

## Isthmus

### *Beer Here: Increase Wheat Gooseberry Berliner Weisse from Milwaukee Brewing Company*



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It's shaping up to be a big summer for sour beers in Wisconsin. These brews are made with wild yeasts and bacteria, which lend distinctive sourness and sharp tartness. Recently, New Glarus released the first sour from its new wild fruit cave, while O'so in Plover and Central Waters in Amherst are stepping up their sour production. Brewpubs are getting into the game too. Vintage in Madison and Sweet Mullets in Oconomowoc are developing a following for their own sours. Now Milwaukee Brewing Company is releasing its first sour, a Berliner Weisse named Increase Wheat. "Sours give us street cred as among the microbreweries who'll make anything," says head brewer Robert Morton. What sets this new sour beer apart from the rest is that it's made with gooseberries.

**What is it?** Increase Wheat Gooseberry Berliner Weisse from Milwaukee Brewing Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**Style:** The Berliner Weisse is a light-bodied sour wheat beer. It's usually very pale to straw in color, highly carbonated, and has a distinctive acidic sourness from a combination of yeast and lactic acid bacteria. In Germany, a shot of raspberry- or woodruff-flavored syrup is customarily offered with the beer to counteract the tartness. The Berliner Weisse has very little hop bitterness; rather, it offers some light bread-like or grainy tones from the wheat, which makes up a significant proportion of the grist. It's also light in strength, ranging from 2.8% to 3.4% ABV.

<http://www.isthmus.com/daily/article.php?article=43196>

**Background:** Milwaukee Brewing Company is only now venturing into sours. As these beers are made via a specialized brewing process that utilizes wild yeasts and bacteria, potential contamination issues must be addressed so these microorganisms don't infect the brewhouse and other beers in production.

The Berliner Weisse is a style that is recognized for its crisp sourness, light and bubbly nature. Milwaukee Brewing takes it another step by adding gooseberries to the fermenting beer. "Whenever I mention this beer, someone always tells me how their grandmother used to make gooseberry pie," says Morton. For every barrel produced, he adds about one pound of gooseberries, which come frozen from Oregon.

Morton and his team of brewers experimented to find the right technique to achieve the sourness they were seeking. They use a sour mashing technique that involves taking fresh wort, leaving it in the brew kettle, adding *Lactobacillus*, and then keeping it warm in the kettle for a couple of days. Normally, wort is cooled quickly and pumped into a sterile fermenter where yeast is added. In the case of this sour beer, the *Lactobacillus* lends sourness similar to what's found in yogurt. The beer's recipe includes basic two-row brewers malt and about 30% wheat malt. It's hopped with traditional German varieties of hops that include Perle and Tettnanger.

The pilot batch of Increase Wheat was made in mid-May at the Milwaukee Ale House. Morton says that initial brew wasn't as sour as he was hoping, so he decided to use the sour mash technique for ramping up production. That initial batch, available at the brewpub, is called Sonne Weiss, and it's been blended with strawberries.

Milwaukee Brewing often references stories about the city's history in the names of its standard brands. This beer gets its name from Increase Lapham, a naturalist who is credited with establishing gooseberries in Wisconsin.

Increase Wheat finishes at just 3.1% ABV and an estimated 5 IBUs. Locally, it sells in six-packs of 12-ounce bottles for \$7-\$9. Milwaukee Brewing produced a limited amount of the beer, about 60 barrels, for this summer. However, Morton has been so pleased with its reception that he's planning to quadruple production next year to at least 240 barrels.

Morton is hinting that Milwaukee Brewing will release more sours this fall. Next up is likely to be a Flanders Red Ale, and in winter look for an Oud Bruin (old brown). "Sours are still a small niche for us right now," says Morton, but he is optimistic the brewery will be making even more in 2015.

Milwaukee Brewing is also getting ready for making its annual batch of Sasquatch, a sweet potato porter that's released every fall. In preparation for brewing, sweet potatoes are roasted and smoked on a large grill in front of the brewery. "It turns out to be a party with grilling, a lot of beer drinking, and an open house," says Morton. The grill day is scheduled for Friday, July 24 at Milwaukee Brewing's production brewery, located 613 S. 2nd St. in Walker's Point.

**Tasting notes:**

- *Aroma:* Light yeasty aroma up front, with a hint of sourness that foreshadows what is to come.
- *Appearance:* Hazy, yellow-golden color. A medium, thick, soft head.
- *Texture:* Light and bubbly.
- *Taste:* A hint of light breadiness and yeastiness, as is found in a weissbier. The sour and tartness does take over, but it's not that intense -- just a solid sour tartness. Also, if you're hoping to find the clear flavor of gooseberries, you really have to concentrate to detect that specific sourness.
- *Finish/Aftertaste:* A mild sourness, yet still firm and sharp, lingers. Bubbly and effervescent through to the end.

**Glassware:** The Berliner Weisse would customarily be served in a special glass that resembles a short cup or bowl with a wide mouth. However, that's not a very common glass for most beer bars. The footed pilsner or a small weizen glass will work as well to show off the beer's bright bubbly yellow-golden color and white head. This is a beer to serve very cold to bring out more of the sharp sourness.

**Pairs well with:** The Berliner Weisse is light-bodied and very bubbly, and its tartness it can be a great palate cleanser. It's also great as a pre-dinner beer to stimulate the appetite.

**Rating:** Three Bottle Openers (out of four)

**The Consensus:** Increase Wheat Gooseberry Berliner Weisse has not received enough ratings to be evaluated at BeerAdvocate or RateBeer.

**The Verdict:** Increase Wheat Gooseberry Berliner Weisse is crisp, tart, light-bodied and at 3% ABV a welcome summer session beer. It will probably not seem all that sour to fans of the style. However, it is a very nice introduction to sours and a great choice for those wanting to learn more about what the hype is about. I like the thought of gooseberries because that suggests a different take on the tart Berliner Weisse. However, there really isn't much gooseberry flavor to this beer. Morton says he's already thinking about increasing the amount used in making next year's batch of Increase Wheat, and I'm looking forward to that. Regardless, I really enjoyed this beer. It's bubbly and refreshing in a summer setting.