**HOW TO MAKE STRONG 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.

To make a strong cider you need a robust commercial yeast, which will gobble up lots of sugar and convert it into alcohol; the more sugar, the merrier. If your fermentation is successful, it will produce a liquor which is pleasant to taste, forceful and conducive to anaesthesia of the skull.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:
Demijohns
Airlocks
A tube for syphoning
Yeast sold for cider-making
Lots of sugar over time
A hydrometer, if you want to get technical

And at the end of the fermentation – ie December;
Campden tablets to stop the fermentation
Wine bottles, corks and a gadget for inserting them

HOW TO:

Start the fermentation soonest after pressing. Fill demijohns or barrels only to the shoulder, allowing plenty of space for an over-excited fermentation. Add the yeast and maybe 200 grams of sugar.
Seal with an airlock. Store in a warm, dark place, such as an airing cupboard, or near a radiator.

The airlock should start bubbling within a few hours and is likely go berserk within a couple of days. It's likely to overflow. Just rinse out the airlock and it'll calm down within a week.

When the fermentation grows sluggish – after perhaps a fortnight - 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, when the sediment has settled at the bottom, rack the cider: You need to siphon off the clear juice, leaving behind the sediment. This is likely to stall the fermentation. Add some sugar to coax it back into life.

You might add sugar several times over the course of a couple of months. Later, when the fermentation calms down, the container should be filled up. As little air as possible for best results.

The fermentation may well plough on for too long, creating a taste that's thin, mean and pinched. Three months is quite long enough. Time to stop it by adding campden tablets and, if necessary, add enough sugar to restore a balanced flavour.

Fermentation is an erratic and variable process. If you end up with one demi-john that's too sweet and another that's too sour, blend the two.

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.

A good, strong cider may be ready to bottle and drink by Christmas. It has the fortitude to keep for up to a year, and still taste good. In my experience it's best after 5-9 months.

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 puckery.

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

Strong cider with an eventual specific gravity (SG) of 1002 – 1006 will probably taste good and be strong enough to leave you approximately legless, with the above mentioned anaesthesia of the skull.

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