



The Cellar

The Official Newsletter of the Colonial Ale Smiths and Keggers

White Labs Opens Big QC Day to Homebrewers

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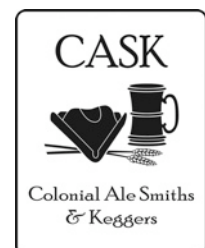
This February, show how much you love your beer!
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Eliminating Glass from Your Brewing Process*, Part 2

* or *How to Avoid a Trip to the ER*

By Jeff Flamm

Using a BetterBottle® as a Primary Fermenter

To continue my quest to eliminate broken glass and severe lacerations from my brew day, I recently acquired a 6 gallon BetterBottle® fermenter. It is a plastic (PET) carboy and BPA free. It is significantly lighter than a typical glass carboy. The BetterBottle® weighs about 1 lb 10 oz empty (with racking adapter installed). Whereas my 6.5 gallon glass carboy weighs over 15 pounds empty. I ordered the BetterBottle® drilled to accept the BetterBottle® racking adapter and SimpleFlo™ valve. I also ordered the BetterBottle® ported Universal O-ring closure and DryTrap™ airlock (see picture 1). The price for the bottle alone was about \$30 (\$10 less than a comparable glass carboy). You can also order the bottle without the drilled hole and just use it as a conventional carboy and save about \$2. The additional accessories were a bit pricey and more than tripled the cost of the initial setup.

If you get the drilled bottle you need both the racking adapter (picture 2) and valve (Pictures 3a and 3b). You also need the racking outlet install rod (\$3 to \$4). This is just a short piece of pipe that allows you to hold the racking adapter in place inside the bottle while you screw on the external portion of the adapter. I was annoyed when I first unpacked the install rod. It looked as though I had just paid \$4 for an 18 inch long piece of 1/2 inch cpvc pipe otherwise available at any home improvement store for less. However, the end of the pipe is drilled to a larger ID to fit the racking adapter. I probably could have made this myself for less money. However, four dollars was worth it to avoid a trip to the hardware store and the hassle.



Picture 1: 6 Gallon BetterBottle® Assembly with SimpliFlo Valve, Racking Adapter, Universal O-ring closure and DryTrap™ airlock

I have brewed two batches of beer using the BetterBottle® as my primary fermenter. I have been pleased with its ease of use. It is much lighter and easier to move (even when filled with wort) than a glass carboy. The manufacturer warns not to lift the bottle by the neck when full (it might break). As such I did not (and still don't) see the point in ordering the optional snap on handle. I have found the bottle is light enough to move easily when empty. I use a brew-hauler to lift and move it when filled.

The ported bottle with racking adapter and valve are very convenient to use to rack to a secondary fermenter or keg. You can also use it with a bottle filler. Drilling a port at the base is something you can't do with a glass carboy. I found it easier to use the racking adapter and valve than my prior method using a traditional auto siphon and racking cane with

the glass carboy. Just attach a 1/2 inch ID vinyl hose to the valve and gravity feed it into the keg or secondary fermenter (Picture 4). Spray the valve opening with sanitizer prior to racking. The racking adapter has an intake stem that can be rotated inside the bottle to just above the yeast cake on the bottom. There is plastic tab that indicates the position of the adapter on the inside of the carboy. This makes it easy to rack



Picture 2: Racking adapter and install rod



Picture 3a: SimpleFlo™ valve assembly

Star San, iodophor, etc...) per the manufacturer's recommended concentrations. They do caution you to mix the cleaning and sanitizing solutions before placing them in contact with your equipment. The higher concentration prior to dilution could cause damage over time. The manufacturer also cautions against using hot water when cleaning. The maximum water temp recommended is 140 deg F. I found the bottle comes clean easily with just a short soak in PBW solution. Put a gallon or two of premixed PBW solution in the bottle cap it and lay it on its side. Roll

Cleaning the bottle itself is quite easy. BetterBottle®'s website states that you can use the standard cleaning chemicals most home brewers are familiar with (e.g. PBW,

the bottle occasionally to slosh the solution around and be sure all interior surfaces are covered. Then drain it through the valve and rinse with warm water. No brush needed (and is not recommended by the manufacturer). A brush could

scratch the interior of the bottle leaving places for bacteria to hide. True to the PR on the BetterBottle® website, the trub and dried krausen do not seem to stick well to the inside of the plastic bottle like it does a glass carboy. It rinses away easily after short soak in PBW solution.



Picture 4: Racking brown ale between two BetterBottles® using 1/2 ID vinyl hose, SimpleFlo™ valves and racking adapters

as much of your beer as possible while drawing a minimal amount of sediment into your secondary.

One problem I have had with the racking adapter is that despite the PR on BetterBottle®'s website I find it a bit awkward to install (Picture 5). It has become a little easier with practice. They recommend removing the adapter with each cleaning. You should perform a leak check with water each time you re-install the adapter. I have found that it typically leaks the first time I re-assemble it. It is usually a very small drop of water that shows up between the bottle and the external threaded piece of the racking adapter. The drop of water shows up after a minute or two (patience is required). It is simple to just tighten the adapter slightly until the leak stops. Admittedly, I have been cautious to not over tighten the assembly. I expect this will improve with practice.



Picture 3b: SimpleFlo™ valve unassembled

I also disassemble the SimpleFlo™ between each use to properly clean and sanitize it. Per the manufacturer's instructions you simply unthread the metal pull ring from the valve plunger and then push the plunger through the valve body (Picture 2b). This is easier said than done. The length of the handle end of the plunger is not quite long enough to allow you to push it all the way through the valve body. The end of the plunger disappears into the valve body. The plunger o-rings are still snug against the inside of the valve keeping the plunger from falling out. I found I had to use a small stick to push the valve plunger out of the valve body. You should not use anything metal to push the plunger through the valve body. It might scratch the plastic. I used the blunt end of a bamboo food skewer we use for grilling to push the plunger all the way through and out of the valve body (a wood tooth-pick would probably work as well). I had the same problem (and same solution) when reassembling the valve. If the handle end of the plunger was a little longer it would be much easier to push the plunger by hand all the way through the valve body past the resistance of the o-rings allowing it to drop out. Both the adapter and valve come clean easily with a short soak in PBW solution and rinse with warm water.



Picture 5: Using racking outlet install rod to assemble racking adapter in bottle

As mentioned earlier, I also purchased the BetterBottle® ported universal o-ring closure (Picture 6) and DryTrap™ airlock (Picture 7a). Together they cost more than the bottle itself. They both seem to work well and I generally have no complaints other than price. I do not see that they offer a significant enough advantage over a conventional stopper and airlock to justify the cost when using the assembly as conventional carboy with airlock.

The DryTrap™ airlock is a plastic one way valve with 90 deg elbow and hose barb on the flow out side. The valve itself is small ceramic bead held in place by a stainless steel retaining clip inside the valve body (Picture 7b). There are several small parts that could easily be lost when disassembled for cleaning.

One advantage of the DryTrap™ airlock purported by the manufacturer is that you do not need to worry about it backflowing into you beer as you might with a conventional liquid filled airlock. True. Though I address this worry by using vodka in my conventional airlock. If the vodka accidentally backflows, it will not hurt your beer nor appreciably change the alcohol content.

Another claim is that there is no worry if the liquid in the airlock evaporates rendering the airlock ineffective. Also true. However, in my experience the liquid in a conventional airlock takes a long time to evaporate to the point of being ineffective. I usually notice and top it up as I routinely check on the progress of the beer in the fermenter. It is more likely to

backflow with barometric pressure changes or temperature changes.

One disadvantage of the DryTrap™ I found is that is difficult to gauge the rate of your fermentation particularly as it slows. With a conventional airlock it is easy to watch as the CO2 bubbles through the airlock and get rough gauge of the fermentation rate. The manufacturer recommends listening for the ceramic ball in the DryTrap™ to click as it seats and unseats in the one-way valve (I had trouble hearing it over the noise of the air-conditioner). Another suggestion by the manufacturer is to attach a small hose to the valve place the hose in a plastic bag containing a small amount of water to watch for the CO2 bubbles. This seems like more effort to me than just using a regular airlock.

An advantage of the BetterBottle® ported universal o-ring closure versus a conventional rubber stopper is that it fits very securely in the bottle. In fact it is difficult to remove. I had to use the rubber gripper we keep in the kitchen for opening jars to pull the stopper out. I have had conventional rubber stoppers pop out of the carboy if accidentally bumped. This definitely will not happen with the universal o-ring closure. Another claim is that the plastic of the closure is less susceptible to contamination and taking on or imparting off flavors to your beer than a conventional rubber stopper. I have no way to gauge this claim and no reason to doubt it. That said I have never really had this problem with my conventional rubber stoppers either.



Picture 6: BetterBottle® ported universal o-ring closure



Picture 7a: DryTrap™ airlock

adapter and valve are little more difficult to take apart, clean and reassemble than I would have liked. Though the general ease of use of the ported BetterBottle® with racking adapter and valve overcomes this shortcoming.

In hindsight I wish I had not purchased the o-ring closure and DryTrap™ airlock. While they work fine, I do not see a large enough advantage over a conventional stopper and airlock to justify the price. I would have rather put the money toward a second bottle, thus speeding up the elimination of glass from my brewing process. I do eventually plan to acquire some of the optional fittings to allow use of CO₂ to push beer from the carboy and perhaps validate my purchase of the o-ring closure. If not having to worry about airlock backflow, evaporation or accidentally knocking the stopper loose is worth \$40 to you then go ahead and get them. They do work. Otherwise save your money and use a medium universal stopper and airlock that cost about \$3 together.

One could also just use a plastic brewing bucket with lid and spigot (about \$21) to replace a glass carboy. I have found brewing buckets are prone to scratching, staining, and flavor transfer (and need to be retired) after a few years of service. The standard bucket spigot is also difficult to clean. I am curious to see how the BetterBottle® holds up over time with regard to both fatigue and failure as well as ability to keep it clean and sanitized. Given that I have broken two glass carboys over the last 10 or so years (once with injury), I will be very happy if the bottle lasts four or five years before needing to be replaced. Even if the bottle only lasts a fraction of that time I am glad I found a viable alternative to using glass carboys. Buying a replacement bottle every few years is still far cheaper than an ER visit. Avoiding the inconvenience of being unable to use your hands for a few weeks or worse is well worth the cost of the BetterBottle® system.

Prost,

Jeff

There are also additional barbs and T's that can be purchased to fit the closure. I have not purchased or tried these fittings. They will allow you to use CO₂ push your beer directly from one BetterBottle® to another or to your keg. Thus reducing the chance of contamination and oxidation. This sounds good and I do plan to try them some day.

The opening of the BetterBottle® is slightly bigger than any of my glass carboys so the regular stoppers I have do not fit. According to the manufacturer website a number 10 drilled stopper will fit the BetterBottle®. Most of the homebrewer supply websites also offer a medium universal stopper for about \$2, which will work with BetterBottle® and the air lock you likely already have.

All in all I have been happy with my BetterBottle® as a primary fermenter. It is light and very easy to clean. I like how easy it is to use the racking adapter and valve to gravity feed to my secondary fermenter versus the auto-siphon and racking cane I typically use. The racking



Picture 7b: DryTrap™ airlock looking into one-way valve at ceramic ball and retaining clip



Addendum: Since writing this article I have acquired two more ported BetterBottles® with valves and racking adapters from Weekend Brewer. Weekend Brewer offers the SimpleFlo™ valve and racking adapter as a bundle at substantial savings compared to most other major online homebrew supply shops which price them individually. For example I checked Northern Brewer and Weekend Brewer websites on 12/11/10. A 6-gallon ported BetterBottle® assembly costs:

	Weekendbrewer.com	Northernbrewer.com
6-Gallon Ported BetterBottle®	\$29.00	\$29.99
SimpleFlo™ Valve	-	\$13.99
Racking Adapter	-	\$27.99
SimpleFlo™ Valve/Racking Adapter Assembly	\$33.40	-
Universal Med. Stopper Drilled	\$1.60	\$1.60
Total (plus tax + S&H):	\$64.00	\$73.57

The Beer in Front of Me ...

"The Beer in Front of Me ..." is a new feature where you can tell your fellow CASK members about a beer that you are enjoying right now. Be it "true-to-style" or "way-out-there creative," if it is a beer that's your current "favorite" and you want to tell the club about it, e-mail your description to beer@colonialalesmiths.org

This month, Norm Schaeffler tells us about Stoudts' Brewing's Fat Dog Imperial Oatmeal Stout ...



The beer menu at the Taphouse in downtown Hampton describes this beer as "pouring like motor oil." Strangely enough, this seems intriguing to me. It is a cold winter night, a perfect night to sample a stout. The beer is an Imperial Oatmeal Stout by Stoudt's Brewing Company in Adamstown, Pennsylvania, and it does not disappoint,

The beer is dark as midnight on a moonless night, drinks silky smooth with just the right amount of roasty, coffee, chocolate notes that let you now that this is a stout. There are times when a beer just hits you as being awesome and this is one of those times. It could of just been the timing, but this was a perfect pint for the night.



Tips from the Tap

CASK Members Like You

"Tips from the Tap" is a new feature where we can share with each other all the little "tricks of the trade" that we have learned over the years to make the brew day easier. So if you have some tips to share, send them to tips@colonialalesmiths.org.



To make labels for the homebrews you are bringing to a meeting, so that everyone will know what it is, try the following:

1. Use the MS Word program that is on so many computers and select Tools.
2. The drop-down menu should list "Letters and Mailings."
3. After selecting that, click on "Envelopes and Labels."
4. Clicking "Envelopes and Labels" produces a screen where you can type your label information into the Address Box.
5. After filling in the desired information, brew name, malt schedule, hops, etc., make sure that "Full page of the same label" is marked.
6. Click the options button and select 8164 for the standard Avery Shipping label which has 6 labels per page.
7. When you click on "Print," you should get six labels for the bottles you are bringing.
8. Attach the labels to your bottles with a rubber bands after cutting them apart with a scissors or utility knife.





CASK Member Profile: Eric Gold

Full Name: Eric Gold

Hometown: St Louis, Missouri

Town of Residence: Yorktown, Virginia

Occupation: Financial/IT Consultant

Years Brewing: 10

Favorite Beers to Brew: Anything

Favorite Commercial Brew: Seriously? I cannot limit it to just one. I love anything sour and funky, anything dark, and anything with well balanced hops.

Favorite Brew Pub or Beer Bar: County Grill in Yorktown, Virginia

How did you started brewing?: My brother started me into it, and I brewed with my college roommates. I took a beer class in college and the rest was history!

Type of Brewing (Extract, Partial Mash, All-Grain): All-Grain now, brewed extract and partial mash for a few years.

Why do you brew?: I love to cook, love to drink, so brewing comes naturally.

Awards, Beer Related Associations, etc: None - yet

