

# PEOPLE'S CHOICE BEER JUDGING: JUDGE BEER LIKE A PRO



## INTRODUCTION

The ability to effectively evaluate your own and other brewers' beers, allows you to become a better brewer. It is a learned skill, the more you practice the better you'll get. HHC brewing competitions create an opportunity and safe environment in which to compare your beers with those of others, learn from fellow brewers and develop your own tasting and evaluation skills.

So, don't hesitate to enter your own beers and/or take part in the judging. To do it like a pro, we recommend you follow these steps –

## STEP 1: BE PREPARED

Get your head in the right place:

- Don't be super critical or mean, only give constructive criticism if necessary.
- Be as objective and honest as possible, you may recognise your own or a friend's brew, take care to score it as you would any other beer.
- When a specific style is judged read the style requirements beforehand and apply them in your judging as appropriate (& as you prefer - it remains a personal choice for people's choice judging).
- As a general guide, most beers you judge will score between 11 and 20 points on the HHC scoring system. 5 points is the minimum possible score and is reserved for truly undrinkable beers, 6-10 points are for badly flawed beers, 21-23 points are very unusual and reserved for exceptional beers, while 24-26 points are almost unheard of and for unsurpassable beers.

Keep your senses fresh:

- Don't eat strong tasting food before judging or use strongly scented toiletries.
- "Reset" your smell & taste between beers, e.g. by smelling the inside of your elbow and eating a neutral-tasting biscuit between beers.
- Don't over-indulge before or during judging.

## STEP 2: POUR & OBSERVE (Appearance 1)

Pour only 2-3 sips of beer into your tasting glass. Pour to maximize head and aroma development – the carbonation level of the beer will influence this, so adapt your pouring style accordingly. Take note of the volume, colour & texture of the head. Remember a bottle conditioned beer's appearance, aroma & flavour may be impacted when the sediment is disturbed – consider appropriately.

## STEP 3: SMELL (Aroma: max point = 5)

Immediately after the beer has been poured, take a sniff as the beer's aromas are released into the glass. Beer's aroma is based on the aromatics in malt, hops, possible adjuncts, and those produced by the specific yeast &/or bacterial strain(s) used. Both good, e.g. the citrusy aromas from hops, and bad, e.g. the fart-like smell of hydrogen sulphide, aromas can potentially be identified in beer (see beer aroma & flavour wheel below). Keep in mind that aspects ranging from the temperature to the amount of time that passed since the bottle was opened can affect the aroma. A beer's aroma should also align with its style, e.g. the roasty aromas of an Irish stout, the earthy, herbal, flowery and/or citric aromas of an American IPA, and the yeasty, fruity and/or spicy notes in German wheat beers and Belgian ales. Off-putting aromas like sulphur and old paper can also reveal flaws of the beer.

#### **STEP 4: OBSERVE (Appearance 2: max point = 3)**

Colour, clarity, foam, and carbonation all play a role in a beer's appearance. The appearance can vary, though, depending on the lighting and background you are viewing the beer against - for the most accurate view, use either a white background or white light. Note the beer's colour, e.g. golden, amber, copper, brown, black, etc., and relate it to style expectations. Note the clarity, e.g. sparkling, clear, hazy, or opaque and its relation to the style. Finally, again note the head characteristics: colour, bubble size, retention, and lacing. Combine your observations here & those made in Step 2 during the pour to award your final score.

#### **STEP 5: TASTE (Flavour: max point = 10)**

Gently swirl the beer to release all the flavours and aromas, take another sniff to experience the beer's full aroma, then take the first sip. Flavour and aroma are closely related (see beer aroma & flavour wheel below). When tasting you also observe cues originating from the malt, hops, adjuncts, and fermentation, but in addition you should pay attention to how these integrate to yield the overall taste perception (e.g. bitterness vs sweetness), flavour, balance, and aftertaste of the beer. Note the presence or absence of DMS and diacetyl, or other characteristics such as oxidation, sourness, sweetness, solvent character, etc. If present, are they appropriate? Be sure to note the balance from start to finish, and through to aftertaste - the best beers will remain in balance throughout.

#### **STEP 6: FEEL (Mouthfeel: max point = 3)**

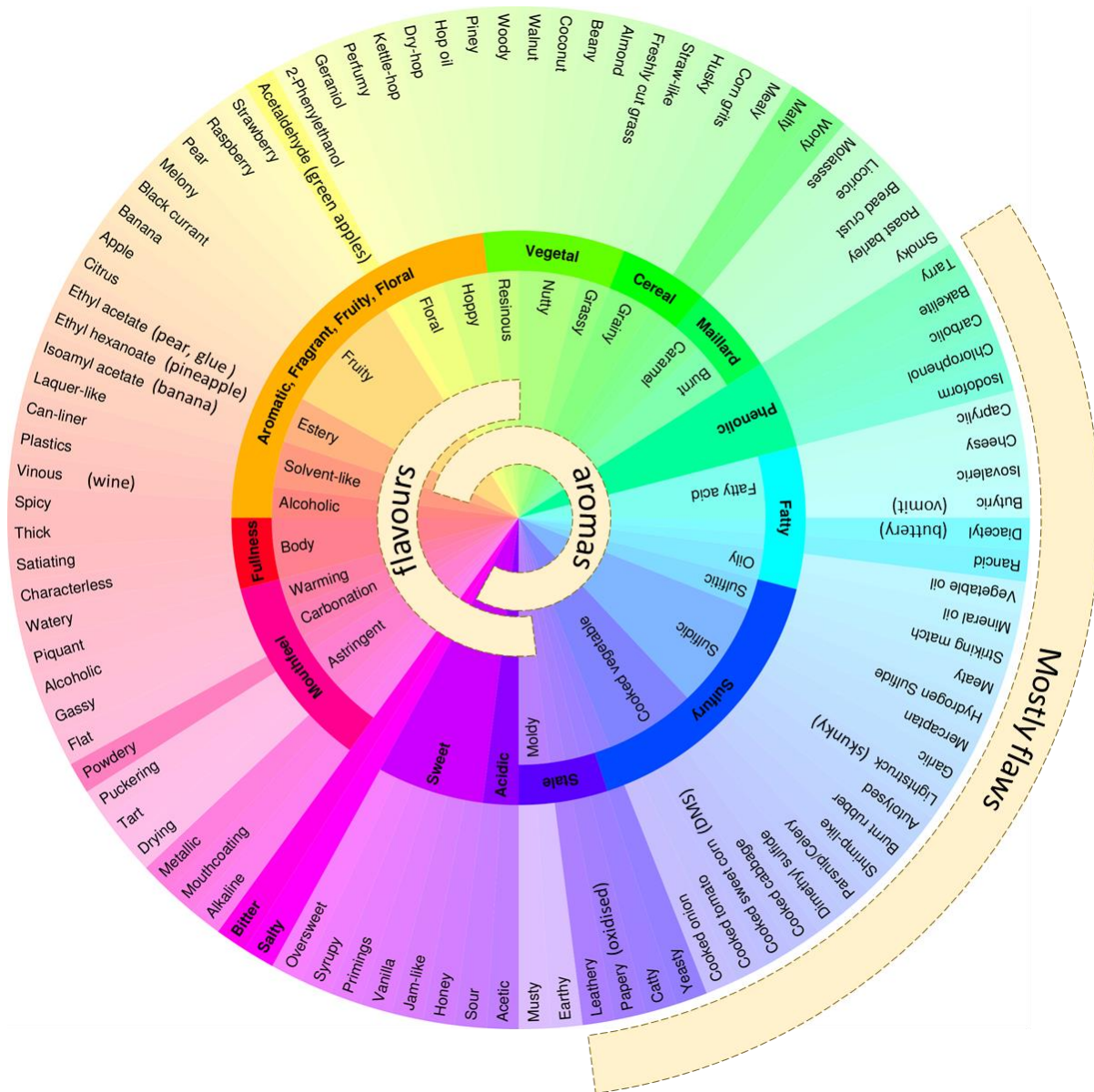
Mouthfeel describes the body, carbonation, and palate sensations beer cause. Essentially, it means how the beer feels in your mouth. Its body can be thick, full, smooth, dry, watery, etc., its carbonation level can be low to high with associated perceptions (e.g. flat vs CO<sub>2</sub> bite), it could have an alcoholic warmth, it could be astringent or cause a variety of other sensations. As with other criteria, these are style dependent.

#### **STEP 7: OVERALL IMPRESSION & ENJOYMENT (Overall: max point = 5)**

After you've evaluated everything from the aroma to the feel, consider and rate your overall enjoyment. To taste beer properly, sip it slowly, allowing the flavours to linger in your mouth so you can fully enjoy the taste and experience. Did the beer disappoint, meet, or exceed your expectations? Was the experience pleasurable or lacking in any way?

# THE BEER FLAVOUR & AROMA WHEEL

The below wheel organises the most common beer flavours & aromas in related groups and can also help you develop the vocabulary to describe what you smell & taste.



## References

1. How to Judge Beer by Thomas Barnes 2012, <https://www.unyha.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/How to Judge Beer.pdf>
2. How to Judge and Evaluate your Beer, <https://homebrewsupply.com/learn/how-to-judge-and-evaluate-your-beer.html>
3. How to Judge Beer by Peter Garofalo, <https://legacy.bjcp.org/docs/How to Judge Beer.pdf>
4. The beer flavour wheel, <http://www.beerflavorwheel.com/>