



Competition Overview

The NW Cider Cup (formerly Portland International Cider Cup) **returns in 2023 for a 10th year.**

The Pacific Northwest's premier cider competition welcomes commercial cider and perry entries from OR, WA, MT, ID and British Columbia. A blind judging, conducted by trained professionals, will be hosted June 12th, at [McMenamins Kennedy School](#), followed by a public awards ceremony at [Polaris Hall](#) on June 15, 2023 in Portland, OR.

Founded a decade ago by regional cidemakers, the NW Cider Cup is organized by the non-profit member organization, [Northwest Cider Association](#). This respected competition works to inspire quality, provide constructive maker feedback, educate cider drinkers and generally amplify the category. Today's NW Cider Cup seeks to holistically evaluate cider and perry for excellence.

Competition judges are trained to thoughtfully review key elements - appearance, aroma, flavor and mouthfeel - of each entry, noting how they contribute to the cider or perry overall. Competition organizers group like ciders/perries to be evaluated together. Judges are asked to evaluate a reasonable number of entries with adequate time to ensure a quality evaluation and lessen the impacts of palate fatigue. The cup's evaluation process is a progressive review of individual elements concluding with judges' final evaluation/overall impression and scoring. As individuals and as a table cohort, judges identify (gold, silver, bronze) exemplary ciders in each of the identified categories. Each entry awarded a gold medal will then be judged in the Best in Show finals.

Recognizing and celebrating cider excellence is at the heart of the NW Cider Cup. The 2023 cup will award bronze, silver and gold medals in 18 updated categories.

All entrants and judges are asked to review REVISED Categories Accepted.

2023 Categories Accepted

NW Cider Cup's goal is to 1) encourage and 2) provide training to support NW cideries' pursuit of producing high quality cider.

How We Do It:

- Conduct an annual review to update judging and category standards.
- Evolve Categories Accepted guidelines in response to category changes.
- Host judge training to coalesce regional cider communities around a lexicon - a common shared language of goals for what quality cider tastes and smells like.
- Create cidemaker opportunities for: experiential learning, sensory training, community building, peer/consumer/media recognition.
- Align with American Cider Association's cider professional standards and [lexicon](#).
- Recognize and celebrate exemplary ciders, composed from a variety of apples, additions, and techniques.
- Move away from assumptions that specific apple varieties will consistently result in particular profiles, as this may vary greatly based on region, season and cultivar.
- Provide judge training focused on the goal of tasting for a holistic flavor profile.
- Increase the pool and overall diversity of qualified judges.
- Use language that speaks to apple origins, without precluding the awarding of excellent ciders crafted using non-traditional sources/methods.
- Help consumers understand and more easily approach the category.

Key 2023 Revisions:

- Introduced: *Low and High Tannin* Cider and Perry categories - grouping like ciders and perries based on finished profile, rather than initial ingredients exclusively.
- Removed: *modern* and *heirloom* terminologies, as attempting to shorthand cultivation origins leads to false dichotomies (i.e., old vs. new) and amorphous apple groups/styles (i.e., dessert, culinary, cider fruit etc.) that are ambiguous in definition.
- Removed: *English* and *French* categories in favor of grouping these NW crafted ciders with their stylistic counterparts based on tannins, oak aging, apple composition, etc.
- Removed: *Wild/Non-Sac* category to now be included in *Specialty* category, subcategory Other.
- Updated: *Red-Fleshed* category to include dry and sweet subcategories.
- Updated: *Fruit Cider* category to delineate co-ferments and those made with post ferment fruit additions.
- Updated: *Specialty* category to reduce catch-all nature of the category and divide it into 3 subcategories: Fortified, Low Alcohol/Alcohol removed, and Other.
- Updated: *Single Varietal* category to be more flexible in accommodating a variable number of entries in subcategories, based on changing orcharding and making trends.

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Entry Guidelines

Category and subcategory divisions group like ciders and perries together with additional subcategory determinations to take place after the entry period closes. The intention is to compare for overall quality and recognition of stand out character within a category. These groupings necessarily evolve with/in response to changes in orcharding, production, market and lexicon standards, etc.

Entrants determine appropriate tannin and sweetness categories to enter. Judges will not perform tannin or gravity readings but will anticipate perceived tannins and sweetness levels based on category. Entrants **MUST** specify: carbonation level (still/petillant/sparkling) and sweetness (dry/medium dry/medium/medium sweet/sweet) and ABV. Entrants may specify apples used and in some categories, must specify. When noted, entrants must specify additional ingredients and/or process.

Entrants determine the best category placement per entry. Competition organizers can advise on category placement, if needed. If an entry potentially fits into multiple categories and/or subcategories, entrants are encouraged to consider what primary quality the cider should be recognized for. For example, a high tannin, barrel aged fruit cider potentially may fit in High-Tannin, Wood/Oaked or Fruit categories. The cidemaker may determine that this is predominantly a fruit cider, with the most recognized quality of this cider being added fruit, entering it in the Fruit, Post Ferment category where it will be best evaluated among other “like” fruit dominant ciders. Alternatively, if the fruit addition is subtle and notable oak aging is the dominant profile character of the cider, the maker may opt to include it in Wood/Oaked to be evaluated among other wood/oaked ciders.

Ciders

1A Low Tannin Ciders Dry: FG < 1.007 (< 1.8 Brix)

Comments: Exhibits characteristics of ciders commonly made from low tannin apples (formerly listed as “dessert” or “culinary”). Low tannin ciders may be higher in acidity. High tannin characters, such as heavy astringency or associated mouthfeel should not be notably present.

Aroma: Dry ciders may be more wine-like with some esters. Aroma intensity may be low, but aroma should be high quality.

Appearance: Variable. Clear to brilliant, typically pale to gold in color.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Medium to high acidity. Dry ciders may present with more acidity. Sugar and acidity should combine in balance to give a refreshing character, neither cloying nor too austere. Low to Medium body. Little to no perceivable tannin, slight to moderate astringency with little bitterness. Softer mouthfeel.

Overall Impression: Variable, but should be a refreshing drink. Dry ciders must not be too austere. Low tannin cider generally serves well as a “session” drink, and suitably accompanies a wide variety of food.

1B Low Tannin Ciders Sweet: FG > 1.007 (> 1.8 Brix)

Comments: Exhibits characteristics of ciders commonly made from low tannin apples (formerly listed as “dessert” or “culinary”). Low tannin ciders may be higher in acidity. High tannin characters, such as heavy astringency or associated mouthfeel should not be notably present.

Aroma: Sweet or low-alcohol ciders may have appley aroma.. Aroma intensity may be low, but aroma should be high quality.

Appearance: Variable. Clear to brilliant, typically pale to gold in color.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Medium to high acidity. Sweet ciders may present with less acidity. Sugar and acidity should combine in balance to give a refreshing character, neither cloying nor too austere. Low to Medium body. Little to no perceivable tannin, slight to moderate astringency with little bitterness. Softer mouthfeel.

Overall Impression: Variable, but should be a refreshing drink. Sweet ciders must not be cloying. Low tannin cider generally serves well as a “session” drink, and suitably accompanies a wide variety of food.

2A High-Tannin Ciders Dry: FG < 1.007 (< 1.8 Brix)

Comments: Exhibits characteristics of ciders commonly made from high tannin apples (i.e. bittersweet/bittersharp, formerly listed as “heirloom,” or “cider” apples). May include wild or crab apples. Tannins and some astringency should be present. Sweetness, acid and tannins should be in harmony.

Appearance: Clear to brilliant, pale to deep gold or amber in color.

Aroma: Low-alcohol ciders may have appley aroma. Dry ciders may be more wine-like with some esters. Aroma intensity varies and may trend high. Aroma should be high quality, offering complexity.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Acidity varies (generally medium to high) and should balance tannins and sugar. Dry ciders may present with more acidity. Sugar and acidity should combine in balance to give a refreshing character, neither cloying nor too austere. Medium to full body and mouthfeel. Moderate to high tannins should be apparent, in balance with acidity, and sweetness.

Overall Impression: Should exhibit more distinctive apple character than a low tannin cider. Should not be bland or watery. Dry ciders must not be too austere. Cider may be complex with a long aftertaste.

2B High-Tannin Ciders Sweet: FG > 1.007 (> 1.8 Brix)

Comments: Exhibits characteristics of ciders commonly made from high tannin apples (i.e. bittersweet/bittersharp, formerly listed as “heirloom,” or “cider” apples). May include wild or crab apples. Tannins and some astringency should be present. Sweetness, acid and tannins should be in harmony.

Appearance: Clear to brilliant, pale to deep gold or amber in color.

Aroma: Sweet or low-alcohol ciders may have appley aroma. Aroma intensity varies and may trend high. Aroma should be high quality, offering complexity.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Acidity varies (generally medium to high) and should balance tannins and sugar. Sweet ciders may present with less acidity. Sugar and acidity should combine in balance to give a refreshing character, neither cloying nor too austere. Medium to full body and mouthfeel. Moderate to high tannins should be apparent, in balance with acidity, and sweetness.

Overall Impression: Should exhibit more distinctive apple character than a low tannin cider. Should not be bland or watery. Sweet ciders must not be cloying. Cider may be complex with a long aftertaste.

3A Red-Fleshed Ciders Dry: FG < 1.007 (< 1.8 Brix)

Ciders whose color is derived entirely from red-fleshed and/or red-skinned apples belong here. Ciders whose color is derived in whole or in part from added ingredients (blueberries, grape skins, rose petals, etc.) should be entered in Fruit or Botanical. Entrants MUST specify apples used.

Comments: This category includes ciders made from red fleshed apples (i.e. Mountain Rose, Airlie Redflesh, Redfield, Cranberry, Dolgo, Geneva Crab, Niedzwetzkyana, Pink Pearl). May have a blend of non-red fleshed apples and red fleshed apples.

Appearance: Clarity varies from medium to brilliant. Color typically ranges from pale yellow or pink to deep garnet.

Aroma: Aroma intensity varies. Quality should be high. May have notes of other fruits, especially red fleshed fruits (i.e. strawberries, raspberries, cranberries, watermelon, etc.). Also can exhibit unique volatile profiles exhibiting other non-fruit characteristics, such as grassiness.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Low to high flavor intensity with a variable body. May have high levels of bitter and astringent compounds - should be well balanced, integrated.

Overall Impression: Flavor and aromas can range from subtle to complex. The body of the cider can range from light to heavy. Should be an enjoyable expression of cider made with a specific segment of apples. Balance and quality of flavor profiles should be apparent.

3B Red-Fleshed Ciders Sweet: FG > 1.007 (> 1.8 Brix)

Ciders whose color is derived entirely from red-fleshed and/or red-skinned apples belong here. Ciders whose color is derived in whole or in part from added ingredients (blueberries, grape skins, rose petals, etc.) should be entered in Fruit or Botanical. Entrants MUST specify apples used.

Comments: This category includes ciders made from red fleshed apples (i.e. Mountain Rose, Airlie Redflesh, Redfield, Cranberry, Dolgo, Geneva Crab, Niedzwetzkyana, Pink Pearl). May have a blend of non-red fleshed apples and red fleshed apples.

Appearance: Clarity varies from medium to brilliant. Color typically ranges from pale yellow or pink to deep garnet.

Aroma: Aroma intensity varies. Quality should be high. May have notes of other fruits, especially red fleshed fruits (i.e. strawberries, raspberries, cranberries, watermelon, etc.). Also can exhibit unique volatile profiles exhibiting other non-fruit characteristics, such as grassiness.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Low to high flavor intensity with a variable body. May have high levels of bitter and astringent compounds - should be well balanced, integrated.

Overall Impression: Flavor and aromas can range from subtle to complex. The body of the cider can range from light to heavy. Should be an enjoyable expression of cider made with a specific segment of apples. Balance and quality of flavor profiles should be apparent.

Perries

4A Low-Tannin Perries

Entrants may specify pear(s) used.

Comments: Some culinary pears may contain significant amounts of sorbitol, in which case a “dry” perry may give an impression of sweetness due to sorbitol in the pears. Perception of sorbitol as “sweet” is highly variable from one person to the next. Hence, entrants should specify sweetness according to actual residual sugar amount, and judges must be aware that they might perceive more sweetness than how the perry was entered.

Appearance: Cloudy to brilliant. Generally quite pale.

Aroma: Varies.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): There is a pear character, but not obviously fruity. It tends toward that of a young white wine. No bitterness. Relatively full mouthfeel, low to moderate tannin apparent as astringency.

Overall Impression: Mild. Only very slight acetification is acceptable. Mousiness, ropy/oily characters are serious faults.

4B High-Tannin Perries

Entrants may specify pear(s) used.

Comments: Some culinary pears may contain significant amounts of sorbitol, in which case a “dry” perry may give an impression of sweetness due to sorbitol in the pears. Perception of sorbitol as “sweet” is highly variable from one person to the next. Hence, entrants should specify sweetness according to actual residual sugar amount, and judges must be aware that they might perceive more sweetness than how the perry was entered.

Appearance: Cloudy to brilliant.

Aroma: Variable. Intensity may trend higher and quality should be high with some complexity. Pear character may be expected.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): There is a pear character. Some slight bitterness may be present. Relatively full body and mouthfeel. Moderate to high tannin apparent as astringency.

Overall Impression: Should be a moderately complex drink. Only very slight acetification is acceptable. Mousiness, ropy/oily characters are serious faults.

Ciders & Perries

5A Wood/Oaked

Entrants may specify apples or pears and the process used. Entrants **MUST** specify wood used, including the type of wine, beer or spirits barrel, if applicable. Entrants notes critically inform judges. For example, if an entry reads, "aged in whiskey barrels," judges will anticipate a notable presence of whiskey barrel imparted profile. Ciders that are primarily wood/oaked in style should be entered here. **Comments:** Barrels, wood chips, spirals, staves, cubes, etc. may be used. Non-oak wood should also be noted on the entry form. Ciders must exhibit some flavors or aromas of wood aging.

Appearance: Varies from cloudy to brilliant, pale to chestnut in color.

Aroma: Wood/oaked aromas are anticipated, but should not overwhelm. Aroma intensity may be high. Aroma should be high quality, offering complexity and balance.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): The base cider should be in balance with the wood/oaked flavors present. Wood flavors that overwhelm the base cider would be considered a fault. Wine or spirit character from previous use may be present and if present should complement cider. Wine or spirit characters should not be dominant. Body should linger and the underlying cider should contribute. Thin, watery ciders with oak additions may not provide enough body. Non-saccharomyces flavors may be present but should be subtle ("smoky bacon").

Overall Impression: Wood and oak flavors should complement the base cider. Flavors should be in balance but the cider may be somewhat challenging to drink.

6 Single Varietal

Entrants **MUST** specify apple or pear variety used. Apple varietal character and will be considered in judge evaluation. Fruit selected for single varietals must create high quality cider without the addition of other apple cultivars or other fruit additions.

Comments: Cider made from a single apple or pear variety.

Appearance: Varies from cloudy to brilliant, pale to chestnut in color.

Aroma: Varies. Low to high intensity, should be high quality.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Varies. Sweet or low-alcohol ciders may have appley aroma and flavor. Dry ciders may be more wine-like with some esters. Specific apple or pear varietal and growing conditions will determine.

Overall Impressions: Flavor and aromas can range from subtle to complex. The body of the cider can range from light to heavy. Should be an enjoyable expression of cider made with a specific apple. Balance and quality of flavor profiles should be apparent.

7A Fruit Co-Fermented

Co-Ferment Ciders are made from apples or pears that are fermented with other fruit(s). Post Fermentation Ciders have other fruit(s) added after fermentation. Entrants may specify apples used. Entrants **MUST** specify all fruits used and indicate primary fruit(s).

Comments: Cider with the addition of other fruit.

Appearance: Varies. May have colors imparted from fruit. Varies from cloudy to brilliant. Adjuncts typically influence color and clarity.

Aroma: Fruity aroma is anticipated. Aroma intensity varies.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Anticipated to be fruity in flavor, but must remain cider-like in nature as opposed to fruit-flavored alcohol. Depending on the fruit added, flavor and mouthfeel may be simple and quick or complex and linger. Puckering and astringency from fruit may be present but should be pleasing and in line with expectations from the fruit (e.g., mango cider should not be astringent, but cranberry should).

Overall Impression: The cider should generally be easily drinkable with fruit profile evident and cider notes also present.

7B Fruit Post Fermentation Addition

Co-Ferment Ciders are made from apples or pears that are fermented with other fruit(s). Post Fermentation Ciders have other fruit(s) added after fermentation. Entrants may specify apples used. Entrants MUST specify all fruits used and indicate primary fruit(s).

Comments: *Cider with the addition of other fruit.*

Appearance: *Varies. May have colors imparted from fruit. Varies from cloudy to brilliant. Adjuncts typically influence color and clarity.*

Aroma: *Fruity aroma is anticipated. Aroma intensity varies.*

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): *Anticipated to be fruity in flavor, but must remain cider-like in nature as opposed to fruit-flavored alcohol. Depending on the fruit added, flavor and mouthfeel may be simple and quick or complex and linger. Puckering and astringency from fruit may be present but should be pleasing and in line with expectations from the fruit (e.g., mango cider should not be astringent, but cranberry should).*

Overall Impression: *The cider should generally be easily drinkable with fruit profile evident and cider notes also present.*

8A Botanical Hopped

Entrants may specify apples or pears used. Entrants MUST specify hop variety or varieties (Cascade, Amarillo, Citra, Chinook, Simcoe, etc.).

Comments: *Cider or perry with the addition of hops.*

Appearance: *Slight haze to brilliant; pale to deep gold or amber in color.*

Aroma: *Variable. Hop and/or apple aroma anticipated. Hop varieties may provide aromas of: tropical, fruity, citrusy, woody, piney, grassy, herbal, floral, etc. Aroma intensity varies. Should balance hop and apple.*

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): *Hop flavor may be present. Varies from dry to sweet. The sweetness of sweet hopped ciders should accentuate hop profile and should not be too cloying. Hop bitterness should be light and may be nonexistent. Light to medium body. Hops may provide bittering. Some tannin may be present for slight astringency.*

Overall Impression: *Should be a moderately complex drink. A distinct hop aroma may be present. Note that freshly-hopped ciders (using wet/fresh hops) may exhibit distinctly different aromas and flavors (grassy, plant-y) than using dried hops.*

8B Botanical Herbed

Entrants may specify apples or pears used. Entrants MUST specify herbs and and/or spices used. Ciders which include both should be entered in the dominant profile category. For the competition purposes Herbs typically refer to the leafy, fresh part of a plant, Spices to the root, stem, seed, fruit, flower or bark of the tree or plant (often dried not fresh).

Comments: *Examples of herbs include: basil, lemongrass, lavender, mint, rosemary.*

Appearance: *Varies from cloudy to brilliant, pale to amber in color.*

Aroma: *Aroma should balance herbs used with the flavors of the cider. Aroma intensity varies. Quality should be high. Herb notes may be apparent or understated, but should not overwhelm.*

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): *Herbs used must be in balance and the flavor of cider or perry must be present. Body varies and may linger due to flavors added.*

Overall Impression: *Should be a moderately complex drink.*

8C Botanical Spiced

Entrants may specify apples or pears used. Entrants **MUST** specify spices and and/or herbs used. Ciders which include both should be entered in the dominant profile category. For the competition purposes Herbs typically refer to the leafy, fresh part of a plant, Spices to the root, stem, seed, fruit, flower or bark of the tree or plant (often dried not fresh).

Comments: Examples of spices: cardamom, cinnamon, allspice, cloves, nutmeg, pepper, turmeric, ginger, mace, saffron, vanilla, black pepper.

Appearance: Varies from cloudy to brilliant, pale to amber or chestnut in color. **A**

roma: Aroma should balance herbs used with the flavors of the cider. Aroma intensity varies. Quality should be high. Herb notes may be apparent or understated, but should not overwhelm.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Spices used must be in balance and the flavor of apple cider must be present. Body varies and may linger due to flavors added.

Overall Impression: Should be a moderately complex drink.

9A Specialty Fortified

Entrants may specify apples or pears used. Typically higher ABV entries. Entrants **MUST** specify the process used. Ice and fire cider/perry would be candidates for this category.

Comments: Fortified Cider has been strengthened in alcohol either before or after fermentation, including by the addition of spirits. Fortified Cider encompasses pommeau, products made in a style similar to pommeau, and other products that emulate fortified wine styles such as apple wine and vermouth made with a base of apples and/or pears.

Appearance: Variable. Medium to dark amber.

Aroma: Intensity - medium to high. Quality should be high, with anticipated complexity.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): A range of sweetness is acceptable but should be balanced. Tannins may run the spectrum—but shouldn't be distracting. Oak aging of spirits and/or final product is allowable. As such, some oxidation character is allowable, if balanced with the oak and barrel profile. **Overall Impression:** Noticeably higher alcohol should not distract from overall profile. Should be balanced.

9B Specialty Low Alcohol/Alcohol Removed

Entrants may specify apples. Entrants **MUST** specify process (i.e. alcohol removed or ciderkin production). Low alcohol, "ciderkin" style ciders and ciders that have gone through a dealcoholization process belong in this category. ABV range: 0.5% - 4.5%.

Comments: Low ABV ciders may be made with different processes, including rehydration of apple pomace for pressing and fermenting. Ciders that have been fermented and have alcohol removed will be expected to have some complexity beyond that of fresh juice.

Appearance: Variable.

Aroma: Variable. Apple, yeast and any herb/spice/wood, etc. addition notes may be present.

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): Easy to drink with some complexity. Mouthfeel varies.

Overall Impression: There is no classic profile for this type of cider and the end product will vary widely depending upon the apple varieties used and the methods through which this range of alcohol has been achieved. There are no sweetness parameters. Credit will be given to ciders which demonstrate good body, complexity and balance.

9C Specialty Other

Where no other category suits. Entrant notes are of utmost importance for ciders in this category. Processes and ingredients that make the cider not suitable for any other category should be noted on the entry form. Entrants may specify apples used. Entrants MUST specify commercial yeast cultures or wild yeast processes used (i.e. wild ferment, brettanomyces or lactobacillus). A cider or perry with added sweeteners (such as honey or molasses) may also be entered here so long as the cider or perry character remains dominant. Entrants MUST note these additions.

Comments: *May include a variety of process techniques and international cider making techniques. Variety of style in presentation expected for this category, but overriding all should be complexity of the fermentation.*

Appearance: *Varies from cloudy to brilliant, pale to amber in color.*

Aroma: *Variable. Aromas may include funky and/or yeast notes.*

Palate (Flavor & Mouthfeel): *Body varies. Flavors such as band-aid, rotting leaves and farmyard may not be considered a fault in this category provided the overall drink is enjoyable, in balance, and those tastes are subtle. May include funky or yeast notes, souring/puckering, overly ripe apples, barnyard notes, funky cheese. Sulfur/H₂S is not acceptable except in minor amounts and not out of balance. Tannins may contribute to astringency.*

Overall Impression: *The greatest capacity for expression exists in the judge's overall impression. For instance, if the entrant notes describe a brettanomyces ferment the judges will look for corresponding flavors.*