

Zydeco Meadery of Wamego prepares for the holidays

ERIC DEPRADINE

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Are you searching for a great wine to pair with your Thanksgiving or Christmas meal?

Well, look no further than a dry or semisweet mead offered by Zydeco Meadery of Wamego.

Wait, where is Wamego?

Wamego — the home of Dorothy from “The Wizard of Oz” — is 10 miles north of I-70, between Manhattan and Topeka. Wamego is the tulip capital of Kansas and home to 456 Wineries, the only winery incubator east of the Rocky Mountains. Highland Community College offers start-up alcohol manufacturers a chance to ferment, age, bottle and sell

mead, cider and/or wine using its facilities for a monthly fee and proper state and federal licensing.

What is Mead?

Mead (honey wine) is an alcoholic beverage with an A.B.V. ranging from 5% to 16% alcohol. Mead is simply honey, water and yeast. The yeasts (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*) convert the sugars into alcohol (ethanol) over a 14 to 21 day period. Once fermentation is done and all fermentable sugars consumed, the resulting beverage is bone dry like a grape wine or hard apple cider. At this point, mead makers can choose to sweeten the mead with honey or leave the mead dry so the consumer can enjoy the essence of honey without the sugars of honey. Some mead makers flavor

their meads with flowers, fruits, grains or hops.

What sets mead apart from beverages like beer, cider or wine?

Unlike beer, mead is gluten-free if made without grains. Mead differs from cider and wine because it is considered the oldest fermented beverage made by humans. The ancient Chinese made fermented beverages containing hawthorns, honey, rice and wild grapes as early as 7,000 BC in the Henan Province. Mead has been enjoyed by ancient civilizations, including the Mayans, Romans and the Greeks. Medieval northern Europeans thoroughly enjoyed mead based on accounts from Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales” or Celtic- and Viking-era poetry. Unlike cider and wine,

meads’ popularity waned in Europe as grape and apple cultivation expanded and became cheaper than honey. It also helped that the continent was flooded with inexpensive slave-produced Caribbean sugar that could be used to sweeten grape wines during the European Enlightenment.

What meads pair well with holiday dinners?

That depends if you enjoy sweet wines or dry wines. For the dry wine imbibers, Zydeco Meadery offers Sunflower Delight, a dry mead made with Kansas clover honey. Sunflower Delight has a mild, clean, well-balanced flavor and is lightly colored, similar to hay.

Zydeco Meadery also offers Creole Queen and Ozark Beauty. Creole Queen is another mildly flavored

dry mead made from Louisiana goldenrod flowers. Ozark Beauty is a dry mead with a strong, robust flavor made from Arkansas wildflower honey.

If you want a semisweet mead, try Zydeco Meadery’s Mass Memories, made from cranberry blossom honey from southeastern Massachusetts and sweetened with dark amber maple syrup from Massachusetts’ Berkshire Mountains. This is the owner’s homage to his home state.

For red wine lovers, try the Hibiscus mead using the owner’s grandmother’s recipe. The Hibiscus mead tastes tart, like cranberry wine, but is balanced with Kansas wildflower honey. It is similar to other drinks known as agua de Jamaica, bissap, zobo, roselle or sorrel. Afri-

can women brought the seeds to the Americas during the Transatlantic Slave Trade as part of the Columbian Exchange. These drinks are made with calyces of the *Hibiscus sabdariffa* plant after the flower blooms during the autumn months in the tropics. Afro-Latino and Afro-Caribbean immigrants commonly drink alcoholic and non-alcoholic hibiscus drinks during the holidays.

Where can I find Zydeco Meadery’s meads for my holiday meal?

Meads can be purchased at 456 Wineries in Wamego and Nespor’s Wine and Spirits on Westloop Place. For more information, visit <http://www.ZydecoMeadery.net>.