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Craft a Champion: 7 Tips for Cider Makers to Take Home Gold .

Cider awards are important marketing tools for cider makers. Like wine and craft beer, the cider market is highly competitive. Awards help small cideries stand out and be noticed.

Winning cider medals has advantages. Award stickers on bottles grab shopper attention and can boost sales. Media coverage from awards raises brand awareness. Awards validate quality, reassuring drinkers they're buying a premium cider. For some makers, triumph motivates them to keep improving their ciders and develop new flavors.

While awards shouldn't be the only goal, following key steps can refine ciders and boost chances of recognition. These seven steps cover the process from choosing apples to fermentation, packaging, and style guidelines. With care and persistence, cider makers can earn that applause.

- **Selecting flavorful heirloom and cider apples is crucial for exceptional cider.**

  Seek out disease-resistant, bittersweet varieties high in tannins, acidity and sugar that ferment well. Visit orchards to taste apples and discover favorites. If you've got the space, growing your own trees allows access to rare cider apples. Great cider starts in the orchard.

- **Controlling fermentation through yeast selection, temperature management, and timing is key.**

  Tailored yeast strains steer the cider's final profile. Cool fermentation temperatures result in slower, more flavorful ferments. Allowing adequate time produces clean, smooth ciders. Mastering fermentation directs the cider's outcome. Runcible Cider's award-winning ciders are produced in poly tanks, which provide great insulation and better temperature regulation, enabling them to master this step while allocating resources to other aspects of production.

- **Avoid unnecessary interventions that diminish natural apple flavors.**

  Let the fruit fully express its character. Judges frown on unneeded additions. Overprocessing strips away subtle qualities. Trust the ingredients and process. Liberty Cider works has found that the neutral material of the poly tanks they use in their cider production doesn't impart flavors or odors to their award-winning ciders. And the poly tanks are oxygen impermeable, preventing oxidation of the cider.

- **Adequate aging time transforms rough, bitter cider into smooth, complex cider.**

  Bulk age 3 – 6 months or more until optimal flavor is reached. Then bottle condition 1 – 3 months to allow carbonation to build and flavor to improve. Proper aging makes the difference between good and award-worthy cider.

- **Thoughtfully blending apples balances sweetness, acidity, tannins, and flavors.**

  Single varietal ciders highlight unique apple traits while blends allow flavor profile control. Experiment with ratios to create harmonious, complex blends that showcase apples' best qualities. Award-winning cidery, 1911 Ciderhouse, uses poly tanks to help with their flavor exploration. They've found that the variety of tank sizes and shapes is perfect for experimenting with different batch sizes and styles. And they've optimized their production space too.

- **Creative packaging makes ciders stand out.**

  Bottle shape, size, and labels influence brand impressions. Square or mini bottles signal artisanal quality. Modern or vintage-inspired labels reflect personality. Eye-catching artwork engages judges and buyers. Packaging shouldn't undermine amazing cider.

- **Know competitions' style guidelines and judging criteria.**

  Tailor ciders to excel in evaluated areas like aroma, flavor, finish, and overall impression. Ask medal-winning makers for advice on matching guidelines. Understanding criteria impresses judges. Entering competitions gets expert feedback for improvement. Use scoring sheets and comments to refine ciders. Do trials before competitions to avoid surprises. Feedback perfects recipes.

In summary, award-winning ciders like those produced by Runcible Cider, Liberty Ciderworks, and 1911 Ciderhouse, require meticulousness across the entire process while letting apples' natural essence shine. You'll increase your chances of winning those awards by focusing on these seven tips: quality ingredients, fermentation control, minimal intervention, proper aging, thoughtful blending, artistic packaging, and understanding the rules. By making cider true to your vision, the passion will come through in every sip.

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