

## Holiday cheer, courtesy of beer

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Here's a thought for holiday gifts slightly off the beaten trail: Beer.

Instead of the grocery store sale on Natural Light or Budweiser, consider some of the hundreds of seasonal ales from around the world available in almost any flavor and size.

Currently, 99 Bottles in Federal Way has dozens of limited edition beers. Some are local and many come from England, Germany and Belgium. There's Insanely Bad Elf, Lump of Coal, Mistletoe Bliss and Pickled Santa, just to name a few labels.

Most of the seasonal beers have something else to offer: Spices and a higher alcohol content. Seasonal beer was originally meant to warm you up from the cold.

### Gifts and food pairings

Beer makes a good gift, store owner Tiffany Adamowski said. 99 Bottles even has some prepackaged gift boxes that have been selling out quick.

"It's a fine art," Adamowski said of ordering seasonal beer products. "You want to have enough, but you don't want to have any left after."

For hostess gifts, Adamowski recommends bringing a large bottle of beer instead of wine. With alcohol contents as high as 10 percent, these beers can be poured into wine glasses and sipped, which Adamowski does at her family gatherings each year, bringing about six bottles to any event.

Her holiday recommendation is Ninkasi's Sleigh'R beer, a dark double alt that comes in a 22-oz. bottle.

Certain brewers offer collector bottles each year. Deschutes Brewery commissions an artist each year to design its bottles. This year, Rogue Brewery's seasonal beers feature glow-in-the-dark bottles; the design glows after exposure to light.

Beers pair well with holiday foods. Lighter beers go better with lighter meats. Adamowski recommends Biere de Noel, or something similar, for turkey. However, with red meats, a dark beer does well.



Tiffany Adamowski, co-owner of 99 Bottles in Federal Way, pours a sample of Tsjeeses Belgian Christmas Ale.  
Andy Hobbs/The Mirror

There are exceptions to the rule. Anything smoked, including turkey, can go well with brown ales.

When selecting beer as a gift, it's important to think about what the person normally drinks. The staff at 99 Bottles always asks that question and can steer costumers toward a beer that suits their palate.

## Seasonal beers

Home For the Holidays is a brown ale that has been aged in an oak barrel. Adamowski describes it as fruity with a peppery finish. Proceeds from this beer are going to support groups for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Adamowski chose the beer as a way to support all the military folks from Ft. Lewis that come to the store. It goes well with pork or steak.

Anchor Brewing Company creates a new recipe each year for its holiday ale, and 2009's edition is particularly fragrant.

"This one's amazing," Adamowski said. "It has an amazing spice to the nose. I am dying over it." Even the foam on Anchor's Christmas Ale has a spice to it, and the beer smells like Christmas once the bottle is opened.

Tsjeeses is a Belgian beer, a strong blonde that has been aged over stone fruits — and has gotten very high marks so far. It also goes great with turkey. The beer got its name after the brewer kept saying "Jesus, what a good beer" every time he drank it, Adamowski said.

"It's the bee's knees," she added.

[Tsjeeses](#) marks the first beer [99 Bottles](#) has gotten from De Struise Brouwers. This beer is typically rare to find in the U.S., and usually only two to four cases are sent over for Washington state. However, this time Adamowski got lucky and scored three cases. This beer sells as an 11-oz. bottle for \$8.99 and can be treated like a good wine.

## Beer tips

- Beer doesn't have to be served cold. Some European beers are meant for consumption at a warmer temperature, even up to room temperature.
- When serving a variety of beer, it's best to go light to strong in serving order. Base your serving order on strength of flavor and alcohol. As a general rule, place the most bitter beers toward the end so they won't ruin your palate for the lighter flavors. Color doesn't act as the primary identifier when selecting tasting order.
- A lager is a bottom fermenting yeast and is brewed at a cold temperature. It tends to have a crisp flavor. An ale is made with a top fermenting yeast and has a fruitier taste.
- When tasting beer, unlike wine, it's never OK to spit it out. Part of the flavor of a beer is in its aftertaste.
- Can't wait to try out your beer from [99 Bottles](#)? Head next door to [WineStyles](#), at South 348th Street and Pacific Highway South in the Federal Way Crossings, where there is a reserved area for consuming alcohol.

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