



## Dislike the IPAs ubiquitous to the Pacific Northwest? Give these easy-to-drink low-ABV beers a try instead

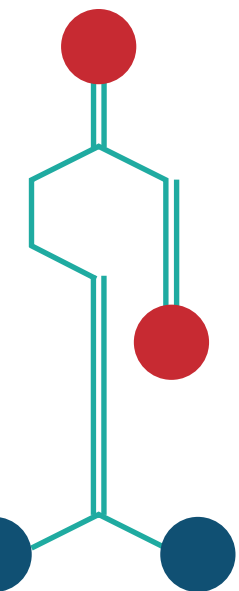
September 6, 2019  
The Seattle Times  
By: Megan Burbank

When I lived in Portland, I spent most summer weekends carpooling with friends to a secret swimming spot on the Washougal River, where we'd blow up cutesy floaties and wade into cool river pools. On the way in, we'd stock up on "water beer" — beer low in alcohol by volume (ABV), the kind you can drink over sunny, lazy hours without getting drunk or dehydrated: Radlers, shandies, session beers, the odd 12-pack of Rainier. We didn't want anything stronger.

But in the IPA-loving Pacific Northwest, low-ABV beers rarely get this kind of respect.

That's too bad, because, as I learned from Robyn Schumacher, one of the owners and brewers at Stoup Brewing in Ballard, you don't have to be into heavy beers to be heavy into beer. As a certified cicerone (the beer version of a sommelier), Schumacher's equipped with a vast knowledge of beer-making and tasting. On a recent weekday, Schumacher and I sat down in Stoup's upstairs bar after she'd finished a brewing shift. The brewer walked me through the chemical intricacies of beer production, and the local prominence of — and alternatives to — the ever-present IPA.





“Almost everybody produces an IPA,” she explained. It’s a “bread and butter” drink for breweries because it sells well.

But folks whose tastes skew lighter have a number of alternatives. There are, of course, ubiquitous domestic American lagers and their regional variants (think Coors and Pabst, which owns the Pacific Northwest’s biggest American lager brands, Rainier and Olympia). And there are also Mexican-style lagers (“put a lime in it”), Belgian whit beers and hefeweizens (“preferably a German hefeweizen”). “I prefer a German-style Pilsner,” Schumacher said, because “you can taste the malt.” You can look for all of these at craft breweries like Stoup.

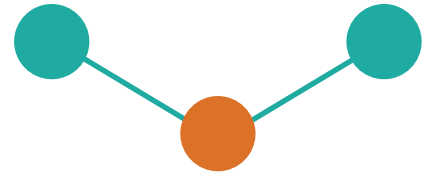
And if you don’t know a kolsch from a porter, another way to tap into a beer’s heaviness is to look for its alcohol by volume (ABV), a metric many breweries list alongside other details like flavor profile, style of brewing, and even awards a particular beer has won.

“Five percent and below is considered a session beer,” says Schumacher; that is, a beer lower in alcohol content, and more appropriate than a heavy IPA for, say, a day at the river. She also recommends talking to brewery staff and bartenders, or even drinking higher-ABV beers in smaller portions by asking for a half-pour or schooner.

And if you’re at home, consider a different vessel altogether: Schumacher likes wineglasses — they’re “better for tasting.” Most important, she advises, “Trust your palate and try not to be influenced by what everyone else is saying.”

As you try new beers (“Drink what you what to drink”), you’ll develop a sense of what you like and don’t like in a beer — regardless of what’s selling fastest at your friendly neighborhood brewery.

In the meantime, to get you started, here’s an assortment of beginner-friendly, low-ABV picks for different palates, whether you’re into fruity drinks or IPA dupes:



## Stoup Sunshine Hand Grenade Dry Hopped Lager

**Beer family:** Dry-hopped Northwest lager; a lower-ABV cousin to the ever-popular IPA.

**Key specs:** Finished with hops, this one is perfect if you like the flavor of an IPA but don't want to fall off your stool.

One of Schumacher's picks, Sunshine Hand Grenade is similar in aroma to an IPA, but "without the heaviness or high ABV," she says. At 5.3% ABV, that makes it an excellent option if you're looking for a lighter beer but don't want to sacrifice flavor and quality.

## Lucky Envelope Raspberry Sour

**Beer family:** Sour beers, intentionally brewed to induce puckering (in a good way).

**Key specs:** This one reminds me of grown-up Sour Patch Kids, with undertones of ginger and cinnamon. And it's pink!

OK, so at 5.7%, Lucky Envelope's raspberry sour isn't quite a session beer. But it packs such a pleasantly tart punch — and a lovely rose color! — that I think we can grandfather it in under Schumacher's "ask for a half-pour" policy. I first tried this one out of a small juice glass, and that may well be the best way to experience its hypersaturated flavor.



## Full Sail Session Premium Lager

**Beer family:** Our old friend the American lager, one of the most ubiquitous low-ABV beers

**Key specs:** Easy to drink, a craft cousin to PBR and Rainier

Brewed by Full Sail in Hood River, Oregon, this one is a classic — low-ABV (5.1%), grocery store-available (it's easy to locate by its cute, stubby 11-oz. brown bottles!), and perfect for sipping at your preferred watering hole. If your introduction to lighter beers has mostly taken the form of mass-produced American lagers, consider upgrading to this one.





## Stiegl Radler

**Beer family:** Radlers, the Arnold Palmer of beers – half beer, half fruit-flavored soda

**Key specs:** Juicy, slightly sweet, easy to drink (but at 2.5% ABV, appropriately lightweight-friendly)

The Radler – the word means “cyclist” in German – was originally invented when an onslaught of riders overwhelmed an innkeeper’s beer stores outside Munich in 1922; he cut their drinks with lemon soda. I first discovered the beauty of the Austrian-brewed Steigl Radler, which swaps in grapefruit-flavored soda, when I lived in hard-drinking Chicago. While the rest of my friends blasted their taste buds with cloudy IPAs on the city’s idyllic sunny back patios, I made the lightweight-friendly Radler my summertime drink of choice. The flavor’s more wine spritzer than hoppy; think grapefruit Jarritos. It converts easily into a highball when poured over top-shelf gin and ice.

## Guinness Draught

**Beer family:** Stout beers – dark and often (not always) strong. If you’ve ever tasted a beer that reminded you of coffee or chocolate, it was likely a stout. Variants include oatmeal stouts and milk stouts.

**Key specs:** Creamy, full-bodied, surprisingly session-friendly

I know what you’re thinking. Guinness? What is Guinness doing on this list? Well, check your ABV. Despite its dark color and creamy head, Guinness’ alcohol content is all of 4.2% – that’s closer to Bud Light than Total Domination. So while Guinness probably isn’t good for you, as Schumacher says, “Dark doesn’t mean heavy.”

