

BEER BUZZ:

HOPS: FRUIT SALAD IN AN HERB GARDEN

by Joey Williams



The India Pale Ale is the workhorse of this craft beer generation. Every brewery across the country seems to have at least one IPA in their lineup. Some breweries seem to only brew variations on the style. At commercial beer competitions, like the Great American Beer Festival, the IPA

categories see the most entries. Many believe the IPA's popularity is part of a trend towards bigger, more aggressive styles and that a time will come when the IPA isn't king. I wholeheartedly disagree. The IPA style is so diverse and interesting that I believe it will always be a cornerstone of the American craft beer culture.

The IPA is, in its current state, a hop delivery system. An understanding of the ingredient is necessary then, to understand something about the style. Hops are the female flowers of an aggressive climbing plant and were originally used in beer for their bitter flavor that balanced the sweetness of the malt and their inherent antibiotic qualities that made for more stable and longer lasting beer. Hops are grown in several regions in the world, but the best known regions are England, Germany and the American Pacific Northwest. Like wine grapes, hops vary from region to region. In Germany the "Noble hops" are grown. There are generally four recognized varieties of noble hops, with a fifth coming under question recently. Noble hops are prized for their well rounded bitterness and flavor. England has a similar tradition of heirloom hops with a pleasant bitterness and flavor. In America's Pacific Northwest, hop growers are producing domestic versions of both German and English traditional hops, new hybrids and the very assertive hops found in many American IPAs.

Also, like wine grapes, new hops are being cultivated all of the time. Nelson Sauvin, a hop originated in New Zealand, was engineered using prized Sauvignon Blanc grapes and a bit of scientific

wizardry. The result is a hop with surprising grape-like qualities. Citra is a hop made famous last year with the release of Sierra Nevada Torpedo. The hops noticeable citrus qualities make for easy name selection and contribute to an excellent IPA.



Hops have a set of flavors all their own that they contribute to a beer. In a standard brew, the influence of the hops is such that it is only part of the flavor, rather than being the focal point. In an IPA, the hops are the star and their flavors are allowed to shine. Flavors of citrus and tropical fruit, pine and resin, flowers and herbs all come from hops and make an appearance in one IPA or another. One hop alone may showcase a number of these characteristics. When used in concert, hops become a symphony of flavors supporting and contrasting one another in the most amazing way. This variety, along with the varieties and combinations of malt and yeast, make for almost never-ending possibilities.

The varietal of hops used in an IPA is only part of the equation. Once the varietals are chosen, a brewer must decide when during the brewing process it is best to add each varietal and how much to add. Adding hops early in the boiling of the beer will contribute considerable bitterness, but many of the volatile flavor and aroma compounds will boil away. While an addition made towards the end of the boiling process will retain some of those delicious compounds while still contributing some bitterness. A brewer can also steep hops in a beer after it has fermented in a process called "dry hopping" to add a fresh hop aroma and flavor. Each step that hops are added another layer of complexity is put into place. Dogfish Head Brewing is known for their "Minute: IPAs that are hopped every minute for a 60, 90 or 120 minute boil and dry hopped enough times to make your head spin. The result is beer with layers of complexity and loads of flavor that has made the brewery a go to for hop heads.



Ultimately the IPA is about balance, often about the lack of balance. All of this information may have you feeling a lack of balance, so let's cover some basics. There are three families in the IPA world, the English, the American and the Imperial. The English IPA is a creature of tradition typically using traditional English malts and hops. The flavors of an English IPA are often more balanced and subdued than their American brethren, but no less interesting. Hop character in an English IPA is often floral, herbal and earthy with the occasional fruit note. The American IPA is much more aggressive and hop forward showcasing the flavors and aromas of citrus (most especially grapefruit), resinous pine and fruit that have come to be expected from an IPA. An Imperial or Double IPA can be based on either the English or American versions, though the American is the more popular base. An all out hop onslaught can usually be expected from an Imperial IPA with a general lack of balance being a foregone conclusion. In 2009 we saw an influx of "Belgian IPAs", which, like the Imperial IPA, can be an offshoot of either the English or American traditions where a fruity or spicy Belgian yeast is used. More recently the "Black IPA" has begun to make an appearance on store shelves and bar tap lists. The jury is still out on where this style actually falls in respect to the IPA, but expect darker malt flavors along with your hop character.

If all of this has your head spinning and your just want a beer, here are some places to start:



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English IPA

Fuller's 1845

A standard when it comes to English ales, Fuller's doesn't disappoint with their bottle conditioned IPA packed with bready malt flavor supporting a spicy, herbal hop character. A great place to start an IPA journey.



Left Hand 400 Pound Monkey **AVAILABLE SOON!**

The brewery let this beast out to show that a beer can be hoppy without turning your face inside out. Herbal hop flavors display a hint of citrus while muscling past a dry, biscuity malt base. A monkey can throw 400 pounds of hops in a beer, but Left Hand can do it with a bit of finesse.

American IPA

Ska Modus Hoperandi

Punk rock bands with a brass section aren't the first thing that comes to mind when I think IPA, but Ska has become synonymous with the style on Texas shelves. Big grapefruit hoppiness dominates the caramel malt backbone.



Stone IPA

A personal favorite and classic for the style, this IPA is tons of pine, piled on top of mounds of grapefruit and tropical fruit dressed with the lightest amount of honey-like malt, for some attempt at balance.



Imperial IPA

Deschutes Hop Henge

In my article Beer in Review, I make mention of Hop Stoopid not being the IPA that converted me. Well, Hop Henge is the IPA that converted me. I don't know what sort of science or witchcraft they're working with in Oregon, but I like it. The obligatory grapefruit, pine, tropical fruit and herbal qualities are all here in spades. A caramel malt backing struggles for attention, but only gets a nod for the attempt.

Brewdog Hardcore IPA

The boys in Scotland play the American game well. Drier and more drinkable than the American Imperials, Hardcore replaces the missing full, stickiness with a banquet of ripe fruits, florals, grass notes and pine laid out over a crisp, clean cookie-like malt center. An interesting blend of English and American brewing traditions elevated to extreme heights.



Belgian IPA

Allagash Hugh Malone

An experiment from the brew crew in Portland, Maine that so many are fond of. This beer showcases new hop varieties and techniques each time its released. The most recent version uses a hop variety called Teamaker, originally designed for the making of hop tea and prized for its huge flavor and aroma with little to no bitterness. Other varieties are employed for bitterness and more flavor to result in a beer packed with candied citrus peel, fresh cut grass, spicy yeast and dry cracker-like malt.



Black IPA

Widmer W'10 Pitch Black IPA

IPA? Porter? Something all together new? Dark, bitter chocolate and coffee roast work well with the earthy, herbal hop character and allow a bit of citrus to shine through. A porter in appearance, but billed as one of the new breed of darker than pale India ales. I've decided it is essentially a hoppy porter in flavor as well, but is still a fantastic brew and one worth checking out to decide a classification for yourself.

I hope this journey through the fields and brew kettles packed with excessive amounts of hops has you excited about IPAs and the diversity the style offers. I believe the IPA will continue to be the American workhorse for years, if not decades, to come. For the not-so-distant future I can most assuredly guarantee you that we will continue to be buried in hops and I won't be the only one celebrating. ☺



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NEW ON SHELVES AT SPEC'S DOWNTOWN:

- Allagash Hugh Malone Belgian IPA 750ml
- Allagash Black Belgian-style Stout 750ml
- Dogfish Head Red & White 750ml
- Koningshoeven Bock 750ml
- Otter Creek Quercus Vitis Humulus Barleywine 22oz
- Avery Black Tot Rum Barrel-aged Imperial Oatmeal Stout 12oz
- Lindemans Faro 12oz
- Brewdog Tokyo Imperial Stout 12oz
- Deschutes Red Chair NWPA 6pk
- New Belgium Ranger IPA 6pk
- Sierra Nevada Bigfoot Barleywine 2010 6pk
- Sierra Nevada Glissade Bock 12pk
- Summit Maibock 6pk