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Beer Wine & Spirits

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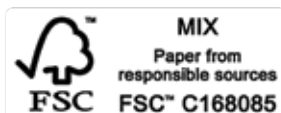
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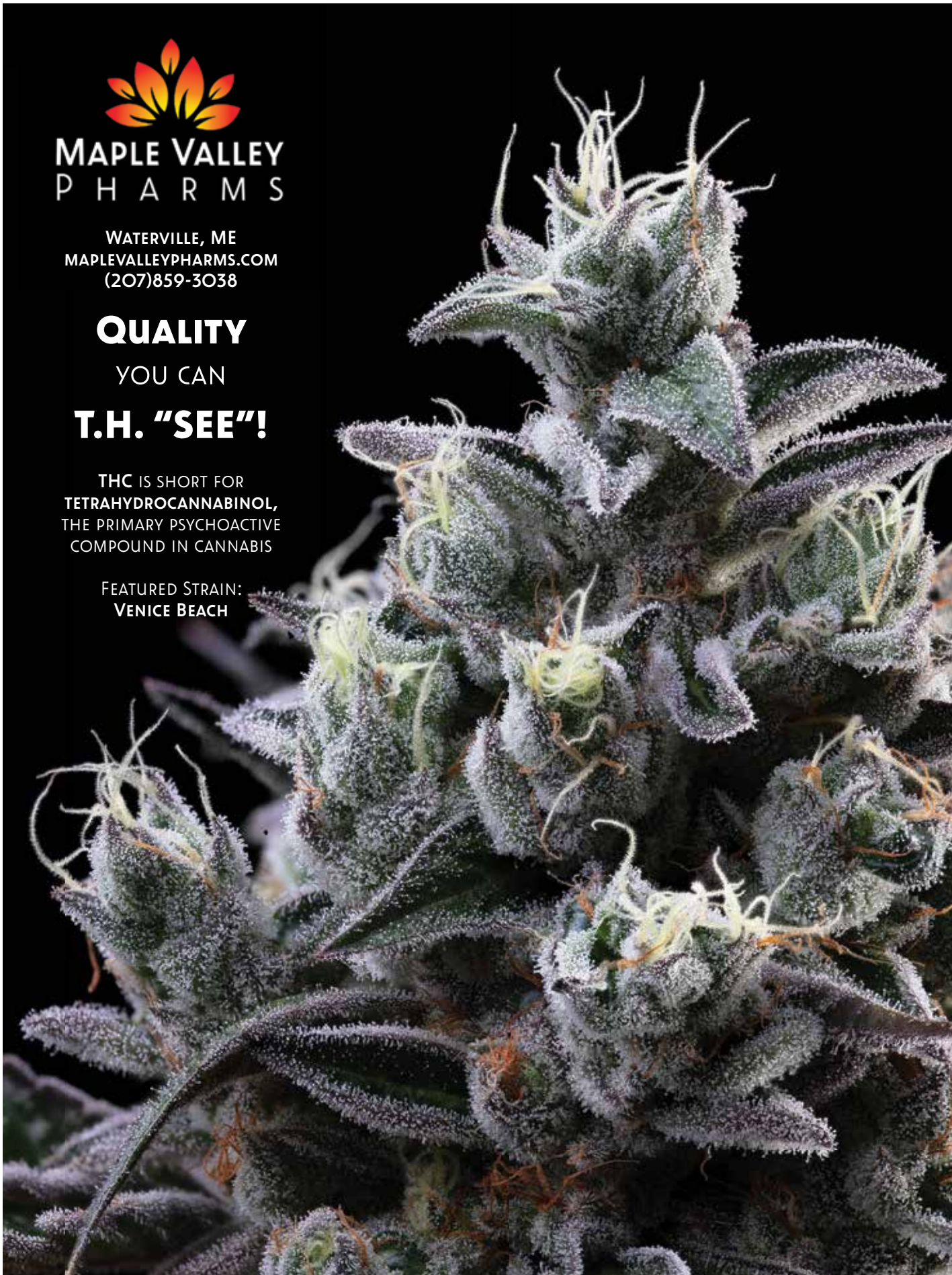
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Maine Makes Winter Warmer

Written by Jeff Cutler



Maine has depth. Maine's people, Maine's mystique, Maine's industry, Maine's wilderness, Maine's community. Depth across the board.

Each and every facet of Maine has depth and exploring this depth is never so fascinating and fun as during the winter. That's what makes our state so great. You know this, too, because you live here, you breathe here, you drink here, and you also endure and enjoy the winters.

I'm not drafting a column that's just a love letter to Maine, yet I am positive that the beer, wine and liquor available here will warm your heart. Let's take a look at what makes Maine great and how alcohol can serve to enhance your experiences.

****Before we jump into the amazing features of a Maine winter, I want to address any confusion in this column's title. You see, as a beer guy, I would think, "Wow, Maine Beer Co. is making Winter Warmer style." That's not what I meant. I was saying that being in Maine makes even the harshest winter seem warmer. I hope that clears things up.****

The State of Maine

Our state's got class and pizzazz and depth. It's exactly that depth I'm exploring today as winter blinks its eyes open. I'm exploring the depth of connection to a place; the depth of connection to a community; and the depth of connection to your favorite cold-weather drink.

Let's look at the Maine winter. Snow's already here — it arrived in a storm on December 2, 2025, bringing with it some single-digit temperatures and a bunch of white fluffy stuff. With all that landing in the lap of Midcoast and beyond, locals don't flinch.

The weather is usually taken in stride because Maine's residents have a wilderness awareness and appreciation not found in many places. It's that ability to explore and enjoy ones surroundings that sets Mainers apart.

You know, Maine is so tied to a wilderness lifestyle that LL Bean coined the phrase "Be An Outsider" for a couple reasons. First, it's a ridiculously clever tagline using just the letters in the company name. BEAN OUTSIDER. Brilliant. Next, I think LL Bean is well aware of how much Maine there is, and they want to help you explore it.

Drinking Culture



Prepare for the Wonderland

In the past, I didn't even bring up apparel for winter months. People reading Craft are from Maine, they know the situation. Unfortunately, for the purposes of communication clarity, there are a lot more people in Maine who don't have Maine in their genes.

For those coming to Maine to enjoy the winter, be prepared. There are two primary things to focus on...and they'll ensure your excursion is trouble-free.

Food and beverage

Bring plenty of food and bring along just one night's worth of beer and liquor. Why just one night's worth? Because after your first step into Maine, you'll be enthralled by the variety and quality of the beer and liquor up here.

The reason I suggest lots of food is because of Maine's infrastructure. You'll find that places to eat are available and supermarkets are more akin to general stores. And you'll also discover significant distances between pockets of civilization (liquor and food stores).

So bring your food, and buy your booze on your way to your camp/resort/lake house/etc. You'll be happier and you'll be thrilled with Maine's alcoholic offerings.

Clothing

You weren't coming over the border without any clothing, I realize that. What I'm pointing out is that the clothing that will keep you safe in Groton, CT is different from the clothing you need up here.

Drinking Culture



Think warmth, water-resistance, and weight. The best outdoor clothing has great insulation, keeps you dry, and is light enough that you won't be tempted to leave it in the car or at the hotel. Cold-weather gear is meant to be worn in cold weather, so be ready for the cold.

Hats, gloves/mittens, and scarves are also on the clothing menu. I suggest gloves over mittens if you're going to need dexterity. This includes operating a corkscrew or pulling up on a pop-top. Try not to be the novice who has a mitten in their mouth while they struggle with the cork on the Pinot Noir.

Lastly, at the bottom of your being are your feet. If possible you should surround these appendages with wool (or other warm, wicking material) socks tucked into wicking and warm long underwear. Then stuff all of this into a warm and waterproof shoe or boot.

That's it. If you follow the Ws you'll be warm, dry and able to move. That means you're ready for action.

Choose Your Toys - Pick Your Playground

Remember grade school? Recess meant a mad dash to the gym equipment on the playground. Some people ran to swings; made their way to the sandbox; climbed up the slide; and generally found a place to relax and be a kid.

In my mind, that's what winter is in Maine. There's a restricted nature to where you can go and what you can do, especially in inclement weather. But that's exactly what we embrace up here. We've also found a way to conquer the challenges a Maine winter brings.

Unlike recess and the desire to win control of the slide or be the first one to tetherball, the pastimes here are mostly community-focused. Ice fishing, skiing, firepits, sledding, hunting. That list has



Drinking Culture

items on it that work well solo, but are much more enjoyable with others around.

What's a firepit with one person sitting there nursing an Allagash? Why wouldn't you get a keg of Thirsty Botanist and make it a party? And it would be more fun. So think about what experience you're looking for and who you might want to join you.

The one caveat about making Maine your winter wonderland, is the same preparation I wrote about earlier. You need to have a plan for your relaxing...especially when others are involved. So here are three short tips for winter fun...

Check the gas — This goes for cars, snowmobiles, dirt bikes, chainsaws, ATVs, and boats (if you still spend the winter on the water).

Locate ALL the keys — Finding keys in the snow is the second most popular game in Maine, after going uptacamp. If you can, establish a key routine. Maybe have a pelican case or other secure location for your keys. It's no fun to get to camp without a key to the house, the vehicles, the outhouse, etc. Without keys, nothing is easy.

Amass your booze — The depth we talked about earlier extends to the beer, wine and liquor industry in Maine. They are constantly trying to improve their products and their reach. Sometimes to the detriment of the consumer. Even if your favorite IPA is being shipped down to MA and elsewhere, you can still be comfortable knowing it came from Maine.

So, let's get into it.

As above, here are the three things you should focus on when gathering booze for any event or excursion. *Remember, in many places you will NOT need ice.

Also, don't be fooled into thinking a fridge is just an electric cooler — it's not. AND IT WILL BREAK if you keep it outside in temps lower than a normal fridge.

Coolers — While there might be ice all around you, it's still civilized and convenient to keep beverages in a cooler. The best choices for coolers are those that allow you to drain off water to keep contents dry. Electric coolers are interesting, and not very helpful beside an ice-fishing hole or in a tree blind.

Take a minute to count the people and the time you'll be spending together. That should give you an inkling about how much booze to put in the cooler — and if you're going to need more than one or two coolers.

Implements of Construction — Containers to pour booze into are required. You're still allowed to pass the Jaeger bottle around the firepit, but have a little bit of class. I'm not saying glass is necessary. A red solo cup sleep is fine for a weekend away in the woods.

Other stuff you'll need will include some sort of knife to cut garnishes and drink fruit. Corkscrews, bring more than one because there's always a bad corkscrew in every house. Koozies are important if you are going to have your hands out at any time. This could be baiting a hook, having a puff, visiting the outhouse, or any other things you need fingers for. Don't freeze them off, bring a koozie.

Lastly, and to wrap up a Wonderful Winter in Maine...

Be safe in your Boozing

The woods and water and wilderness in Maine are epic. It's also unrelenting and can be dangerous even in good weather. To that end, I made a short list of some items to bring and some steps you might take before you go have fun.

First Aid Kit — No-brainer. See if you can get one with emergency blankets inside.

Flare gun — If you never use it, just remember to replace it after a number of years. And it's a super way to get noticed if you're desperately lost.

Water — Make sure you have water sources available and that you've filled and brought clean water with you. It might seem silly to bring extra water into the woods on a drinking-themed jaunt, but trust me, water is good.

Spare dry clothing — not to make your pack too heavy to carry, but a dry set of clothes can be a literal life saver.

Communications device — cell phones are good, satellite phone is better, and some of the 'avalanche victim' locator devices wouldn't be bad to have on hand.

That's about it.

While you might feel like this has been an endless list of stuff to bring on a relaxing adventure, it's pretty basic. Only you will be able to decide whether your adventure will require ready to eat meals and compasses; or if it will actually accommodate wine glasses, white robes for massages, and swim gear for hot tubs and pools.

Whatever you decide, make Maine your source for great beverages to enhance your trip. See you next issue — drink local. 🍷



Photo Via Blaze Brewing Company, Facebook

Holiday Beers & Drink Recipes

Jonathan Strieff

Photo by Cushman Brewing Cajun Queen



I'm not embarrassed to admit that I'm a sucker for all things "seasonal," regardless of the season. Red, white, and blue plates and napkins for the Fourth of July barbecue? Absolutely. Pumpkin spice everything as soon as the first leaves start to change? Yes, please. But my most impulsive impulse buying by far happens during the holiday season. I will buy just about anything during the month of December if it's colored red and green, especially if I hear sleigh bells jingling over the store's speaker system. At first, I try to rationalize my indulgence by pretending, "These could be gifts," or that, "Everyone will enjoy some new decorations," but when the fever fully sets in, I know without a doubt that these little slices of joy to the world are just for me.

One way I do try to actually share the holiday cheer is by keeping my fridge stocked with every Winter Ale, Christmas Ale, and Holiday Ale I come across. Thankfully, unlike many seasonal releases at other times of year, this broad style of beer tends to hit on everything I'm looking for; dark, malty composition, high ABV, interesting spice blends. The big boys, like Sam Adams and Sierra Nevada, seem to get away with just adding some cinnamon or ginger to their familiar lagers and IPAs and slapping a snow landscape scene on the label, but the custom of brewing dark, strong beer specially to fortify us against the cold winter months could arguably be considered the original seasonal beer. Traditionally, the malt-forward, unhopped or lightly hopped style we associate with winter ales was brewed to be the base for a number of different

drinks, served hot and spiced featuring ingredients like cream and sugar (eggnog, anyone?), bread, roasted apples, and other liquor. The rise in popularity of hopped beers overtime, which react poorly to being heated (as anyone who has ever tried to choke down a skunked Budweiser can confirm) led to hot ale drinks falling out of favor, but not the appetite for dark, strong beer during the dark, cold months. Some beer historians online and at living history museums like Colonial Williamsburg are enthusiastic about reviving old style warmed beer mix-drinks like Ale Possets, Lamb's Wools, and Egg Flips, but this seems likely more for novelty and authenticity than for flavor.

Today, creative brewers are taking traditional winter ales and infusing them with just about anything they associate with the holidays. In Kennebec County, Davey D'Angelo at Sidereal Farm Brewery has long specialized in a wide variety of barrel aged and fruit infusion beers, many made with fruit and botanicals directly from his 28-acre organic farm estate. Sidereal's holiday offerings are no exception. In 2023, D'Angelo made a Double Pastry stout called Merry Thiccmas, brewed with marshmallow crème, vanilla beans and 50 pounds of Little Debbie Christmas Tree Cakes. One regular I spoke to at the Sidereal tap room described it as, "A heart attack in a can." Last December also saw the release of Solstice D'hiver, a light, high ABV saison style brewed with more than 130 lbs. of crushed cranberries. The beer was aged in both red wine and gin barrels and then blended. The wine, juniper, and cranberry flavors, while subtle, added a tart brightness to the traditional saison backdrop, more like embracing the chill of winter than fortifying against it. This year, Sidereal will be opening barrels of a sugar plum fairy inspired winter ale, brewed with local plums and aged for 18 months.

Nearby, in Augusta, Cushman Brewing has two special winter releases planned for the holiday season. While not explicitly "winter," or "holiday" themed, Cushman's Cajun Queen is a dessert imperial porter strong enough to keep jack frost from nipping at any part of you. Brewed with molasses, pecans, and chicory coffee, the beer is thick and sweet without tasting syrupy, my number one turn off in a strong dark beer. The roasty bitterness of the malt gives impressions of graham cracker and chocolate and, at 9%, one pint is plenty to warm you up. Cushman will also be featuring a variation on their flagship Gigantic Dad Pants IPA called Abominable Snow Pants. Brewed with Australian and New Zealand hops, this hazy New England style double IPA is described as the per

Road Trippin'

fect complement to ski and snowboard runs down your favorite mountains in Maine.

Further east, at Lake St. George Brewing, Danny McGovern has planned a number of seasonal releases that embrace the tradition of dark, strong ale for the winter without emphasizing seasonal exclusivity. One release being resurrected due to popular demand is a Russian imperial stout first brewed as part of their experimental "Fledgling" series. The beer is velvety smooth, with minimal head, and strong notes of dried fruit, dark chocolate and roasted malt. McGovern has also been aging barrels of their popular Danny's Oatmeal Stout in bourbon and rum barrels for a limited run at their tap room in Liberty. Another small batch offering in the tank is a molé stout, brewed with local chili peppers and chocolate sourced from Bixby's Chocolate in Rockland.

Before contacting our local brewers, I assumed that the holiday season was an important time for craft breweries to market small batch bottles and cans and gifts for the beer connoisseur on your holiday shopping list, but no one I talked to would indulge this idea. All three brewers I spoke to maintained that they are bottling and kegging unique, delicious beers all year long. While the season might inform what style they choose to pursue, overall production and marketing remain relatively constant, or actually tick up in the summer months when Maine's population explodes with visitors. Sidereal and Lake St. George also spoke almost pessimistically about the economics of bottling and canning small batch specialty releases, preferring to host events at their tap houses making the debut of a new line on draft an occasion to mark on your calendar. However, you choose to access your winter ales this year, with so many talented, passionate brewers all around the state pushing themselves creatively, there is clearly no reason to fear the dark season. 🍷

Photo Via getrecipcart.com



For readers interested in drinking down some history this holiday season, these recipes for Ale Posset and Lamb's Wool offer a taste of the warm, winter ale drinks popular in Europe and the colonies of the 18th century. Surviving recipes from the time period vary greatly between different regions and these two recipes have been adapted for more modern tastes. Consider playing with the recipes until you land on something that flips your powdered wig.

Ale Posset (adapted from Historic Foodways at colonialwilliamsburg.org)

Ingredients

- 1 quart of whipping cream
- 1 pint of dark, strong ale
- 10 egg yolks
- 4 egg whites
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp. grated nutmeg

Instructions

1. In a large pan, combine the cream and ale and whisk together gently.
2. In a mixing bowl, whip egg whites until very frothy. Add the yolks and continue to whip until well blended. Add egg mixture to cream and ale.
3. Add sugar and nutmeg and cook over medium heat until thick.
4. Serve in a punch bowl or individual bowls or glasses.

Lambswool Wassail (adapted from Brew Beer like a Yeti by Jereme Zimmermen)

Ingredients

- 6 apples
- 1 teaspoon each grated nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, and ginger
- ½ cup cane sugar or brown sugar
- 1 cup water (or cider, red wine, ginger beer)
- 1 small lemon or orange
- 4 pints spiced dark ale

Instructions

1. Core the apples and place them in a deep baking dish.
2. Sprinkle apples with spices and sugar and pour over water.
3. Squeeze the lemon or orange juice over the mixture.
4. Bake at 350 for 45 minutes or until apples are soft.
5. Remove from heat and allow apples to cool enough to remove skins.
6. Add ale and mash warm apple mixture into smooth puree.
7. Serve

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The Heart and Soul of a proper Maine winter:

Root vegetables and aged oak-cask red wines

Written by Beverly Ann Soucy

Winter up here in Maine does not ask for attention or tap you on the shoulder. It roars on in and owns the place. By the time January settles in, Maine is firmly locked into its coldest, steadiest stride. The novelty and thrill of that first snowfall has faded into a distant memory; the holiday lights and decorations are all boxed away, and the days have settled into that familiar pattern of exceedingly early sunsets and biting cold mornings. You know the ones. The mornings where getting out of a warm bed makes you second guess your life choices. This is the long stretch of wintertime when the white mountains look sharper, the lakes take on a steel-blue stillness, the trees look like they are covered in frosting, your breath defined by little white clouds. The pace of life shifts into something more deliberate, more grounded, and despite your best efforts, you are forced to slow down and make time for things like shoveling snow and warming up your vehicles before heading off to work. It is the time of year where wool things come out of storage and crockpots become the preferred method of preparing family meals.

For generations, us Mainers have understood that feeding ourselves through the coldest months requires more than comfort; it requires thoughtful preparation. While our modern homes are stocked with refrigerators, electric heat, and grocery aisles that never empty, the winter kitchen still follows the same basic logic that carried our families through decades of New England winters: rely on what's hardy, what stores well, and what stands up to the shortened days for long, slow cooking. It becomes all about comfort food that can be served for more than one meal. That is where root vegetables, winter meats, and oak-aged red wines take center stage. Together, they form the backbone of a Northeast winter table. Not only are they nutritious and hearty, but they are perfectly suited to the months when we naturally shift indoors and cook with more intention. This is not nostalgia talking; it is simply "smart food culture" rooted from a place that knows winter intimately.

To understand why winter cooking in Maine looks like the way it does, you have to look back at the practical systems our ancestors built for survival. Long before freezers and supermarkets, rural

families relied heavily on gardening, canning, preservation, and hunting season, and following the rhythm of the seasons. A well-managed winter pantry was not a luxury; it was a necessity to get through the long winters. Some of us remember those old days where a typical snowstorm was several feet, not inches and staying in the house sometimes resulted in several days at a time in wool pajamas with a good book or two between shoveling snow.

The root cellar was the cornerstone of that system, dug into hillsides or tucked beneath farmhouses, or off in the darkest, coldest corner of the cellar. Root cellars maintained a reliably cool, stable temperature that allowed vegetables to last for months. A well-stocked cellar contained carrots layered in sand, potatoes and onions sitting in cardboard boxes filled with straw, turnips and cabbage wrapped in paper or straw stored in crates, and beets with their tops trimmed, blanched and canned, tucked into old wooden bins. It was not glamorous, but it was effective, and it ensured that even in the dead of winter, everyone still had access to nutrient-dense produce.

This ancestral practice has long since shaped how Mainers cook to this day. While today we may store our parsnips and carrots in refrigerators instead of cellars, our winter palate remains the same: craving earthy flavors, grounded with hearty vegetables, dense loaves of sourdough bread, and flavorful slow-cooked meats. All the flavors and goodness that deepen with time and heat. If summer meals are about quick freshness, winter meals are about depth. Slow and steady often accompanied by rich gravy. Maine families have been leaning into that depth for hundreds of years. And really, who does not love good gravy?

Root vegetables have a reputation for being simple, but simplicity is exactly what makes them indispensable. Unlike summer produce that demands immediate use and attention, roots are forgiving. They wait patiently, hold their integrity, and improve immensely in flavor as the temperature drops. In a climate like ours, they are the workhorses of winter cuisine.

Carrots, parsnips, beets, potatoes, rutabagas, cabbage, turnips,

Food & Wine

and sweet potatoes offer a range of flavors that play exceptionally well with long cooking times. Carrots and onions caramelize beautifully, developing sweetness that anchors stews and a great roast. Parsnips contribute a subtle spice and softness that adds refinement to winter dishes. Rutabagas bring a peppery edge, balancing richer meats. Beets lend their signature earthiness, especially when roasted in a good old-fashioned cast-iron pan until tender. And potatoes, in all their varieties, remain the universal binder of winter cooking. They are creamy and so delicious when mashed, crisp and flavorful when roasted, and a baked potato is something to behold where an entire meal can be created around it, stuffed with so many wonderful things. Imagination and the sky are the only limits. They are endlessly adaptable.

What makes root vegetables particularly suited to Maine winters is their ability to stand up to bold flavors. They pair naturally with culinary herbs like rosemary, thyme, and sage. They benefit from cooking methods that build layers of flavor for searing, roasting, boiling or slow simmering. And because they hold their shape well, they remain visually appealing and texturally interesting long after other vegetables have collapsed. In short: root vegetables are a culinary advantage, filled with vitamins and minerals, and not a compromise because of the season. Wintertime brings with it a natural invitation for heartier comforts, and nothing fits the season better than the earthy pull of root vegetables and the warm depth of an oak-aged red wine.

As Maine settles into its coldest stretch, it is the perfect backdrop for dishes that come from the ground up and wines that have taken their time to become themselves.

And to bring it all together, let us step into the luxury of a well-stocked wine cellar, where those aged bottles wait to be opened and shared with friends over long, leisurely dinners.

If there is a season tailor-made for oak-aged red wines, it is wintertime. As temperatures drop, our palates shift toward wines with full bodied structure, rich, warm, and complex. Those bottles whose secret magic can complement, along with the richness of slow-cooked meals and the depth of all things that involve winter ingredients. And not only that, but they are also wonderful for sipping while you are spending time in the kitchen and do well for decanting to bring out the full flavor of those aged grapes. While there are many reds that perform well in cold weather, two stand firmly above the rest for the Maine kitchen: old-vine Zinfandel and aged Cabernet Sauvignon.

Old-vine Zinfandels are unique in the world of wine. The vines, often decades or even a century old, produce fewer grapes, concentrating flavor into each berry. The resulting wines are

deeply expressive, rich with dark fruit; think of raspberry jam, black pepper, subtle smoke, and spice. They carry enough weight to stand alongside venison or bison and most slow cooked roasts, while remaining balanced enough not to overwhelm a dish and are perfectly wonderful to enjoy long after dinner is through. What makes old-vine Zinfandel especially fitting for winter cooking is its versatility. Its natural sweetness complements roasted root vegetables. Its spice mirrors the aroma of winter herbs. Its depth enhances braised meat. And its warmth offers a welcome counterpoint to cold evenings. Every cellar should have several bottles of old vine Zin for just those evenings. Paired with a venison stew or a roasted root medley, an old-vine Zin becomes more than a beverage; it becomes part of the meal structure.

Cabernet Sauvignon remains one of the most consistent and reliable winter wines. When aged in oak, it gains nuance, with hints of cedar, tobacco leaf, cocoa, vanilla along with a wonderful jammy finish. The longer it is allowed to “breathe” its natural tannins will soften into a more elegant structure. What you get is a wine that stands firmly beside winter dishes rather than fading behind them. Cabernet excels with dishes that showcase richness and depth. Glossy reductions, long braises, charred edges, and roasted meats all benefit from its backbone and structure. Its boldness pairs well with root vegetables, bringing out sweetness in carrots and earthiness in beets. And because Cabernet retains structure even when paired with hearty flavors, it becomes a natural component of winter table conversations. Simply put, Cabernet Sauvignon is designed for meals that simmer, roast, or braise for hours, the kind of cooking winter demands. Every wine collector should have several bottles in their pantry for exactly these occasions.

Now, let us talk about meat. Specifically, venison and bison. Winter meat traditions in Maine run deep. Historically, hunting seasons and farm cycles aligned with the colder months, which meant that winter meals often centered around game and livestock harvested earlier in the season and put up for our long, dark winters. Venison has long been part of the cultural landscape, prized not only for its availability but also for its flavor. Hunting season was not just a rite of passage; it was an important part of feeding families through winter. Venison was prized. Lean and earthy, without the preservatives of supermarket meats. It is reflective of the environment it comes from, and pairs seamlessly with the vegetables and wines that define winter cooking in New England.

Bison, though less traditional, has become an increasingly valued winter meat in Maine thanks to local farms raising it with quality and care. Bison’s richness, coupled with its subtle sweetness, makes it exceptionally compatible with Cabernet reductions and roasted roots. It stands up to bold flavors without overwhelming them, and it brings an appealing depth to winter meals. Both meats reinforce the

practicality and straightforwardness of Maine's winter cuisine: use what is available and enhance it with ingredients that make sense in the season.

Cooking in winter follows a different cadence than summertime does. There is less urgency, more patience, and an instinctual return to techniques that rely on slow transformations like browning, deglazing, roasting, and simmering over long, slow periods of time all based on pleasure. A winter kitchen often smells like something is in progress and often conjures up smells of childhood: onions caramelizing in a pan, a pot roast browning with fresh herbs and a pot of stock cooking down slowly on the stove for creating a second meal with the leftovers. The kitchen windows fog up, cast iron pans earn their keep, and the whole room becomes a quiet engine of heat and wonderful smells. This rhythm is not romanticized; it is practical and most suited to the season.

Where summer meals lean toward fresh green and brightness for having to use fresh vegetables immediately so as not to lose them, winter meals lean toward slow and steady. Root vegetables and hearty meats benefit from long cooking times. Wines release the flavors more fully if they sit open for a time. And the overall experience becomes one of layering flavors and building up those stews and gravies rather than showcasing singular notes and cooking down.

To put these principles into practice, here are two dishes that showcase the best of Maine winter cooking: hearty vegetables, deep rich flavors, great wines, and techniques that reward patience.

Old-Vine Zinfandel Venison Stew

This stew is a cornerstone of winter cooking. It brings together the sweetness of root vegetables, the depth of venison, and the complexity of an old-vine Zinfandel. The wine acts as both a cooking liquid, meat tenderizer, and a flavor-enhancer, integrated with fresh dried herbs, foraged all summer for the pantry apothecary, a rich stock, and browned meat to create a layered, satisfying dish as well as a little imbibing while it all comes together. Served with crusty bread and a glass of the same Zinfandel, it becomes a complete winter experience.

*A simple rule of thumb in my own kitchen is never cooking anything you would not drink.

Winter Cellar Venison Stew with Old-Vine Zinfandel

Serves 6

This is the stew that steams up the kitchen windows and pulls everyone in from the cold. A stew built from the cellar, from the hunt, from the heart.

Ingredients

- 2 lbs. venison stew meat, 1½-inch cubes
- 2 tbsp olive oil or rendered fat
- 1 large onion, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 carrots, thick sliced
- 2 parsnips, thick sliced
- 2 medium potatoes, cubed
- 1 cup rutabaga or turnip, cubed
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tbsp flour
- 2 cups old-vine Zinfandel
- 3 cups beef or venison stock
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1 tsp rosemary
- Salt and cracked pepper
- Fresh parsley

Instructions:

1. Brown the venison well.
2. Get a deep sear—this is where the soul of the stew comes from.
3. Sauté onions and garlic.
4. Add the tomato paste and flour; let them toast until fragrant.
5. Pour in the Zinfandel.
6. Scrape up every brown bit. Let the wine speak to the pot.
7. Simmer.
8. Add the meat back, pour in stock, add herbs, and let it gently bubble for 1½ hours.
9. Add vegetables; Carrots, parsnips, potatoes and rutabaga. Simmer until tender.

Finish.

Season, stir in parsley, and let it rest.

Serve with:

- Seghesio, Quivira or Turley Old-Vine Zinfandel.
- Cabernet-Glazed Bison with Maple-Roasted Roots
- Serves 4–6

This dish balances rustic ingredients with polished technique. The root vegetables gain caramelization in the oven, the bison browns beautifully, and the Cabernet reduction brings structure. The final glaze is robust but refined, exactly what winter meals aim to achieve for impressing your friends and family. The dish pairs naturally with an aged Cabernet Sauvignon, reinforcing the harmony between the ingredients.



Roasted Root Vegetables with Cabernet-Glazed Bison (or Venison) Sausage

Ingredients

- For the Vegetables:
- 3 carrots, peeled and cut
- 2 parsnips, cut
- 1 beet, cubed
- 1 sweet potato, cubed
- 1 red onion, wedged
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- Salt, pepper, red pepper flakes

For the Glaze:

- 1 lb. bison or venison sausage, sliced
- 1 cup Cabernet Sauvignon
- 1 tbsp maple syrup
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1 tsp rosemary
- 1 tbsp butter

Instructions

1. Roast vegetables at 425°F until caramelized.
2. Brown sausage in a skillet.
3. Add Cabernet, maple syrup, mustard, herbs—reduce.
4. Stir in butter.
5. Toss roasted vegetables in the glossy wine glaze.

Food & Wine



Serve with:
Jordan Cabernet, Stag's Leap Artemis or Columbia Crest

The best winter meals are not just about sentiment; they are about methods as well. Use ingredients that hold up. Cook with time as your friend. Let your best wine anchor the flavors rather than compete with them. Trust the vegetables that have sustained New England families for centuries. Embrace meats that complement the sturdiness of the season. Maine winters may be long, but they supply us with a remarkable culinary landscape when we approach them with the right ingredients and techniques.

Root vegetables, venison, bison, and oak-aged red wines may seem like classic cold-weather staples, but they remain relevant simply because they work. They deliver nutrition and practicality. All the things winter demands. When the temperature drops, these ingredients step forward reliably, forming meals that are satisfying

and firmly grounded in Maine's history and tradition.

If summer is about abundance, winter is about intention. In kitchens across the state, that intention continues to shape some of the most memorable meals of the year. Meals like these do more than nourish the body. They anchor us. A bowl of venison stew tastes like warmth and all the memories of childhood. A plate of roasted roots in Cabernet and butter tastes like the end of summer. A glass of Zin or Cab helps to get through the short days and long nights for it all.

We lean on these foods and share meals, and we lean on the season itself, because there is no getting away from it. Life is like that. For trusting it to teach us patience and presence and for slowing down the craziness of everyday life. Winter in Maine is not something to endure; it is something to savor and what better way to get through it all than with a little comfort food with family and friends and a few bottles of great wine. 🍷

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Brewers Love Winter *Because The Hops Are Here!*

Written by Dave Bolton

Winter is coming...

For those of us that fell in love with “Game of Thrones” before it went from being about the struggles of House Stark fighting against the seemingly impossible odds of survival — an army of unstoppable ice zombies, dragons, getting slaughtered at a wedding, political machinations — the phrase was the perfect analogy for living in New England. It literally means that the colder weather is on its way, and you need to be prepared for both the harsher temperatures and shorter days that winter brings.

Yes, the phrase took on a life of its own as the TV show rumbled through eight seasons and 73 episodes — more than 70 hours of “must-see” television, apparently — but it has become an easy way to think about not only the end of the year but also the first 10-12 weeks of the next. In much the same way that Spinal Tap introduced us to the concept of turning things up to 11, “winter is coming” acknowledges that our lifestyles will have a seasonal change, most of which will probably be spent indoors.

From a craft beer community perspective, that is a blessing and a curse. The days of summer when we all sat outside, drinking a refreshing lager or one of the myriad versions of a hazy IPA are now a memory, albeit one that should soon become a reality again in coming months. For those of us that tend to stay away from outdoor pursuits in the freezing cold, supping beer in a warm room is the only option, even more so as the snow and ice limits driving or walking to your nearest taproom.

Brewers, on the other hand, welcome winter with a level of enthusiasm that seems bizarre to the end drinker.

Granted, they get to produce seasonal flavor profiles that are a reflection of what the body needs to survive in the frozen tundra that covers most of Maine between December and March (warmth, mainly), but the appearance of high-alcohol content such as imperial stouts, barley wine, winter warmers and dark beers is just another example of craft beer’s commitment to seasonality. Which I have talked about before... probably.

The real reason that brewers get excited about winter is very simple. It’s when the majority of breweries receive the crates of hops that were harvested in the fall.

This alone is a highlight of the year for the average brewery, as it allows them to start planning ahead for the next 12 months and, importantly, working out the logistical elements that they will need to be successful in the coming year. Fruited or seasonal ingredient availability aside, this is becoming ever more critical across the craft beer industry, especially in terms of consumption rates and what the end drinker actually wants to sup.

It is common knowledge that alcohol consumption in the United States has been declining for several years. That is going to lead to what some people in the industry are calling a “great re-balancing” as consumers seek out quality, value and drinkability, while also exploring non-alcoholic options.

According to a recent Gallup poll, the percentage of adults who say that they drink alcohol has fallen from 62 percent in 2023 to 54 percent in mid-2025 (Writer note; this was the latest data available, it’s unlikely to change by year end), with a majority of Americans — 53 percent — saying that even drinking in moderation (defined as one to two drinks per day) is bad for one’s health.

Let’s not forget that going sober in January has become a lifestyle choice for a lot of people, but there is a significant amount of industry data which shows that consuming alcohol, especially among young people, is no longer as central to having a good time as once it was. For the record, I will be doing my version of Sober January again and am planning to drink on less than 10 days during that month.

We should note that the Gallup poll doesn’t go into the specifics of what alcohol (if any) people are choosing to imbibe, although beer, wine and liquor are the most common choices for drinkers (38 percent, 29 percent and 30 percent, respectively). However, it does present a sobering (no pun intended) overview of the challenges facing the alcoholic beverage sector as a whole.

Business Of Beer



“Americans’ drinking habits are shifting amid the medical world’s reappraisal of alcohol’s health effects,” the report said. “After decades of relative steadiness in the proportion of U.S. adults who drink, Gallup has documented three consecutive years of decline in the U.S. drinking rate as research supporting the “no amount of alcohol is safe” message mounts. Compounding the challenge for companies that sell alcohol, drinkers now appear to be dialing back how much they drink, as well.”

As a long-standing craft beer drinker, wine and liquor consumption is rarely of relevance to me. My better half drinks wine and an occasional bourbon or whiskey, so overall alcohol consumption levels among the millions of people who still enjoy a drink rarely register on my radar. Numbers always matter, but it is

safe to say that my drinking habits will remain constant for 11 out of the next 12 months.

Breweries (both major and craft) are still part of a multi-billion dollar industry in every state, and produce more than enough liquid refreshment for their customers. However, a drop in the amount of beer drunk or consumed could see more breweries close in 2026, a trend that has been well-documented within the craft beer sector.

Maine, for example, brewed 349,555 barrels of craft beer in 2024, which had an economic impact to the Pine Tree State of \$743 million. There are still 158 operating breweries in Maine, equating to 14.3 breweries per capita – deemed to be per 100,000 21+ adults, and ranked 2nd in the country, according to the Brewers Association.

Business Of Beer



At the time of writing, the numbers for 2025 have not been released but I am quietly confident that Mainers will not have turned their backs on beer just yet. If I am wrong, then this is going to be a long year.

With that segway into data and statistics over and done with (for this issue at least), let's get back to hops. Which are as vital to brewers as a huge wall was to House Stark in keeping the White Walkers away from their cold and chilly lands — if you never watched GOT, these are the ice zombies that I alluded to earlier.

The hop lifecycle is fascinating (from a plant perspective) and is, according to almost every craft brewer I talk to, one of the reasons why they got into the industry in the first place. Full disclosure: my knowledge of the genetic makeup of plants or what they need to grow is extremely low, but I do know that hops +

other things = beer.

A quick prompt to my AI-powered search engine informs me that there are anywhere between 200 and 400 catalogued varieties of hops, a reassuringly vague answer that reinforces my belief that AI's content writing skills can still be filed under work-in-progress.

All of them differ in terms of their characteristics, which includes alpha acids, beta acids and essential oils. Brewers use them for bittering and aroma, with some hops being used for both. Simply put, hops are not only the X factor in every craft beer that we drink, but also a historical ingredient that stretches back for hundreds of years.

"Centuries ago, brewers realized that hops added a unique



bitterness and aroma to their beer,” a blog post on Get Er’ Brewed website said. “This discovery revolutionized the brewing industry, as hops became preferred over other bittering agents like herbs and spices. Hops were cultivated in monastic gardens in Europe during the medieval period. As the demand for hops grew, hop farms emerged, dedicated solely to producing this valuable ingredient. Today, hop farms can be found worldwide, providing brewers with many hop varieties. Sourcing hops is an essential aspect for brewers.”

Granted, this revelation comes from a company that, no surprise here, sells ingredients to brewers, but there is no denying that the humble hop is why we drink what we do, irrespective of what that end product or style is.

Commercial hop fields, for example, start their lifecycle early in the year, often partnering with what are known as “hop institutes” to grow thousands of miniature plants that can be taken to the fields for planting. This normally requires a scientific approach to pest control and disease management at the institute itself, ensuring that hop quality is not compromised.

Hops might look like buds but they are actually small flowers that grow vertically on bines. They are a perennial plant, which means that they can a) live outside for a long time and b) come back to life from their roots every year. The caveat is that hops do not thrive everywhere — mainly between the 50th and 40th parallels (geographic circles of latitude that have a North and South, according to Food & Wine magazine), which limits extensive growth in the United States to Washington (state, not D.C), Oregon and Idaho, although there are hop farms in Michigan, New York, Vermont and, yes, Maine.

This is where the logistics kick in. A recent article on the Hop Culture website cited the fact that 74 percent of commercial hops sourced by breweries nationwide is focused on Washington, with 16 percent in Idaho and 10 percent from Oregon.

You don’t need to be a math wizard to realize that this equals 100 percent. Which means that there is not a lot of wiggle room for hop farmers in other parts of the country.

When you also throw in the hops being imported from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, then it becomes a complicated web of supply and demand that requires brewers to plan ahead and tick all the boxes. If you are sourcing your key ingredient from the other side of the country or somewhere in the world that might fall under the latest installment in Trump’s Tariff Plan, then knowing when these products will arrive (and in what condition) is a mix of nervous anticipation and regular floor pacing.

The good news is that New England has a long and storied relationship with *humulus lupulus* (it’s Latin), with our neighbors in Massachusetts producing hops as far back as 1648. In more recent years, commercial and small-scale production has moved steadily north. According to Ryan Houghton, owner and farmer at Gorham’s The Hop Yard, the growth of hop farms in the region is a significant change to the status quo,

“It [New England] was the main growing region for hops in the country,” said Houghton, in an interview with Hop Culture. “It was really Maine, New Hampshire, New York, a little bit in [Massachusetts]. After Prohibition, everything started out West. For the past eighty, ninety, one hundred years, it’s all been in Oregon and Washington.”

The increased availability of hops grown locally is just one part of the picture. I said earlier in this article that brewers get giddy when the winter comes around because it’s hop time. That is an understatement; hops are their North Star, the *raison d’être* for their brewery’s existence and, ultimately, the beers that they keg, can and ship to the outside world. When the hop harvest is done, they are waiting for their chosen varieties to be delivered with all the excitement of a child looking out for Santa Claus.

Hops are not just essential to the craft beer community, they help to define what we drink and our preferred flavor profiles. Winter is when breweries source hops, either on a contract basis (consistent supply, access to hops from previous years) or on a spot basis (taking what is available on any given day). Both of these business optimization strategies dictate what gets brewed and when. It goes without saying that the fresher a hop the better, but most brewers are either using frozen hops that have been processed straight off the bine or (and this is becoming more frequent, according to my brewer chums) dried and pellet-sized versions that have been in cold storage. The latter is a critical element, as hops can be stored in a cold environment at the brewery for months at a time before they even make it into the beer production process.

In other words, the beer that you are probably drinking now as you read this issue of Craft in a nice, warm room, has been a labor of love for your local craft brewer for more than a year. And that is thanks to the hops.

Winter is already here, it’s cold outside and there is probably several feet of snow... but the craft beer brewer doesn’t care, it’s all about the annual arrival of the hops that the end drinker will consume. A seasonal present that everyone in the craft beer community should be really happy about. 🍀



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