

FOR EVERY BEER THERE IS A SEASON

Brewing was once governed by the seasons. The process started in the fall when hops and barley ripened for harvest. It ended in the spring with the knowledge that summer-brewed beer wouldn't make it through the warm months ahead without spoiling. The last beer of the spring, called Marzen in Germany, was stored in cool caves to preserve it for drinking in the fall.

The seasons no longer dictate the brewing calendar, thanks to refrigeration and other modern brewing technologies. But in the same way that craft brewers use technology to enhance an ancient process, they've revived the tradition of seasonal brewing. But they're not just letting the passing months determine what they brew. Oregon craft brewers are making beers that suit the season.

Winter beers typically offer a higher alcohol content, traditionally for the warming effect but perhaps also to further the festive seasonal activities. Often dark, malty and slightly sweet with coffee or chocolate tones, winter ales, stouts and porters provide comfort and cheer. They pair well with hearty winter stews, root vegetables and braised meats.

Spring traditionally meant bock, a dark lager-style beer brewed in the fall for drinking at the end of winter. Craft bock-style beers follow the same model but include a wider range of malts to produce different flavors. Spicier Mexican and Thai food, pizza and smoked meats are complimented by the yeasty, malty flavors of spring beers.

When the sun really comes out, thirst-quenching pale ales and crisp, clean lagers cut through the heat. The citrusy flavors of a hoppy IPA seem particularly refreshing during the summer. Lighter-bodied pilsners and kolsch-style beers match the casual, light food of the season and are perfect with anything cooked outdoors.

September marks the hop harvest, and since the Pacific Northwest is the world's largest producer of this essential ingredient, Oregon's craft brewers make it the focus of their fall beers. Many make a special beer with fresh hops, an option only available to brewers in hop country. Usually dry with super hoppy and bitter notes, these beers are perfect for the rich foods that mark the abundance of harvest time. Salmon, another Northwest icon, goes particularly well with a fresh hop ale.