

# Irish Red Ales

## A brief history

- Red ales were mentioned in an Irish Poem about beer written sometime in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century.
- This red ale was probably nothing like the style today as it was most likely smokey and contained barley and rye along with various herbal additives such as sweet gale or bog myrtle.
- Modern style originated in the Irish town of Kilnenny in 1710 and was most likely a derivative of an English Pale Ale with a larger focus on malt with less hops and a small portion of Roasted Barley in place of some Crystal malt for color and dryness.
- The style was typically brewed in the wintertime. Thus allowing it to be able to be fermented as either an ale or a lager depending on the seasons conditions.
- The small amount of hops present in the style might have to do with lingering resistance to the use of hops in Ireland. Another fact might be very high import taxes on hops from England.
- American styles tend to be much more alcoholic and bitter than beer made in Ireland.
- The style is much more popular in the United States than in Ireland, due to heavy advertising by Killians which is actually a amber lager brewed by Coors.

## Style Guidelines

**Aroma:** Low to moderate malt aroma, generally caramel-like but occasionally toasty or toffee-like in nature. May have a light buttery character (although this is not required). Hop aroma is low to none (usually not present). Quite clean.

**Appearance:** Amber to deep reddish copper color (most examples have a deep reddish hue). Clear. Low off-white to tan colored head.

**Flavor:** Low to moderate malt aroma, generally caramel-like but occasionally toasty or toffee-like in nature. May have a light buttery character (although this is not required). Hop aroma is low to none (usually not present). Quite clean.

**Mouthfeel:** Medium-light to medium body, although examples containing low levels of diacetyl may have a slightly slick mouthfeel. Moderate carbonation. Smooth. Moderately attenuated (more so than Scottish ales). May have a slight alcohol warmth in stronger versions.

**Overall Impression:** Low to moderate malt aroma, generally caramel-like but occasionally toasty or toffee-like in nature. May have a light buttery character (although this is not required). Hop aroma is low to none (usually not present). Quite clean.

**Comments:** Sometimes brewed as a lager (if so, generally will not exhibit a diacetyl character). When served too cold, the roasted character and bitterness may seem more elevated.

**Ingredients:** May contain some adjuncts (corn, rice, or sugar), although excessive adjunct use will harm the character of the beer. Generally has a bit of roasted barley to provide reddish color and

dry roasted finish. UK/Irish malts, hops, yeast.

**Commercial Examples:** Moling's Irish Red Ale, Smithwick's Irish Ale, Kilkenny Irish Beer, Beamish Red Ale, Caffrey's Irish Ale, Goose Island Kilgubbin Red Ale, Murphy's Irish Red (lager), Boulevard Irish Ale, Harpoon Hibernian Ale

### Notes on grain and hops selection

Roasted Barley is essential for the color and slightly dry finish of this beer. Don't be heavy handed though as you only really need between 3-5 oz for a 5 gallon batch. About 5-10% of the grain bill should be 10-40L crystal/caramel malts for help with body and head retention. Roasted grains can help balance out the sweetness of the crystal malt. Black Patent and Chocolate malt are a tempting addition, but often make the beer too brown. Special B and Caramunich while interesting additions are not suitable as they lend flavors not fit to the style.

Traditional hops include Fuggles and Goldings for bitterness with as little hop aroma or flavor as possible. The style ideally relies more on the astringency of Roasted Barley to counterbalance the sweetness of the other malts. You want just enough hops to help balance the sweetness, but leave as little hop presence as possible.

Yeast should be selected based on its clean profile, no fruity esters should be detectable. A slight bit of diacetyl is appropriate if brewed as an ale but not so if brewed as a lager. Fermentation temps should be kept close to the low end of the scale as possible. Red's can often benefit from a month or 2 of aging as time will help bring out the roasty flavors of the malt more. While N02 is most common this beer's finer flavors come out better when bottle conditioned or on CO2. ABV should be between 4-6% depending on what you're going for.

WLP840 American lager, WLP833 German bock.lager, WLP005 British Nottingham or US-05, Wyeast 1272 are all good selections.

## Recipes

### All Grain recipe:

#### **Malt Bill for 10 gallons:**

12# Maris Otter (70%)

4# Vienna (24%)

12oz British Roasted Barley 500L (4%)

6oz Crystal 120L (2%)

Mash 150°F for 75 min.

#### **Hop Bill for 10 gallons:**

2oz 4.5% AA Fuggles (75 min)

1oz 5.0% AA Goldings (15 min)

### **Extract Version (for 5 gal):**

4# Light DME  
2# Munich LME  
5oz Roasted Barley, steeped 20 min @155°F  
2.5oz C120L, steeped 20 min @155°F

### **A quick discussion on the style.**

The Irish Red Ale seems to be a bit of an odd predicament when it comes to its own style. There are still many who insist that the good ol' Irish Red is nothing more than a subcategory of an English Pale Ale, and doesn't deserve its own unique style. Looking at the vital stats and guidelines, it can be hard at times to really argue against that position.

**Irish Red** = O.G 1.044-1.060/F.G 1.010-1.014/IBU=17-28/SRM=9-18

**Overall Impression:** Low to moderate malt aroma, generally caramel-like but occasionally toasty or toffee-like in nature. May have a light buttery character (although this is not required). Hop aroma is low to none (usually not present). Quite clean.

**English PA** =O.G 1.048-1.060/F.G 1.010-1.016/IBU=30-50/SRM=6-18

**Overall Impression:** An average-strength to moderately-strong English ale. The balance may be fairly even between malt and hops to somewhat bitter. Drinkability is a critical component of the style; emphasis is still on the bittering hop addition as opposed to the aggressive middle and late hopping seen in American ales. A rather broad style that allows for considerable interpretation by the brewer.

When you compare the two to each other it becomes pretty apparent that those Irish brewers used the base of the English Pale Ale for more than a bit of inspiration. So one can simply toss out most of the hops and add a bit of Roasted Barley and call it a day, right? Not quite. Unlike an English Pale, at its heart an Irish Red is all about the malt. As stated above, there is a fine line between balancing the roasted barley and hops to counteract the sweetness of the other malt. Adding too many hops or too much grain leads to either an overly sweet beer or a dry and bitter mess.

To further complicate matters, you have the decision to brew this beer ale as either a ale or a lager. Going with ale yeast allows you to add a touch of butterscotch or toffee to complement the malt. Take the route of a lager and you provide for a nice clean platform for your malt to shine through. Both paths require the proper cool fermentation temperatures to bring out just enough of the yeasts attributes support the malt.

Irish Red Ale suffers from brewers under-appreciating the amount of finesse one can put into the beer. It is quite more than just a modified English Pale Ale. The style itself leans towards being an easy going and economical drinking pint. With a little bit of effort and preparation, it's not hard to make a very tasty beer that you and your friends and family can enjoy. Ask yourself if you can remember the last

time you had a really good Irish Red, if you can't why not make one yourself? Remember do not ask what Irish Red Ales can do for you, but what you can do for Irish Red Ales!