

Intoxicating hobby

Club shares tips of the trade at
Learn to Homebrew Day ▶ DON TSE

THE 15TH ANNUAL Learn to Homebrew Day takes place Saturday, November 1. The event is organized each year by the American Homebrewers Association, but is recognized and celebrated around the world. As the name implies, this is a day when avid homebrewers gather to share their craft and recruit more members for their cult... er, hobby.

Neil Bamford is the “beer geek” at The Vineyard near the Chinook LRT (6025 Centre Street South; *thevineyard.ca*), a local homebrewing and wine-making supply shop. Bamford is also a member of the executive of the Cowtown Yeast Wranglers (*yeastwranglers.ca*), a local homebrew club that meets once a month to talk about making and drinking beer. “In the last five years, I bet it’s grown 50 times,” he says of homebrewing’s popularity.

Indeed, The Vineyard first opened as a wine-making shop, hence the name. It started selling homebrewing equipment and supplies to meet emerging demand, and watched as the hobby exploded in popularity. In fact, by supporting the Cowtown Yeast Wranglers and hosting events like Learn to Homebrew Day, The Vineyard has helped to contribute to the craft’s present popularity.

On Saturday, members of the Cowtown Yeast Wranglers will bring their brewing equipment to the parking lot behind The Vineyard to brew beer and answer questions from people looking to learn more about the hobby. Representatives of the city’s newest brewery, Dandy Brewing Company — who started as homebrewers before making the leap to the pro ranks — will also be on hand.

Homebrewers will show off different types of brewing equipment and demonstrate different brewing techniques. Mash in (the first step of brewing) starts at 10 a.m.

“It’s like any hobby,” says Bamford. “You can make it as simple or as complicated as you want. You can now make really good homebrew from a \$50 kit and \$100 of starter brewing equipment.

“And as you improve your skill, you can make beer that’s better than the beer you buy at the store, because you can make it the way you want,” he adds.

Indeed, most homebrewers start with brewing kits. Paul Heslop, a member of the Cowtown Yeast Wranglers, is now one of the top-ranked homebrewers in Canada after taking up the hobby just four years ago. He started with a kit, where you basically just boil the ingredients on your kitchen stove and add yeast. He now buys bulk quantities of various varieties of hops and grains, formulates his own recipes and spends many weekends brewing on his specially designed backyard brewing system.

Heslop enjoys the challenges of homebrewing as much as the results. “I’m a bit of a perfectionist and a problem solver and nearly every time I brew, something new comes up that I need to figure out on the fly. Small changes in brewing can have a big impact on the final product and I love perfecting my beer.

“What better hobby is there where you get rewarded with a cold pint at the end of it?”

Bamford agrees. “If you like beer, you’d be crazy not to try homebrewing.” ▶▶



Cowtown Yeast Wranglers at Learn to Homebrew Day 2013.

BOOZE