

A delicious education in flavour

Single-hop beers showcase the hop breeders' art ▶ DON TSE

MANY BEER LOVERS declare a favourite hop, but almost none declare a favourite malt, water or yeast. While all four ingredients (and sometimes more) are essential to any good beer, hops have achieved a sort of rock star status. Indeed, the current North American craft beer movement was largely founded on the back of hop-forward beers.

The breeding of proprietary hops has become big business. Breeding companies around the world are hoping to create the next Citra, Simcoe or Nelson Sauvin, all ludicrously lucrative hop varieties that command premium prices compared to other hops, which already are the most expensive ingredient in beer.

It's no surprise, then, that brewers are anxious to show off the hops in their beer. Many are now offering "single-hop" beers, made with only one variety of hop, for two reasons: first, to showcase the hop; and second, to educate consumers on the different aromas and flavours hops contribute to beer.

Scottish brewery Brew Dog, which has developed a cult following for its cutting-edge beers, has a four-pack of IPAs ironically called "IPA is Dead." The four-pack contains four beers that are identical except for the different hop used in each one. The common Goldings hop is used in one, while the more unusual Dana, El Dorado and Waimea comprise the other three. At 6.7 per cent, this four-pack is perfect for sharing with a friend or two for a very enjoyable and educational beer tasting.

In a similar vein, Danish brewer Mikkeller has an entire series of single-hop IPAs. Available in single bottles, there are well over a dozen to choose from. The latest two feature experimental hop varieties Belma and Mandarinina. Prior to these, Mikkeller featured classic hops, such as Cascade, Centennial and Mt. Hood, and showcase hops, such as the Citra, Simcoe and Nelson Sauvin varieties mentioned above.

Closer to home, Edmonton may no longer have a respectable sports franchise, but they do have a respectable brewery. Alley Kat Brewery makes a series of single-hop double IPAs dubbed "the Dragons." Every couple of months, a new dragon featuring another variety of hop is unleashed and given a colour as its name (Red Dragon, Blue Dragon, etc.). At 7.5 per cent and in 650ml bottles, the Dragons do not lend themselves to side-by-side comparison, but they do showcase the hop breeder's art. The current edition is Maroon Dragon.

Coming from south of the border, Laughing Dog Brewing of Idaho has started a "Purebred" series of single-hop beers, starting with the (currently) hottest hop in brewing, Citra. Featuring soft tropical fruit flavours like lychee, Purebred Citra will have you quickly returning to your liquor store to fetch more.

Finally, no listing of hoppy beers would be complete without mentioning Victoria's Phillips Brewing Company, which is famous for its use of hops. The brewery's Kaleidoscope IPA is made solely with Mosaic hops, which some are predicting will supplant Citra at the top of the popularity charts.

Grab a Pure Bred Citra and a Kaleidoscope IPA and decide which hop is your favourite rock star. ▶▶



MAROON DRAGON
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Alley Kat Brewery's Maroon Dragon single-hop double IPA.

BOOZE