

Fermented Food Judging Class

By Selene Colfox

On judging:

Go over the [form](#). Instead of bottle condition, we consider plating presentation instead, since few of us actually ferment in wooden barrels. If they bring in an entry in a jar, we will judge the jar same as a wine or beer bottle, presumably.

This is a volunteer organization. You are not required to put anything in your body that is hazardous to your health. If you are allergic to an ingredient, you may recuse yourself from judging. If an entry appears to violate food safety, it may be returned for that reason. [Personal anecdote: aged skyr whey of over one month which smelled spoiled. Lady said it was supposed to be that way. Nothing could entice me to put that in my mouth.]

Things we will not be considering: non-fermented dishes of the above base ingredients. Simple dried foods without fermentation. Unyeasted flat breads. Fresh or smoked sausages without bacterial cultures.

On Time and Place:

“The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) is an international non-profit volunteer educational organization. The SCA is devoted to the research and re-creation of pre-17th century skills, arts, combat, culture, and employing knowledge of world history to enrich the lives of participants through events, demonstrations, and other educational presentations and activities.” Non-European entries are now eligible, with pre-1600 documentation. Archeological references, literary and legendary citations are acceptable as well as actual cookbook entries.

Pre-Columbian preparations need documentation in the context of their native lands, outside of Europe. [Trying to avoid the issue of “jalapeno mead” anachronisms in the food core.] A reference to Korean 'pepper paste' is recorded in a 9th-century Chinese document. An extant Korean source shows recipes with black peppercorns and/or chopi/sansho (also known as Korean or Japanese pepper). Please do not bring modern style gochujang without pre-1600 documentation.

CATEGORIES:

Vegetables, Fruits, Grains, Beans, Dairy, Meat, Fish, Other

This is still a work in progress. There may be changes. This and other decisions may be kicked upstairs to the Guildmaster and senior ranked cooks and judges.

Sub-category assignments have yet to be made. You have the chance to influence this by participating in the judging process!

We could work on written standards, for some of the more common preparations. What is the goal for each dish? Some organizations have a system available, such as American Cheese Society [ACS].

VEGETABLES:

- Fermented, pickled with an outside agent [vinegar, alcohol]
- Pickled vegetables, cucumbers and many more. Sauerkraut.
- Composts and chutneys, as long as they are aged or pickled.
- Technically, Poi comes from a root vegetable. This might be a decision to kick upstairs, being a starchy dish.

FRUIT:

- Fruit has fermented on its own since prehistory. There's not much we need to say about this.
- Fermented, pickled with an outside agent [vinegar, alcohol]
- Safety advisory for the alcohol-sensitive.

Many fruits can be preserved in pre-existing cultures, from whey to pickle juice from other projects. Or else, fermented on their own, using natural yeast from the skin [apples and grapes are famous for this].

[Lynnette's Fermented Fruit Pot](#) is a good starter project, if a bit short on pre-1600 documentation. Completely delicious WHEN you remember to add all the ingredients on schedule.

[Moroccan Preserved Lemons](#), packed in salt.

Umeboshi, salted plums, become sour and strong. Allegedly used by the samurai to combat battle fatigue.

GRAINS:

Bread with yeast, whether commercial, sourdough, home-cultured levain or wild-caught yeast sponge. Be prepared for sourdoughs from India [idli, dosa] and Africa [injera]. This category may warrant its own judging form in the future, using crust and crumb considerations.

Spoonable grain dishes that have been fermented.

Ama koji, precursor to sake, was eaten as a porridge rather than filtering out the liquid to drink. Not recommended for the alcohol-sensitive.

BEANS:

Miso, Tofu, Tempeh, and other solids. Shoyu / soy sauce belongs in Varietal Core at this time.

Chocolate comes from a bean, Theobroma, which is fermented before drying and grinding.

DAIRY:

Dairy foods that have been fermented with [lactic acid bacteria](#) such as [Lactobacillus](#). This category may warrant its own judging form, to be composed, using ACS guidelines to guide us.

Cheese is made from the milk of domestic mammals: cattle, goats, sheep, horses. Heat, bacterial cultures and herbal additives curdle the milk to create cheese, yogurt and other products. Dairy products have been discovered that were made 10,000 years ago; let's do what we can to establish credible dates of origin for different cheese types, and sort out the ones we can prove were invented much after 1600 [the cheddaring process is going to be one of these, apparently invented in the 19th Century].

Alcohol content of liquid dairy products such as kumiss/airrag can reach up to 2%. Most other cheeses and yogurts do not contain measurable amounts of alcohol and considered safe for minors and alcohol-sensitive persons.

Liquid dairy beverages such as kumiss or doogh will be considered in the Varietal Core.

MEAT:

Animal proteins from muscle or other tissue of animals, with some aspect of fermentation in the aging process.

Dry salami with acid bacteria in the recipe.

Whey-preserved meats, known in Scandinavia. Sausages in sour skyr whey appear in the Eddas.

We need to talk about salt-preserved meats such as corned beef and aged pork like ham or prosciutto. This may be a step beyond the scope of the Brewers' Guild, or may not.

FISH:

Lutefisk, Surströmming. Not liquid: garum belongs in Varietal Core at this time.

Fermented shrimp or tiny fish as seasoning: almost lies on the line between a food and a sauce.

Should this be part of the Meat category? Kick that decision upstairs.

OTHER:

Entrants will try to surprise us. At least we have a category ready.

Century eggs [Hunan, Ming Dynasty, 1400's C.E.] would go here.