

Yeast Washing

Yeast washing is a technique for harvesting yeast from a batch of beer after racking the beer post-primary fermentation. It prepares the yeast for the next use, so you can pitch a hearty starter with clean yeast. If you have (or can buy) some basic canning supplies, it will make the process easy, and the jars and equipment are ideal for a sanitary process.

Procedure

To start with, you will need a large jar with a fairly wide mouth and lid. It will need to be sanitized. This can be done either by boiling or with vodka. You will also need about a half jar of sanitized filtered water. If boiling, you can boil the filtered water first, then pour into the jar, put the lid on loosely, and boil the half-filled jar for about 10 minutes. If using vodka, pour some in, put on the lid, then swirl to ensure all inside surfaces have been covered, then pour the vodka out slowly while turning the jar to ensure the entire lip has been sanitized.



Allow the boiled filtered water to cool



This is the fermentation bucket after racking the beer off to a secondary for clarification and some aging. The yeast cake at the bottom is too good to just wash down the drain.



Pour the cooled sanitized filtered water into the bucket/carboy.



Swirl the bucket/carboy until there are no big chunks and the yeast slurry resembles thin mud.



Pour into the large jar. Leave the jar about 1/3 to 1/4 empty so there is room for shaking and agitation. You may not be able to fit all of the slurry in the jar and still leave room. It's a tragedy, but we'll move on.



Secure the lid tightly and shake well. There should be NO clumps at all - it should be totally homogenous. Put in the refrigerator for at least 24 hours.



After 24 hours, the slurry will have settled into 3 distinct layers: There will be thin watery looking "beer" on top, then a tan creamy middle layer (that's our yeast), and a thin dark layer of trub on the bottom containing bits of hops, grain, etc.



Sanitize your storage jars. You will need 2-4 pint sized jars. Canning jars work well. Sanitize them (and the lids) as before.



Pour off the watery layer.



This leaves the yeast and the trub.



Pour the yeast into the sanitized jars (a sanitized canning funnel makes this easy). Do not fill more than halfway - we will need head space when we make a starter later, and need to dilute the yeast for the starter. Stop pouring when you reach the trub at the bottom.



Put on the caps, rinse off the jars, and label with the type of yeast and the date, and refrigerate until using. The yeast will remain viable for a few months. Dispose of yeast when it gets too old, or your results will be disappointing.



This may seem daunting at first, but it's really quite simple once you do it. I generally sanitize the small jars at the same time as the big jar by pouring just a splash of the boiling water in each, then putting on the covers and putting in the steam bath along with the large jar. Then a day later, I just need to pop off the lids, pour out the little bit of water, and pour in the washed yeast.

Washed yeast will also need some extra energizer and nutrients when used, so be sure to toss a little extra into the boil at about the 20 minutes left mark.

Happy Brewing!