

LV Education: Should This Beer Be Aged?

Aging beer can be a fun and rewarding process. Watching a beer you know well develop over time for the better, worse, or just for the different offers a taste-able look at the processes of flavor development, staling, and oxidation. It's a great way to gain a deeper understanding of the beers you love while filling up that lonely, empty corner in your basement. But here's the thing: most beer tastes best fresh. So how do we know which beers we should age, and which we should drink now? Here's a bit of advice:

Why Age Beer?

Breweries release beer when they feel it is ready for consumption. Aging beer is never a necessity. But it *can* be a fun hobby that can yield some seriously delicious results. Some beers have the potential to improve with age, and finding those and drinking them at their peak is satisfying and addictive.

To get the most out of your newly established beer cellar, it helps to be in the right mindset. Don't expect every beer you age to be a winner—I can promise you that not every bottle will be. Rather than finding disappointment in the flops, enjoy them for what they are and use it as a learning opportunity for future aging experiments.

Which Beers to Age?

This guide would be a whole lot easier to write if there were a set of rules that would reliably produce wonderful aging results when applied to any brand of beer. It'd be great to know that aging an imperial stout for two years will always make it better, but that is absolutely not the case.

There are a few beer types that tend to age better than others. Let's have a look:

- **Bottle conditioned beers:** All beers will change over time, but bottle conditioned beers tend to have the best chance of improving. The living yeast within the bottle helps protect the beer from oxidation and can develop new, pleasant flavors over time. Beers that are not bottle conditioned will change as well (sometimes for the better!), but may develop off flavors more quickly.
- **Higher ABV beers.** Stronger beers tend to fare better with age than those with lower levels of alcohol. If a beer is especially boozy, that alcoholic flavor may soften and mellow out with time.
 - **Try:** barleywines, imperial stouts, old ales, tripels, quadrupels.
- **Less hoppy beers.** Hop character is one of the first flavor characteristics to fade with time. If a beer's flavor is driven by hop-derived aromatics, it probably won't taste great when aged. Drink 'em fresh!
 - **Don't try:** IPAs, pale ales, American amber ales, ESB.
- **Highly acidic beers.** Sour beers have the potential to change dramatically over time. The array of living organisms within the bottle can continue to affect the way the beer tastes long after it is packaged and sold.
 - **Try:** lambics, Flanders sour ales, American sour ales.

How Do I Do It?

Beer ages best in a cool, dark place with minimal fluctuations in temperature. 50-60°F is ideal. Warmer temperatures will accelerate the aging process, but can hasten the pace of staling and oxidation. Cooler temperatures are better, but will slow the aging process, so what's the point?

Some like to store beer on its side, maximizing the liquid's contact with any yeasty sediment that remains in the bottle and keeping the cork moist at all times. Others prefer to store beer upright, ensuring that the yeast forms a compact cake on the bottom of the bottle, which will make it easier to pour later on. Choose your own adventure!

One more thing (this is an important one): make sure you buy more than one bottle when you're preparing to stick a beer in the cellar. You'll want to taste the beer fresh so you have a good understanding of how your beer is changing, and it's nice to have extras if you taste an aged beer and decide that it needs a bit more time in the cellar. We recommend buying at least three, so you can taste a few different points in a beer's lifecycle. There's no way of knowing how long is the "right" time to age a beer, so taste a bottle every six months to a year, and you'll see some definite progression. Most beers don't improve on timelines longer than 1-5 years, but there are many exceptions to that! We've tasted beautiful 15-year-old barleywines and 25-year-old lambics. Have fun with it!