

Specialty Beers

Pumpkin Beers

Pumpkin beers were brewed regularly by colonial American brewers, who had little or no barley malt to use in beer. Pumpkins supplied sugar necessary for fermentation. Barley was scarce during those days, but pumpkins and other squash varieties were common and were often used as a fermentable. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson both brewed beer with pumpkins.

It is likely that dark “**pumpkin porter**” beers were very common. Sometimes we know very little about the actual look and flavor of beers in history, because the ingredients have changed or methods of preparing those ingredients have changed, but most beer prior to the Industrial Revolution was probably dark in color.

In colonial times, the malt drying process was very in-exact and almost all dried malt was either blackened or took on a very smoky quality from the crude drying ovens of the day. Only the widespread use of “coke” ovens during and after the Industrial Revolution allowed relatively smoke free malt drying at very controlled temperatures.

Food Pairings

Pumpkin beers are great with holiday dinners and pair nicely with turkey and chicken.

Holiday Beers

Throughout history, beer of somewhat higher alcohol and richness has been enjoyed for the winter holidays, when old friends get together to enjoy the season. Today folks still enjoy strong or spiced beers, mulled cider or “wassail” during the holiday season with friends and family.

Brewing a unique beer for Christmas is a tradition that dates back to medieval times, when most European brewers were monks who saved their finest ingredients for a special brew to honor the birth of Christ. Anchor Brewing Company revived this tradition in the United States in the 1970's and now there are dozens of interesting holiday beers available.

Saturnalia

The history of drinking spiced beers or wine dates to at least the Roman festival called Saturnalia, the celebration of the winter solstice. Festive Romans drank a beverage of wine cut with water and seasoned with honey and spices. One Saturnalia tradition that remains today is the cutting and decorating of evergreen trees, which was originally intended to pay homage to the Roman god, Saturn.

Saturnalia was often observed over several days, but December 25th was the official day of Saturnalia for many years, as the winter solstice fell on December 25th in those days. Many historians believe that Saturnalia directly evolved into today's Christmas holiday.

[Wikipedia has a very interesting article on the history of Christmas here.](#)

Wassail

During the Middle Ages, spiced beers called “wassails” were often served at celebrations. A surviving song lyric from the Middle Ages called the Gloucestershire Wassail begins:

**Wassail, wassail all over the town
Our toast it is white and our ale it is brown
Our bowl it is made of the white maple tree
With the wassailing bowl, we'll drink to thee**

Today wassail is often associated with spiced ciders or meads, but beers spiced with traditional holiday seasonings like ginger, nutmeg or cinnamon are still popular in the winter months. England, Belgium and the United States brew many of the most popular strong, spiced winter beers.

Food Pairings

Pumpkin beers are great with holiday dinners and pair nicely with turkey and chicken. Cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger and molasses are popular spices in holiday fare and many Holiday Beers pair well with those spices, or make use of them in the beer recipe.

12 Beers of Christmas

World Class Beverages has assembled our own list of [The 12 Beers of Christmas!](#) Take a look at the [12 Beers of Christmas](#) on the right side of this page!