

Making Malt Scotch Whisky



Malt Whisky is made by a simple, traditional batch process, from natural raw materials: malted barley, water and yeast.

Malting

Barley must first be malted - steeped in water and then traditionally spread out on a malting floor and allowed to germinate. This process provides a source of starch which can be converted into soluble sugars which can then be turned into alcohol.

During this malting process, which lasts about a week, the barley starts to sprout. It is stopped by drying the barley in a large oven, the kiln - sometimes by burning peat, which gives some whiskies a distinctive, smokey flavour.



Mashing

Once dried, the malt is ground in a mill and the crushed grain or grist is mixed with hot water in a mash tun.

Sugars from the malt dissolve and create a sugary liquid known as wort which can be turned into alcohol. The remaining solids are not wasted, being removed for use as nutritious cattle feed.

Fermentation

The wort passes into large vessels - washbacks - where it is fermented by adding yeast. The yeast converts the sugar in the wort, turning it into alcohol and creating what is known as the wash, a liquid of around 8% abv.



Distillation

The wash is then distilled twice in distinctive copper pot stills, once in the wash still and once in the spirit still, which act like large kettles.

As the liquid is heated, alcohol vapours rise and pass over the head of the wash still before being guided through condensers and returning to liquid. The resulting spirit, the low wines, is forwarded to the spirit still where distillation is repeated. Only the heart of the run - high quality usable spirit - is then collected in the spirit safe.

Maturation

The new-make spirit is then filled into oak casks. By law, it cannot be Scotch Whisky until it has matured in Scotland for at least 3 years. As the spirit matures in the cask, it will develop further flavour characteristics and its distinctive golden colour.

Where a label carries an age statement, all the whisky in the bottle must have matured in the cask for at least that amount of time.



Different Malt Whiskies

Malt whisky produced at one distillery is sold as "Single Malt Scotch Whisky", and malt whiskies from more than one distillery can be blended together to create "Blended Malt Scotch Whisky".

Further information from: The Scotch Whisky Association