

A number of club members determined that having set monthly themes would be helpful by providing a list for folks to consult in advance in their hunt for beer to bring to meetings. This list covers a wide spectrum and should touch upon every possible type of beer. So when you come across that beer with a scary label or name, that high alcohol beer, or that beer that goes so well with chocolate, you will know to buy extra bottles to share at the appropriate beer club meeting.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are unable to find a beer that fits the theme, do not be discouraged. Just buy the appropriate amount of any good beer to bring along to the meeting. Home brews are more than welcome. Don't skip a meeting because you cannot find a theme brew. Your presence is more important than keeping with a theme.

January: Beers the Dark Lord Hasn't Had

This theme was first proposed several years ago. Since Your Dark Lord has sampled and rated almost 1700 beers (actually a modest number by RateBeer standards), it was a challenge. The first event yielded almost forty beers not yet sampled by Your Dark Lord and everyone benefited by the wealth and diversity of brews. To determine what Your Dark Lord has had, go to www.ratebeer.com and, in the upper right corner type yourdarklord in the search box that says FIND BEER. You will see my account. Click on the column titled BEER to sort them in alphabetical order for ease in determining what to look for.

February: Beer and Chocolate

Bring along some chocolate and a beer that you feel fits well with it. Over 3,000 years ago, Central American Indians brewed beer from the pulp of cacao seedpods. The pod pulp was used to make the beer and the seeds were then discarded. Chocolate was then made from fermented cacao pods. Give an ancient Central American the sludge left over from brewing and what do you get: chocolate. So, what goes well with chocolate? There are chocolate stouts that are obvious, but there are more possibilities. As for the chocolate, there are chocolate bars, chocolate truffles, fruit filled chocolates, filled chocolates, nutty chocolates, milk, semi-sweet, bitter-sweet, exotic flavored Vosges bars; or make your own chocolate fudge, chocolate cookies, chocolate cake, etc. How about chocolate ice cream in a chocolate stout for a float? There are some great beer and chocolate ideas in the May 2005 issue of *All About Beer* magazine.

March: East of the Mississippi Beers

Simple enough concept. Bring beer made by a brewery located east of the Mississippi.

April: West of the Mississippi Beers

Bring a beer from a brewery located west of the Mississippi.

May: Imported Beers

Some people are of the opinion that American breweries do it better (my hand raised). Much of those beers are based on styles created elsewhere and kicked up a notch or tweaked here. Bring a good beer from any country other than the States.

June: Blind Tasting

How often are our evaluations of beer biased by the brewery or the particular beer's notoriety? Likely, quite often. Assessing beer is a very subjective experience. Well, this month those cues

are removed. Bring your beer in a brown paper bag. If the bottle cap gives away the beer or brewery, cover it with aluminum foil. Rating sheets will be provided for you to mark the style, brewery, and beer name, and to give your rating from 1 to 5. It will be interesting to see what you rate a beer sight unseen.

July: Beer and Hot Sauce

This is a very popular evening. A plethora of hot sauces are provided ranging in heat from spicy to fuhgeddaboutit. Seriously, hot sauces are measured in Scoville Units with the standard Tabasco sauce weighing in at a mere 2500 units. We have sauces that range from 50,000 units to an incredible 1.7 million units. Some sauces are strictly heat while others also provide interesting flavor. The bottles have art work and comments that are entertaining, also. What beer to bring? Whatever you feel is intense enough to stand up to the heat or put out the fire.

August: Beers from Your Travels

Many members travel for vacations, to visit family, or specifically to visit breweries or brewpubs, bringing home samples of beer not available in central Illinois. This is a chance to share those treasures with the club. Bring a beer that you discovered in your travels.

September: Your Favorite Style of Beer

We all have a favorite style. What's yours? Bring it for this meeting and be prepared to tell why it's your favorite style.

October: Scary Beer Names or Labels

Celebrate Halloween with Scary Beer. Ghosts and goblins on labels, skulls and grim reapers? Bring it along. Scary, macabre names? We want it.

November: 10% + ABV

Another very popular evening. Bring beer with an alcohol by volume (ABV) rating of 10% or greater.

December: Anniversary or Holiday Beers

December is the anniversary of the founding of the Champaign-Urbana Beer Club (15 December 2003). It is also the month of holidays: Christmas, Chanukah, Festivus (for the rest of us), and New Year's Eve. Bring beer that has anniversary or holiday in the name.