

SODA...FUN AND EASY

There's a quick, easy (and educational) project the whole family can do together, and kids always like to participate. Not only that, the end result is something they will really enjoy, and the project is a money saver too. We're talking about homemade sodas, a tradition that goes back many years. As you help organize this project, you may feel a dim memory returning - forgotten bottles of pleasure standing at attention in the childhood cellars of long ago. These days there are a number of flavors to choose from, such as: Sarsaparilla, Root Beer, Ginger Beer, Ginger Ale, Cola, Cream Soda, Birch Root Beer, and Cherry Soda

The equipment needed is quite modest: a bucket, a stirring spoon, a siphon hose, some bottles, and a boiling kettle. If bottling in glass bottles, you will also need a bottle capper and enough caps for four gallons worth of bottles. This is much the same sort of thing home brewers use, of course, and all should be available at your local homebrew supply shop.

Normally, The Beverage People can supply the soft drink flavoring extracts and yeast packs you'll need as well (Pasteur Champagne strain yeast settles out better than bread yeast, and produces a better flavor). Sugar (about four lbs.) and water are the only other ingredients needed.

Once the equipment and ingredients are ready to go, making four gallons of soda should take only 30 to 45 minutes. Here's what you do:

1. Make a simple syrup by mixing the sugar and water at the rate of one cup of water per pound of sugar, and heating it to boiling. Turn off the stove.
2. Unless your kettle is five gallons or larger, pour this mixture into a five to seven gallon bucket, add the flavoring extract and however much cold water is needed to make up four gallons. Stir. Add 2 1/2 to 5 grams of Pasteur Champagne strain wine yeast. If you have a large enough kettle, you may mix the entire batch there instead of in a bucket.
3. When the batch has been thoroughly stirred, siphon it into clean bottles and cap them. If using plastic bottles, simply screw the original cap back on tightly. If using glass crown cap bottles, you will need a capper and a supply of unused crown caps.

Note that one advantage of plastic screw top bottles is that they can be chilled, and the cap can be quickly loosened, to allow

gas to escape when you suspect overcarbonation. Champagne bottles, the sturdiest glass bottles you'll probably find, may often be located through recycling centers or wedding caterers.

4. Stand the sealed bottles at room temperature, and leave them for one to two weeks. Chill one of the bottles, pop the cap, and see if it's ready. As soon as the desired level of carbonation has been reached, slow any further yeast activity by refrigerating the remaining bottles. Enjoy your batch of fresh, homemade sodas during the next couple of weeks. Pour them slowly, tipping the bottle upright just in time to keep the yeast sediment from coming out the neck of the bottle.

Note that you can cut calories by mixing up the batch to taste using an artificial sweetener instead of sugar. Once the desired sweetness level has been reached, however, you will still need to mix in 1 to 1 1/4 cups of sugar so the yeast can feed on it and give you carbonation.