



# Style of the Quarter

## Kölsch

"Kölsch is the only language one can also drink"  
anon.



- » Kölsch is an ale and fermented as such, but it can be lagered up to 8–10 weeks.
- » At one point in history, the city council of Cologne actually forbade lager brewing.
- » Kölsch is truly an appellation, centered in Cologne (Köln)
- » The "Kölsch Konvention" is recognized by the German government. It gives the 22 or so breweries in and around Cologne the exclusive right to call their beer "kölsch".

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# BJCP Guidelines

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## 6C. Kölsch

**Aroma:** Very low to no Pils malt aroma. A pleasant, subtle fruit aroma from fermentation (apple, cherry or pear) is acceptable, but not always present. A low noble hop aroma is optional but not out of place (it is present only in a small minority of authentic versions). Some yeasts may give a slight winy or sulfury character (this characteristic is also optional, but not a fault).

**Appearance:** Very pale gold to light gold. Authentic versions are filtered to a brilliant clarity. Has a delicate white head that may not persist.

**Flavor:** Soft, rounded palate comprising of a delicate flavor balance between soft yet attenuated malt, an almost imperceptible fruity sweetness from fermentation, and a medium-low to medium bitterness with a delicate dryness and slight pucker in the finish (but no harsh aftertaste). The noble hop flavor is variable, and can range from low to moderately high; most are medium-low to medium. One or two examples (Dom being the most prominent) are noticeably malty-sweet up front. Some versions can have a slightly minerally or sulfury water or yeast character that accentuates the dryness and flavor balance. Some versions may have a slight wheat taste, although this is quite rare. Otherwise very clean with no diacetyl or fusels.

**Mouthfeel:** Smooth and crisp. Medium-light body, although a few versions may be medium. Medium to medium-high carbonation. Generally well-attenuated.

**Overall Impression:** A clean, crisp, delicately balanced beer usually with very subtle fruit flavors and aromas. Subdued maltiness throughout leads to a pleasantly refreshing tang in the finish. To the untrained taster easily mistaken for a light lager, a somewhat subtle Pilsner, or perhaps a blonde ale.

**History:** Kölsch is an appellation protected by the Kölsch Konvention, and is restricted to the 20 or so breweries in and around Cologne (Köln). The Konvention simply defines the beer as a "light, highly attenuated, hop-accentuated, clear top fermenting Vollbier."

**Comments:** Served in a tall, narrow 200ml glass called a "Stange." Each Köln brewery produces a beer of different character, and each interprets the Konvention slightly differently.

Allow for a range of variation within the style when judging. Note that drier versions may seem hoppier or more bitter than the IBU specifications might suggest. Due to its delicate flavor profile, Kölsch tends to have a relatively short shelf-life; older examples can show some oxidation defects.

Some Köln breweries (e.g., Dom, Hellers) are now producing young, unfiltered versions known as Wiess (which should not be entered in this category).

**Ingredients:** German noble hops (Hallertau, Tettnang, Spalt or Hersbrucker). German Pils or pale malt. Attenuative, clean ale yeast. Up to 20% wheat may be used, but this is quite rare in authentic versions. Water can vary from extremely soft to moderately hard. Traditionally uses a step mash program, although good results can be obtained using a single rest at 149°F. Fermented at cool ale temperatures (59-65°F) and lagered for at least a month, although many Cologne brewers ferment at 70°F and lager for no more than two weeks.

### Vital Statistics:

OG: 1.044 – 1.050

IBUs: 20 – 30

FG: 1.007 – 1.011

SRM: 3.5 – 5

ABV: 4.4 – 5.2%

**Commercial Examples:** Available in Cologne only: PJ Früh, Hellers, Malzmühle, Paeffgen, Sion, Peters, Dom; import versions available in parts of North America: Reissdorf, Gaffel; Non-German versions: Eisenbahn Dourada, Goose Island Summertime, Alaska Summer Ale, Harpoon Summer Beer, New Holland Lucid, Saint Arnold Fancy Lawnmower, Capitol City Capitol Kölsch, Shiner Kölsch

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# Technique

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## Grist:

Can be as simple as 100% German Pilsner malt

Can use up to 20% wheat malt

Specialty malts can be used at approx. 3-5% of the grist (ex- CaraPils, CaraHell, Vienna, Munich)

## Hops:

German hops are almost exclusively used.

- Balanced bitterness
- Can have a perceptible, yet not dominant hop aroma

Common varieties used are; Hallertauer and Perle for bittering and Tettnanger, Hallertauer, Perle and Spalt for aroma.

Other hops used are Northern Brewer, Mt. Hood and Magnum (bittering only).

## Yeast:

It is important to use the correct yeast for this style. WLP029 or Wyeast 2565 are highly recommended. A neutral ale yeast such as Safale US-05 could be used, but the beer won't really be a kölsch.

Water should be soft with low alkalinity.

## Mash:

pH of ~5.5, wort pH of 5.2

- Higher pH can impact fermentation by-products, such as increased diacetyl and higher fusels alcohols

Early versions were single infusion

- Mash low at 143° - 149° F for a higher degree of fermentability and greater attenuation
- Step-mashing is an option with a mash in at 143° - 149°, and a step at 156° - 167°

A decoction is not necessary, as malts are well modified, although some kölsch brewers still decoct. Personally I use a couple ounces of Belgian Aromatic malt, which will give some of the character of a decoction due to the melanoidin content.

A thin mash is beneficial, as it will reduce the amount of sparging needed, limiting possible tannin extraction.

## Boil:

A normal 60-90 min boil. A vigorous boil will help to precipitate proteins and tannins, as well as minimize development of DMS.

Typical hop additions:

- 2/3 total AA for bittering addition
- 1/3 total AA for aroma addition

## Fermentation:

Temperature is typically on the cool side, 60-64° F (I've found 59° F mentioned frequently). Attenuation is high, producing a crisp, even 'dry', finish.

- Recommended not to pitch yeast lower than 59° F
- Ferment at temps between 55° - 63° F. If some fruity esters are desired, ferment between 64° - 72°
- Finings can be used to help clarify (kölsch yeast has very low flocculation)
- Filtering can be done, and is recommended if you have a filter setup. Filtering is generally done in Köln.
- Can also be clarified with cold conditioning.

After fermentation is complete, the beer can be lagered for 2 weeks or up to 10 weeks to clarify and cold-condition.

## Carbonation:

Most kölsch are naturally carbonated, but force carb is AOK. Bottled kölsch typically has a higher level of carbonation than draft versions. Carbonation levels: on the low end 2.05 volumes are typical (usually draft versions), with 2.65 volumes at the higher end (usually bottled versions).