

<http://www.germanbeerinstitute.com/Roggenbier.html>

ROGGENBIER

AKA: Rye Ale

Pronunciation guide for English-speakers:

Pronounce "Roggen" (German for "rye") like "rogg'n" — a combination of "rocking" and "rigging," but swallowing the "i" and "g" in "ing" "Gose-uh" as in "rose" plus "uh."

Definition:

Roggenbier is a medieval ale usually made from a grain bill of about half barley malt and equal portions of wheat and rye malts. Today, a Roggenbier may be either an ale or a lager. Modern renditions of the brew have about 5 to 5.5% alcohol by volume. Rye ales are mildly hopped, which allows the grain flavors to be dominant. Filtration appears to be optional in a rye ale and many, such as the Paulaner (depicted right) are "naturtrüb," meaning naturally turbid. A yeast-turbid Roggenbier is more authentic, considering that the style had been around long before beer filtration was invented in 1878.

Being ancient brews, Roggenbiers can have a faint whiff of earthiness in the nose that is reminiscent of rye bread. The up-front sensation is one of mild fruitiness. There is a slight to extreme yeastiness and breadiness in the middle, and an almost smoky, spicy, faintly sour and very dry finish—clearly the effects of the rye malt. Effervescence ranges from medium to spritzy like a Hefeweizen. The body is substantial, almost reminiscent of a Bockbier. The brew has a pleasant, rich, off-white head when poured.

For the most part, Roggenbiers are tart, refreshing summer quaffing beers, a nice alternative to a Hefeweizen. They go extremely well with a succulent slice of barbecued roast pork.

Roggenbier — An Old Medieval Ale Style Revived



For thousands of years, until roughly five centuries ago, man used to brew with whatever grain grew best where he lived, and in many parts of the world, especially in the more northern latitudes, that meant adding rye (*Secale cereale*), or Roggen in German, to the grain bill. In modern times, however, rye has largely fallen out of favor as a brewing grain. Today, there are only very few breweries making ale from Roggen. Perhaps the most readily available Roggenbier is the Thurn und Taxis Roggenbier, made by the Munich Paulaner brewing conglomerate. Originally, this Roggenbier was known as Schierlinger Roggen, so-named after the village of Schierling near Regensburg at the Danube in eastern Bavaria, where it was made by the local brewery. In 1988, the Schierlinger brewery was acquired by the Fürstliches Spezialitäten-Brauhaus Thurn und Taxis of Regensburg, which, in turn, became part of Paulaner in 1997. The current version this Roggenbier has an alcohol content of 5.3% by volume. It is not as dry some Roggenbiers. Instead, it leaves you with just a hint of residual sweetness in your mouth.

Rye ales declined in the Middle Ages in large part because the absolute rulers of the day decided that certain grains, such as rye and wheat, ought to be reserved for making solid, rather than liquid bread. Especially in years with a poor harvest, the lords reasoned that the people might be foolish enough to prefer imbibing and starving to eating and abstaining. This logic was also one of the hidden motives

behind the now much-hailed Bavarian Beer Purity Law of 1516, which legislated the exclusive use of barley in beer-making. Barley was chosen not just because it was deemed better suited for beer-making, but also because it was deemed ill-suited for bread-making. In the traditional feudal system of social stratification, therefore, rye was eventually restricted to being a dependable bread grain, and barley a dependable beer grain for the unwashed masses, while the more elegant wheat became the luxury bread grain and beer grain mostly for the high and mighty.

Rye, like wheat and unlike the best brewing barley is always planted in the fall and harvested the following summer. Top-quality rye demands top-quality soils, but it tends to be less finicky than wheat so that it can generate at least some yield even in poorer and more acidic soils, where wheat would not grow. Historically, therefore, rye was the only grain that could be counted on, from the North Sea to the Ural Mountains, to ripen in the short and often rainy summers of central Europe. Rye has been planted with particular success in such countries as Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. These are also the places where rye beers were once prominent, and where rye rather than wheat bread is still the staple sandwich maker.

Because rye is always planted for purposes other than beer-making, there simply is not enough demand for brewing rye to warrant the development of special brewing rye strains. Rye's malting and brewing

characteristics, especially its protein content are unpredictable and vary greatly with the climatic and agronomic conditions under which the crop is grown. The rye malt's protein level, for instance, can vary between nine and 13%. The protein content of top-quality brewing barley by contrast is always in a narrow range between 10 and 11%. Like wheat and unlike barley, rye has no husks and thus absorbs water comparatively quickly, which means it is next to impossible to brew an all-rye beer, because the run-off (the fermentable extract the brewer draws off the mash tun would get stuck).

There seem to be only two cultures in Europe that bucked the anti-rye trend. One of the rye-based brews that held their own is the unusual, unhopped, low-alcohol (0.5 to 1.5% abv) Kvass of Russia. There are many recipes for making an authentic Kvass, but traditionally it seems to have been brewed mostly from a changing mixture of mashed grains, rye flour, crumbled-up rye bread, and honey. Kvass was also often flavored with peppermint or fruit. The other rye-containing brew that survived the Middle Ages is the juniper-flavored sahti of Finland. In a few small breweries in this northern land, sahti is still brewed with a good portion of rye malt on top of a base of barley malt.

