



# MHTG Gruit Ale Presentation

Education Meeting for June 20, 2018  
Presenter: Jeremy Kaukl

# What is Gruit?

Wikipedia: Gruit (alternately grut or gruyt) is an herb mixture used for bittering and flavouring beer, popular before the extensive use of hops. Gruit or grut ale may also refer to the beverage produced using gruit.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language:

- 1: Any of various mixtures of herbs such as ground ivy, yarrow, or sweet gale, formerly used in brewing for their flavor, aroma, or preservative qualities.
- 2: A beer brewed with such a mixture.



Pictured: Not Gruit

# What is Gruit?

Gruit is Old German (500-1050 AD) for “herb.”



Gruit grew beyond the simple meaning of herb to encompass the herbal mixture used to bitter fermented grain beverages. The primary three ingredients were Sweet Gale (bog myrtle), Wild Rosemary, and Yarrow. These mixtures also included multiple other ingredients based on the mixture, including hops.

Gruit as a mixture was originally used and produced in areas of the Netherlands, Belgium, and western Germany (Westphalia region).

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language:

Dutch from Middle Dutch *gruit*, *grute* from Old Low Franconian *grūt* perhaps originally referring to a mixture of malt and herbs used at the beginning of the medieval brewing process and akin to Old English *grūt* coarse meal, hulled grain

# What is Koyt/Kuit/Kuyt?

A style of gruit specific to the Netherlands (possibly the city of Haarlem).

Brewers Association Beer Style Guidelines: Dutch-Style Kuit, Kuyt or Koyt



- Color: Gold to copper
- Clarity: Chill haze and other haze is acceptable
- Perceived Malt Aroma & Flavor: The aroma is grainy or grainy-bready. The distinctive character of this beer is derived from the use of at least 45 percent oat malt, at least 20 percent wheat malt with pale malt making up the remainder of the grain bill.
- Perceived Hop Aroma & Flavor: Very low to low from noble hops or other traditional European varieties
- Perceived Bitterness: Medium-low to medium
- Fermentation Characteristics: Esters may be present at low levels. Very low levels of diacetyl are acceptable. Acidity and sweet corn-like DMS should not be perceived.
- Body: Low to medium



# What is Gruit?

Currently, gruit is generally accepted to be any beer brewed primarily without the use of hops. These beers rely instead on ingredients such as herbs, spices, roots, tree bark, berries, etc. for the bittering process.

BJCP currently has no specified style guidelines for gruit ale. Gruit ales would currently fall under category 30A: Spice, Herb, or vegetable Beer.

The Brewers Association also does not currently have specific guidelines for gruit ales.

# What is Sahti?

Wikipedia: Sahti is a Finnish beer made from malted and unmalted grains including barley, rye and oats. Traditionally the beer is flavored with juniper in addition to, or instead of, hops. The mash is filtered through juniper twigs into a trough-shaped tun, called a kuurna in Finnish. Sahti is top-fermented and many have a banana flavor due to isoamyl acetate from the use of baking yeast, although ale yeast may also be used in fermenting.

BJCP Category 27 - Historical Beer: Sahti: A sweet, heavy, strong traditional Finnish beer with a rye, juniper, and juniper berry flavor and a strong banana-clove yeast character.





# What is Sahti?

## Brewers Association Beer Style Guidelines: Finnish-Style Sahti

- Color: Pale to copper
- Clarity: Chill haze, yeast haze and general turbidity is acceptable.
- Perceived Malt Aroma & Flavor: Malt aroma is medium-low to medium. Malt flavor is medium to high with malt sweetness evident.
- Perceived Hop Aroma & Flavor: Not present to very low
- Perceived Bitterness: Very low
- Fermentation Characteristics: These beers can vary significantly in character. Fruity-estery and yeasty aromas are medium to high. Diacetyl should not be perceived. Bread/bakers' yeast is traditionally used for fermentation and may produce flavors and aromas of complex alcohols, clove-like phenols and banana fruitiness.
- Body: Medium to full

# Gruit Examples - Available Tonight

**Jopen Koyt: Gruitbier** - Brewed with Sweet Gale

**Professor Fritz Briem: 13th Century Grut Bier** - Brewed with Lorbeer (Bay Leaves), Ingwer (Ginger), Kummel (Caraway), Anis (Anise), Rosemarin (Rosemarie) & Enzian (Gentian)

**Oliphant Brewing: Groot** - Brewed with Juniper Berry, Rainbow Peppercorn, Clove, and Caraway Seed

**Vintage Brewing Company: Summer Sahti** - Brewed with Juniper Berries, Birch Bark, & Hops; and Aged on additional Juniper Berries

**Vintage Brewing Company: Briny the Elder (Elderberry Gose)** - Brewed with Elderberries, Coriander, Cinnamon, Sea Salt, and Hops



Still Not Gruit



# Gruit History

Gruit, while not always by that name, has likely existed as long as humans have been creating fermented grain beverages. The ingredients for brewing consisted of whatever was on hand, including grains, fruits, nuts, herbs, and grasses. Some of these ingredients had bittering and antibacterial properties that preserved the beverage from spoilage. Over time, these ingredients became the herbal mixture known as gruit.

The original brewers were women. It was part of the household chores. Until around 1400 AD, women grew and foraged their own grains and herbs. They became known as Brewsters or Alewives.

Starting around 1400 AD, aspiring entrepreneurs saw the profit to be made in making beer commercially in large quantities. This is also around the time when men became the predominant brewmasters.

# Gruit History

It is believed by some historians that the origin of the 'witch' may in fact originate from the women brewers of the time.

- Beverages were boiled and fermented in black copper cauldrons.
- Cats were kept to control rodents and other vermin.
- They would hang a broom (ale stake) outside above their door to indicate there was ale available.
- The magical boiling of the cauldron was likely the yeast (a then unknown organism) vigorously fermenting.
- Brewsters often wore tall, pointy hats so that the public could easily identify them in busy markets.



# Gruit History

## Ale vs. Beer:

In the 15th thru 17th century England ale and beer were both used to describe fermented grain beverages. 'Ale' was used for non-hopped beverages (gruit). 'Beer' was used for hopped beverages.

At this time, through much of Europe, there were laws preventing the use of hops in fermented beverages.

This began to change in 1516 with the passing of Reinheitsgebot, the German Purity Law.





# Gruit History

Why were there laws to both prevent and require hops in fermented beverages?

Politics. Money. Religion.

The recipe for gruit was a closely guarded proprietary secret. All brewers were required to buy their gruit from the local gruit house. This created a monopoly on the practice.

Gruit ale was also a very inebriating drink. Many of the herbs and spices used in the gruit mixture are known narcotics, intoxicants, aphrodisiacs, and psychotropics. Their inclusion in fermented beverages seemed to increase their effects as compared to when ingested separately.

# Gruit History

Hops, however, have a sedating effect and are an anaphrodisiac. They also have better antibacterial and preservative properties than many other bittering ingredients.

A combination of the Protestant temperance movement against inebriating beverages and the money to be made from a monopoly of the beer preservative market led to the decline of gruit.

In 16th and 17th century Europe, stimulating herbs found in gruit were portrayed as dangerous and adulterants while the use of hops was encouraged.

By the 18th century, most beer contained hops.



# Gruit Ingredients - Herbs and Spices

Anise Seed

Blessed Thistle

Burdock

California Sagebrush

Caraway Seed

Cinnamon

Coriander

Dandelion

Darnel



Gentian

Ground Ivy

Heather

Hibiscus

Hops

Horehound

Labrador Tea

Lavender

Lemongrass



# Gruit Ingredients - Herbs and Spices

Lungwort

Meadowsweet

Monkeyweed/Japanese Knotweed

Motherwort

Mugwort

Nettle

Rue

Saffron



Sage - Leaves and Flowers

Saint John's Wort

Spikenard

Wild Lettuce

Wild Rosemary

Wood Betony

Wormwood

Yarrow



# Gruit Ingredients - Trees

Alder - Bark

Balsam

Black Locust - Flowers and Seed Pods

California Sycamore - Bark

Fir

Hemlock

Juniper



Nutmeg

Poplar - Buds

Redwood

Spruce - Tips/Immature Cones

Star Anise

White Oak - Bark

Willow - Bark



## Black Elder - Berries and Flowers

# Chaga

## Sagebrush

## Scotch Broom

## Sweet Gale (bog myrtle)

## Tarragon

## Yerba Santa



# Gruit Ingredients - Dangerous, But Useful in Small Amounts

Henbane

Mandrake - Not American Mandrake or Mayapple

Nightshade Family

Scotch Heather



# Effects of Ingredients - Detrimental

Cramping

Headache

Narcotic Effects

Nausea

Pregnancy Complications



# Effects of Ingredients - Benefits

Antibacterial

Antidepressant

Antimicrobial

Antioxidant

Aphrodisiac

Digestif

Pain Relief

Psychoactive



# Use in Brewing

Can commonly be added similar to hops:

Hung in a bag or muslin sack

Added whole

Powdered/Ground

Syrup/Extract





# Future Education Committee Presentations

Foraged Beer: How to grow/procure your own brewing ingredients and brew your own foraged beer. (February 2019?)

Foraged Beer Night: Taste foraged beers from MHTG members. (May or June 2019?)



# Resources

Against All Hops - Butch Heilshorn

Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers - Stephen Harrod Buhner

The Wildcrafting Brewer - Pascal Baudar

Wikipedia.org

BJCP Guidelines

Brewers Association Guidelines

