

HOW TO MAKE LIGHT CIDER

Disclaimer: This is a recipe that has worked consistently for me, but I make no great claims for it. I dare say better and more authentic alternatives are out there to be discovered. If you find a good'un, please consider sharing it with the others in our group.

This recipe should produce what amounts to apple juice with an alcoholic twist – a light, pleasant drink that's ready by Christmas, mildly boozy and gone by Easter.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

Demijohns or barrels

Airlocks

A tube for syphoning

Sugar

A hydrometer, if you want to get technical

And at the end of the process – ie December:

Campden tablets to stop the fermentation

Bottles – corked, flip-top or screw top

If using corks, you'll need the gadget that inserts them, and maybe a rubber mallet.

HOW TO:

Start the fermentation soonest after pressing. Fill demijohns or barrels to the shoulder, allowing a little space for frothy fermentation. Seal with an airlock. Store in a warm, dark place, such as an airing cupboard, or near a radiator.

The natural yeast in the apples will be sufficient to ferment the cider. The airlock should start to bubble within a couple of days. The fermentation may be vigorous for the first week or so.

Later, when the fermentation calms down, the container should be filled up. As little air as possible for best results.

When the fermentation grows sluggish, add some sugar to pep it up. 100-150 grams at a time works well. The yeast eats the sugar, creating froth, reviving the fermentation and increasing the alcoholic strength.

After about a month, rack the cider; siphon off the clear juice, leaving behind the sediment that has settled at the bottom. This is likely to stall the fermentation. Add some sugar to coax it back into life if necessary.

You might add sugar several times over the course of a couple of months. Eventually the natural yeast will get exhausted and the fermentation will stop. After that, adding more sugar will just make the cider sweeter, so don't add too much.

When the airlock stops bubbling, the fermentation has stopped – or paused. Beware; it may revive if you shake the demijohn, warm it up or add more sugar. It can be deceptive.

The fermentation can go too far. In that case the cider tastes thin and puckery. Add sugar to taste, and if necessary at the end - add campden tablets to stop the fermentation.

After three months, it should be ready – in time for Christmas. Bottle it and drink it. Light cider is not vintage wine. Best necked before Easter.

USING A HYDROMETER:

If you can figure out how to use a hydrometer, and you're scrupulous about taking measurements, you can work out the alcoholic strength of your cider.

You're measuring the buoyancy of the liquid, or specific gravity. Sugar raises the buoyancy, giving a high reading. Alcohol lowers the buoyancy. Water gives a hydrometer reading of 1000.

A lower reading – say, 996 – means the yeast has gobbled up all of the sugar and made alcohol. Good. But it may taste thin and yucky.

A high reading – say, 1010 or above – means there's plenty of sugar left – probably too much, unless you like your cider sweet. And it's probably alcoholically weak.

Light cider with an eventual specific gravity (SG) of 1000 – 1004 will probably have a good balance of taste and a respectable alcoholic content.

To figure out the precise alcoholic strength, you have to know what the SG of the original juice was, how much sugar you added along the way, and what the final SG is. It's a bit technical – too technical for me. So you'll have to do your own research!

WHERE TO GET THE KIT – see separate document.

Buzz Cousins