

Cellar Husbandry

Are you new to Cask Ale? Are you new to cellar management?

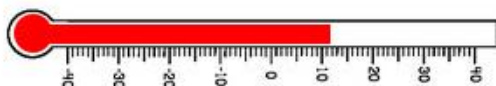
Keeping cask beer is a skill, these guidelines are designed to help you overcome the difficulties and make it less daunting. There is nothing more rewarding than gaining a reputation for serving great beer.

Cask ale is generally dispensed using 2 methods, stillage racking and vertical extraction.

Cleanliness is key. Ensure the cellar is clean and beer spillages are washed away. Taps, filters, spears etc. should be soaked in line cleaning solution and rinsed well before use. Run filters under hot water and scrub with a small brush to loosen hop and yeast debris if necessary. Using either dispense method, air is drawn into the cask to replace the beer drawn out and airborne bacteria will compromise the beer quality quickly. Beer should be sold between 3-5 days after broaching. The beer may not go 'off' after this time but it will lose its' natural condition.



The cellar temperature should ideally be between 10-13 Centigrade or 50-55 Fahrenheit. Beer stored below this temp will result in inactivity in the yeast and the beer will not condition. Stored above 13°C the yeast may spring into action and start a stronger secondary fermentation, the beer will become over conditioned, and fob resulting in difficult pouring and high losses. It probably won't clear giving poor presentation. (in our opinion)



The cask will need venting, this is when the cask is opened to release excess Co₂ created by the secondary fermentation taking place in the cask (cask conditioned beer). Venting times will vary depending on the brewery. As a general rule our beers require little venting, 24 hours should do it, we condition the beer to a point in the brewery to remove some of the unpredictability for the publican so we know that our beer will not usually over condition and the yeast will flocculate (settle out) quickly. Ideal for pubs with varying cask requirements and could be tapped and ready to go overnight if necessary. The beer may have settled bright in this time but could still be slightly lively and present fobbing until the excess Co₂ is dispersed.

Remember these timings are only a guideline. Cask beer is a living thing and batches will vary.

Stillage

Laid on their bellies. The cask should be level initially and tilted when half full (by gently lowering the front or gently raising the back). Done perfectly on auto tilt stillage systems where it gently moves on springs as it empties.



Ideally casks should be stillaged (racked) immediately and left for around 24hrs. Tap the beer and release excess pressure, soft spile (porous cane spiles) and let the beer vent for 24 – 48 hours before it is required. When this secondary fermentation has ceased, replace the soft spile with a hard, non-porous spile. Test the beer from the tap before connecting to a beer line, this ensures any disturbed yeast, resettled around the tap is poured before going through the line. Test the beer at the barrel before every session. The hard spile needs to be removed whilst the beer is being dispensed and replaced at the end of the session, closing the cask like this will keep the beer fresher for longer.

Vertical Extraction

This is when the barrel is stood upright and a spear or cask widget is inserted for extracting the beer. The cask should be rolled into place and firmly wedged under the keystone side of the cask. This wedge needs to lift the cask between 3-5cm, so the cask is elevated enough for the yeast sediment to fall away from the spear but not enough to lose saleable beer. Use a tap or broaching blank to break the keystone, drive the tap in with one hard hit from the mallet if possible, this will break the opening but not compromise the seal. In this case the side vent on the tap is used to release the excess Co2, when satisfied the fermentation has stalled close the vent until ready to serve.



Cask widgets have become very popular as the beer has less necessity to settle completely, these have a float on the end that rises to the top of the liquid so the beer being pulled through the line has already begun to drop bright. Widgets are also be used when beer is stillaged. Cons; the filter on the end of the widget line has very fine mesh so blocks up easily and can hinder the pour, giving problems with dispense. This causes resistance on the pump.

Spear extraction requires removing the broaching blank and gently guide the spear through the body of the tap until it touches the base of the cask, lift it about 1cm off the base and attach the line to the pump. Pull on the pump at the bar until you have pulled off all the water in the line and taste to ensure you have undiluted beer coming through. The spear also has a filter on the end that can block up with yeast and hops but can be easily lifted back out through the tap for checking.

The longer the beer stands before use, the less time there will be to serve in good condition. Remember the beer starts to deteriorate from the point of opening not when you start serving it. The most damage is done when serving begins and the void within the cask is filled will air but air does make its way in during the venting process.

- Wash down your cellar floor immediately after any spillages
- Ensure your taps, filters, spears etc are thoroughly clean
- Clean cask lines every 5 days and rinse through with water between cask changes
- It is good practice to keep records of when beer comes in, when it's tapped, when did it go on/when should it be used by, when lines are cleaned. A small note pad kept nearby is ideal, unless you have our beer provided with a sticker
- Do not try to move the cask once it has settled, if the yeast is only just disturbed it rarely compacts down again. For the finings to work efficiently they need to be thoroughly mixed up again to reactivate
- Take care when placing barrels next to settled stock, even a gentle knock will disturb the yeast
- Close all your valves at the end of each night to prolong the freshness of the beer
- **TOP TIP:** When dealing with that difficult customer at the bar, do not go into the cellar and start kicking casks!

