

Cider Making Starter Pack: Handy Tips.

Check to make sure you have everything listed in your Starter Pack, and read these notes fully before starting.

The two most important things to consider whilst cider making are cleanliness and temperature. If you are mindful of these two issues, you will produce a successful brew every time (as long as you read & follow the instructions).

Sterilisation

Everything that comes into contact with the cider should be sterilised. The cleaner / sterilisers we stock are a 'no rinse' and chlorine based and are used by the commercial breweries. They are strong so you only need to put enough into your container to be able to swish it around. In a 23/25 litre container this would typically be 5 litres of water with sufficient steriliser (around 2 teaspoons). With the no rinse contact time at the start is 10mins (wait for this time) and then should be used within one hour.

Keep rinsing the solution around the inside of the container intermittently for around 20 minutes, so all areas of the container come into contact with it on a regular basis. Also make sure that your lid, spoon/paddle, hydrometer, thermometer & airlock are sterilised. These should then be well rinsed with clean water to remove any traces of chlorine. Always make sure you thoroughly clean your equipment once you have used it as it really helps to prevent the build up of stains. The no-rinse is designed to be used on new (very clean) equipment. Again mix a small amount with water and swirl around.

Temperature

Temperature is the other important item to remember. We are looking for a room temperature typically between 20-25° C..However the thing to bear in mind is we are looking for a constant temperature. Far too many of us get the temperature too high and think because the airlock is popping like mad we are having a great fermentation.

Ideally we are looking for a steady rate of popping through the airlock. If the room temperature is cooler, then the fermentation will take a little longer, but on the upside the taste will be better. As with almost all home brewing, we are weighing up speed against quality.

All of our starter kits include a thermometer, so use this to find the right area to place your fermenting container. Whilst we are talking about temperature it's also important that the liquid temperature (consult your instructions for the actual temperature) is correct before we add the yeast. If the liquid is too warm then allow it to cool until we reach the ideal temperature. Don't worry about leaving the liquid to cool for a few hours, as no harm will come to it as long as you ensure the lid is secured on the bucket.

One thing worth noting is that once the fermentation starts the yeast will generate heat as it works, so the temperature of the liquid in the container will always be higher than the room temperature.

For more information on controlling temperature, see our handy video at <http://www.lovebrewing.co.uk/videos/product-demos/temperature-control/>.

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Whilst the majority of it is self explanatory, some of the equipment in your cider making kit needs explaining.

Airlocks

Airlocks should be half filled with clean water. The airlock functions as a one way 'valve' which allows excess gasses given off by the fermentation to escape, without letting outside air in. This means that the fermentation is protected by a head of carbon dioxide, which helps prevent any infections.

Some airlocks come with a cap and this should always be placed on the top. The cap prevents any liquid from being squirted out of the airlock. If the fermentation is quite lively, liquid can be forced out of the airlock and end up decorating your floor and walls! If this happens reduce the room temperature, or move the container to a cooler area.

If the airlock isn't bubbling, you might need to improve the seal between the airlock, grommet, and where it joins the bucket/fermenter lid. You can do this by smearing some Vaseline around the joint.

Siphons

Siphons vary in style but all the ones we stock have a special fitting on the end to help prevent sediment being drawn up from the bottom of the container. This means you can go very close to the bottom and extract as much liquid as possible.

Whilst the design of the siphon helps prevent you from drawing up sediment, we would always recommend siphoning off from the top of the container, and slowly lower the end of the siphon towards the bottom of the container as the liquid is removed. This requires slightly more effort on your part, but it is time well spent.

As you reach the bottom of the container, and have removed the majority of the liquid, a good trick is to wedge something under the bucket on the opposite side to the siphon, thus tilting the bucket and helping to extract every last drop of liquid. Always leave the heavy sediment behind in the bucket.

Most of the siphons in our starter kits have a tap or pipe clamp fitted to the end and come with a bucket clip. The bucket clip is a great help as it frees up your hands. Most siphons require a good suck to get them started (except our Easy Start siphon uses a pump action to get it going). Some come with a bottling attachment which will allow you to fill your bottles directly from the bucket.

If you haven't used a siphon before, we strongly recommend you have a test run using water. This will allow you to get a good feel for it without wasting any valuable cider! See our YouTube channel for a guide to siphoning.

Hydrometer

A Hydrometer is the must have piece of equipment in cider making. The instructions for use are included inside the container but we have also produced a handy guide and video, which can be found at <http://www.lovebrewing.co.uk/guides/wine-making/how-to-use-a-hydrometer/>.

The purpose of the hydrometer is to measure the specific gravity of the liquid. The higher the gravity, the more alcohol we will have at the end of the fermentation. It is therefore important to do a hydrometer reading at the start of the fermentation and make a note of this. Most kits normally give a guide of the starting gravity. If you find you are too low with your initial reading, give the liquid a good stir, and take it again. Low initial readings can normally be attributed to poor mixing.

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If you have any concerns about the fermentation, and are unsure if anything is happening, take a reading with the hydrometer and compare it to your previous reading. This is the only way to know if a fermentation is happening (bubbles through the airlock are only a guide). If the container allows you can drop the hydrometer directly into the liquid or you might have to draw some liquid off into a separate container to facilitate taking a reading. Some kits have a separate hydrometer trial jar included, others don't, sometimes you can use the case the hydrometer comes in. Fill this with liquid about $\frac{3}{4}$ full and then drop the hydrometer into it. Give it a twirl so it doesn't stick to the sides. The reading is taken across the liquid line. You can always drop it in your bucket

To determine if your fermentation has finished, take two hydrometer readings 24 hours apart. If there is no change in value, then your fermentation has finished. At this point you can calculate the final alcohol strength using your starting gravity reading, and your final reading, using the following formula:

Starting gravity – Final Gravity \div 7.5 (some use 7.2)

E.g.

$1045 - 1015 \div 7.5 = 4.0\%ABV$.

Barrels

A barrel is included with some of our starter packs. All of our barrels have a pressure valve fitted to the cap. This valve is designed to release any excess pressure that builds up during secondary fermentation, whilst at the same time maintaining a controlled pressurised environment inside the barrel.

Once the fermentation is complete we need to transfer the cider to a secondary container (either a barrel or some bottles). Once we have done this we need to add some 'priming sugar' to the cider and seal the container.

Priming sugar is just normal granulated sugar, or brewing sugar. The name comes from the fact that this sugar fuels any remaining yeast in the cider, resulting in a secondary fermentation. As this takes place, the fermentation produces more CO₂, which will now be trapped inside the sealed container. This will permeate the cider, and is what is responsible for creating the gassy nature of lager and cider. This CO₂ also helps provide the necessary pressure to dispense the cider.

The secondary fermentation will usually take a further 5 days in a warm place. Once this has completed, the barrel or bottles should be moved to a cooler area to clear and condition. Check your cider kit instructions for timings and amounts to add.

Whilst we check the parts on all barrels, you must take responsibility for checking your barrel before first use, and maintaining it properly over its life time. Many people have had to redecorate rooms after a barrel has blown due to neglect!

The most important thing to check regularly is the valve. This allows any excess pressure (over 10psi) that builds up to escape making the barrel safe. All of our barrels use an S30 valve, which uses 3 different seals/valve rubbers, and these should be checked regularly.

With regards to checking the barrel before first use, we recommend that the threads are smothered with Vaseline (which is food grade approved) and will help the seal. Then $\frac{3}{4}$ fill the barrel with water and inject some gas to it using one of the 8g bulbs (or an S30 cylinder). Check the barrel has no leaks by rotating it in water and checking the seals. A bath is ideal for this and its good practice in the use of gas.

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The S30 Gas Valve.

Depending on which barrel you have selected the S30 valve (which is fitted to the cap) may have a piercing pin fitted. The pin will be pointed upwards and is designed to pierce the 8g CO2 bulbs. Again depending on which system you have, you will be able to screw the black bulb holder directly onto the valve. The piercing pin will then inject the full bulb into the barrel.

You should only need to add additional gas if the pressure in the barrel drops to a level where you are unable to get the desired head on the cider. Never add more than one bulb without first checking the cider pressure. This can easily be done by placing a glass under the tap and seeing the results. Think of the gas as 'insurance' if you don't have sufficient pressure. This is normally caused by drawing too much of the liquid in one go.

If the valve is to be used with the large S30 CO2 bottles then the piercing pin needs to be removed. This can be done easily by taking a needle and removing the "O" Ring that is seated in the top of the valve. When this has been removed the piercing pin will drop out of the valve, we don't need this for S30 cylinders (so keep it safe somewhere). Finally carefully replace the "O" Ring.

Make sure that you treat CO2 cylinders with respect as the gas is under high pressure. Only small amounts should be injected at a time when using the S30 cylinder, as the rapid transfer of gas can cause the valve to freeze.

When empty, shop bought S30 cylinders can be refilled by returning them to the shop, for a charge that is substantially less than the initial purchase cost. 8g Bulbs are single use only, and should be disposed of once used. We also have full instructions & detailed drawings of the workings of the S30 valve. Go to the S30 product page on our website.

Final Notes

If you ask the advice of any seasoned home brew expert, one of the first things they will tell you is 'R.T.I.', which is 'Read The Instructions'.

We have written so many instructions for all types of kits, and the vast majority of queries we get regarding problematic fermentations are caused when people have deviated from the instructions or just ignored them altogether!

Our number one aim is help you produce a fantastic tasting cider that's right first time. We know that home brewing can sometimes be daunting to newcomers, so if you have any concerns or queries, please drop us an email to info@lovebrewing.co.uk, as all of our staff are only too happy to share their experience and expertise.

Once you've enjoyed that first home made cider, you'll never look back, and once you expand your knowledge, you'll be able to experiment a little, and brew a cider that's perfect for you.