



Pouring The Perfect Pint

Do you want to get the greatest impact from every beer in terms of both visual presentation and sensory enjoyment? Then you need to know how execute a proper pour.



So what does a perfectly poured beer look like? This will vary somewhat by style, for instance whether a beer should appear cloudy or clear or sport a thick mousse-like head, a thinner rocky one, or even no head at all. But if I may be allowed to generalize, a perfect pour will have a one-inch cap of foam forming a gentle dome above the rim of the glass. There will be no clusters of carbonation bubbles clinging to the side of the glass and it will leave consecutive rings of lace on the glass with each swallow.

Why is it important to get the perfect pour? The first reason is visual appeal. Any good chef will tell you that the enjoyment of a good meal is at least 50% presentation. A beer that looks good inspires appreciation even before the first sip. A proper pour also releases carbonation from the beer. High levels of carbonation affect the flavor and mouthfeel of beer. [Recent studies](#) have shown that the sour-sensing taste receptors respond to CO₂. Carbonation can also make beer seem more filling or give it an unpleasant carbonic bite. Because the rising bubbles carry volatile aromatic compounds out the beer and into your nose, the release of carbonation is also important for the sensory enjoyment of a beer's aroma.

So how do you get the perfect pour? The first consideration is glassware. Please humor me as I get on my soap box for one moment to insist that you drink your beer from a glass. Whether it's Budweiser or Deus Brut des Flanders, you won't get the full enjoyment from a beer drinking it out of the bottle. The type of glassware is important. I cover glassware selection in another article. Suffice it to say here that selecting the proper glass for the beer you are pouring will provide the best visual and aromatic presentation and allow enough space for a nice cap of foam.





Once you have selected your glassware it is important to insure that it is clean. A “beer-clean” glass is one that is free of visible marks and smudges, residual oils and films, as well as any aromatic compounds. Residue on the glass will create nucleation points for CO₂, causing excessive foaming and carbonation loss that is too high. Oils and soaps will inhibit head formation, resulting in a lackluster presentation. To get a beer-clean glass just wash your glassware with non-oil-based soap, rinse well, and air dry. It never hurts to rinse the glass with a little cold water just before pouring. This breaks the surface tension on the glass to reduce excessive foaming.

The last consideration for glassware is temperature. Never freeze your glasses. Frozen glassware causes water in the beer to freeze on contact, affecting the flavor and resulting in a beer slushy. It will also chill the beer below the desired serving temperature, numbing your taste buds and reducing your flavor perception. Room temperature glasses are perfect for most craft beers. Refrigerated glassware is good for American style lagers.

So you have proper glassware that is clean and at the proper temperature. What’s next? There are a couple schools of thought on how to properly execute the actual pour; down the middle and down the side. The best way to pour most beers from a bottle is slowly down the middle. Allow the head of foam to reach the top of the glass and then wait for it to settle. Once it has sufficiently settled, continue pouring the rest of the bottle. This method will give you the best degree of CO₂ release and leave you with a full, rich, creamy head. If you are pouring a highly foamy beer like Hefeweizen then pouring down the side is the best bet. Hold the glass at a 45-degree angle. Pour the beer slowly down the side of the glass until it is about half full and then straighten the glass as you continue pouring the remainder down the middle. Properly executed, this method should leave you with a nice 1-inch head on your beer.





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To get a proper pour from a tap use the down the side method. Hold the glass at a 45-degree angle about 1-inch below the faucet. Open the faucet completely and fill the glass about 2/3 full before slowly straightening the glass and pouring the remainder down the middle. Be sure to open the tap fully as a partial opening will cause turbulent flow and excessive foam. Never let the tap faucet touch the beer in the glass. The faucet can transfer germs from glass to glass and become a breeding ground for beer spoiling bacteria.

There are a couple of exceptions to this draft pouring method; the traditional 3-minute pilsner pour (or 7-minute depending on your source) and the Guinness pour. To pour a perfect pint of Guinness, pour down the side of the glass until 2/3 full and then set the glass aside to let the cascading gas settle. Once the beer has settled, top off down the middle to achieve a slight dome of foam over the rim of the glass. For a proper German pilsner pour go down the middle, stopping to allow the beer to rest as often as needed until the proper fill level has been reached.



One last thing to consider when pursuing the perfect pour is the yeast sediment in non-filtered, bottle conditioned beers. In most cases you will want to leave this yeast in the bottle. Avoid rocking the bottle when pouring into multiple glasses as this will rouse the yeast into the beer. When you see the sediment approach the neck of the bottle stop pouring and don't sweat the bit of beer left behind. With German wheat beers the yeast is an important part of the flavor and mouthfeel profile of the beer. Roll the bottle gently on the table before opening to rouse the yeast and then swirl the last inch of beer in the bottle before completing the pour.

There it is. You are now well on your way to consistently pouring the perfect pint.