I want to add fruit flavor to my beer, how do I do it?

It used to be that fruit was only found in a few specific styles of beer, such as a belgian lambic. But thanks to the tinkering nature of craft brewers and homebrewers, it’s become increasingly popular over the years. Nobody ever heard of a blueberry stout or a raspberry wheat until the mid ’90’s, but there are presently several breweries making beers with fruit in them. In our experience, it requires some trial and error to come up with the right combination, but it can yield some delicious results.

While you can add fruit or fruit flavoring to any style of beer, some styles lend themselves to being paired with fruit better than others. Wheat beers are a popular style to add fruit to. Porters and stouts blend well with fruit as well. One of the great things about homebrewing is that it’s all up to you: if you think it tastes good, brew it! Who cares if your beer isn’t up the standards of the Reinheitsgebot, your wife finally likes a beer that you’ve brewed!

Fresh, frozen, canned/jarred or extract?
You do have quite a few options for adding fruit flavor to your beer. Using any of these is pretty easy to do, it just depends on what fruit you may have available to you, and your personal flavor preference. We’ll cover each of these, as well as the techniques used for the different types of fruit. One thing to keep in mind no matter which type of fruit you use is that you should make sure it contains only fruit or fruit and some sugar. Preservatives can kill off your yeast before it gets a chance to do its thing.

Fresh fruit
The easiest way to add fruit flavor to your beer is to use fresh fruit. This requires washing, cutting, mashing, and fermenting to create a blend that’s more like a fruit wine than a fruit beer. These can be very expensive, but can add a distinctively fresh flavor to your beer.

Frozen fruit (frozen concentrate)
Freezing makes for easy storage of fruit, but it also prevents the yeast from taking full advantage of the fruit’s natural sugars. Use this to add a mellow, pleasant flavor to your beer.

Canned/jarred fruit
Canned fruit is convenient for those who don’t have room in their freezer. It’s also easy to remove the excess syrup from the can to add a crisp, sweet flavor to your beer.

Extracts
Fruit extracts are a popular option for those who prefer a more consistent flavor. They’re easy to use and save time in the brewing process, but they may not be as tasty as fresh fruit.

Fruit extracts
The easiest way to add fruit flavor to your beer is to use a fruit extract. These come in 4 oz. bottles, and are added just before bottling or kegging. Most recipes call for 4 oz. in a 5 gallon batch, but some brewers find this to be too much. We recommend adding 2 oz., stirring it in, then tasting it. You can always add more extract if the flavor isn’t strong enough for you, but you can’t really take it back out. To use fruit extracts, simply pour the extract into your bottling bucket or keg before you transfer the beer. This way you can be certain that the extract gets blended in really well. The main advantage of using extracts is their ease of use. Some brewers may find the flavor to be too strong or too sweet. If this is the case for you, you may want to try fresh, frozen or canned/jarred fruit next time. Real fruit isn’t quite as sweet and provides a nice backdrop to many beers. For more info, check out these links:

How much fruit extract flavoring should I use in my beer?
When should I add the flavoring extract?
Fruit purees
Midwest stocks over 20 varieties of canned fruit purees. These are the second easiest way to add fruit flavor to your beer, and we feel the best. With fresh fruit, you need to pasteurize it to kill off any unwanted natural yeasts and bacteria. This step is already done with these canned purees. One thing to consider (if you didn’t know this already) is that fruit contains natural, fermentable sugar. So you will see some fermentation activity after the puree is added. There are a couple schools of thought on how these purees should be used. One school says that it should be put into the primary, near the end of the initial fermentation. The other is to rack your beer onto the fruit in the secondary.

School one: Adding fruit puree to the primary fermenter
Some brewers don’t like to add fruit to the secondary because the resulting mini-fermentation may bubble over in a 5 gallon carboy. We find that this only occurs when a large quantity of fruit is added (say, more than 10 lbs.). That much fruit doesn’t leave a whole lot of head space, plus there is a decent amount of fermentable sugar present in that much fruit. For this reason, you may choose to follow this school of thought. You’ll want to wait until the primary fermentation is nearly complete. If you take a hydrometer reading and its around 1.020, that should be about the right time. If you don’t have a hydrometer, wait until you’re seeing 3-5 bubbles a minute coming out of the airlock. Then simply let it ferment out and rack to the secondary as usual. Midwest suggests using a secondary when adding fresh fruit or purees to a beer to allow the additional fruit sediment to settle out.

School two: Adding fruit puree to the secondary fermenter
This is definitely the easiest method of using purees. One drawback is that it is somewhat difficult to rack off of the fruit after fermentation is complete, so some brewers like to perform a tertiary (or third) fermentation. For the uninitiated, this simply means racking the beer into another carboy after 2-3 weeks in the secondary. After primary fermentation is complete, get ready to rack as you normally would (sanitize the carboy, equipment, etc.). Then place a funnel into the neck of your carboy, and pour the fruit puree in. Now just siphon your beer on top of the fruit, add your airlock (or blowoff tube if you think there may be a risk of it bubbling over), and wait. Since you will be seeing some active fermentation, you’ll want to keep it in the secondary a bit longer than usual, 2-8 weeks. At this time you may choose to rack it off the fruit, or you can bottle or keg it.

Like fruit beers? Try making fruit wine!

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<tr>
<th>1 Gallon Fruit Winemaking Kit</th>
<th>Fruit Winemaking Accessories</th>
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<tr>
<td>Our fruit wine kit includes all the equipment, yeast and additives you need to make one gallon of fruit wine. There are enough additives to make up to 15 gallons of wine. Kit includes Winemaker Recipe Handbook, featuring 101 one-gallon fruit recipes, 2 gallon plastic fermenter, 1 gallon jug, tubing, airlock, stopper, straining bag, sanitizer, campden tablets, pectic enzyme, acid blend, grape tannin, yeast nutrient, stabilizer and 1 all-purpose dry yeast. Fruit, corks, corks and bottles not included)</td>
<td>3 Gallon glass carboy: For those who want to make larger batches of fruit wine. Uses number 7 stopper. (6023) (15 lb.)</td>
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<td>Add-on kit for 1 Gallon Fruit Wine Equipment Kit: All of the items needed to make wine but not included in the 1 Gallon Winemaking Equipment Kit, if you don’t already have them. Kit includes a plastic plunger corkscrew, 30 corks, 1 case of wine bottles and a hydrometer. (8210) (20 lb.)</td>
<td>5 gallon glass carboy: Many homebrewers and vintners keep a few of these around so they can have multiple batches fermenting. Uses number 7 stopper. (6025) (18 lb.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Please specify green or clear bottles)</td>
<td>Extra Large Straining Bag 2’ x 3’ Coarse Mesh: (6326) (1/2 lb.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mary’s Recipes (Utherman): Over 100 pages of tips and recipes compiled by wine shop owners from Milwaukee. 116 pages. (9136) (1 lb.)</td>
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1 Gallon Fruit Winemaking Kit
**Frozen fruit**

There are a couple of benefits to using frozen fruit. The obvious one being that you can keep the fruit in your freezer until you’re ready to use it. The second is that freezing the fruit ruptures the cell walls, and allows the fruit to mush up and release its flavors into the beer more rapidly. You’ll want to make sure that the fruit you use contains only that—fruit. If it contains a little added sugar, that’s okay, just make sure there aren’t any preservatives in it, as they may kill the yeast. You’ll want to thaw it out before adding it to the fermenter, so as not to shock the yeast. Just keep that in mind, and follow either “school of thought” listed above.

**Fresh fruit**

The amount you’ll need depends on the recipe and the fruit being used, but it’s usually between 3 and 7 lbs. Fresh fruit is a little more difficult to use, because there is a lot of preparation that needs to be done prior to adding it to your beer. First of all, it will need to be mashed up, try using a potato masher or a food processor. Then the fruit will need to be pasteurized to kill off any unwanted yeasts or bacteria. There are a couple ways to do this. You may add the mashed up fruit to the brew kettle, but you don’t want to add it while it’s still boiling. This may release the pectins in the fruit which will make for a mess in your fermenter and a hazy beer. So you want to wait until the wort is chilled somewhat, say to below 180°F. That should allow enough time for the fruit to be pasteurized. We don’t feel you will get as much flavor out of the fruit if it’s placed in the primary, so Midwest suggests method number two. This requires pasteurizing the fruit before its added to the secondary. To do this, put your mashed up fruit into a medium saucepan and add a little water. Slowly heat this mixture, stirring often, up to 170°F. Hold it at this temp for 5-10 minutes, and you should be good. Now just follow either of the “schools of thought” listed above.

For more information, check out: **How much fruit do I want to add to my beer?**