



# A Fermented Affair

Four Missoulians Share Why They Craft Beverages at Home

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PHOTOGRAPHY PAMELA DUNN-PARRISH

The first time I bottled my own beer, a decent chunk of it spilled on the floor. The random piece of tubing I used as a siphon flowed too fast for my inept attempts to fill the bottles that I'd painstakingly saved for months. My sister and I giggled aplenty as we capped that batch of golden ale. And we were pretty darn proud of ourselves when we popped off the tops to sample it a few weeks later.

Granted, that first batch didn't taste great. But it tasted good enough to drink it all, and convinced me of the benefits of crafting beer at home. A decade later, I'm happy to report my brewing process is smoother and the results are tastier. I still make messes in the kitchen, though—that's half the fun.

As an amateur homebrewer, I find myself most inspired by the creativity and the camaraderie I've uncovered with each batch of beer. I wanted to find out what inspires other homebrewers in our hometown. The Missoulians interviewed give some stellar insight into why it's worthwhile to make your own craft beverages.



**NATE SCHWAB: BEER, WINE AND CIDER**  
***Homebrewing Since: 2008***

Since there's no glass recycling in Missoula, I always felt guilty throwing my beer bottles away. I wanted to keep drinking good beer guilt-free, so I started brewing my own. It evolved into a pretty intense passion.

***Inspired By: The Scientific Process***

I'm a scientist by trade, and brewing beer is the perfect marriage between science and art. I love experimenting and being creative, but also enjoy understanding what's happening scientifically during each step of the process. As a homebrewer, you can do whatever your brain can imagine. Plus, it's fun to share the brews. Bottles make great gifts, and growlers are a good contribution to a party.

***Most Creative Creation: Sour Beer***

I took a two-week trip to Belgium in April, and got into spontaneous fermentation. Right now I have two sour beers fermenting, which are the most unique thing I've made so far.

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The Mead Mavens toast another batch



**CAROL MILLER: MEAD**  
**Homebrewing Since: 2006**

I brew with a group of women here in Missoula. We call ourselves the Mead Mavens and meet four times a year, roughly following the solstice calendar: We brew on the solstices and bottle on the equinoxes. It's an easy way to remember when fermenting is finished.

**Inspired By: The Party-Like Atmosphere**

Each time we meet to brew or bottle, we sample our previous batches. Everyone goes home with a six-pack, and then we put the rest in my basement cellar to enjoy together. The samples get better and better as they age.

It's been fun to watch everyone take ownership of the mead brewing. When we created the group, I was one of the few with any experience. Now, everyone weighs in on what we should add: "Do you think we need a teaspoon of cloves, or a tablespoon of cinnamon?"

**Most Creative Creation: Chamomile, Rosehips and Mint**

We had a freshly pressed apple that was amazing, and a ginger lemongrass perfect for summer. We keep notes about each batch, so that we remember whether we used backyard apricots or store-bought mangoes.





**GEOFF GILBERT: WINE, MEAD AND BEER**  
**Homebrewing Since: 1992**

In general, I like knowing where my food and beverages come from, which is why I garden and why I brew.

**Inspired By: *The Connection to What We Drink***

I like the process of fermentation and am fascinated by the way we can utilize living creatures like yeast to augment our food. That's why I also make my own yogurt, honey, and kombucha. Making your own food and drinks adds value by connecting you to what you consume. With gardening, the food tastes better. I'm the first to admit that my wine and beer might not taste better than what you find downtown, but I enjoy the connection I have to the beverages I make at home.

**Most Creative Creation: *Cherry-Chocolate Dark Ale***

I made this with chocolate-roasted grains and pie cherries from our own tree. Mild and delicious!

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**HEATHER MCKEE: WINE**  
***Homebrewing Since: 2012***

Nothing is quite as exciting to me as finding a good tree covered in fruit. In Missoula, so much of the fruit goes to waste in the summer and fall. I started knocking on doors, and asking if I could glean people's fruit to make wine.

It's such a simple thing to do. You can find the supplies locally, and get great recipes online. Plus, you can't beat the cost-to-benefit ratio—15 pounds of apricots turns into three gallons of wine!

***Inspired By: Sampling It Throughout the Process***

I love tasting my wine every day during fermentation because I'm curious about how the process is going. Roughly 75 percent of the alcohol in the wine is formed in the first week, and the fruit flavors are the most pronounced during the early stages. Right now, I have a fresh batch of apricot wine fermenting, and elderberry, green plum, pear and apple wines all aging in bottles.

***Most Creative Creation: Three-Plum Wine***

I used ancient grain dessert plums from our farm and added in red plum and purple Italian prune plums that I found on other folks' trees. It had such a rich, deep flavor that we really loved.

