

Session Lesson

Craft-beer tastings are bubbling up in gastropubs all over town, so why not host one at your place? Herewith, a guide to hosting a successful beer soiree at home.

BY ANNE VICKMAN

Step one: Stock up. Choose several pale ales or a slew of different styles, but keep the number at six or below (yes, it's hard) so as not to bewilder your palate. If you or your cohorts are new to craft beer, avoid anything extreme; overly hopped or highly alcoholic varieties can be overwhelming.

Buy from locations with a sizable selection and knowledgeable staffers who can answer your questions. Try Bauer Wine and Spirits (330 Newbury St., 617-262-0363), Publick House Provisions (1706 Beacon St., Brookline, 617-487-4322), Downtown Wine and Spirits (225 Elm St., Somerville, 617-625-7777), and Marty's Fine Wines (675 Washington St., Newton, 617-332-1230) to stock up on brews. And of course, don't think twice about asking for recommendations.

Consider choosing beers based on the season, since weather can affect your cravings. Anthony Liberti, beer and cheese buyer at the South End Formaggio, recommends Belgian-style dubbels (Allagash Dubbel), pumpkin ales (Cambridge Brewing Company's

Great Pumpkin Ale), and Märzen-style Oktoberfest lagers (Brooklyn Brewery's Oktoberfest) for fall. Break out the strong stuff, such as barley wine ales (Cisco Brewers' Baggywrinkle) and Russian imperial stouts (Otter Creek Russian Imperial Stout), for winter months. Spring is the time for mild English porters (Mayflower Porter) and grassy Belgian farmhouse *saisons* (Pretty Things' Jack d'Or). In the summer, reach for sour beers (Dogfish Head's Festina Pêche) and IPAs (Kennebec River IPA).

Know your pouring basics. "I always choose a glass with a stem," says Dann Paquette,

co-owner and cofounder of the Pretty Things Beer and Ale Project in Cambridge. Paquette, who has been brewing beer for 18 years, points out that keeping your hands off the glass allows the suds to stay chilled. Beer shouldn't be too warm or too cold—between 45 and 55 degrees is ideal. "Pour straight down the center of the glass," he advises. This releases the full aroma of the beer and creates that coveted layer of foam, or "head," at the top.

Taste in order of flavor intensity and alcohol content, suggests Andy Crouch, Cambridge

resident and author of *Great American Craft Beer*. "[Beers] that are the lighter on the palate are better to start with, versus a 10 percent alcohol hop bomb." Save high-alcohol, bitter-tasting beers for last.

Be a careful observer. Before you sip, take a big whiff. You're sniffing for raw materials such as hops and yeast, which often have the fruity aroma of berries, apples, or bananas. Swirling the beer can release more scent, but it isn't necessary like it is with wine. Next, look at the color and clarity, which reflect malt characteristics and filtration. These visual cues will help you note similarities and differences among comparable brews. Lighter beers have pale malts, which impart a smooth, crisp taste; amber brews tend to have caramel malts that add sweetness and body; and russet- and brown-hued beers contain roasted malts with flavors of cocoa and coffee. Filtered beer is clear, while unfiltered varieties are hazy. Finally, take a swig. "You're going to be hit by things you picked up in the smell," says Drew Brosseau, president of the Massachusetts Brewers Guild and founder of Plymouth-based Mayflower Brewing Company. "Notice how the flavor changes over the course of the first sip through the aftertaste. You'll find that some are sweet, dry, nicely bitter, or harshly bitter."

Add some sustenance. A unique brew calls for complementary fare. However, Paquette suggests caution when pairing with food. "Don't eat anything that will smother your palate," he says. "Beer is not meant to compete with anything crazy. Cheese and beer are perfect together." Liberti concurs. "The most important thing when choosing a cheese is balance," he says. "Find common flavors—they will cancel each other out, allowing the more subtle flavors to come out." Try Belgian *witbier* with fresh goat cheese, or malty brown ale with a clothbound cheddar. For a dessert option, try pairing barley wine with Stilton, or stout with Brie. Suzanne Schalow, general manager of Cambridge Common, adds that sweet red fruits like raspberries and blackberries go well with basic porters and stouts.

Compare notes. Don't forget to talk about what you see, smell, and taste. "That's when you start going down a path toward becoming a beer enthusiast," says Crouch. 🍺



PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT GOODWIN; STYLING BY TRAVIS GRANDON/ENNIS



ACORN TREE & LANDSCAPE

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION SPECIALIZING LARGE TREE TRANSPANTING



OVER 2,000 MATURE TREES AVAILABLE TO EXACTLY MEET YOUR LANDSCAPE

- All Species Available
- Planting & Maintenance
- Pruning & Trimming
- Fertilizing & Watering

A LEADER IN NEW ENGLAND IN LARGE TREE & SHRUB TRANSPANTING

JAPANESE MAPLES | DOGWOODS | BIRCH | SUMMER MAPLES | SPICEIES | ETC...

HAMMILL, MA • TEL: 978-461-1444 • FAX: 978-461-1445 • ACORN@TREEACORN.COM

What is it like to feel Beautiful?

PLASTIC SURGERY SPECIALISTS, INC.

Excellence in cosmetic surgery

Robert H. Gilman, MD, FACS
Richard J. Ehrlichman, MD, FACS

Offering the Full Range of Cosmetic Plastic Surgery of the Face and Body

Certified by
The American Board of Plastic Surgery

Member of
The American Society of Plastic Surgeons
Faculty, Harvard Medical School

888 Washington St., Waltham, MA
TEL: 978-251-7247
TOLL-FREE (800) 225-5125 • FAX: (978) 251-7247
Evening hours available

AUTUMN SPECIAL FOR TUMMY TUCKS AND BREAST AUGMENTATIONS. MAKING SHAPING UP AFFORDABLE. CALL TODAY!

Visit our web site @ plasticsurgeryplastics.com
Monitor this ad for a free consultation