

# BREWING SIMPLE ALES

Simple ales are the quickest, simplest, no-stress beers you can make. While beer is traditionally made with malted grain, simple ales only need cane sugar or brown sugar as the sugar source. Think of them as something akin to hard soda. They tend to taste somewhere between beer and cider.

## *Basic Equipment*

- 2–3 gallon (8–12 L) cooking pot and stirring spoon
- 1-gallon (4 L) glass or plastic jug
- Airlock with rubber stopper, or a balloon
- Funnel and sieve
- A vessel with a spigot for bottling (or careful pouring through a small funnel)
- Bottles with re-closeable lids or cappable bottles with new caps and a bottle capper

## *Ingredients for 1 Gallon (4 L) Ginger Beer*

- 1 gallon (4 L) water
- 1 pound (0.5 kg) brown sugar, light brown sugar, or cane sugar
- 2–3 ounces (57–85 g) fresh gingerroot, chopped or bruised (use more if you really like ginger)
- Juice of ½ small lemon, 2 ounces (60 mL) lemon juice OR 2 teaspoons dried orange peel granules or 2 wedges of a freshly sliced orange
- *Optional:* 1 ounce (28 g) lightly crushed dried coriander seed, 1 ounce (28 g) lightly crushed black pepper seed (or experiment with small amounts of other herbs and spices)
- 1 teaspoon brewing yeast, ale yeast or bread yeast, or ½ cup wild yeast starter

## *Process*

1. Bring water just to a boil in a stockpot and stir in sugar until fully dissolved.
2. Bruise ginger lightly by squeezing it with your finger or pressing with a spoon or butter knife and drop it into the pot. Add lemon or orange.
3. Reduce heat to medium-low and shut it off after half an hour.
4. Let cool until 60–80°F (15–27°C), or simply wait until it feels warm to the touch.
5. Pour into jug with a funnel and sieve (or remove flavoring ingredients first)
6. Add yeast and insert airlock into jug opening.

*Continued...*

7. Place jug in a warm, dark spot (60–80°F/15–27°C); it should start showing signs of active fermentation within a few hours.
8. In 1 to 2 weeks, check for signs of CO<sub>2</sub> (small bubbles rising to the surface). Taste and if you like it, drink it. Otherwise give it another week or so for fermentation to fully complete and proceed with bottling.
9. To bottle, first transfer the ale into a vessel with a spigot or use a small funnel that fits into the opening of your bottles.
10. An hour or so before bottling, warm 2 tablespoons of cane sugar or honey in a cup of water and stir it into the beer to *prime* it for bottle carbonation.
11. Check to be sure any yeast residue has settled and pour carefully into bottles.
12. Cap / close bottles, store in a cool, dark spot, and open in 1 to 2 weeks; open each bottle carefully and have a glass ready, as the amount of carbonation can vary by bottle.

**Note:** Ideally, simple ales should be bottled in thick-glass bottles with flip-top lids or plastic soda bottles. When you prime, you are force-carbonating, meaning you are restarting the fermentation in the bottle to produce additional CO<sub>2</sub>. Ideally, this will result in just the right amount of pressure for light carbonation, but bottling can be unpredictable. Always open bottles pointed away from you, preferably outside. Results can range from light fizzing to gushing. Have a glass on hand to pour it into. Refrigerate bottles when they've reached ideal carbonation or keep them in a box or wrapped in a towel, as glass bottles can sometimes burst (this is rare but important to watch out for).



Jereme Zimmerman is a writer, urban homesteader and traditional brewing revivalist who lives in Berea, Kentucky with his wife Jenna, daughters Sadie and Maisie. He writes for various sustainability, homesteading and farming magazines, and travels nationwide to present on topics such as fermentation, natural and holistic homebrewing, modern homesteading, and sustainable living. He is an avid fermenter and researches extensively into traditional fermentation practices in order to revive lost food arts and to educate people on how to preserve food and drink using traditional, natural and healing techniques and ingredients. He is the author of *Make Mead Like a Viking* (which has been translated into German as *Met Brauen wie ein Wikinger*) and *Brew Beer Like a Yeti*.