



Aluminum Brew Pots v. Stainless Steel Brew Pots

by Randy Barnes

Editor Note: Over the years I've been asked which is better for brewing beer aluminum or stainless steel. Some folks are under the impression that aluminum pots will leave a taste in the beer and that beer being acidic will attack the aluminum. Wort is not acidic until it is fermented into beer. Hmmmm....looks like Randy Barnes did not have trouble winning an AHA national gold medal brewing in aluminum. As usual, I like to supply the information and let you make an educated decision from that. These are not necessarily my opinions, just some facts...."just the facts Joe".

I've used an aluminum pot for years, a terribly beat up, hand-me-down from a friend who owned a ranch. The 20 gallon pot was formerly used on an open fire to dip the feathers off of chickens! Very deeply pitted, we scrubbed it as best we could when I got it and I've used it for about 7 years. I left the gray/brown oxide layer for "protection." This kettle brewed the 2001 AHA National Gold Medal American Lager!

It's disappointing to see people continue to assume that stainless steel is better for brew pots. Stainless is a durable material and you can shine it up nicely. But that doesn't make it better than aluminum for boiling pots. Heat transfer is an important factor in which aluminum is substantially better than stainless. Suggesting that an aluminum pot should be tossed and a stainless pot obtained for wort boiling is unfounded.

Concerns of the link between Alzheimer's and aluminum have been disproven. Studies of aluminum concentration in wort boiled in aluminum pots have been shown to produce no increase. An other important factor is the relative cost of a stainless vs. aluminum pot. The aluminum is going to be more economical to buy and the better heat transfer means you'll get more of those BTU's into the wort instead of floating away in the hot air.

I do have an important suggestion for aluminum pot use. Never scrub the aluminum pot to a metallic finish. Just scrub off any hop or wort debris off the pot interior after use and allow the brown patina to develop. If there is any thought that aluminum in the wort could cause health effects, the patina effectively leaves the wort separated from the aluminum metal.

You can buy stainless if you can afford it, but you'll pay for it in more ways than one. Aluminum pots for wort boiling are OK. The most important thing to consider when looking at those turkey fryers is the size of the pot. For 5 gallon batches, a minimum capacity of 34 quarts will help avoid or contain boilovers. Remember that the boil starting volume is likely to be 6 or more gallons in order to end up with the 5 gallon final transfer.