

21 Questions on starting a Brewstillery

Question 1: So ... what's a Brewstillery?

A Brewstillery is a brewery that wants to start producing distilled spirits like whiskey, brandy, vodka or gin.

Question 2: And why should I consider this?

Well, if you own a brewery, you already turn grains into beer via mashing and fermenting. Add one step to the process – distilling – and you double your product portfolio. Instead of “just” beer, you can use your beers to make beer brandy, vodka, whiskey or even gin.

Question 3: Distilling ... I don't know anything about it. How do I get started?

By searching the internet, finding us, and now reading this booklet, it seems you already got started. Congrats! We wrote “21 questions on starting a Brewstillery” to help explain to brewers why distilling is actually not difficult at all. So please, read on and fire away!

Question 4: How does distilling work?

Distillation, in theory, is the separation of two or more liquids via their difference in boiling point. In practice, you put your beer in a device called a “still”, bring it to a boil, redirect the gasses to a cooler, and thus strengthen the beer into a higher alcohol spirit.

Question 5: Say that I start with an 8% beer ... why is the distilled spirit stronger?

Remember those boiling points? Alcohol boils at around 78 degrees Celsius or 172 Fahrenheit. Water boils at a much higher temperature: 100 degrees Celsius or 212 degrees Fahrenheit. As a result, because the alcohol molecules need less energy to evaporate or boil out of your beer than the water molecules do, the gasses that you create, will be richer in alcohol. If you redirect those gasses to a cooler, you have now created your first spirit.

Question 6: How strong can I make my 8% beer?

That depends on the still that you purchase and on the product you want to make. A beer brandy, that could be served next to the beer it is made from, could be around 40 to 45%. If you want to turn your beer into a whiskey, and barrel age it, 60 to 65% is the goal. Vodka needs to be distilled to 95%.

Question 7: What still do I need, then?

There are various types of stills. Potstills are very good at creating beer brandy and whiskey, but it is an ancient technology, that has been around for probably 2,500 years, and is quite a handful to manage. A beer brandy or whiskey needs to be distilled twice in a potstill and getting the flavors right, consistently, each and every time, is a challenge.

Plated stills can make whiskey and beer brandy in one go, with slightly less variability, but they come with a compromise: you lose flavors, especially those back-end flavors that otherwise result in a long-lasting finish and a more interesting product. And ...

Question 8: Odin, you promised to not make things difficult, so I have a simple question for you: "What still do I need?" Now, what's the answer, what do I need?

To make distilling easier, I designed the iStill. The iStill makes beer brandy, whiskey, vodka, and gin. All in one machine and without any compromises on taste. One machine that can make any spirit you like, and if you are maxed out on the brewing side of things, please know that the iStill can also mash and ferment your distillers beer.

Question 9: Wait now! Did you just say the iStill can make any spirit ... and that it can mash and ferment as well?

Yes. You can use the iStill to produce any distilled product. Just fill it with the beer you have left (or the few batches that turned sour). And if you reach the maximum of your brewing capacity, no worries, the iStill comes equipped with all the technology and automation for mashing and fermenting as well.

Question 10: So one machine can do it all? And did I hear you correctly? Did you say "automation"?

Yes, the iStill is based on modern-day technology. It is automated and robotized. The iStill has a touchscreen, temperature and power control, and various programs to help you make your beer brandy, whiskey, vodka or gin.

Question 11: This definitely piques my interest! Let's dive in deeper: what is beer brandy?

Beer brandy is the distilled version of your beer or beers. It is a clear spirit, served between 40 and 45% alcohol strength. You can distill it in a day and serve it after just a few weeks to two months of resting. Or just a few days, if you use our fast-aging programs. You will be amazed at how the flavors from your beer translate into beer brandy!

Question 12: Fast-aging programs? What are they?

A spirit, fresh from the still can be a bit harsh. It needs time to mellow out and mature. Depending on the drink you make this can take weeks, months, or years. The iStill has special programs, where you can accelerate the maturation process to just 3 days.

Question 13: Okay, the beer brandy and fast-aging make sense. Now how would I make whiskey?

Easy. You take your beer brandy and barrel age it. Preferably at an alcohol percentage of 60 to 65%. The wood matures the spirit and adds interesting tastes to the drink. Instead of a clear spirit like vodka or beer brandy, whiskey has a nice, brown color.

In Europe, legally, whiskey must be aged in a barrel for 3 years. So if you are a European brewer, please prepare for a long turn-around time, when you want to venture into whiskey.

In many other countries such restrictions do not apply. In the USA, for instance, you can make whiskey by basically letting the freshly made beer brandy flow through a barrel. That opens opportunities. Remember those fast-aging programs? Flow your beer brandy through a barrel (or let it sit in there for just a day), then transfer the spirit back into the iStill, now add chunks of wood and dial in the fast-aging protocol ... your whiskey will be ready in days instead of years.

Question 14: Beer brandy: check, whiskey: check ... so, how do I make vodka?

Vodka is a clear spirit like beer brandy. It is usually served cold and at an alcohol percentage of 40%. Contrary to beer brandy, it has a more neutral taste character. This lower amount of flavor is the result of your beer being distilled to a very high percentage of 95%. A pure distillation run creates a very pure taste. Of course, you have to water the resulting drink back down to 40% before bottling or serving it.

Question 15: You told me the iStill can also help make gin?

Yes, gin is very important if you want to sell cocktails and gin tonics in your bar. Making gin is very easy with the iStill. You just fill the machine with 40% strong vodka, add herbs like juniper, coriander, and more ... and do a gin run.

Question 16: Do a gin run ... how?

Just like how you make your beer brandy or whiskey or vodka. You select the gin program on your iStill and press the start button.

Question 17: That easy? "You just press the start button"? Really?

Yes, well, you do need to fill the iStill with beer of course. And we advise you to follow the iStill University.

Question 18: What's the iStill University?

The iStill University offers education programs that help you become a distiller. There is an online introduction course that teaches you the theory of how to distill and how to make spirits. Then there is a 4-day training program at iStill HQ in the Netherlands where you will practice and hone your distilling skills.

Question 19: What do I learn at the iStill University?

We train you on how to distill beer brandy, whiskey, vodka, and gin. We teach you how to assemble and run the iStill. We help you prototype your specific recipes. You become a member of the iStill University Facebook Group, where hundreds of fellow brewers and distillers share experiences and help each other out.

Question 20: Hundreds of brewers and distillers? I thought iStill was bringing new technology to the market place. How old is the company and how many customers do you have?

iStill took the market by storm since we started only a decade ago. In those 10 years we have become the world's leading manufacturer of distillation equipment. We have over 1000 customers all around the world.

Question 21: So the iStill University first, right? When is the next course, where is it held, and how can I register, and is it any good?

We have online courses and organize practical trainings at iStill HQ in the Netherlands, near Amsterdam, at only 35 minutes from Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. The iStill University trains over 200 distillers per year. Our students rate the courses we give with a 9.8 out of 10. For more course info and registration, please reach out to Veronika@iStillmail.com