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Making Cyser

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Sonoma County produces a wide range of agricultural products in addition to wine grapes. Apples are especially abundant in the Sebastopol-Forestville area and high quality honeys are produced by local apiaries. Apple juice and honey combine to make a wonderful fermented beverage called Cyser.

Depending on the amount of honey added, the Cyser Maker can produce dry, light-bodied "wines" reminiscent of chenin blanc or heavier, sweeter apple-flavored meads. I prefer the lighter style (recipe follows) which brings out the pleasant aromatic qualities of the apples and also makes for a crisp, refreshing summer drink.

The blending of compatible honeys and apple juices is essential if you want a balanced cyser. Neutral flavored honeys, such as clover or star thistle, are best. "Meadmakers Magic" clover honey sold by the Beverage People is an excellent choice. Be wary of honeys with distinctive floral or fruity attributes as they may overwhelm or conflict with the delicate apple character.

Choose apples varieties, or blends of apples, that have medium to high acid levels and pronounced aromatic properties. Apples with good acidity are jonathon, winesap, gravenstein, granny smith and pippens. Aromatic apples include gravenstein, mcintosh and pippens. Sweet dessert-type apples, like red delicious, golden delicious, or rome beauty, are less expensive and can contribute sugars to the blend but add little to the final flavor or aroma.

Gravenstein apples, the pride of Sonoma County, are my favorite because they possess good flavor, good acidity and are quite aromatic. Their high malic acid contents contribute sufficiently high levels of acidity so that acid additions are not necessary to balance the syrupy sweetness of the honey. Fermenting cyser at the cooler temperatures of 50 - 60 oF, like a white wine or lager, seems to preserve more of the apple-y character.

Ingredients for 5 gallons

4 3/4 gallons unfiltered Gravenstein Juice (or a blend of apple juices)
7 1/2 pounds of Honey
1/2 gallon Water
2 oz. Beverage People Mead Nutrient
1/4 tsp. Irish Moss
Adequate amount of Acid Blend to bring total acid level to 0.5%
10 gm. Prise de Mousse Wine Yeast
Campden Tablets for sulfiting after fermentation is complete
Starting Gravity: 1.092 (23 Brix)

Directions

1. Heat the water in your boiling kettle until warm (170 oF), turn off the heat and stir in the honey until dissolved.
2. Heat the honey solution to boiling, add Irish moss and boil for 10 minutes; use a spoon to remove the scum that forms on the surface. (Note: by heating the honey in water instead of apple juice to remove the honey's impurities, you will not set the pectins in the juice which will give a cloudiness to the final product.)
3. Stir in mead nutrient and cool to room temperature.
4. Transfer honey solution to glass fermentors and add apple juice. Test for sugar and acid levels and adjust with acid blend as needed.
5. Stir yeast into 1 cup of 80 oF water. Wait 10 minutes and add yeast to surface of must. After 4 hours, stir in.
6. Ferment for two to three weeks at room temperature until visible signs of fermentation have ceased.
7. Rack cyser off of sediment into a 5 gallon glass fermentor and add 3 crushed campden tablets. Age cyser under airlock for 2 - 3 months. (Option: cold stabilize by placing the carboy in a refrigerator for 2 - 3 weeks prior to bottling to help clarify the cyser.)
8. Bottle cyser in beer bottles, champagne bottles or wine bottles and age for additional 3 months. (Option: adjust final sweetness by adding sugar syrup to taste and remember to stir in potassium sorbate as a wine stabilizer.)

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