

The 10 Summer Beer Styles You Need to Know

By Charles Antin
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Summer beers should be refreshing. The quintessential summer time period is the long afternoon — the sun stays up, the grill stays lit, the beers are drunk by the cooler-full. Unless you have the endurance of Andre the Giant, summer beers should be low in alcohol. One, so you can drink a lot of them, and two, because no one likes a drunk in the kiddie pool. We like to stay away from brooding, heavier styles — no Imperial IPAs or barley wines here. This a list of beer styles — some you may have heard of, some you probably haven't — to try this summer.



Kölsch

Kölsch is a delicately bitter, lightly hopped beer brewed under the German Purity Law of 1516 in Köln, Germany. Like AOC in wine, if it's not brewed in Köln it can't technically be called Kölsch — everything you'll find made on our shores is "in the Kölsch style." Goose Island's Summertime is in the Kölsch style.

Drink This: Gaffel Kölsch is widely available, and at under 5% alcohol it's a great one to while away the afternoon. Crisp, refreshing and "clean" in the sense that there isn't an overload of maltiness, Gaffel is a summer classic.



Hefeweizen

Unfiltered yeast beers ("hefe" means "yeast" in German) are made by replacing some of the malted barley in a beer with wheat. Krystal weizen is filtered and clear, Weizen "mit hefe" has yeast sediment at the bottom of the bottle that should be agitated before drinking.

Drink This: Weihenstephaner is a classic. Founded in 1040, the Abbey claims to be the oldest brewery in the world, and one of the oldest continuously operated businesses. The fermentation process results in a frothy, low-alcohol beer with telltale flavors of spice, banana and citrus.



Berliner Weisse

The lowest-alcohol beer on this list, coming in around 2-4%, this sour wheat beer was first made in Berlin, as the name suggests. Addition of the lactobacillus bacteria makes a tart, acidic beer without bitterness. According to legend, Napoleon's troops dubbed it the "Champagne of the North" in the early 1800s.

Drink This: Dogfish Head calls their Festina Peche "neo-Berliner Weisse," since very few breweries in Germany are still brewing the real thing. Traditionally, a splash of fruit syrup was added to the beer to temper the sourness. Dogfish uses natural peach flavors to add fruitiness — no syrup needed.



Gose

In the same family as Berliner Weisse, Gose is a somewhat forgotten style now making a comeback. Low in alcohol, Gose's characteristic flavors are coriander and salt — yes, salt — that means it's only allowed in Germany outside of the brewing laws as a regional specialty.

Drink This: Westbrook Brewing in South Carolina makes a 4% ABV Gose at only 5 IBU (International Bittering Units — for comparison, their IPA is 65). Their refreshing take on the classic features coriander and salt.



Shandy

Think of shandy as a beer cocktail, of sorts. In broad terms, shandy is beer mixed with juice. In practice though, it's often lemonade. A pretty DIY summer cocktail; for those who can't be bothered to peel themselves off the poolside chaise, many bottled versions are now available.

Drink This: Narragansett has recently released a shandy made in partnership with Del's frozen lemonade. Gansett's lager combined with the classic summertime treat in the iconic yellow and green cup; what's not to like?



Session IPA

Is this the summer beer of 2014? The idea is: an intensely hoppy beer, without all the alcohol, which ideally means you can drink more than one of them when it's over 100 degrees. Some claim the name is an oxymoron — by definition an IPA is only an IPA if it's high in alcohol.

Drink This: If you prefer to drink, however, as opposed to argue about beer nomenclature, try Founder's All Day IPA. At 42 IBU it's got the assertive hoppy aromas you'd expect from an IPA, but at 4.7% alcohol, it's like drinking half of some of the IPAs on the market.



Saison

Saison is a traditional summer beer from Wallonia, Belgium, originally brewed for farm workers. Now, of course, they're made internationally, and often bottle-conditioned and sealed with a champagne cork. Often a fruity (orange, lemon) flavor with some spice notes (sometimes from actual spices added).

Drink This: Stillwater Cellar Door is made from German wheat and pale malts with Sterling and Citra hops, Cellar Door is citrus and herbs, topped off with sage.



Pilsner

Named after the city of Pilsen in the Czech Republic, where it was first produced, Pilsner (whether Bohemian, German or American) is crisp and light, malty and floral. Pilsner Urquell was the first Pilsner, and is still produced today.

Drink This: Jack's Abby Sunny Ridge is made in Framingham, MA. Pilsner malt, hops, and only 5.1% alcohol: a refreshing beer that tastes like normal beer should. Why complicate it?



"Summer Ale"

There's no definition of "summer ale," other than that they're released over the summer. A marketing ploy, perhaps, but that doesn't mean that aren't good ones.

Drink This: Shiner Bock Ruby Redbird is one of our personal favorites. We don't usually go in for beers with too much flavoring, but this seasonal beer, made with ginger and Texas Ruby Red grapefruit, was just plain refreshing. Take note: Texans know a thing or two about drinking in the oppressive heat.



Cider

Made from fermented apples it's not technically beer, but then it's not wine, either. Cider's reputation has suffered in this country — somehow getting a reputation as a sweet, alcoholic alternative for beer. This is changing, as some very traditional ciders are being brought in from Spain and France and even made locally. The best examples are dry and fragrant, and are no more oppressively "appley" than a refreshing glass of white wine is "grapey."

Drink This: Isastegi Segardo Naturala Cidre is an excellent, dry cider from Spain. To borrow from winespeak, there is some funkiness to it, so it's probably not one you're going to drink bottles of. Better for silent contemplation of the sweat trickling down your forehead.