

To make Mead

Take 20 Quarts of Water Set it over a hot fire when it's warm put in 2 quarts of Honey 12 pound of good white powder Sugar then put in a good Spoonfull of Coriander Seeds bruised & tyed in a bagg with a little Root of Horse Radish, & 6 Races of Ginger when ye Honey is Dissolved Let it boyl over ye Fire till it's clean without Scum then take it off & Turn it warm into a vessell fitt for it & put into it 40 Cloves & 8 Lemons Squeezed in, & put in all ye Rinds, about 6 Hours after take 2 or 3 little toasts of white bread Spread 'em warm with yeast & put 'em in ye vessel then Stop it close & let it Stand 5 Days, then bottle it off & in 5 days twill be fit to Drink

Waller recipe book, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR0341/300 (page 51)

How we did it (approx. 1/4 of the original)

5 litres water

500ml honey - This should be good quality – if you've got a friend who keeps bees then you're set! Otherwise, spend a little more to get the good stuff - the budget honey will lack flavour and body in your finished mead. If you can, use a mix of different types, it'll add depth/complexity. We used 1 2/3 jars of Little Apiary heather and 1 jar of Little Apiary wildflower, but try whatever is available.

1.23kg caster sugar

1 tsp crushed coriander

Approx. 10 inches peeled and chopped ginger - In the original, it calls for 6 'races' or roots of ginger, and doesn't explain whether to peel/chop/whatever – we went for 2 roots, and cut them into 1cm slices, to make up for the lack of horse-radish root. This may have been overkill, so feel free to scale back. If you're adding horse radish root (only a tiny bit, mind!), I'd suggest using 5 inches ginger.

10 cloves

2 lemons, with zest and juice

1 sachet/teaspoon wine yeast

I won't go into the full details of making mead here, as I'd very much recommend getting a book which tells you the general process of

winemaking (we use 'Country Wines and Cordials' by Bernard Charles Arthur Turner), or use the various forums and guides online. Instead, I'll give you our notes throughout the process. Unfortunately, our hydrometer broke so we weren't able to measure the specific gravity at any point, and we were rubbish and forgot to note temperature but it was over winter so fairly cold throughout. We don't claim to be experts at this! But the mead tasted good, and that's what counts...

Day 1 – Heated water on hob, when warm added honey and sugar. Made bouquet garni from ginger and coriander wrapped in muslin and tied up. Added this, and simmered until the scum cleared (approx. 80 degrees). Left to cool down somewhat, then transferred to bucket when warmish. Added lemon zest, lemon juice, and cloves, then covered and left overnight.

Day 2: Very lightly toasted a slice of white bread, then floated in the bucket with the wine yeast sprinkled on top.

Day 7: Discarded bread (including approx. half the yeast which had been sitting on it – but let half of the yeast slosh into the mix), strained through muslin into a demijohn and 2 bottles.

Day 8: Demijohn bubbling every 8 seconds.

Day 12: Tasted from the bottle (à la 'federweisser') – very nice. Sweet, very gingery and warming, but a bit too fizzy!

Day 14: Tasted again – better, less fizzy, but still sweet and gingery, like sweet ginger beer, didn't taste alcoholic at all!

Day 18: Demijohn bubbling every 12 seconds.

Day 21: New years day with friends - tasted perfect. Ginger quite strong, less sweet and fizzy than before.

Day 23: Bubbling every 20 seconds.

Day 26: Bubbling every 28 seconds.

Day 32: Bubbling every 33 seconds.

Day 61: Bubbling every 32 seconds.

Day 80: Bubbling every 45 seconds.

Day 98: Was fermented out, so racked with campden tablet.

Day 116: Racked from remaining sediment.

Day 117: Bottled, end total 4 litres. Very fiery, gingery, warming. Not sweet.