



THE BEVERAGE PEOPLE

COCONUT PORTER – PUT SOME ALOHA INTO YOUR BEER

It pours a clear, dark cola brown with ruby red highlights (when held to the light) and a creamy tan head. Smells milky sweet with fudge, dark chocolate, roasted malts, and toasted coconut. Take a sip. In the flavor are dark brown sugars, coconut, iced coffee, and bitter dark chocolate. The body is light to medium, but not watery. It is balanced, and creamy, with a dry finish.

You've just enjoyed a well crafted coconut porter. Hopefully it was a hot day and you were in the outdoor seating of a cabana themed bar, or maybe you were out on the beach. If it was your first time trying it, you were likely amazed at how refreshing that dark beer was. And you want another one.

DARK BEERS ON HOT DAYS

There is a history to drinking dark, roasty beer in hot weather. While the yellow “lawnmower beer” gets all the advertising dollars, and is the thirst quencher most of us are thinking of when we break a sweat, many brewers are aware that a certain selection of dark beers can also be extremely satisfying summertime beers--plus, they have a lot more flavor! Tropical versions of Export Stout, sweet Milk Stouts, and my own favorite Coconut Porter are great options. As far back 1801, Guinness was brewing a stronger, and significantly fruitier tasting version of their porter for export to the far flung reaches of the empire, originally bound for the West Indies. The beer was brewed stronger with the intent of surviving hot temperatures and long travel. The tradition survived and today there are some excellent tropical stouts being brewed in those old export markets such as Sri Lanka (try Lion Stout) and Jamaica (try Dragon Stout). Milk stouts work out well for drinking in heat due to the milk sugar (lactose) which remains unfermented during fermentation and leaves the finish sweet rather than dry and bitter. Coconut porter, however, is a relatively new invention--a product of the abundant creativity of the craft beer movement. I suppose it was inevitable that some Hawaiian brewmaster, surrounded by tourists refreshing themselves with coconut water, drank straight from the coconuts, would be unable to stop himself from putting that coconut in the beer.

THE INSPIRATION

During my last trip to Hawaii in 2013, this style became my new inspiration as a homebrewer. I spent four weeks on the island of Kauai (had to come home sometime!), and did my best to try all the Hawaiian craft beers available. There were very few beers that could beat our California products, but one stood out above the rest--Maui Brewing Company's CoCoNut Porter. You've likely seen their cans in store and hopefully tried it. When I returned to life and hobby after vacation, I set to work.

THE RESEARCH

Reviewing the available recipes and advice I could find, I settled on two methods of adding coconut that seemed to be of great promise--direct addition in the secondary/keg, and addition of an alcohol extract. As for the base beer, I reviewed a number of homebrew recipes but relied more on my sensory evaluation (see top) along with basic statistics from Maui Brewing Co to develop a light bodied yet rich base porter. In order to lighten the body and reduce the roast astringency, without losing too much of the coffee and chocolate complexity a porter needs, I opted to make use of Dark Candi Syrup in the place of a portion of black malts. I also settled on use of some highly fermentable corn sugar in lieu of a portion of base barley malt. Further, to ensure that the beer flavors remained clean and easy drinking, I decided to use a neutral lager yeast and ferment it cool. With these thoughts as the basis of the recipe, I brewed.

THE RESULTS

The base beer was brewed without coconut, so it was easy to assess the porter alone. It was a rather light bodied porter. It would be appropriate as an initiation for the beer drinker who has yet to find the joys of

black beers. While alone it did not make a stand-out product, it was the base beer I was looking for---a medium intensity, easy drinking, chocolaty porter that was ready to be “filled in” with toasted coconut goodness! Since the batch was 10 gallons, I split it into two 5 gallon kegs and proceeded with my two chosen methods of coconut addition.

ALCOHOL EXTRACT: While the fermentation was taking place, I had created a coconut extract. I used shredded coconut from my local grocery store. I selected unsweetened coconut, dried but with no preservatives. To make the extract was very simple. I filled a gallon glass jar with shredded coconut and filled with a moderate quality vodka until the coconut was covered. As the coconut hydrated, I occasionally added more vodka just to keep it saturated. After a couple of weeks of fermentation, both the extract and the base beer were ready. I added the coconut extract, to-taste, during packaging (about 2 – 4 oz of extract in 5 gallons will keep your alcohol increase below 0.5%). In keg, I had the advantage that more could be added at any time.

DIRECT ADDITION OF TOASTED COCONUT: You may note that Maui Brewing Company uses “hand toasted” coconut. My direct addition method took this into account. To prepare the shredded coconut for direct addition into the keg, I toasted it on a cookie sheet at low oven temperatures (approx. 225 – 250 degrees F). Flipping often is necessary to avoid excessive browning. It takes about 15 minutes to reach a golden to light-brown color (you may experience anywhere from 10 – 30 minutes, therefore judging by the color will be important). The fresh toasted coconut was then placed in a boiled nylon straining bag and added to the keg before the beer. To prepare for later removal of the bag, sanitized teflon tape or dental floss can be tied between the straining bag and the outside handle of the keg. The keg lid will still seal in place under pressure.

The porter with the coconut extract added was ready immediately, but the batch with the direct addition needed several days to soak. When both were ready, I began the blind taste testing with homebrew friends and unsuspecting victims. Generally, the beers were very similar except that the coconut intensity was much higher with the direct addition. The batch with alcohol extract added remained relatively light bodied, whereas the direct addition of coconut had a much fuller richness on the palate. Early on, however, the alcohol extract version had cleaner flavors in general. I found that after about 2 weeks in the keg (after coconut removal), the direct addition batch dropped a fair amount of coconut solids and the flavors cleaned up wonderfully. At this point, I declared it the winner! Therefore, I'd recommend this method to anyone with a keg. If you use this method, though, be sure to let it age in the fridge for a couple weeks after the removal of the coconut to precipitate solids.

THE RECIPE

The final recipe, which I have now brewed many times, is based on the direct addition of coconut into a keg at packaging time. If you do not keg, I would proceed with making the coconut extract---it is still very good! For the extract brewer, the recipe can be adapted slightly to use dark dry malt extract and the specialty malts can be steeped as a mini-mash as usual. Aloha!

"Island Harmony" Coconut Porter (10 gallons All-Grain recipe)

- 16 lbs. British Pale (Maris Otter) Malt
- 1 1/2 lbs. Pale Chocolate Malt
- 1/2 lbs. Caramel 80 Malt
- 1/2 lb. Special B Malt
- 4 oz. Chocolate Malt
- 1 lb. Dark Candi Syrup
- 2 lb. Corn Sugar in the boil
- 2.25 oz. Golding Hop Pellets (60 minutes boil, 7.2% aa) 32 IBU
- 2 lbs. Shredded Coconut (non-sweetened, no preservatives)

1 tsp. Gypsum
1/2 tsp. Calcium Chloride
2 tsp. Chalk
4 Whirlfloc tablets (15 min.)
RO Water to 10 gallons
1 1/2 cup Corn Sugar for Priming or Force Carbonate at 10 psi
2 Pkg. 2007 St. Louis Lager Yeast or 2 pkg. #1272 American II

Mash grains together at 152 degrees. Use a 90 minute boil, adding hops as indicated above. Ferment at 50 – 55 deg. F for #2007 Yeast or 60 - 65 deg. F for #1272.

Adding Coconut:

Add 1 lb of shredded (non-sweetened, no preservatives) coconut per 5 gallon. Toast the coconut at low oven temp (about 250 deg. F), flipping often to avoid burning, until golden brown. The reaction may take as little as 10 – 15 minutes or as much as 25 – 30. Add the coconut to secondary in boiled bag. Age on the coconut for 24 hours to 4 days. If flavor is lacking, follow up with coconut extract added at bottling time (this can be purchased or made at home with toasted coconut soaked in vodka). It is recommended to lager the beer for a couple weeks before drinking to clarify and help remove coconut solids.

SG 1.054 FG 1.013 – 1.014 IBU 32
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"Island Harmony" Coconut Porter (5 gallons Partial-Mash recipe)

5 lbs. Dark Dry Malt
3/4 lbs. Pale Chocolate Malt
1/4 lbs. Caramel 80 Malt
1/4 lb. Special B Malt
2 oz. Chocolate Malt
1/2 lb. Dark Candi Syrup
1 lb. Corn Sugar in the boil
1.25 oz. Golding Hop Pellets (60 minutes boil, 7.2% aa) 36 IBU
1 lbs. Shredded Coconut (non-sweetened, no preservatives)
1/2 tsp. Gypsum
1/4 tsp. Calcium Chloride
1 tsp. Chalk
2 Whirlfloc tablets (15 min.)
RO Water to 5 gallons
3/4 cup Corn Sugar for Priming or Force Carbonate at 10 psi
1 Pkg. 2007 St. Louis Lager Yeast or 2 pkg. #1272 American II

Follow instructions as detailed in All-Grain version above. If kegging is not an option, consider making an alcohol extract of the coconut and adding at bottling time.

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