

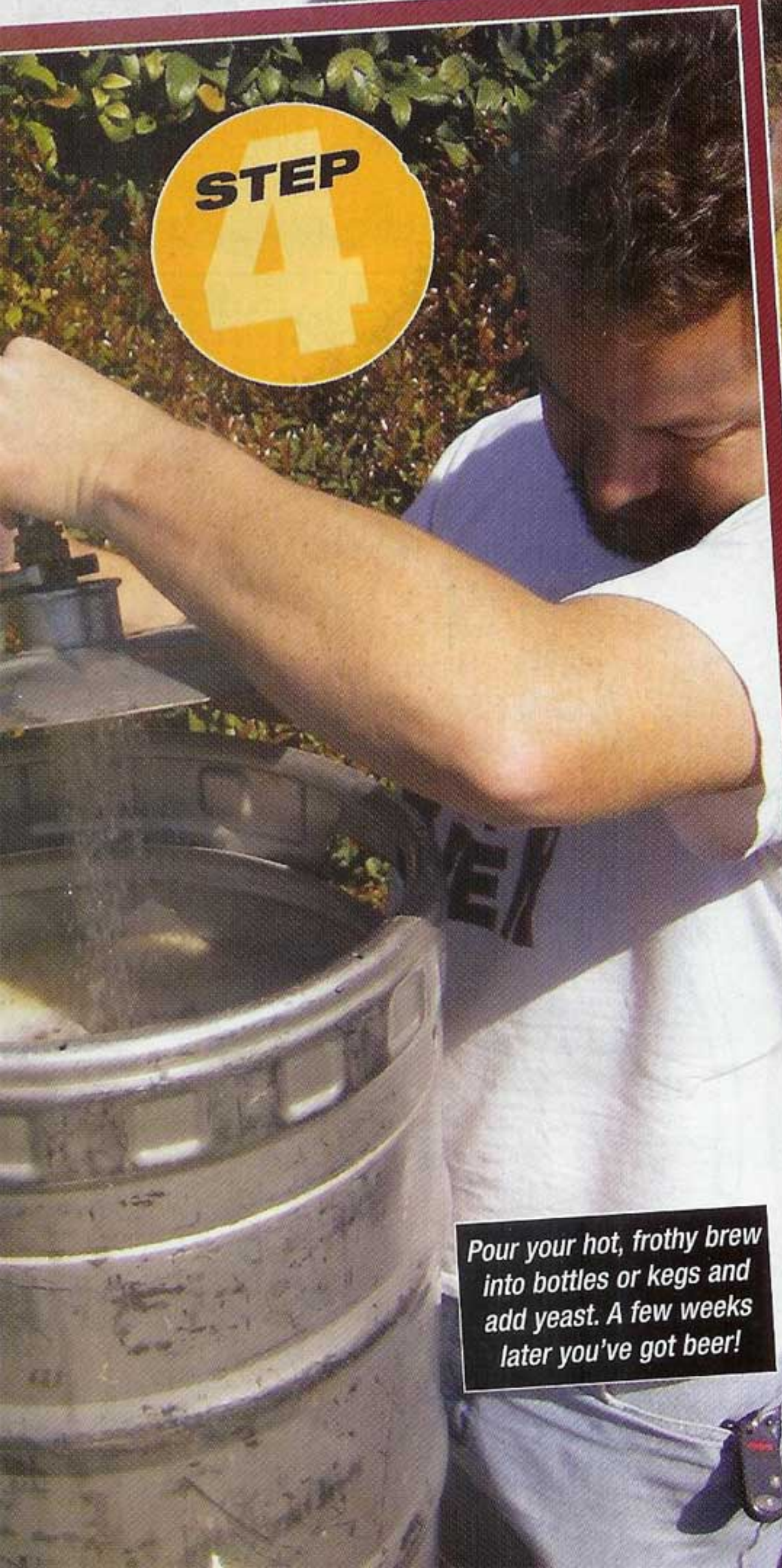
SOME BASIC SUPPLIES for brewing beer include a cooking thermometer, water, yeast and large metal containers.



1 STEP



Find some fresh hops, which provide each beer's distinctive taste. Check the alpha acid levels and don't forget to smell the hops. That aroma will translate into your brew.



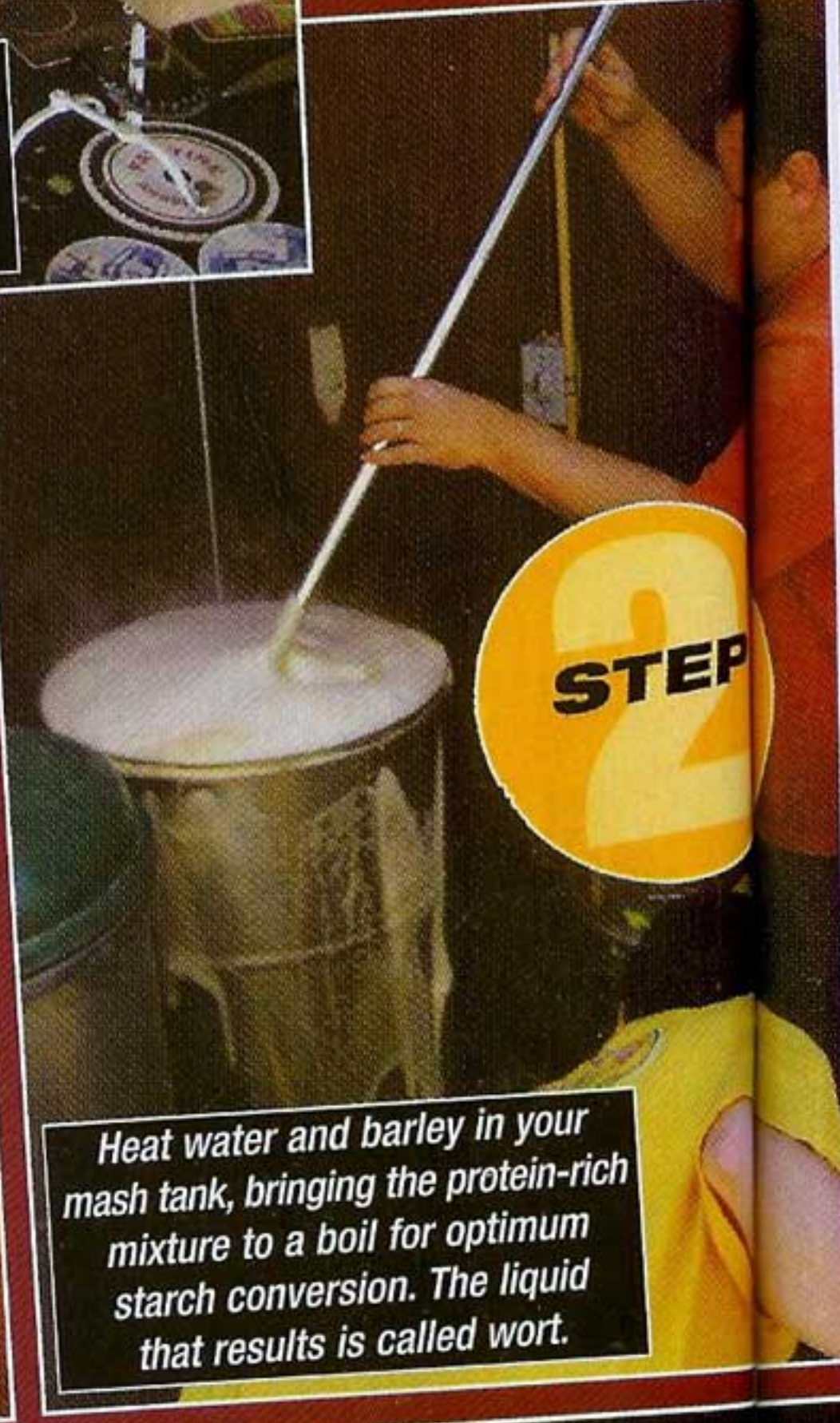
4 STEP

Pour your hot, frothy brew into bottles or kegs and add yeast. A few weeks later you've got beer!



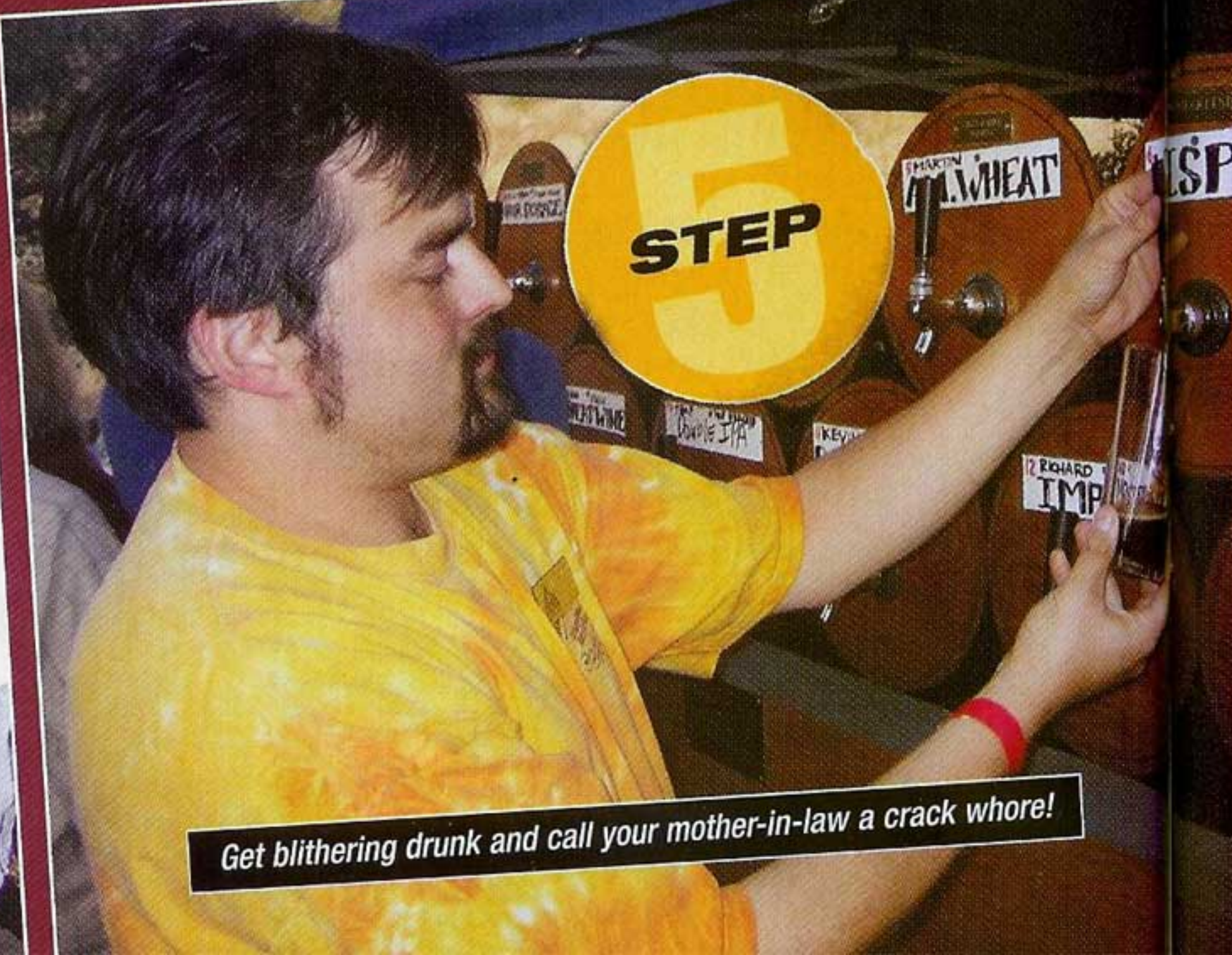
3 STEP

Get wasted while waiting for the wort to filter with hot water through your aromatic hops.



2 STEP

Heat water and barley in your mash tank, bringing the protein-rich mixture to a boil for optimum starch conversion. The liquid that results is called wort.



5 STEP

Get blithering drunk and call your mother-in-law a crack whore!

ON A GLORIOUS SUNDAY AFTERNOON, members of America's first homebrew club gather to concoct the oldest beer in existence. Their recipe comes from an ancient Sumerian hymn heralding a beer goddess, and the main ingredient is bappir—an unleavened, storage bread that looks either like a big cookie or a cow pie, depending on your level of optimism. (Sumer was a pre-Babylonian civilization in what is now Iraq.)

"Hymn to Ninkasi is all about turning bappir into beer," explains Drew Beechum, president of the Maltose Falcons, a Los Angeles-area homebrew club established in 1974. "It's the first written recipe we have. Beer and religion were intertwined."

To re-create the granddaddy of all beers, Beechum and half a dozen Falcons crumble homemade bappir into a bucket of barley during their monthly gathering at Falcon headquarters in Woodland Hills, California. Whether they're hijacking history or concocting an original, the Falcons are no strangers to strange beers.

"I really screw around," says John Iatchison, a ten-year Falcon vet. After learning that ancient Germans hefted huge boulders heated over fire into their brewing beer, Iatchison thought, *I've gotta try that*. Soon he was roasting river rocks over a barbecue grill to 700 degrees, using tongs to plunk them in his brew and hopping back to avoid a barrage of boiling bubbles and scalding steam. "I had rocks explode on me," the aficionado recalls. "But it did the job. It was a good beer."

Like the homebrewers who pioneered the present-day hobby upon federal legalization in 1978, Iatchison brews largely because he wants beer that isn't readily available. "You can literally make high-quality beer that you can't get anywhere," he says. "You make it to your parameters, your taste." You know, like beer boiled by scalding-hot, explosive rocks.

"There's a certain caramelization that you get from the hot rocks," Iatchison continues, "a certain caramel flavor that doesn't come through any other way. And again, can you buy this beer at a store? You cannot. If you want it, you have to make it yourself."

The average homebrewer need not go to such lengths as Iatchison to spice up fermented nectars. Flavorful varieties of malted barley are widely available and impart delicious traces of chocolate, coffee and even plum.

"You get some that taste just like a grain," Beechum explains, munching malted barley from bins stacked at Falcon headquarters. "Then you get some that taste like coffee and some that taste like roasted walnuts and raisins. So the art of doing this is understanding the flavor impacts you get from the ingredients and choosing the right balance."

Sound complex? It's not. Most homebrew starter kits cost around \$100.

"Just do it," says Aubrey Howe III, president of California's Santa Barberians Homebrew Club. "Find a good book."

Ray Daniels, director of craft beer marketing for the Brewers Association, recommends *Zymurgy for Beginners*, a free how-to guide available online at its Web site, Beertown.org. "Go to your local homebrew store [check your Yellow Pages], and tell them you want to get started," Daniels suggests. "They're always a good source of information. Brewing is a craft just like gardening, baking or photography. There's a tremendous pride of ownership."

And sometimes that pride can transform simple backyard brewing into a bona fide business. Consequently, America is now home to 1,400

breweries, most of them small independents known for taking risks with recipes that pay off on the palate. Even California megabrewery Sierra Nevada started as a backyard project, when founder Ken Grossman began brewing five-gallon batches of his now-famous ale using basic equipment. Today his award-winning brewery houses more than 100 giant barrels.

In his Santa Barbara backyard, Howe lights a burner beneath a boiling tank. He's making ten gallons of extra-special bitter (ESB) ale using three stainless steel brewpots, 25 pounds of malted barely, 4 ounces of hops and plenty of water. He first heats the water and barley in the mash tun (tank number 1) for an hour, which converts the

barley's inaccessible starches into ready-to-eat sugars and produces a liquid called wort.

Next, Howe filters the wort through hot water into the boiling tank, where he adds hops, which give an aromatic quality to the beer. Depending on the variety you choose, the hops can make a beer fruity, floral, spicy, bitter and even grassy. This provides a break from barley's trademark sweetness.

The bubbling wort resembles witches' brew and smells like steaming, cooked cereal. When finished, Howe transfers the concoction into five-gallon glass bottles and adds yeast. The mixture ferments for about two weeks. Yeast then eats the sugar and produces two by-products: carbon dioxide and alcohol.

"If you can boil water, you can brew beer," Howe reckons. "When I taste some of the beers I make, I go, 'Wow! I made that!' I get a sense of accomplishment!"

Now all you need to get started is a backyard and a hankering for a cold brewski. 🍻

