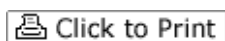




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With fall nearing, beer lovers celebrate brewing

- Story Highlights
- Two of the biggest beer festivals take place each fall
- Germany's 185-year-old Oktoberfest is held September 22 to October 7
- There are 364 microbreweries and 975 brewpubs operating in the U.S.
- Rather do it yourself? More and more people are trying home brewing

By Linda K. Harris

(LifeWire) -- Sometimes, a hobby can take on a life of its own. That's what happened to Sam Calagione of Lewes, Delaware. He began brewing beer at home in 1993. Two years later, that avocation blossomed into a full-fledged business: Dogfish Head Craft Brewery.

"We're proud of our growth," Calagione said of the Milton, Delaware-based brewery. "But what we're most proud of (is that) we've been able to continue this growth without dumbing down our beers. We opened with the mission of off-centered ale for off-centered people."

This has meant trying out such unusual ingredients as maple syrup, raisins and St. Johns Wort.

Dogfish Head brews run the gamut from their signature 60 Minute IPA, an India pale ale available year round, to limited and seasonal specialties like Punkin Ale, released in September and October.

Oktoberfest and Beyond

Whether the drink in question is an American craft brew, a German pilsner or an Australian ale, there are festivals the world over dedicated to celebrating beer. Two of the biggest [beer](#) festivals take place each fall. Germany's 185-year-old Oktoberfest, held September 22 to October 7 in Munich, is perhaps the best-known celebration of beer.

In the United States, the Great American Beer Festival is the big beer event. Now in its 26th year, this gathering in Denver, which takes place October 11-13, offers competitions, socializing and lots of beer tasting. In 2006, 41,000 people turned out, and attendance this year is expected to be comparable, as interest in craft brewing continues to be strong.

"The first (festival) was in 1982. There were 22 breweries, 40 beers and 800 attendees. This year there are 470 breweries entered," said Julia Herz, a spokeswoman for the Brewers Association in Boulder, Colorado, and a home brewer herself. "The growth of craft beer in the U.S. is based on the marketplace's demand for flavor and diversity."

Craft beers, according to the Brewers Association, are "made using a traditional process of blending the sugars from malted grains (such as barley or wheat), with hop flowers and water."

The association, which tabulates industry data, reports that, "The volume of craft beer sold in the first half of 2007 rose 11 percent compared to (the) same period in 2006, and dollar growth increased 14 percent. For the first time ever, craft beer has exceeded a 5 percent dollar share of total beer sales," and the demand is spreading to markets in Europe and China.

If you can't make it to Munich or Denver, there are plenty of other beer festivals in the U.S., including The Oregon Brewers Festival in July in Portland and the Great Taste of the Midwest in Madison, Wisconsin, in August.

Overseas beer celebrations include the Great British Beer Festival in August and Belgium's Zythos party in March, as well as similar events in China, Japan and Australia.

Rather not travel too far for your brew? There were 364 microbreweries and 975 brewpubs operating in the U.S. in 2006 pumping out 6.7 million barrels, according to the Brewers Association.

Brew it Yourself

Interest in making beer at home also appears to be growing. The American Homebrewers Association reported a 20 percent increase in membership in 2006. Although they don't conduct formal research on brewing at home, the association estimates that 500,000 people in the U.S. make their own beer. Vermont-based Brew Your Own magazine puts that figure at about 1.25 million.

One of those brewers is Phil Clarke, who lives in New York City and works at Maltose Express, a home brew supply store in Monroe, Connecticut. He devotes a whole room in his apartment to the craft, making British ales and German lagers, a little mead and even some wine. Clarke says he brews about 60 gallons, or four cases, of beer a year. But he doesn't keep it all for himself.

"A lot of it goes to competition," Clarke says. "I probably drink about a third of it."

He leans toward Scotch ales, fruit beers and smoked beers. Once he made a prize-winning blackberry porter and he's also won for a beer using spruce tips, an idea he got, he says, from a technique used during the colonial era.

"I like my strong scotch ale, that's my signature beer," Clarke said. "Scotch ales are all malt, they're very chewy, very sweet, lot of character and depth."

Finding The Best Brews

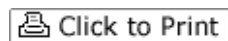
If brewing your own is a little too much work, but you want to expand your beer horizons, look for recommendations at beeradvocate.com and ratebeer.com, which rank the best beers in the world. Both of these sites are dedicated to all things beer and feature lively online communities of beer aficionados from the world over.

LifeWire provides original and syndicated lifestyle content to Web publishers. Linda K. Harris is a freelance writer and former lifestyle editor for The Philadelphia Inquirer.

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