

The EssentialList: Fermenting Fresh-Pressed Apple Cider

Sweet Cider

Wild fermentation happens because of natural yeasts that enter your brew from the air, converting the sugars in the juice to alcohol, and releasing CO₂ (carbon dioxide) bubbles.

1. Begin with freshly squeezed/pressed apple juice/cider (not filtered or pasteurized). If you want clear cider, let the bottled juice stand at 72° F for 3 - 4 days, to settle.
2. Transfer juice/cider to clean bottles, to just below the brim. Stopper with a new, clean wooly-cotton plug (rather than a regular lid or cap) for safety purposes, to avoid explosion: If pressure builds up during fermentation, the cotton will pop out to release the pressure.
3. After 3 - 4 days at room temperature, a sediment will form as fermentation bubbles rise to the top. This is when you want to stop the fermentation, and “rack off” the cider to clean bottles (see below). Pasteurize the cider if desired. Store in refrigerator.

Hard Cider

Use same process as for sweet cider (above), but allow to ferment for a longer period at room temperature. A glass air lock can be used instead of the cotton plug. Or use three thicknesses of clean muslin, stretched over the top of the bottle opening and secured well around the neck. See [Gathering Summary: Making Beer at Home](#) for more information on using an airlock.

The cider will become quite frothy, and may foam over the top after about 10 days. This is normal; just wipe off the bottle and replace the muslin with clean fabric and let the frothing continue until the foaming stops and fermentation is complete. At this point, all the sugars in the apple juice will have been turned into alcohol; the beverage is dry, not sweet.

In his book *Wild Fermentation*, Sandor Katz says that for his cider:

“After 3 days [of fermenting] it was “bubbly, mildly alcoholic, sweet;’ after 5 days it had ‘lost its sweetness, still bubbly, not at all sour;’ after a week ‘hard and dry;’ and a day later ‘starts to have a sour edge.”

However in another recipe he calls “Cider Take Two,” it ferments slowly for 1 - 2 months while the sediment collects on the bottom and the liquid begins to clear, then is siphoned to a new clean bottle, without the sediment, and ferments another 2 - 4 months, for 4 - 5 months total; then aged in the bottle for yet another 1 - 2 months before it’s ready for drinking.

Racking Off

If you are making a small quantity, you could carefully pour from the original bottle to a new, clean one, leaving the sediment behind. But for larger quantities, siphoning is more practical; it can also be used for smaller quantities.

To rack off:

1. Insert a clean, 3-foot long rubber tube, into the liquid; suck at the outer end with your mouth.
2. As soon as you feel liquid in your mouth, pinch off your end with your fingers and insert the tube into an empty, clean and sterilized bottle that is placed below the full bottle. Liquid will flow from the upper bottle into the lower bottle, leaving the sediment behind.