

## Sake Brewing: Part One

Even though sake is often referred to as “rice wine,” the process of brewing sake is actually closer to beer-brewing. In Japan, sake is called *nihonshu*, which literally means “Japanese alcohol.”

At the heart of sake brewing is *sakamai*, a variety of rice for making sake not for eating. Also important to the process are a reliable source of clean, pure water and two microbes: the distinctively rich and sweet-smelling powdery *kōji* mold (a type of fungus) that converts rice starch into simple sugars and the sake yeast that converts those simple sugars into alcohol.

Sake is traditionally fermented at cooler temperatures than beer or wine. Many sake brewers believe that a slower, colder fermentation will bring out the finest aromas from the yeast. The fermentation usually takes between two and four weeks, and the entire process of making sake often takes from four to nine weeks. The fermentation is usually conducted during the winter months, when low temperatures also help to reduce the risk of contamination from other microbes.

While sake is ready to drink from the moment the liquid is isolated from the lees (leftover solids from the fermenting process), it is often pasteurized and filtered. Generally, sake has an alcohol content similar to wine, about 13 to 17 percent. But unlike wine, sake is not usually aged. The quality between years depends on the brewing conditions and the ingredients used, the skill of the [\*tōji\*, or master](#) brewer, is demonstrated by the consistency in flavor from year to year.