What is the proper way to use my yeast?

There are two types of yeast that home brewers use when fermenting their beer. You have dry and liquid yeast available. We'll cover both types, the pluses and minuses of each, and how to prepare them for use. Let’s start with dry yeast.

**Dry yeast**

Dry yeast can be sprinkled right into the cooled wort if you want. You do not need to rehydrate, but some people still like to get the yeast going before they pitch it. This is what you need to do if you plan on rehydrating it:

- Add 1 cup of 80°F water to sanitized container.
- Add 1 package of dry yeast to the water.
- Stir the water and yeast mixture for 30 seconds. Do not stir vigorously.
- Let the yeast sit for 15 – 30 minutes until you notice a light foam forming on top of the liquid.
- Pitch (add) the yeast to your fermenter.

**Pluses:**
- Dry yeast is very easy to work with and does not require being stored in a refrigerator. Dry yeast is freeze dried and will last for years in a cupboard.
- Dry yeast can be pitched right into your wort without the need for rehydration. The wort will show signs of fermentation very quickly.

**Minuses:**
- Dry yeast will ferment the beer very quickly. This can sometimes lead to a sweet or fruity flavor in the beer. Dry yeast is also very limited on the varieties available.

**Liquid yeast**

Liquid yeast is available from two main manufacturers, Wyeast and White Labs. Liquid yeast should be stored in the refrigerator until use. We will talk about each one individually because how you prepare them for use will differ.
Wyeast: Propagators and Activators

Wyeast comes in two different sizes, propagator and activator packs. Which one you have will determine how you will want to prepare it for use.

The Wyeast Propagator packages include a sterile liquid nutrient pouch that, when "smacked", releases its contents into the yeast slurry and "activates" the package. The available nutrients initiate the culture’s metabolism which in turn generates CO₂ and causes swelling of the package. This process will reduce lag times by preparing the yeast for a healthy fermentation prior to inoculation. Activation also serves as a viability test of the culture. Expansion of the package is an indicator of healthy (viable and vital) yeast. Although beneficial, cultures do not need to be activated prior to inoculation.

We’ve found that you can pitch a Propagator pack directly into a 5 gallon batch with good results. It may take a bit longer for the fermentation to begin, but this will work just fine. However, if you are brewing a higher gravity beer, like an Imperial Stout or Bigfoot’s Barleywine, then you should make a yeast starter. For more information, see our PDF titled “How do I make a yeast starter?” Here is how you prep a Propagator pack:

- To activate, locate and move inner packet to a corner. Place this area in palm of one hand and firmly smack package with the other hand to break inner nutrient packet. Confirm inner packet is broken.
- Shake the package well to release the nutrients.
- Allow package to incubate and swell for three hours or more at 70-75°F (21-24°C).
- Use sanitizing solution to sanitize the package before opening.
- Pitch into your wort or yeast starter that has been cooled to below 80°F
- Signs of fermentation should be evident within 24 hours, depending on yeast strain, brewing procedures and fermentation temperatures.

The Wyeast Activator pack does not require the use of a yeast starter. Activator packs already contain 100 billion yeast cells ready to turn your sugar into alcohol. We’ve found that the Activator has enough yeast cells for even a higher gravity beer, but a yeast starter will always ensure a healthy fermentation. For more information, see our PDF titled “How do I make a yeast starter?” Here is how you prep an Activator pack:

- To activate, locate and move inner packet to a corner. Place this area in palm of one hand and firmly smack package with the other hand to break inner nutrient packet. Confirm inner packet is broken.
- Shake the package well to release the nutrients.
- Allow package to incubate and swell for three hours or more at 70-75°F (21-24°C) or immediately direct pitch into wort.
- Use sanitizing solution to sanitize the package before opening.
- Pitch into your wort or yeast starter that has been cooled to below 80°F
- Signs of fermentation should be evident within 24 hours, depending on yeast strain, brewing procedures and fermentation temperatures.

Note: Do not panic if you pack does not swell. Sometimes the inner pouch can be difficult to break. Just cut off the top and pitch into your wort. It takes a lot to kill yeast, so try the pack anyway. 99% of the time everything will turn out just fine.

Pluses:

Wyeast comes in many specific yeast strains to make your beer exactly like the commercial breweries do. Wyeast has a long fermentation time so your beer is more likely to ferment out, resulting in a better beer. Activator pack is very easy to use.
**Minuses:**
Fermentation appears to take a long time to start, but don’t worry. Liquid yeasts sink to the bottom of your fermenter, so it just takes longer before you start to see bubbles coming out of the airlock.

**White Labs**
White labs come in what looks like a test tube. You can either pitch the yeast right into your wort, or make a yeast starter if you choose. For more information, see our PDF titled “How do I make a yeast starter?”
Most brewers will pitch the yeast right into the wort. Here is how to prep for using White Labs yeast:

- Take the yeast out of the refrigerator 24 hours before use and set on counter.
- Open cap on vial.
- Pour contents into the wort.

That’s all you need to do with White Labs!

**Pluses:**
White Labs has many specific yeast strains to choose from. Open the top and you are ready to use.

**Minuses:**
Fermentation appears to take a long time to start, but don’t worry. Liquid yeasts sink to the bottom of your fermenter, so it just takes longer before you start to see bubbles coming out of the airlock.

**Note:** Yeast can take 24 – 72 hours to show signs of fermentation. Give the yeast time to work before you start becoming concerned. If after 72 hours and no signs of fermentation, add dry yeast. If you are not sure if the yeast has worked or not; take a hydrometer reading, or taste the beer. If it is very sweet, the yeast has not worked. Dry yeast may start in a couple hours, but it can ferment a beer in less than 12 hours.

If you are not sure about the viability of your yeast then make a starter first. This will give you the opportunity to ensure that the yeast is working before you pitch it into your wort. Even if there are only two yeast cells left, that is all you need to ferment a beer.