

# Texas Nordic: How to make a simple mead

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## Texas Nordic

In an effort to spread worthy craft, I would like to share with you a really simple mead recipe, technique, and steps for you to be able to make this fine drink at home. Our Norse forebears were not the only ones to enjoy this drink. Archaeologists have found drinking vessels between the ancient world and India that record this drink having been enjoyed for around 10,000 years. Most believe it even predates beer. Almost every country on earth has a fermented honey drink. There's interesting science to that but I will skip it for now.

Many have not heard of or enjoyed mead. The simplest form of this drink is a mixture of water, honey and yeast. Once fermented, it's delicious. Mead, or mjöður in Icelandic, is written to have been enjoyed by gods, royalty, warriors, giants, and the heroes of old.

Ever heard the word "honeymoon"? Of course you have. The word's origin comes from a newly wed bride and groom being presented with enough mead to last for one "moon", and that the couple drinking mead after the nuptials would promote procreation during the month after their vows.

Today, the drink has once again become popular. Honey is expensive, and much can go awry in the process of making mead that great ingredients can sometimes make a sub par drink. I would like to help you overcome that, and hope that all of our cousins of Scandinavian descent could enjoy an age old craft by making this for your family and friends at home.

I'll show you one that is my current addiction, and for months I have been making batches of this every week. The larger batches disappeared quickly and friends and family kept coming back for bottles. In the recipe below, I will show you how to make one gallon. If you want to make more, simply scale up the quantities per ingredient and follow the same methods.

These next two pictures show both the simplicity of ingredients, and a few helpful tools you will need to start and complete your first batch.



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### Ingredients

- 1 gallon of spring water
- 2.5 to 3lbs honey
- 2 Tbsp culinary lavender
- 1 apple
- Appx 1in of a knob of ginger
- ½ pack of Voss Kveik

I started using Voss Kveik back this summer. Kveik is a Norwegian farmhouse yeast and there are a small handful of varieties. Kveik is a unique yeast strain. It activates and ferments really aggressively. As an example, this one gallon of mead we're going to make will be ready to drink in 3-4 days as opposed to most meads only being drinkable after aging a minimum of

around 5 months. That's a big difference!

Farmhouse ale has continued to be made in Norway for over 1,000 years. It's getting more notice today in craft brewing circles, and Kveik is really making a comeback with others rediscovering the craft in Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

The strain we'll be using is Voss, and can be readily found at online brewing supply shops. This strain of yeast we'll be using is literally the same yeast our forebears used for making beer and mead during the Viking age. Want to connect with your ancestors? Making and drinking your own mead is a tangible way to do just that.

Kveik is the real star of this show. I went from waiting 5 months for a mead to be ready to serve all the way down to inside one week. I've imagined feasts in the Íslendingasögur would have been ready quickly due to this yeast's quick work. I've named the mead we're making here "Norðmandi" since we're using apples and lavender.



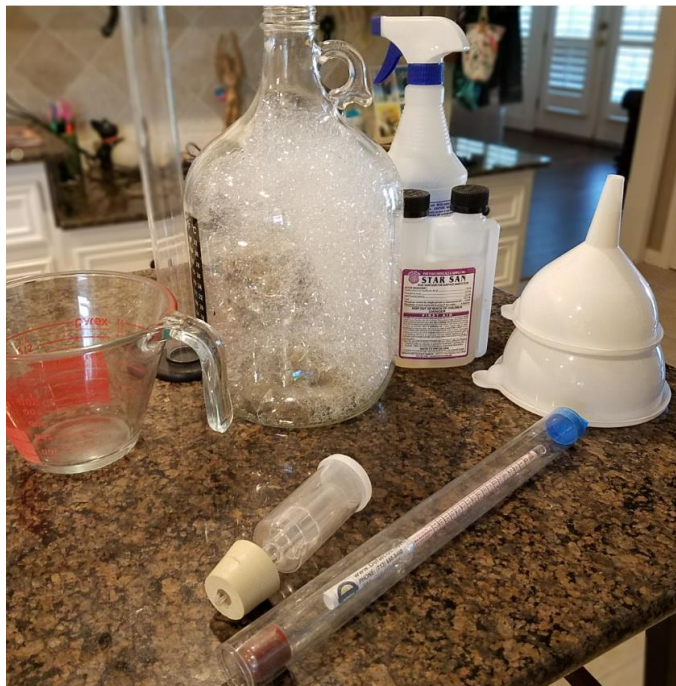
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As for supplies and tools, I have the essentials here alongside a couple of extras that help simplify some of the work.

## Tools

- 1 gallon carboy
- Pyrex measuring cup
- Star San
- A couple of funnels
- A carboy airlock
- 1 spray bottle
- Hydrometer
- Plastic measuring cylinder



One of the instruments here is a hydrometer. It isn't necessary by any means, but it's a handy tool for calculating the exact alcohol by volume you've produced in your mead. Because this mead is ready in only a few days, the airlock with rubber stopper is not completely necessary, as you can just cover the top of your carboy with a paper towel and a rubber band.

The Star San product you see pictured is a common brewery sterilizing agent. I keep a spray bottle of it filled to sterilize tools and anything else that may come in contact with the mead ingredients. For any responsible brewing, sanitation is key and instructions are provided on the bottle. It wasn't around 1,000 years ago, however!

## Step 1

Sterilize all of your tools, measuring cups, funnels, and carboy. Allow those to dry for at least 10 minutes. You won't need to rinse them after 10 minutes. The sanitizer will have done its work and become inert.

## Step 2

Put around 2/3 of your gallon of water in a pot on the stove to slowly heat. Should you boil it, let it cool down to around 110 or 120 F before using. If you mix honey with boiling water, you'll kill all of the beneficial nutrients in the mead. You want to keep your drink healthy! Once your water is around 110F or so, add that to your carboy then add around 2.5lbs of honey in the carboy next. Mixing honey with warm water in the carboy will help you incorporate the mixture better. Cap the bottle off and shake vigorously for a minute or so until the honey is completely mixed.



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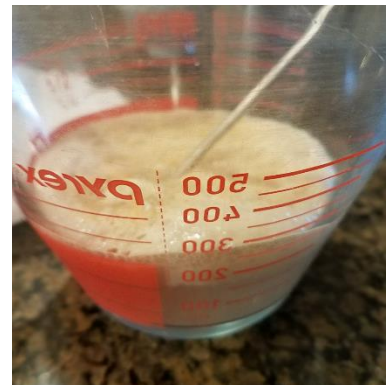


### Step 3

Core and chop up your apple into small enough bits that they'll fit into the carboy. You can add the apples and lavender at this point. I julienne the ginger after peeling it and add it as well. If you are taking fussy initial gravity measurements as you build your must (what mead is called before it's fermented) you'll want to leave your apples, ginger, and lavender for last.

### Step 4

In your clean measuring cup, add about ½ cup of warm water (95F to 105F is optimal). Also drop in about 1tsp of honey and mix it all up. Like pitching yeast for bread and dough, we want to give the kveik something to snack on for a while before adding the rest to our must. This step is called “pitching” your yeast. Now you can add ½ pack of Kveik and stir it in. After about 20-30 minutes you should notice the yeast has become active and foamy in your measuring cup. If not, continue to wait. It'll wake up. This pic here shows foaming action.



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## Step 5

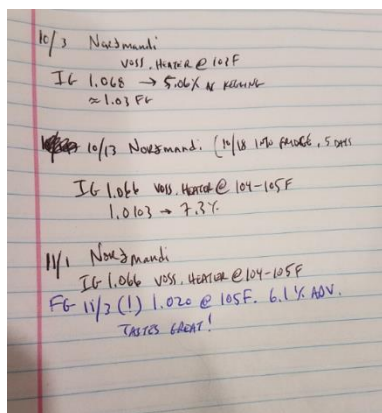
Add almost all of the rest of the water to your carboy. You want to leave some space at the top and not overfill. Like the picture here. After this, pour in your pitched yeast and give the whole thing another vigorous shake.

## Step 6

After about an hour, you should notice the kveik has gone well to work, and your whole mixture of mead should be boiling. In a few hours, this will become even more aggressive with strong bubbling continuing through the first 24 to 48 hours.

During this next period, continue to watch your mead and the bubbling activity. This is the fermentation stage that will produce alcohol in your drink. The longer it sits, the more alcohol content you'll get. Up to around 12% or so. As with all things, there are tradeoffs. The longer it ferments, the more sugar is being consumed. This part becomes a matter of taste and how sweet you want your mead to be. I prefer meads at around 6-8% ABV with a bit of effervescence. Much like beer. Meads of old were likely quaffed "by the pint" as opposed to the smaller wine glasses many enjoy mead from today. Many meads on the market are around 12-16% ABV, and have a lot of wine-like characteristics. Some are even heavier up to around 19% and are more like fortified wines, liquors, and port.

This of course is all a matter of preference, and you should feel free to experiment. This pic here is of my current mead journal where I take name, ingredient, and gravity notes along with a date. This newest entry here is of this very mead we've made.



As of this writing, I'd made this mead and took these pictures on a Sunday. Two days later (and at a fermentation temp of 105F) this mead had reached 6.1% ABV and I'd put the carboy in the fridge to cold crash. "Crashing" halts fermentation by temperature or chemical means, and I prefer to do mine in the fridge without added sulfites or stabilizers. The cloudiness and almost all of the apples and lavender will also drop to the bottom of the carboy as the mead's temperature lowers over time.

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Here you can see I'm using the hydrometer to take my initial gravity reading when I first mixed the must. You don't have to do this as you can just drink this when you're ready after a couple of days. I do it every time as a part of my different runs for flavor profiles. This initial gravity reading here is 1.066, and my final gravity came out to 1.020. That means

the bulb sank due to less density in the mead offset by the production of alcohol.

meadmkr.com/abv-calc  
displayed.

ABV Calculator	<input type="radio"/> Brix <input checked="" type="radio"/> SG
Starting Gravity	1.066
Final Gravity	1.020
ABV	6.1 %

1	2	3	< x
4	5	6	Go
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This mead reached 6.1% when I put it in the fridge, but it likely picked up another % while the temp was dropping as the crash is not instantaneous and kveik is pretty aggressive.

After 5 years of trial and error, good batches and bad, I finally made a mead my wife liked so I named it after her. This "Heiður" mead uses orange peel, ginger, and cardamom instead of apple and lavender. You can give that a go too and see what you prefer.

Having a 1 gallon keg chiller is nice for enjoying mead on tap. If you bottle your mead, I'd suggest using the heavy glass bottles with the flip top lid as opposed to regular wine bottles. Sometimes the kveik can reactivate and build enormous CO2 pressure inside the bottle. When this happens in regular beer and wine bottles they'll explode sending glass and mead everywhere. Not a fun cleanup job for certain.

Skál í botn!

