

My Favorite Fall Beer: Narragansett Fest Lager

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Fall in New England is a great time for many things: sports and pie and politics are all peaking, and even the leaves throw cheap thrills to the nature perverts and tourist trappers. I find New Englanders to be a generally grumpy bunch, but everyone's in a good mood for the six-week stretch between the last blanketed pig of the wedding season and the first gravy-boat murder of the holiday season.

There are all sorts of harvest festivals and road races and hay rides (probably—do people still ride on hay? Did they ever?), the best of which are just loosely organized excuses for people to smile and drink on sunny Saturday afternoons. We know winter's coming, so we'll gladly seize any excuse to congregate outside without freezing. Just a couple of weeks ago my trip to the grocery store was interrupted by a street closure to accommodate the entire city of Cambridge's decision to watch handsome strangers race [pointy motorless boats](#) up and down the Charles River. Yes indeed, come October we'll watch even the dullest paint dry if you give us a sunny day and a beer tent.

Of course, as a native New Englander, I am obligated to complain about every damn thing in the world, including, yes, sunny days and beer tents. My beef with the autumnal sun is that it's so often completely disingenuous: Sunshine is supposed to mean warmth! I am fully aware that come this time of year you should check the thermometer before you get dressed for an outdoor event, but a large and dumb part of my brain refuses to accept that the temperature isn't 100 percent directly correlated to the UV index. I wear my flannel facemask on cloudy days in July, and even in the depths of February, a cloudless sky means a pantsless Will.

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I find that one of the steadiest remedies to being underdressed is to quickly become overserved, which brings us to my gripe about fall festival beer tents: I'm pretty picky about my fall seasonals. I've been choosing lagers

over ales more and more often in the past year, but I still haven't warmed up to most marzens, the German seasonal brews most commonly served at Oktoberfests and similar parties this time of the year. I find the majority of them to be overly malty and lacking in balance. I'm sure there are tons of great ones out there, but in my experience you're more likely to get a sweet, bready caramel disappointment than a beer worthy of such an exalted occasion.

Narragansett Fest Lager is one notable exception, and its modest price (around \$9.00 for a 6-pack of tallboys) and wide availability (where I live, at least) make it my favorite fall beer. Narragansett is a storied Rhode Island brand that's gone and come, and while most of the beers are now contract-brewed outside New England, some of the annual run of Fest is pumped out of the Cottrell Brewery in Pawcatuck, Connecticut, which is plenty New England enough for me to call it local.

But flavor is more important than heritage, and 'Gansett Fest delivers. Vienna, Pilsner, Light Munich, and Dark Munich malts are joined by Northern Brewer and Tettnanger hops that provide an earthiness and a subtly spicy finish lacking in less well-rounded marzens.