack open some bottles with friends and see how our brew turned out!

daffodils and rolling countryside was certainly an enjoyable way to take a short break from work.

And what did people make of the beer? Well, we had several people come back for seconds (and we didn't spot anyone



So, one Friday (when it wasn't raining) we brought in a load of bottles and put out an open invite to the studio to join us during lunchtime for an al fresco beer tasting session.

Working in the grounds of an old English stately house has its perks and getting to stand around enjoying a drink with a few friends amidst the backdrop of

spitting it out) so we were happy. Plus, people commented that it was pleasingly bitter and hoppy, and some detected the peppery, musty, and woody notes.

The Mayflower pilgrims might not have been into their beer, but their voyage of discovery 400 years ago opened up new horizons. And we'll happily drink to that. Cheers!

