

# The Beer Festival Planning Checklist

Cask sizing, timeline and the questions to ask before you book anyone

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Everything a committee, steward or landlord  
needs to plan a beer festival that doesn't run dry,  
run over budget, or run into surprises on the day.

# 1. How much beer do you actually need?

The single most common planning mistake is guessing. Here's the rule of thumb that professional festival organisers actually use:

**Rule of thumb:** budget 2-3 pints per head across an afternoon or evening event.

Cask sizes, for reference:

| Cask      | Volume      | Pints     |
|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Pin       | 4.5 gallons | 36 pints  |
| Firkin    | 9 gallons   | 72 pints  |
| Kilderkin | 18 gallons  | 144 pints |

## Worked example

200 people, 2.5 pints a head = 500 pints needed. At 72 pints per firkin, that's roughly **7 firkins** — in practice, most committees round to 6-8 and mix a couple of reliable crowd-pleasers with one or two local or unusual ales to keep it interesting.

| Guests | Pints needed (2.5/head) | Firkins needed |
|--------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 50     | 125                     | 2              |
| 100    | 250                     | 3-4            |
| 150    | 375                     | 5              |
| 200    | 500                     | 6-8            |
| 300    | 750                     | 10-11          |

These are planning estimates, not guarantees — weather, ticket price, and whether other drinks are on offer all shift the number. Round up slightly rather than down; running out is far more memorable (in a bad way) than having a little left over.

## Pin, firkin or kilderkin — which should you actually order?

- **Pins** are ideal for a smaller ale you want to offer as a "guest" alongside your main line-up — low risk if it doesn't sell through as fast.
- **Firkins** are the standard workhorse size for most festivals — the sweet spot between variety and manageable handling.
- **Kilderkins** make sense for your one or two guaranteed best-sellers, where you know you won't be left with a part-empty cask at the end of the night.

2. Your 8-week planning timeline

| Weeks out | What to sort                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8         | Confirm your date and venue. Check ground conditions (flat, stable, power access) if you're outdoors or in a marquee.                                        |
| 7         | Decide roughly how many guests you're expecting and use the sizing guide above to land on a cask count.                                                      |
| 6         | Book your racking, cooling and taps — the earlier you lock in a supplier, the more choice you have over dates and package size.                              |
| 5         | Place your cask orders with breweries. Popular or seasonal ales can sell out of allocation earlier than you'd expect.                                        |
| 4         | Sort glassware, bar staff/volunteers, and a float for the till.                                                                                              |
| 3         | Confirm delivery times with your equipment supplier and brewery deliveries — casks generally need 24-48 hours to settle and be tapped/vented before serving. |
| 2         | Brief your volunteers: how to pour, how to vent a cask, what to do if a line needs clearing.                                                                 |
| 1         | Confirm final numbers with your supplier, check the weather forecast, and sort waste/recycling arrangements for the day.                                     |
| Day of    | Delivery and install (see Section 4), first pour test, doors open.                                                                                           |

### 3. Five questions to ask any equipment hire firm

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Whoever you book with, ask these before you commit — the answers tell you a lot about whether they'll actually turn up and do the job properly.

#### 1. Is the price fixed, or will I get a "surprise" invoice?

Ask for delivery, installation and collection to be explicitly included, and ask what happens if you're outside their free delivery radius. Fixed weekend pricing published upfront (rather than "get a quote") is a good sign of an operator who isn't padding the bill later.

#### 2. Are you insured and is the equipment PAT tested?

Anything with a plug on your site is your liability too if something goes wrong. A supplier who can't confirm both without hesitation is a risk not worth taking.

#### 3. Is it dry hire, or are you supplying the beer too?

Dry hire means you choose the breweries and keep 100% of the bar takings — the supplier just provides and installs the kit. Make sure you know which one you're getting, since it changes your margins significantly.

#### 4. What happens if the weather turns or the site becomes inaccessible?

A good supplier will have a straightforward answer, not a shrug. Get this in writing if you can, especially for outdoor or field-based events.

#### 5. What's your deposit and cancellation policy?

A modest deposit to secure the date is normal and reasonable. Be wary of anyone asking for full payment upfront with no clarity on refunds if plans change.

**Firkin Fresh answers, for the record:** fixed prices from £195, published online — fully insured and PAT tested — dry hire only, you keep the bar takings — clear delivery bands with no surprise mileage charges — 25% deposit secures your date.

## 4. On-the-day checklist

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- ☐ Flat, stable ground confirmed for racking — check the day before if outdoors.
- ☐ Power socket available and accessible for the cooler.
- ☐ Casks delivered with enough time to settle and be vented before serving (24–48 hours where possible).
- ☐ Equipment supplier's delivery and install slot confirmed in writing.
- ☐ Glassware ordered and washing-up/collection point sorted.
- ☐ Volunteers briefed on pouring, venting, and who to call if something goes wrong.
- ☐ Float and card payment method (if used) ready at the bar.
- ☐ Waste and recycling arrangements confirmed for the day and the morning after.
- ☐ Collection/decommission time confirmed with your supplier.
- ☐ Someone designated as the point of contact on the day if the supplier needs access.

### Need the kit sorted too?

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Firkin Fresh supplies racking, piped cooling jackets and taps — delivered, installed and collected. Fixed weekend prices from £195, covering Milton Keynes, Bletchley, Stony Stratford, Wolverton, Newport Pagnell, Woburn Sands, Olney, Bedford, Northampton, Aylesbury, Luton and Leighton Buzzard.

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