



The Midland Craft Brewers Association



Brewing crafted ales.....at home

Brewlab Yeast Slopes.....some additional notes and tips.

Several members are now familiar with the liquid yeast cultures that are available from White Labs & Wyeast and there have been some excellent beers produced from them, some which have won prizes at national beer festivals. However the results obtained from these cultures can be variable as can easily be seen from threads on Homebrew Forums, with inactivity, long lag times and weak or incomplete fermentations being a common issue. The problem is not the yeasts themselves which are freshly dispatched from the lab, but more to do with the fact that these packs have travelled half way round the world to your dealer, and may have experienced extreme temperature changes along the way. As a result the vial that eventually reaches you may only have about 20% of viable yeast cells or worse in extreme cases.

So perhaps it's time to take a look at Brewlab yeasts. These are available as "slopes" and are freshly prepared at the Sunderland laboratory prior to dispatch, ensuring that we receive a fresh culture with a high cell viability. They cost £4 each including postage and are I think particularly good value when compared to liquid cultures. You'll notice on the attached info from Brewlab, that an all malt 300ml starter of around 1.040 OG is recommended and this quantity in my own experience is enough for worts of low to medium gravity and a batch size of 23L. This pitching rate however is somewhat lower than recommended by several other sources, including the recent publication "Yeast" by Dr Chris White but many brewers have found them to be very satisfactory. If you're brewing stronger beers (say over about 1.048) or like myself brew larger batches, (28L) I would suggest first making a 200ml starter and when active stepping this up to 1.5 to 2L to ensure a good fermentation. As regards making up a suitable starter, my own preference is to partially fill the slant with the prepared wort, firmly replace the cap then shake hard for several seconds to dislodge the yeast cells and repeat this a couple of times. I prefer to work in the corner of a small draught free room near a naked flame from a gas torch, however before I took these extra precautions I never experienced any problems with

infections. Once the starter is in a flask or suitable bottle I hold the torch over the top for a few seconds then cover loosely with foil.

The starter culture can now be placed in a suitable area and left to grow which can take between 24 and 48 hours. Agitating the flask or bottle can be carried out by swirling it around a few times at intervals. This helps to drive out any excess of CO₂ which may build up and helps to ensure a larger cell count at pitching. By 24 – 48 hours the starter should show signs of vigorous activity with CO₂ bubbles forming and a frothy head appearing, the starter is now ready for pitching into your batch of wort.

Managing the Fermentation.

- ⤴ Brewlab recommend aerating the starter well just before pitching; this can easily be done by pouring the contents into a jug and repeating this back and forth a few times.
- ⤴ An appropriate amount of yeast nutrient such as Yeast-Vit can be added to the wort prior to pitching; this will help to ensure a good fermentation and is particularly necessary if your starter is a little on the small side for your batch size.
- ⤴ Try and avoid temperature fluctuations (such as can happen at night when the heating is switched off) by placing your FV in a suitable area and lagging if possible.
- ⤴ Don't rack your beer too soon even if you think it has fermented out. A couple of days further at room temperature will help the yeast to re-absorb any diacetyl that may still be present.
- ⤴ When above is complete, cooling your FV down by a few degrees will help the remaining yeast to settle out and assist clarification.

Saving Yeast. This can be performed by skimming some clean yeast off into a jug, covering with foil and storing in a fridge if required to be used in (ideally) a few days for a subsequent batch. Quantities for pitching can be determined from the useful calculator on the web site www.mrmalty.com which also contains much more valuable information. Or for longer term storage the yeast can be streaked on to a blank agar slope. These are available from Brewlab ready to use or you can make up your own. The information on how to prepare your own slopes is available on the link www.braukaiser.com then go right down the page until you come to “Making Plates & Slants,” there is also much other useful information on this site. (Note; the AGAR needed for preparing your own slopes is available at Waitrose stores and also from Indian grocers as FALOODA powder, the latter is considerably cheaper.)

And finally a few brief remarks about specific Brewlab strains that I've used.

Thames Valley 1 which I believe is also known as their “Standard Ale” yeast. Good for worts up to about 1.048 OG and ferments quickly whilst producing some desirable esters. May need some fining or chilling down to assist clarification.

Thames Valley 2 is also known as “Strong Ale” or “High Gravity” yeast and as implied has a high alcohol tolerance. A true “top-cropping” variety and will produce more fruity esters than the above strain, all other factors being equal. Again may need some fining to assist clarification.

Thames Valley 3 I understand originates from the Fullers brewery and has similar characteristics to White Labs WLP002 or Wyeast 1968. A highly flocculant strain with an excellent flavour and can be bottled or kegged without the need for fining.

Yorkshire 1 is a little more neutral in flavour than the above strains and very suited to top-cropping.

Some sort of fining or chilling may be needed to assist clarification.

If you have any queries or need advice about using and storing these yeasts, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will do my best to help.

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