

Harvest Time Brings Out the Hops



The Ska "Hop Harvest Crew" prepare to brew their "Hoperation Ivy" Special Local Release.

From early September through mid-October, my e-mail inbox was flooded, as it is each year, with press releases about brewers abandoning their mash tuns and bottling lines to head out into the fields to gather "fresh" or "wet hops."

It seems that more and more craft brewers, like the "Hop Harvest Crew" from Ska Brewing Company in Durango, Colorado (pictured below) are "hopping" into their trucks to visit local hop farms and bring back wonderful, end of the season, fresh hops to create some very unique limited release beers.

Ska's 2009 wet-hopped IPA called "Hoperation Ivy" was released in late September as part of their "Local Series" of beers and it is a "hop heads" dream, meriting an "A minus" rating on beeradvocate.com.

"My truck smelled like hops, I smelled like hops, and I thought to myself, using locally-grown hops that we just picked a few hours ago is going to make an incredible beer," said Ska Co-Founder Bill Graham.

Plus, added Ska Co-Founder Dave Thibodeau, "Using local ingredients means fewer ingredients we have to transport here from the Northwest or Europe, and that's about the biggest reduction in environmental impact you can get."

Taking the quest for "fresh" hops to the next level, the 2008 hop shortage prompted bigger craft brewers like Rogue and Sierra Nevada to take the next logical step, and start growing not only their own hops, but barley as well. The move was like stealing a page from the winemaker's playbook, and for Sierra Nevada growing their own

ingredients has yielded their fabulous Chico Estates and fall Harvest Ales, while Rogue created their Sesquicentennial Series boasting a series of beers containing all Oregon produced ingredients.

"Wet hops"- what's the big deal?

It is all about the flavor, which is all about the freshness. Generally, when hops are harvested they are dried, pressed into pellets and stored until they are ordered and used by the brewer. Fresh hop or "wet hop" beers use whole hop flowers that are plucked from the vine just hours before they are used. These beers stand out because the hops they use still retain a majority of the fresh flavors that can be reduced during processing.

"Wet hop" beers are even more unique, because vine fresh hops are not an ingredient that every brewer has the luxury of using. Hops won't grow just anywhere, so close proximity to hop vines and a very dedicated brewing staff is a prerequisite.

Hops fall into three different categories: bittering, flavoring and aroma hops. Depending on the variety, a specific hop type can be used for one or all of these categories and their contribution to an individual beer's profile is dependant upon when the hops are added in the brewing process. Bittering hops are added first,

followed by flavoring styles, and aroma hops are added last. All categories can benefit from "wet hop" availability, however they are best used as flavoring and aroma additions to the boil.

Bittering hops are high in alpha acids and are added at the beginning of the boil. Flavoring hops are added next and tend to have a low to medium alpha acid profile. Aromatic hops also have an alpha acid rating that is low to medium, however these hops are used to provide the beer's unique bouquet. The higher the alpha acids, the more bitter the hops.

"Wet hop" beers we recommend for your local "hop head":

- Sierra Nevada Harvest Ale
- Deschutes Hop Trip
- Rogue Independence Hop Ale
- Hoppin' Frog Fresh Frog
- Raw Hop Imperial Pale Ale
- Founders Harvest Ale
- Bridgeport Hop Harvest
- Ska Hoperation Ivy
- Two Brothers Heavy Handed IPA
- Port Brewing High Tide
- Great Divide Fresh Hop Pale Ale
- Moylan Triple Hopsickle
- 3 Floyds Broodoo

Are You Thinking Out-of-the-Box?

How innovative is your store at selling beer? We would like to know. If you have promotions that go beyond refilling the cold box, we would like to hear from you and share your "out-of-the-box" thinking with our fellow *Style Trends* readers.

E-mail me at mkuderka@mcbasset.com with your successful ideas for selling beer, along with your contact information. If we write about your program in our column we will send you a free copy of The 3rd Edition of *The Essential Reference of Domestic Brewers and Their Bottled Brands*.

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