Mead Tutorial- Brett “Sven” Barker

Today I’ll be making a Show Mead. Show Mead is a style of honey wine which does not have any added flavors or ingredients beyond the strict basics of mead: Honey, water, and yeast.

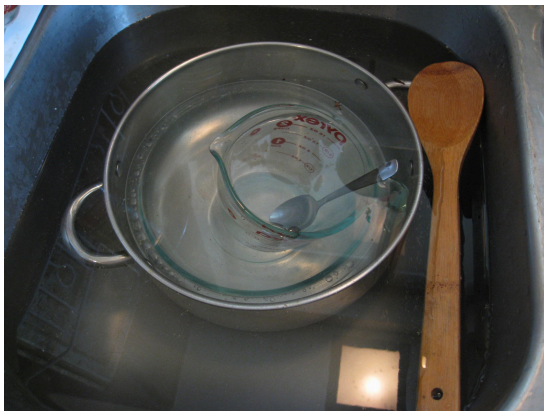
Glossary of terms:
Mead: a type of wine made with honey, water, and yeast
Must: the honey and water mixture
Pitch: adding yeast to honey and water mixture
Hydrometer: tool for measuring specific gravity
Specific gravity: the amount of sugar in a solution
Primary fermentation: the first time the yeast, honey and water all come together
Lees: the scum that collects on the bottom of your fermenting vessel. It’s mostly dead yeast
Rack: transferring your mead out of the primary fermentation to a different vessel
Secondary fermentation: after the rack

Required materials:
Honey, 4lbs

Water, enough to make a gallon of must (that's the unfermented honey mixture) plus more for sanitizing
Yeast. I'm using a commercially available Red Star Pasteur Blanc, a white wine yeast
A Jug. I'm using a glass one gallon apple juice jar
An airlock. There are two kinds of airlock available. I prefer the 's' type because it doesn't run out of water as quickly as the three part airlock. The airlock keeps bugs both macro and micro out and lets the fermented gasses out of your jar.
A sanitizing agent. I'm using 1 Step, a commercial sanitizer. You can also use regular bleach at one capful per gallon of plain water, but make sure if you do to rinse thoroughly after sanitizing if you use bleach.
Bottles and corks for when your mead is done.
Mixing bowls, measuring bowls, spoons, funnel.
Some way to measure your honey. I'm using a postal scale.

Optional materials
Brewers Hydrometer
Yeast Nutrient. You can use raisins if you don't have a commercial yeast nutrient.
Other flavoring agents such as fruit or spices.
Thermometer such as a candy thermometer

Procedure:
Sanitize everything that will come into contact with any of your ingredients. You only want your intended yeast to have access to your honey and no other microorganisms. Follow the directions on your commercial sanitizer or you can use bleach. One capful of bleach per one gallon of water will create a sanitizing solution. Make sure to rinse very well anything that you have bleached.



Measure out your honey by weight if you have the technology. I'm using four pounds of honey here for a one gallon batch. I'm going for a sweet mead and this amount of honey should exceed the alcohol tolerance of this particular yeast by just a bit to leave some sugar when it's done. This method can lead to some weird flavors according to some sources I've read and is

perhaps not recommended for contest mead, but anecdotes from people I've met and talked with say simply exceeding a yeast's alcohol tolerance is a good method for a sweet mead.

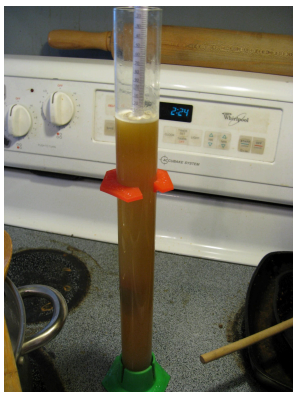
Next we'll be heating our honey just enough to dissolve it into the water. Make sure that the amount of water you add to the honey will still fit into your jug with room to spare. I'm using about a quart and a half. The topic of heating the must (honey and water mixture) is somewhat of a topic of conversation, but I find that the honey I use crystallizes before I can use it and dissolving it in water with heat is the best way. Don't boil or even simmer. This honey was pretty fresh so I didn't go above 110f. Don't be afraid to use crystallized honey. The first honey I used had been in the garage for 20 years and the mead came out delicious! If you get any scum rising to the top you can scoop it out or leave it. It's most likely pollen or wax.

While your must is dissolving you can prepare the yeast. Premier Blanc instructs you to rehydrate the yeast before pitching (adding it to the must). If you proof your yeast (add it to warm water) and it bubbles like this and smells like fresh bread, it's good. Follow the instructions on the package.

When your must is dissolved, remove it from heat and transfer it to your jar. Here's a cool tip: put a spoon between your bottle neck and your funnel to keep it from gurgling.

Add enough cool water to make it up to about the shoulder of the jar where the side starts to slope inward. When your must has reached between room temperature and 90f you can pour (pitch)the yeast mixture in with your must. Be very careful that your must is cool enough to put yeast in it otherwise the yeast could die. This is also when I add my yeast nutrient. ½ teaspoon per gallon. Follow the instructions on the package. If you aren't using a yeast nutrient you can use 5-6 raisins for the same effect. If you are using fruit in your primary fermentation they will also serve the purpose.

At this point you can measure your initial gravity. This is an optional step, your mead will be fine without it. It is, however, helpful to have this tool and do this additional step because everyone will ask you what your percentage of alcohol is and it's also helpful for troubleshooting if you run into issues with your fermentation. Specific gravity is how much sugar is in your solution. My initial gravity came out to be about 1.135. To calculate alcohol by volume you take initial gravity, subtract final gravity then multiply by 131.25.



Put the airlock full of water or sanitizer on your jar and put your jar in a dark place for a long time. Your airlock should bubble within a day. Make sure to keep an eye on your airlock so it doesn't dry out.

When your fermentation slows down to less than one bubble every thirty seconds you have three choices. A) rack to secondary and add fruits. B) bottle if you really need to. C) Leave it in the cupboard for another year. Mead is a very long process. I've left mead in the carboy in the linen closet for two years and it was just great. It's impossible to wait too long if your carboy is in the dark, at room temperature, and airlocked. The longer the better. I've tried mead that is 6 months old and mead that is 6 years old, and older is always better. I cannot overemphasise the benefits of waiting. My resources say it's good to rack your mead off the lees before aging.

When you have waited as long as you are going to wait, (no less than 6 months) and you have decided it's time to bottle, take a final gravity reading and transfer your mead to sanitized bottles. One gallon will make a little less than four 750ml size wine bottles. You can also use the flip top beer bottles.

Step - n: Drink