

Winter Warmers



Style Spotlight- Winter Warmer

- Why Winter Warmer?
- North vs South (January 2022)
- Big and/or spiced beers generally need a little time to smooth out

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- Winter Warmer- a generic label used to describe many winter seasonals

“It should be a warming beer of the type that is best drunk in half pints by a warm fire on a cold winter’s night”

-Michael Jackson

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These malty, sweet offerings tend to be a favorite winter seasonal.

A big malt presence, both in flavor and body, leads the way.

The color of this style ranges from brownish reds to nearly pitch black.

Hop bitterness is generally low and balanced but hop character can be pronounced in the aroma.

Alcohol warmth is not uncommon.

Many English versions contain no spices, though some brewers of spiced seasonal ales will slap "Winter Warmer" on the label. Those that are spiced, tend to follow the "wassail"* tradition of blending robust ales with some combination of cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and the like before hops became the chief "spice" in beer.

American varieties many have a larger presence of hops both in bitterness and flavor.

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BJCP 2015 Guideline

- **Spiced Beer**
 - **30A. Spice, Herb, or Vegetable Beer**
 - **30B. Autumn Seasonal Beer**
 - **30C Winter Seasonal Beer**
- Winter Seasonal Beers are beers that **suggest cold weather and the Christmas holiday season**, and may include holiday spices, specialty sugars, and other products that are reminiscent of mulling spices or Christmas holiday desserts.
- **Overall Impression:** A **stronger, darker, spiced beer** that often has a rich body and warming finish suggesting a good accompaniment for the cold winter season.
- **Aroma:** A **wide range of aromatics** is possible, although many examples are reminiscent of **Christmas cookies, gingerbread, English-type Christmas pudding, evergreen trees, or mulling spices**. Any combination of aromatics that suggests the holiday season is welcome. The base beer style often has a **malty profile that supports the balanced presentation of the aromatics from spices and possibly other special ingredients**. Additional fermentables (e.g., **honey, molasses, maple syrup, etc.**) may lend their own unique aromatics. **Hop aromatics are often absent, subdued, or slightly spicy**. Some fruit character (often of **dried citrus peel, or dried fruit such as raisins or plums**) is optional but acceptable. Alcohol aromatics may be found in some examples, but this character should be restrained. **The overall aroma should be balanced and harmonious, and is often fairly complex and inviting**

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- **Appearance:** Generally **medium amber to very dark brown** (darker versions are more common). **Usually clear, although darker versions may be virtually opaque.** Some chill haze is acceptable. **Generally has a well-formed head that is often off-white to tan.**
- **Flavor:** Many interpretations are possible; **allow for brewer creativity** as long as the resulting product is **balanced and provides some spice presentation.** Spices associated with the holiday season are typical (as mentioned in the Aroma section). The spices and optional fermentables should be supportive and blend well with the base beer style. **Rich, malty and/or sweet malt-based flavors** are common, and may include **caramel, toast, nutty, or chocolate** flavors. **May include some dried fruit or dried fruit peel flavors such as raisin, plum, fig, orange peel or lemon peel.** May include distinctive flavors from specific fermentables (**molasses, honey, brown sugar, etc.**), although these elements are not required. A **light evergreen tree character** is optional but found in some examples. **The wide range of special ingredients should be supportive and balanced, not so prominent as to overshadow the base beer.** **Bitterness and hop flavor are generally restrained** so as to not interfere with the spices and special ingredients. **Generally finishes rather full and satisfying, and often has some alcohol flavor.** **Roasted malt characteristics are rare, and not usually stronger than chocolate.**

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- **Mouthfeel:** A wide range of interpretations is possible. **Body is generally medium to full, and a certain malty chewiness is often present.** Moderately low to moderately high carbonation is typical. Many examples will show some **well-aged, warming alcohol content, but without being overly hot.** The beers do not have to be overly strong to show some warming effects.
- **Comments: Overall balance is the key to presenting a well-made Winter Seasonal Beer.** The **special ingredients should complement the base beer and not overwhelm it.** The brewer should recognize that some combinations of base beer styles and special ingredients work well together while others do not make for harmonious combinations. **If the base beer is a classic style, the original style should come through in aroma and flavor.** Whenever spices, herbs or additional fermentables are declared, each should be noticeable and distinctive in its own way (although not necessarily individually identifiable; balanced with the other ingredients is still critical). Whenever spices, herbs or additional fermentables are declared, each should be noticeable and distinctive in its own way (although not necessarily individually identifiable; balanced with the other ingredients is still critical) – in other words, **the beer should read as a spiced beer but without having to tell that specific spices are present** (even if declared).

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- **History:** Throughout history, **beer of a somewhat higher alcohol content and richness has been enjoyed during the winter holidays, when old friends get together to enjoy the season.** Many breweries produce unique seasonal offerings that may be darker, stronger, spiced, or otherwise more characterful than their normal beers. **Spiced versions are an American or Belgian tradition, since English or German breweries traditionally do not use spices in their beer.**
- **Characteristic Ingredients:** Generally ales, although some dark strong lagers exist. **Spices are required, and often include those evocative of the Christmas season** (e.g., allspice, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, ginger) but any combination is possible and creativity is encouraged. Fruit peel (e.g., oranges, lemon) may be used, as may subtle additions of other fruits. Flavorful adjuncts are often used (e.g., molasses, treacle, invert sugar, brown sugar, honey, maple syrup, etc.).

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- **Entry Instructions:** The entrant must specify a base style, but the declared style does not have to be a Classic Style. The entrant must specify the type of spices, sugars, fruits, or additional fermentables used; individual ingredients do not need to be specified if a well-known blend of spices is used (e.g., mulling spice).
- **Vital Statistics:** OG, FG, IBUs, SRM and ABV will vary depending on the underlying base beer. ABV is generally above 6%, and most examples are somewhat dark in color.
- **Commercial Examples:** Anchor Our Special Ale, Goose Island Christmas Ale, Great Lakes Christmas Ale, Harpoon Winter Warmer, Lakefront Holiday Spice Lager Beer, Weyerbacher Winter Ale



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1. **Wassail** ([/'wɒsəl/](#), [/-eɪl/](#) *WOSS-əl*, *-ayl*, likely from Old Norse "*ves heill*") is a beverage made from hot [mulled cider](#) and spices, drunk traditionally as an integral part of [wassailing](#), an ancient English Yuletide drinking ritual and salutation either involved in door-to-door charity-giving or used to ensure a good [cider apple](#) harvest the following year. The drink is now increasingly popular from the internet as a historical Christmas-time beverage- Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wassail>
2. [https://www.bjcp.org/docs/2015 Guidelines Beer.pdf](https://www.bjcp.org/docs/2015_Guidelines_Beer.pdf)