

Written by Mark Emiley
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Tomme Arthur, who has been brewing with Pizza Port since 1997, talked about a recent effort they undertook with a local farmer to plant and harvest a small hop field to support specialty beers for the brewery. They brew a wet hop beer called High Tide Fresh Hop. They've brewed it for three years and have a production of about 240 bbl. They add the hops post-kettle in a hop back (they actually use their mash tun but now have a dedicated 10 barrel hop back which was an old mash tun).

They use Centennial in the hop back and dry hop with Simcoe.

They are hoping that they will eventually get to a sustaining harvest with the field, but for this year, they are going to have to do a 1-off beer to showcase the hops due to the very low yield (normally low in the beginning).

Focusing on the discussion with the farmer and wet hops beers, the main thing to keep in mind is that it requires being in touch with the harvesting. In particular, the timing and size (mainly for mechanization) of the harvest is critical.

Tomme did a great job of covering some critical hop principles. Hops love early water but late water in the form of rain is bad, mainly for mildew. Initially the main focus needs to be on developing the rootstock. Cut back the first shoots early in the season (March-April) to encourage a full hearty vine growth later. Growth should peak in July for a late summer harvest. You want the area to have good drainage and a supportive trellis site. Most trellises are 18" and if possible you should use drip irrigation. Hops need sun, water, and a healthy soil with a pH between 6.5-8.0. Once hops get going up the trellis, don't be afraid to cut back the leaves on the bottom 3-4 feet to reduce mildew formation and promote air circulation. It will be a matter of time before mites and aphids find their way to your vines. Ladybugs are a great natural predator to combat them if you don't want to spray.

You know that your hops are ready to harvest when they are light, dry, and springy to the touch (they should bounce back when compressed). They will be slightly papery at this point. Most importantly, you'll see plenty of lupulin (yellow powder) at the base. It is recommended to harvest when it is dry and not windy outside.

A few more points. When your hops are growing up the vine, if the main shoot head breaks, that is it. The side arms will not reach the potential that the main shoot would have. Consequently, take care of that head! Wind damage can be a big problem. When planting hops, don't be afraid to plant them just ½" under the soil. Planting them too deep (several inches) will greatly reduce the chance that the plant will surface before it runs out of reserve energy. Instead of trying to figure out which side is up, just lay it on its side and it'll take care of

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itself.

And just to summarize a bit more about hop production. Washington accounts for about 70-75% of the domestic hop production with Oregon at 15-20% and Idaho sitting at around 10%. Overall, for the hops that come through Hop Union, about 80% are pelletized and 20% are sold as whole hops. Once hops are dried, you can crank them down to sub-freezing with no problems (not the best for non-dried hops). You may wonder why hops spontaneously combust. The pressure on the oil is the main culprit. Myrcene has a flash point of 104F. Tack on some pressure with that and you've got a pretty dangerous situation if it can't vent.