

Oktoberfest

Oktober Fest-Marzen

Brauerei Aying - Aying, GER

5.8% ABV. Fall seasonal. Bottles, draft.

Oktoberfest

Spaten - Munich, GER

5.9% ABV. 23 IBU.

Oktoberfest Wiesn

Paulaner - Munich, GER

6% ABV. Fall seasonal. Cans, draft.

Octoberfest Beer

Harpoon - Boston, MA

5.5% ABV. 30 IBU. Fall seasonal. Bottles, draft.

Malt: Munich, chocolate, pale. Hop: Tettnang, Willamette

The overall character is a rich, full-bodied, maltiness whose sweetness is balanced by generous use of hops.

Oktoberfest

Brooklyn Brewery - Brooklyn, NY

5.5% ABV. 25 IBU. Fall seasonal. Bottles, draft.

Malts: Bavarian Heirloom Munich, Pilsner Malts (malted specially for us in Bamberg).

Hops: Hallertauer Perle, Hallertauer Mittelfrueh.

Brewed from the finest German malt and hops, Brooklyn Oktoberfest is true to the original style, full bodied and malty, with a bready aroma and light, brisk hop bitterness.

The Kaiser

Avery Brewing - Boulder, CO

10% ABV. 24 IBU. Fall seasonal. Bottles, draft.

Hops: Bravo, Tettnang, Hersbrucker

Malts: Two-row barley, Vienna, Munich, Dark Munich, Aromatic

The Kaiser once said, "Give me a woman who loves beer and I will conquer the world." If the Kaiser and his significant other had tipped this bottle, we'd all be "sprechenden Deutsch!" We took all that is good in a traditional Oktoberfest - gorgeous, deep copper sheen, massive malty backbone and spicy, floral, pungent noble hops - then intensified each into this, an Imperial Oktoberfest.

From German Beer Institute.com

About half a millennium ago, brewers in Bavaria had difficulty controlling the quality of their brews in the summer, and they didn't have a clue why their beers often tasted sour and medicinal during the hot season. However, they had learned from experience that beers brewed roughly between early October and the end of March tended to taste clean and appetizing. Nowadays, of course, we understand that, in the foothills of the Alps, it got much too cold in the fall and winter for most airborne microbes to survive and spoil the brew. So the Bavarian brewers resorted to a simple but effective strategy that ensured a drinkable beer supply for the summer. They worked overtime in their brewhouses in late winter to make plenty of potent and well-hopped "March" beer, Märzen-Bier in German. Its color was deep amber to copper and its alcohol content probably somewhere between 5 and 6%. These beers were full-bodied with a malt-accented finish.

To keep these Märzen beers fresh during the summer months, they were stored in casks in cool cellars and mountain caves, some filled with ice from the previous winter. The beers were released gradually starting in late spring or early summer. The high alcohol and hop content served as preservatives and the ideal storage conditions ensured that this beer kept well and actually matured and improved as summer turned into fall. It probably became especially good near the end, when the hops would have mellowed out and the brew's malty character would have come fully to the fore. By October however, after the year's grain harvest, the last of the Märzen beers had to be consumed so that the precious casks could receive the new brewing season's fresh delectables. Now, combine the pressure on those poor medieval souls to vacate the needed cooperage in a hurry with their innate propensity for having a jolly good time, and the concept of an Oktoberfest emerges almost automatically—as does the name by which this Märzenbier is most commonly known: Oktoberfestbeer.

Like most medieval beer styles, the Märzen-Oktoberfest evolved with advancements in the art of brewing. It underwent its first systematic, brew-technical change in 1841 at the hands of two brewmaster friends, Gabriel Sedlmayr and Anton Dreher. These gentlemen were the owners of the Spaten Brewery of Munich and the Dreher Brewery of Vienna, respectively. Both brewers cooperated in lightening the color of the traditional Märzen-Oktoberfest's grain bill (Dreher more so than Sedlmayr) by the addition of a new, slightly caramelized, but fairly pale malt to the grist—a malt which we now call Vienna malt. At that time, Sedlmayr was already using nothing but lager yeast for his Märzen, while Dreher was not. So Dreher switched to Sedlmayr's yeast. In Munich, the new beer continued to be called a Märzen, but with the cosmopolitan tag line "gebraut nach Wiener Art" (brewed the Vienna way). But on Dreher's home turf, in Vienna, the new beer was given a new and separate style designation, Vienna Lager.

Sixpoint

The “Vienna way” of brewing was arguably more of a marketing than a brew-technical term. It was true that the color of the two 1841 brews was raised well above that of the standard beers of the day, but it was not yet as blond as the Pilsner lager, which was to be introduced a year later by the Burgher Brewery of Pilsen, in 1842. In reality, both Dreher’s and Sedlmayr’s beers were still made the traditional Munich way, with an emphasis on multi-step decoction, the use of caramelized malts for body and some nutty sweetness, relatively long wort boils, low hopping rates to preserve the brew’s predominantly malty character, and relatively long lagering periods for mellowness.

The Munich Märzen of “the Vienna way” became “re-Bavarianized” in 1871, when the Spaten Brewery introduced at that year’s Munich Oktoberfest a reformulated Märzen beer with a slightly darker version of Dreher’s Vienna malt, a new malt which we now call Munich malt. This new märzenbier was marketed under the explicit brand name of Oktoberfestbier, the one we still use today.

Also, with the spread in the nineteenth century of scientific brewing methods, including controlled malting, yeast management, beer filtration and especially refrigeration, Germans (and the world) could brew great-tasting beers of any style any time of the year, not just during the cold season. Thus, there was no longer a need for the mass production of Märzen-Oktoberfestbier in the spring. Instead, Bavarian brewers made their strong March-type beers only if and when they wanted to, usually as specials. They also shaved some time off the long lagering periods that the Märzen-Oktoberfest beer received in the Middle Ages. In a modern, bottom-line driven brewery, storing beer in refrigerated stainless-steel tanks for six months is considered a rather expensive luxury. Such extensive lagering is practiced only if it is a brew-technical necessity and the beer’s sales can amortize the extra investment. As a result, brewers now package their beers as soon as they are ready. As a general practice, Märzen-Oktoberfest beers that are marketed without the Oktoberfest suffix on the label may now be lagered no longer than six to eight weeks, while beers that carry the hyphenated Märzen-Oktoberfest designation (or the Oktoberfestbier name just by itself) may have stayed in lagering tanks for about 12 to 16 weeks.

From this discourse it ought not to be surprising that the style definition of the Märzen-Oktoberfest-Vienna is somewhat fuzzy and perhaps controversial. However, there is much history behind the brew’s three-part name...and its namesake beer party, the Munich Oktoberfest.

The Munich Oktoberfest and its Beers

Both as a beer style and as a beer fest, the Oktoberfest started out as a decidedly informal affair, probably sometime in the

fifteenth century. The brew was the Bavarians’ summer beer and the fest was the Bavarians’ excuse to polish off any leftover summer beer in the fall. Since then, both the beer and the fest have gradually evolved into quite formal affairs. While the Oktoberfestbier has become a modern beer style, the celebration which shares its name with the brew has acquired official status, too.

The date of the Oktoberfest’s great transformation was October 12, 1810. On that day, the Bavarian Crown Prince Ludwig, who later became King Ludwig I, married Princess Therese of Saxony-Hildburghausen. To allow the commoners to partake in the ceremonies, the noble couple decided to organize a grand wedding party for its subjects on some grazing land outside the Munich city gates—and some 40,000 happy Bavarians showed up for the fun. That meadow, incidentally, was then given its current name of Theresienwiese (Theresa’s meadow), in honor of the Crown Princess. Ludwig sure must have been smitten with love, because every year on the anniversary of his nuptials, he repeated the whole show. To this day, the Theresienwiese (now known in local vernacular as just the “Wies’n”) is still the site of the annual Munich Oktoberfest.

Strangely, the most popular attraction at the first Munich Oktoberfest in 1810 was horse racing, not beer, because there wasn’t any! However, this sorry state of affairs was not to continue for long. Already in 1814, the German poet Achim von Arnim reported that the festivities featured an ample array of beer shacks where the people could get their suds in half-liter, tin-lidded steins. Eventually, horse racing was dropped from the program, but—foreshadowing a trend—more and more beer stands were added to keep the crowds in high spirits, and the festivities were extended to several days.

Today, the Oktoberfest lasts more than two weeks, during which Theresa’s once pastoral meadow is covered by more than a dozen huge beer tents. In these canvas monsters, with oompah-bands blaring, some six million noisy revelers from all over the globe congregate. They are there, it seems, for only one purpose: To down more than six million liters (roughly 1.75 million gallons) of beer. This consumption accounts for about 30% of the entire annual beer production of all the Munich breweries combined. These visitors also munch a staggering 400,000 sausages—or just about one sausage for every two seconds during the fest’s business hours!

The Munich Oktoberfest has become by far the biggest party in the world, but the full-bodied Oktoberfestbier that erstwhile dominated the famous fest is no longer the signature brew of the event. As a sign of the times, the hefty, deep-amber Oktoberfestbier has long since been replaced in the beer tents by the lighter Bavarian pale lager, the Helles.