

Barleywines

Here's another classic English family of beers that is more commonly referred to as **Strong Ales**. Strong Ales include several different beer styles including **Old Ales**, **English Barleywines** and **American Barleywines**. Old Ales and Barleywines are typically the strongest beers produced by a brewer, so if you are looking for high alcohol contents, this is the place for it. More importantly, Old Ales and Barleywines have some of the richest, most complex flavors of any beers, so they don't make for light refreshment. Old Ales and Barleywines are sipping beers that are usually most popular on cold evenings next to a fire.

While some beers do not age well, Old Ales and Barleywines are meant to be aged. Most of them are aged for some time before they are released to the public and many of them can be stored at cellar temperatures in the home for months or even years. As with some wines, these beers evolve over time and some achieve their greatest flavors only after years of aging.

Old Ales and Barleywines are sometimes referred to as "**Stock Ales**" because they are usually stored for long periods of time. In some cases, the older versions of the beer are mixed with younger versions of the beer, or blended, to create a beer with an aged character without having to age the entire batches for prolonged periods of time. Today, many Old Ales and Barleywines are vintage dated, so that the connoisseur can easily reference the year that the beer was brewed and bottled.

Old Ales

Old Ales are a type of beer that was very commonly brewed in England prior to the Industrial Revolution. While they are not specifically the same as Barleywines, they are the immediate predecessor of Barleywines and are very closely related to them.

Old Ales were typically aged for months or even years before they were consumed. Prolonged aging in unlined wooden vessels (known as tuns) typically gave the beers very distinct flavors. As the beer aged, wild yeast and bacteria, as well as tannins from the wood tuns would create sour flavors in the beer that we sometimes associate with old or stale beer, but which were very desirable flavors in an Old Ale. Today, Old Ales are still aged, but the aging usually takes place in the bottle rather than in wooden tuns. Many brewers will add yeast or bacteria to the beer to replicate the aged flavor of traditional Old Ales.

Old Ales can be either dark or light in color and they typically range from 4 to 9% alcohol by volume, so they are not always as strong as their Barleywine cousins. Many of the beers that are referred to as Winter Warmers today are modern versions of Old Ales.

English Barleywines

English Barleywines, like Old Ales, date to 18th century. During much of the 18th and 19th centuries, England and France were at war and Barleywines gained popularity with English patriots who boycotted French Clarets, a popular drink in England before the 18th century. In order to replace the complexity and alcohol content of the Clarets, British brewers made their Barleywines very strong, often around 10 to 12% alcohol by

volume. Also like Old Ales, Barleywines were often stored for months or even years prior to consumption, which allowed them to gain in complexity through aging.

English Barleywines rely mostly on their rich malt character for flavor. They are rich, malty beers with fruity flavors. Flavors you might expect to detect in English Barleywines would include nutty, biscuity, toffee, molasses and you'll often find flavors of dried fruit.

American Barleywines

American Barleywines are rich, malty beers like their English counterparts, but like other beer styles, American brewers tend to favor more use of hops. In particular, the use of American hop varieties (instead of the earthy English hops) tend to give American Barleywines more of a citrusy hop character.