Cider is made from fermented apple juice. There are also variations of cider made with added honey or other fruits each with its own name (see below).

Traditionally, cider is made from particular types of apples, often containing high levels of tannin & the best ciders are generally made from blends of several different cider apples. Cider apples can be hard to find but don't worry about that because you can use all types of apples and apple concentrates too. Actually, it is rewarding & fun to experiment with different apples.

In the past, the wild yeast on the fruit was used to make juice ferment. Some traditionalists still use this method but with the availability of good quality yeasts, brewing yeast cultures are now widely used thus producing consistently good quality ciders.

Types of cider

Cider can be carbonated or still and range in style from really dry, to very sweet. In Europe, “cider” refers to alcoholic fermented apple juice. In the US, fermented apple juice is known as hard cider & unfermented apple juice is called sweet cider. There are many terms used to describe cider. Here are some of them.

Still cider
Fermented apple juice that is not carbonated.

Sparkling cider
Fermented apple juice that contains carbon dioxide (the gas produced during fermentation) & is stored under pressure like beer or soft drink.

Draft cider
Still cider which may or may not be served from a keg but is generally limited to 6% or less alcohol.

Farmhouse Style
A traditional style of still cider also called "real cider." . Alcohol can range from 5% to 12%.

French Style
A cider whose fermentation has been stopped to keep its alcohol level down in the range of 2% to 5%.

Scrumpy
A cider made from cider apples only in the traditional method with no additives & no added yeast.

Cyser
A cider with added honey which is also considered to be a mead.

Perry
A cider made with a mixture of apple & pear juice.

Apple wine
Fermented apple juice with alcohol content over 12%. 
The traditional process

Cider apples are usually harvested when very ripe & often a mixture of different apples is used. They are put through a crusher called a cider mill & the pulp is wrapped in cloth. These days nylon is most commonly used but hessian, canvas & even straw have been used in the past. Some traditional producers still use these materials.

The wrapped pulp (or pomace) is placed in a press & the juice is squeezed out & collected. This is called "must" & it is transferred to fermentation vats or casks. Fermentation is allowed to start naturally or a yeast culture is added to get it going. Cider makers often use champagne yeast to make cider.

For dry cider, the fermentation is allowed to continue until all the sugar is used up. For sweet cider, the juice is filtered before it is finished so there will be some sugar remaining to sweeten the cider.

Dry cider is often left on the sediment (lees) for up to three months to mature. It can then be filtered to remove sediment and cloudy appearance however, some traditional cider makers like to retain the natural cloudiness.

Most commercial ciders are artificially carbonated by adding carbon dioxide to the bottles. Traditional ciders can be carbonated naturally in the same way that bottle fermented beer is done. The traditional champagne method can also be used.

MAKING YOUR OWN CIDER

Cidermaking is easy and fun. You can buy cider making kits at homebrew suppliers. You make cider kits in exactly the same way as beer kits. It is really easy to do & if you have experience with beer kits, you won’t even have to think about it. Just add sugar or glucose & the yeast provided & in a week or so, you will have about 30 750ml bottles of excellent alcoholic cider.

We have a really good cider kit made by "Black Rock". They process their own blend of cider apples to make this kit so it tastes really good & it is always reliable. Give it a go, you will be glad you did.

When you make Black Rock cider you will need

- A 25 or 30 litre fermenter *
- A priming scoop for measuring sugar into the bottles *
- Enough bottles for 20 litres of cider
- Homebrew sterilizing compound *
  * available from Liquorcraft

Varying cider kits

You can start with the Black Rock cider kit but make it with extra additives to vary the taste & alcohol content. Here are some suggestions

- Add 500g of malt extract
- Add 500g of honey (don't use Eucalypt honeys)
- Use a few litres of fruit juice to replace some of the water. Try pear juice, orange juice, black currant juice, grape juice or anything else you like.
- Mince some fresh apples & add this to the fermenter
Home made farmhouse cider
Here is a basic recipe for 22 litres of Farmhouse Style cider.

You will need
- A 25 or 30 litre fermenter *
- A priming scoop for measuring sugar into the bottles *
- Enough bottles for 20 litres of cider
- Homebrew sterilizing compound *
  * available from Liquorcraft

Ingredients
- 22 litres of fresh pressed sweet apple juice
- 5 cups of sugar
- 1 pack of lager or champagne yeast *
  * available from Liquorcraft

Method
- Sterilize your fermenter according to directions on the sterilizing compound.
- Put the juice into the fermenter, add the sugar & stir well to dissolve. Add the yeast and fit a fermentation lock in the lid of the fermenter & half fill it with water.
- The fermentation should start within 24 hours. When it starts, bubbles should stream through the water in the airlock.
- Allow the cider to ferment and then leave it for at least two months to mature.
- Transfer it into sterilized bottles & seal the bottles. It is now ready to drink.

This is a still cider which is not fizzy.

If you want it to be sparkling cider, You will need to use bottles that can withstand gas pressure. Beer bottles with crown seals & screw top lemonade bottles are suitable.
- Use a priming scoop (available from homebrew suppliers) to add a measure of sugar to each bottle.
- Fill the bottle to about 50mm from the top then seal it firmly with a crown seal or screw cap.
- Store these bottles in a warm place for a week or 2 to allow them to condition (become fizzy). They will now be ready to drink.