

## Women and brewing: More are hopping back in to the pastime

BY ANGELA JONES For the Telegraph Herald  
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Jerry Anderson

Photo by: TH file



Kelly Hueneke

Photo by: TH file



One thing is apparent when attending a craft beer share such as the one hosted by the Dubuque Area Beer Enthusiasts: These gatherings are made up mostly of men.

That might not be surprising. After all, many women might gravitate toward wine or other beverages with fewer calories as their drink of choice.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of the craft beer and home brewing movements is that women shared in early beer-making efforts. In fact, mothers often passed recipes down to daughters, which makes sense considering women were at home and could tend to the hours-long boiling process.

“Many people think Martin Luther brewed beer, but really, it was his wife, Katherina,” said Jerry Anderson, owner of Bluff Street Brew Haus.

Luther called his wife, “Lord Katie,” for her ability to learn a decent brewing process and creating a beer he preferred. She sold her beer at the couple’s tavern to help support them.

Before Katherina was brewing, Hildegard of Bingen (or Saint Hildegard) introduced hops as having healing properties. That soon became an ingredient in beer.

Long before these two women brewed (or altered the process), women on nearly every continent brewed beer. And many cultures continue to brew their traditional recipes.

One of the more interesting ancient methods of brewing comes from a pre-Columbian Andean practice, used today, to make chicha. Brewers chew the maize to break down the starch needed to kick start fermentation.

Today in our region, an increasing number of women are carrying on the tradition and embracing brewing.

“If I were to guess, I’d say that 10 percent of brewing customers are women,” Anderson said. “The total number of brewers is growing, and so is the proportion.”

And for those who like beer, the process is accessible.

“When people start, the only true skill they need is to boil water and follow a recipe,” Anderson said.

Of course, brewers also need materials to make the beer.

## Getting started

Up front, the cost goes toward items such as a large kettle to a thermometer. However, they can be used repeatedly. After that, the expense depends on the recipe, but the ingredients (in a kit or individually) amount to anywhere from \$25 to \$50 for a yield five to six gallons of beer. These ingredients mostly include grain, hops and yeast.

Allison Mitchell and Jenna Strub were kind enough to tackle a golden ale recipe with me.

Anderson put together the individual ingredients from a recipe, but had to replace a type of hops called Endeavor that is too new or not widely known.

Mitchell’s husband, Jacob, lent the group his brewing set up and offered guidance.

## A social experiment

The whole process — mashing, sparging, etc. — took five hours, but it was a social time during which Mitchell attended to a diaper laundry process, Strub sampled hefeweizens, and the discussion centered on many things “women” — pregnancy and motherhood, for instance, in addition to work and research pursuits.

The brewing process has a scientific experiment feel to it that comes down to measurements, timings and temperatures. There’s even an online calculator, [brew365.com](http://brew365.com), which allows brewers to input information from the recipe and to get additional measurements and temperatures.

The terminology of brewing — mash, sparge, wort — seems to connect science and history. Mash means “soft mixture,” “sparge” means sprayed with hot water to extract wort, wort could mean “root” or “spice,” maybe of a plant having healing qualities.

Given the social dynamic (which also can easily be an independent pursuit) and given the creative process, it’s somewhat surprising that more women are not involved in home brewing.

“It’s cool and satisfying to drink your own creations,” Mitchell said. “And it’s also cool to learn how to do it. There’s no reason women can’t do it, if interested.”

## More women taking an interest

Though the number of women might be fewer than men, it’s increasing.

“There’s more exposure in general to beer, and the craft movement helps,” Strub said. “Drinking (different types of) beer and making beer helps to get more women involved.”

Once the brewing process ended, with each woman taking on a task, it was time for the fermenting process to begin. This could take a week or two — good practice in delayed gratification — before the batch is ready to keg or bottle.

## From amateur to pro

More women are choosing to brew professionally. In fact, professional groups, like Pink Boots Society and FemAle, bring together women in the brewing industry and encourage more women to choose brewing as a profession.

The tri-state region hosts a number of small breweries, and a few women brewers have chosen to brew at them for their career.

One area woman brewer, Kelly Hueneke, is a part owner and brewer at River Ridge Brewing in Bellevue, Iowa. She's been brewing for about three years, after having become interested in the craft beer evolution.

"At that time, I worked for a distributor so I was more on the sale side," she said. "However, I did buy my first home brew kit around that time, though I (first) used it a few years later."

At River Ridge, the owners and brewers have other full-time careers. Brewing is their hobby, done in their free time.

"Whenever I am working in our taproom it is always the best to see people's faces who figure out that not only am I the 'beertender,' but I am also one of the owners and brewers," she said. "Not everyone is surprised, but there are always a few people that are. I have no clue why they are, especially since there are so many great female brewers out there now."

Hueneke said there are very few challenges she faces in the industry.

"I run into some issues with something being too heavy or awkward to move, but there is always a work around," she said. "Mostly, I love teaching people about the brewing business, so I would say any female who is interested in getting in the business should stop on in at our taproom or check out Pink Boots Society."

The Pink Boots Society has 1,900 members (all have to be professional brewers), and their involvement can only mean more innovation and more options for all beer connoisseurs.

And this is true for home brewing, too. Women are brewing, and by doing so, are reconnecting us to our brewing roots and leading us to vats of possibilities.

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Jones is a freelance writer from Dubuque.

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**Dubuque Area Beer Enthusiasts:** [tinyurl.com/y933ssbp](http://tinyurl.com/y933ssbp)

**Pink Boots Society:** [www.pinkbootssociety.org](http://www.pinkbootssociety.org)

**FemALE:** [www.femalebrewfest.com](http://www.femalebrewfest.com)

To read more about local women in the food industry, check out the September Foodie edition of Her magazine, available in the Sunday, Sept. 2, TH.