

Pick Local Hops (+ homebrewing tips)

Sep1

By [Ryan Reschan](#) | [No Comments](#)

This article is partially a continuation of “Pick Local Hops” from our [September issue](#):

While most commercial hops come from Washington, Oregon and Idaho, our local climate is definitely suitable for growing hops as long as you are not too close to the ocean. In fact, San Diego is warm enough that most varieties get a head start on the growing season here, and the harvest is not likely to last through the end of September. So, if you hurry, you may still have the chance to pick your own hops at one of two local hop farms – call Phil at Hoppportunity Farm in Julian (858-734-2977) or Eric at Star B Buffalo Ranch and Hop Farm in Ramona (760-789-8155) to inquire about availability. If the season is over, call up your local homebrew shop to see what varieties of fresh hops they have in stock.



Hop rhizomes like this one will be available at local homebrew shops come spring

Fresh, un-dried hops are great for homebrewers looking to add flavor and aroma additions later in the boil; if you want to let these “wet” hops take center stage, use a neutral bittering hop like Magnum to get your desired IBUs for the style of beer you’re brewing. So yes, hops do like to grow in San Diego. If you’re looking to grow your own it’s too late to plant your own hops this year but check your local homebrew shops next March to see if they have any hop rhizomes (chunks of root used to propagate the plant) for you to plant at home. Cascade is a great place to start with Cascade, a high yielding varietal that is very tolerant to Downy Mildew, a microbe that thrives in moist climates such as the one along our coast. As it dries out the further you get from the coast, many other American varietals such as Centennial, Columbus, Chinook, Nugget, Willamette, and more should have no problem growing as long as temperatures are not excessive like in the deserts of East County. Hops Direct (<http://www.hopsdirect.com/>) and Fresh Hops (<http://freshops.com/>) both sell rhizomes in the spring along with packaged hops year round.

The popularity of wet hop beers, brews using un-dried freshly harvested hops, have become popular among breweries and homebrewers so an opportunity to source locally produced varieties might be worth a trip up to the hop farms. Just be aware that the moisture content of fresh hops is significantly higher than dried hops and therefore will impart much less bitterness when using the same measured mass. So unless you want to use massive quantities of wet hops, I'd suggest bittering with dried hops and leave the wet hops for flavor and aroma additions later in the boil. Not only will it save you money, but you'll use a much less volume of hops in your boil kettle.

While there won't be near the shortage of hops this year as there was in 2007, American hops are becoming more popular among breweries worldwide. Popular varieties such as Simcoe and Amarillo are proprietary branded cultivars and have acreage controlled by growers so availability might be limited once again if you wait till the spring and summer to buy them. If you like either variety, I suggest that you buy in bulk quantities to stock up until the 2012 harvest arrives. Other varieties like Citra and Sorachi Ace are becoming immensely popular and are bound to sell out quickly once again this year. Keep the hops vacuum packaged in your freezer and they should last until the next harvest and possibly beyond. If you have a re-sealable package and are not using up all of the quantity contained, flush the packaging with nitrogen or CO₂ (you like have one if not both on hand if you are kegging homebrew) to get all of the oxygen out of the package before throwing it back in the freezer. Oxygen is the enemy of hops in long term storage as it slowly permeates through most storing bags over time. Give your hops the best chance of remaining as fresh as possible until you brew up your next recipe.

For more information on hops grown in the United States, Hop Growers of America has an informative website on hops and the U.S. hop industry. Visit them at <http://www.usahops.org/>.