

# Using your Party Keg

Ok, so now you have made a party keg out of a pressure sprayer, how do you use the damn thing?

It depends a little on what you want to use it for and what gear you already have or are prepared to shell out the cash for. I'll try to cover as many variables as I can and give a description of how to use the keg in that way and what gear you will need.

I'll basically start at the least complex and cheapest, and work my way up to an option that is basically a small keg replacement system.

For all options... you will need a tap of some sort and between one and three meters of 8mm outer diameter beer line. Seeing as this is predominantly a portable system I will give you the two most sensible tap options to choose from for that application.



Pluto Gun: - These cost around \$100 from the AHB sponsors and other homebrew outlets or perhaps e-bay. You can probably get one cheaper or you could go for a stainless one at a 25+% premium. Your Choice.



A Bronco Faucet or Picnic Tap:- These do the same job as a Beer Gun but only cost about \$10 (without the hose) from the same places. For the purposes of this guide, I will assume you chose a Picnic Tap... because that's what I have and it will make it easier for me.

If you want to play with other varieties of tap and mount fixed ones etc etc. Go for it. I suggest you look at the [Party Kegs thread on AHB](#) for some inspiration. It's where I got most of mine from and incidentally where I stole the large majority of the information I used to write these guides. There are some killer set-ups that people have made.

## Dispensing options

You have a party keg. You have fitted a meter or so of beer line to a picnic tap and pushed it into the JG fitting that is your beer out fitting. Your keg is ready to rock and you have filled it with carbonated beer. You might have filled it from a keg, or you might have carbonated it naturally in the party keg (see later for how to do both of these things) but either way... now your party keg is full of ready to drink beer and you have a tap to pour it with.

So how do you get the beer out?

### Option #1 – Gravity Feed

*You will need in addition to your keg and tap – nothing*

*How –*

Put your keg in a little eski or something with some ice to keep it cool, and put it up on a shelf at face height, dangle your beer line down to the table.

You will be able to just pour a beer or two from the pressure that's already inside the keg, when the beer slows down too much, you just let some air into the keg via the relief valve or the gas in valve and it will flow out under gravity. You might even want to unscrew the little mechanism inside the valve body so that it lets unrestricted air in.

This is the way that the 5L kegs you can buy in the bottle shop work, they just rely on you to drink the whole keg before it goes flat.

#### Pros

- Cheap, easy, simple.

#### Cons

- Beer goes flat.
- Pour is very slow.
- Hard to get a nice looking glass of beer with a good head.
- Must drink all the beer on the night or very soon thereafter.

### Option #2 – Pressurised Air

*You will need in addition to your keg and tap – a bicycle pump that you have washed all the grease out of and re-greased with food grade lubricant (if you are fussy)*

*How -*

Your keg will have a little pressure in it already, pour a beer and see how it pours. Too slow?? OK attach your bike pump to the gas-in post and give it a few pumps. Pour a test beer. Keep pumping till the beer is just starting to come out too fast for a proper pour.

You will struggle a little for the first glass or two, then the beer will progressively slow down with each beer you pour. When it slows down too much... pump some more. The more headspace in the keg (ie: as it empties) the less often you will have to repeat the pumping procedure. When the keg is full, it will be every couple of glasses, but by halfway down, you will only need to do it every half a dozen glasses or so.

#### Pros

- Cheap, simple.
- Pour is a good speed
- Beer pours well and able to get a good head etc

#### Cons

- Labour intensive
- Beer still goes flat
- Must drink all the beer on the night or very soon thereafter.

**Explanatory note:-** If you let air (or more specifically oxygen) come in contact with your beer, it goes stale very quickly. Within a day or two it will be nasty. Also there are bacteria in the air that can spoil the beer. So the options that push the beer out with air mean that you need to drink the beer on the night or the next day, otherwise it will spoil.

### Option #3 – CO2 from a Tyre Inflator.

**\*\* Thirsty's recommended option for parties**

You will need in addition to your keg and tap –



A CO2 inflator used by bike riders to quickly inflate their tires. There are lots of different types and they all use small bulbs of CO2 and some sort of trigger to allow a squirt of gas. Google "CO2 inflator" for a bunch of options from about \$18. The replacement bulbs vary a lot in price and can be hard to get via mail order because the larger ones are sometimes illegal to ship via post. You can get combination inflators that are also a standard bike pump, handy in case you run out of gas mid-keg.

These are NOT the same chargers as you see occasionally in homebrew shops. The homebrew shop ones usually have a fitting that allows them to be attached to a standard corny keg quick disconnect. They won't fit on your car tire valve. The bike shop ones are cheaper anyway.

How –

This is going to work almost the same as the bike pump. Unsurprisingly really, these things are just fancy bike pumps. Attach the inflator to the gas in valve, it should form a nice firm connection. Give the trigger mechanism a little pull and shoot a squirt of gas into the keg. Check the pour? Adjust the amount of gas you put into the keg till it is pouring nicely and top it up as needed.

The first couple of times you use it, check for leaks around the gas in with soapy water. If it seals really well, you can just leave the inflator connected for your whole party, if not, you will need to disconnect and re-connect each time you need to add gas.. not too hard really.

It will take a bit of experimenting to get the hang of squirting in the right amount of gas without going overboard. The more headspace there is in the keg, the more room for error you have. I suggest that till you get the hang of it, you underfill your keg a little. No further than the 5L mark (or 8L if you made the bigger version)

Try not to just "pull" the trigger on the inflator... give it little "taps" instead, the pressure inside the bulb is massive and the gas goes into the keg really fast. You will probably set off the keg's relief valve a couple of times before you get the hang of it. Don't let your mates play with it at the party.

If you don't drink your whole keg, you can keep your beer carbonated and fresh with this option as only CO2 has been in contact with the beer.

- If your keg is more than half empty at the end of the night, carefully put gas into the keg until it's just short of the pressure at which the relief valve activates. If you didn't bring your pressure gauge (include it in your party keg kit next time) then even more carefully add gas till you hear the relief valve start to vent. Let a little gas out. This will get your beer back up to a good level of carbonation for next time you want to drink it. Be careful to vent a little pressure before you open the tap next time.. if the beer hadn't gone flat and the pressure is still at 20+ psi... beer will go across the room.

- If your keg is less than half full, see the instructions for "Force Carbonation with Unregulated Gas" below, for how to bring your beer back to the correct pressure for storage.

#### Pros

- Small, simple, easy, convenient
- Correct pour speed and presentation of beer.
- Beer stays fresh and well carbonated all night.
- Keg can be partially drunk and still remain good in the longer term.

#### Cons

- A bit more expensive
- Gas bulbs can be expensive
- Unregulated gas is tricky to use and takes some practise to get right
- Unregulated gas is dangerous and presents the possibility of blowing yourself up

**Safety note:** Do not, remove or modify the pressure relief valve on your keg. Make sure it is working properly, test it regularly. As jagged shards of 3mm thick plastic to the face at 100+kph often offend.....

## Option #4 – CO2 from a modified Soda Stream Cylinder (unregulated)

You will need in addition to your keg and tap –



An old soda stream and its gas cylinder. The machines can be gotten from tips, second hand shops, e-bay etc etc from about \$10.00 if you are lucky. You can swap the old cylinders for new at Big-W (and maybe some Safeways) and when you have a new cylinder you can swap empty for full at Big-W, K-Mart, some Safeways and some Coles or online at [SodaStream's website](#) for about \$12.

You also need a car tyre filler attachment from Supercheap Auto, Auto barn or K-mart etc. They will cost about \$5.

Here's how I modified mine. There are other ways too. But if you aren't completely confident you can do this safely and securely, maybe you better pick a different option. I repeat again... unregulated gas is dangerous and you need to make your own decision about working with it.



After you have the modified Sodastream up and running – then you would use it in exactly the same way as the Tyre Inflator. It's just a really really big one that's all.

You need to find some way to make sure your Soda stream remains upright. If you press the button when it's upside down or tilted too far over..... Liquid CO2 will come out and things WILL go bang

### Pros

- Lots of gas to play with, you will dispense a dozen or so 5L kegs with 1 cylinder
- Correct pour speed and presentation of beer.
- Beer stays fresh and well carbonated all night.
- Keg can be partially drunk and still remain good in the longer term.
- Cheaper than Bulbs and inflator

### Cons

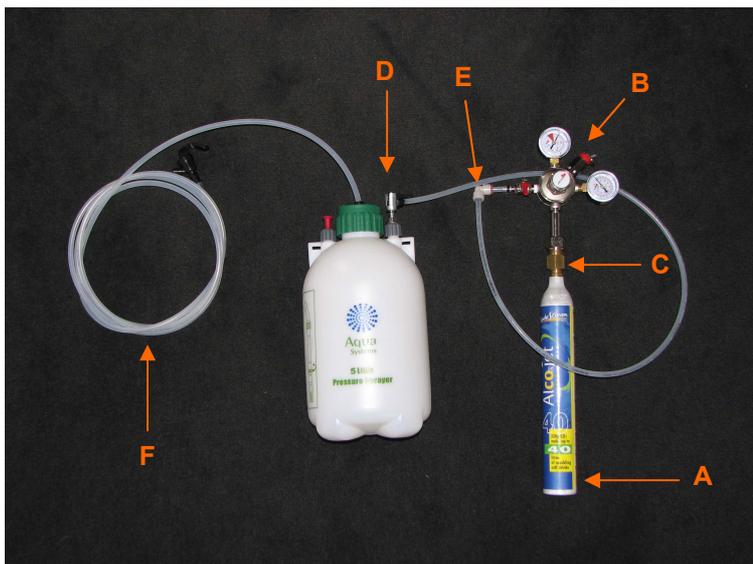
- Not "off the shelf" and therefore a little higher on the dodgy scale
- Unregulated gas is tricky to use and takes some practise to get right
- Unregulated gas is dangerous and presents the possibility of blowing yourself up

**Safety note:** Do not, remove or modify the pressure relief valve on your keg. I'm gonna keep on saying it till it absolutely sinks in. Safety valve removed = Bang + Arrrrgh + Hospital + less eyes than optimum

## Option #5 – CO2 from a Sodastream cylinder & regulator

**\*\*Spills' Gold Plated option**

You will need in addition to your keg and tap –



**A** - At least 1 x Soda Stream cylinder (not the machine this time, just the cylinder. \$33 from K-mart/Big-W with \$12 swap overs from Empty to Full

**B** - A CO2 regulator. AHB sponsors and other Homebrew shops or e-bay etc. From \$75 up to about \$150

**C** - An adapter to fit the regulator to the SS cylinder. \$37 – \$70 from some AHB sponsors and other homebrew shops

**D** - Car tyre filler from Supercheap, Autobarn, K-mart etc. About \$5.00

**E** - at least one John Guest tube to tube fitting for 8mm OD beer line. I'd get a couple. About \$4.75 from some AHB sponsors.

**F** - Up to 3meters of beer line for your tap, depending on whether you want to run the keg as part of a "balanced" draft system.

How –

Screw your Soda stream adapter to your regulator, make sure your regulator is turned completely down (off) and screw the soda stream cylinder into it. The high pressure gauge will register the pressure inside the cylinder. Vent the pressure from your party keg via the gas in valve and attach your car tyre filler to the Gas In valve – make sure you have a good tight leak proof connection, add a little food grade lubricant to make sure.

The system is now ready to pressurise and from here on in, will work in exactly the same manner as a "normal" kegging system. I suggest you read the other guides on AHB about running a balanced kegging system for all the gory details. What follows is a quick guide to using it strictly as a party system, no attempt is made to "balance" the dispense and carbonation pressures.



Use about 1.5m of beer line between your keg and tap. If you put a JG straight through connector on the line just before your tap (see picture) it means that you can swap or add lengths of beer line with ease.

After attaching your gas line to the keg, turn the regulator up till you have about 5psi of pressure in the keg

Try pouring a beer – Beer coming out too fast and foaming?? Turn the regulator down a bit and vent some gas from the keg, try again.

Beer coming out too slow and not giving any head to the beer?? Turn the pressure up a little and try again.

Keep playing with it till you get it right. The "right pressure depends on a few things, but mainly on the length of the line, so if you don't change the length of the line between the keg and the tap, the correct pressure for your different beers will be close to the same every time and you should only need minor tweaking.

As mentioned before, this option allows you to treat your party keg system in exactly the same way as a full kegging system. So if you aren't an experienced kegger I suggest you read the following AHB articles as well as anything else you can get your hands on.

[A Beginners Guide to Kegging](#)

[Balancing Draught System](#)

**Safety Note:** Even if you are using regulated gas – still don't mess with the safety relief valve. Really don't OK.

## Filling and Carbonating Options

The last section started with the assumption that your keg was full of carbonated beer. But how did it get that way?? Let's explore some options.

I will assume that we all know about sanitation and that the kegs have been thoroughly sanitised before use.

### **Option #1 (a) – You already have a full keg system at home, this thing is just for parties.**

Well, just fill it up out of the tap then. Stick the keg in the fridge for a while so it's nice and cold to reduce foaming; and pour it full like it's a giant pint. Screw on the lid, shove in the line and tap... and away you go.

### **Option #1 (b) – But I might want to keep it in there for a while...**

Then you can counter pressure fill it. There will be a few different way to make this happen, but here's how I do it.

*You will need to buy:* - about 10cm of 10mm OD beva beer line from a nice reputable homebrew shop, one of the AHB sponsors would be nice.

1. Attach a line and picnic tap to your normal corny (or whatever) keg.
2. Attach another beer line and picnic tap to your empty party keg.
3. Turn the pressure on the regulator up to 5psi more than normal and allow your corny keg to come to steady out at that pressure for a minute
4. Detach the gas from your corny keg
5. Purge the party keg with CO2 from your main system's regulator
6. Pressurise the party keg to the same pressure as the corny keg
7. Take your 10cm of beer line and jam it into the ends of both the picnic taps
8. Open first the tap that comes from your corny keg, then the tap from you party keg. The pressures should be equal, so more or less nothing should happen
9. Using the gas valve, slowly bleed gas from the party keg, as the gas comes out, beer should flow in, if you do it nice and slowly, there will be no foaming and you shouldn't lose any carbonation. Or expose you beer to any oxygen.
10. When the keg is full, flip the taps closed and pull them off the chunk of beer line connecting them.
11. Done, Don't forget to bleed a little of the pressure off till you get back to your normal pressure, the 5 psi extra is just to make sure you don't suffer from foaming or lose any gas.

### **Option #2 – I want to force carbonate in my Party Keg. (Regulated Gas)**

Your Party Keg is essentially the same as any kegging system, so if you are familiar with force carbonating in a keg, then you can simply use the methods you normally do, they should work just fine.

I use a quick shake carbonation method, because I am not 100% confident about the connection between the car tyre filler on my gas line and the car tyre valve that makes up the keg's gas in. So I don't want to have to leave the connections under pressure over a long period of time where they will be unattended.

1. Purge you keg with CO2 several times to get rid of any oxygen on there.
2. Fill your keg with un-carbonated beer. Preferably fill the keg through the Beer Out connection, but if you are careful not to splash, you can of course just open the lid and fill it from the top.
3. For the moment, you don't need the tap connected, I'd have the JG end plug in the Liquid out fitting. You can leave a beer line and tap attached, but that's a whole lot more stuff that will be flapping around when you are trying to shake the hell out of this set-up.
4. Chill your keg in the fridge overnight. Measure the temperature of your fridge, you need to know.
5. Decide the level of carbonation you want in your beer. A chart like the one in the Brewing Reckoner (see attachment in the parent pot of this document) will tell you how much pressure you need at the temperature of your beer, to achieve your desired carbonation levels.
6. Attach you gas line to your party keg, and open the valve on your gas cylinder. Adjust your regulator to the pressure you worked out in step 5 PLUS two or three psi
7. Now pick up your Party Keg and shake it around. You should be able to hear the gas bubbling into the keg as it dissolves into solution.
8. When the bubbling slows down and more or less stops... you keg is carbonated.

- Its probably a good idea to try and keep the keg a little lower than the level of your regulator while you are shaking it, that way when the pressures start to get close to each other, there is no chance that liquid might flow back through the line and get into your regulator
- *Remember to de-pressurise the keg before you try to take the end plug out of the party keg.* First - it will be really hard to take it out with pressure behind it. Second – it will shoot across the room if you do. Third – it will be followed by a stream of very wet, very foamy beer that will hit the ceiling and probably all the walls of the room you are in before you can make it stop. I would also be inclined to either have the gas valve or the relief valve cracked open at any time when you don't have a line and tap, or end plug in the Beer Out fitting. Just the bit of fizzing that will occur from the keg warming up etc will be enough to cause sufficient pressure in the keg to push beer out and make a mess.

#### **Option #4 – I want to force carbonate in my Party Keg. (un-Regulated Gas)**

You could do this with either of the un-regulated CO2 options above, but you would get through a hell of a lot of those little CO2 bulbs if you tried to do it using a bike tyre inflator... so lets just assume that you have taken on the risks of modifying a soda stream set-up and that's what you are using.

You *could* just put cold, un-carbonated beer in the keg and keep on giving it shots of CO2 and a shake till you were happy with the fizz if you have... but that's not nearly technical enough to warrant an over complicated explanation from me... so we shall ignore that option and go with the super science method.

*You will need to buy:* - (Although if you followed the instructions for Constructing a Keg, you would already have one) from autobarn/supercheap/Kmart etc etc. A normal car tyre pressure gauge. One of the pop up ones is fine, I got a dial one from a Vietnamese \$2 shop for about 5 bucks. You can see it in the photo of my old Soda stream in option #4

**Note:-** Leave a little head space in your party keg, it will make the pressure more manageable. Best to fill it only up the 5L mark, you can get away with a little more, just not all the way to the top OK.

Alright, lets go –

1. Decide how much carbonation you want in your beer. You can consult the brewing reckoner for the appropriate level of carbonation to suit your beer style.
2. Purge your keg with CO2. The most effective way to do this is to fill it with no rinse sanitiser (or boiling/boiled water) attaching the tap and pushing all the solution out of the tap with CO2 pressure. Then there is nothing in the keg but CO2. At the very least, pressurise the keg with CO2 and vent it a few times. Try to avoid any exposure of your beer to oxygen. Fill it through the beer out connection, or if you must, through the lid. Seal the keg and chill it in the fridge overnight.
3. How cold is your beer?? Measure the temperature. If you left the beer in the fridge overnight it will be the same as everything else in there, stick a thermometer in a bottle of water rather than your beer. Our example will be at 4°C
4. Consult a chart (the Brewing Reckoner) or look in pro-mash/beer smith to find out how much pressure you need, to carbonate to your desired level at that temperature.
5. Attach your gas and pressurize the keg carefully in small bursts until the pressure relief valve just starts to bleed. (you are confident that the pressure relief valve is in good working order because you have *not removed or modified it* and you check it regularly.... right??) Now disconnect the gas, pick up the keg and shake it for a minute. Repeat.
6. After the second time round, let it settle for a minute or two, then use the tyre pressure gauge to read the internal pressure of the keg, its probably still a fair bit less than your desired pressure, but we need to go a little more carefully from now on to avoid over shooting.
7. Pressurize your keg again, but this time only to 3-5psi more than your target pressure, disconnect gas and shake. Repeat this, you will need to put in less and less gas each time, until the pressure stops dropping completely and is stable at a few PSI above your target pressure.

**Your beer is now carbonated to you desired level....** yes I know you are a few psi higher than your original target, but with all the grabbing measuring and shaking, you are also probably a couple of degrees warmer than when you started as well. It will be pretty close to right.

Store the beer at that pressure till you want to drink it. When you do, if you don't get through all the beer and you want to make sure the carbonation level is OK for next time you drink it, just a couple rounds of the - measure/pressurise/shake/measure – routine will get it back to where it started and you will be right to go next time.

## Option #5 – I want to naturally carbonate inside my party keg

**\*\*Thirsty's recommended option for bloody minded masochists**

God knows why you would want to do this, it's a pain in the bum, only going to be successful in certain circumstances or with much bugging about and when you make it work... the second you pick up the Party Keg to take it to a party... you will stir up a bunch of yeast and have cloudy beer. You'll only use it for Hefeweizens you say? So the yeast doesn't matter!! Well - it wont work for Hefes buddy. Let me explain why.

*You will need to buy:-* Some sugar to prime your keg with

OK, remember that the pressure you need to apply to a beer to get it carbonated to a certain level, is dependent on its temperature. Nice and easy when you are carbonating beer in a corny keg that's at 4°C. The keg will hold a 100psi and you can chill it down, you could carbonate it to 10volumes of C02 if you wanted. But... your party keg wont hold that much pressure, it should only be good for somewhere around 20-25psi... If yours is holding significantly more than that.... It shouldn't and you need to check the pressure relief valve. For the rest of this argument I am going to assume that the Party Kegs will only hold 20psi.

So what?? 20psi is more than enough to carbonate a beer at fridge temperatures right up to 3+ volumes of C02 and that's as high as needed for any of the styles. Right? Well, yep, that is right. BUT.....

You are *naturally* carbonating, not force carbonating, which means you need active yeast to make your C02 for you; and at average fridge temperatures, your yeast isn't going to be doing much at all apart from lying on the bottom of the keg in an unappealing brown layer. So your beer need to be warmer to get your C02. Lets say that you can coax some action out of the yeast at down to 15°C, they generate C02 and it dissolves into your beer. Trouble is, that the beer will only hold a certain amount of C02 at the 15°C temperature unless its under pressure.

The most pressure it can be under is 20psi and at 20psi & 15°C the most C02 that will dissolve is 2.3volumes. Not too bad... that'll do for a fair variety of beers, but you need to make sure the keg stays at 15°C, let it warm up to 20° just once; and all the gas will come out of solution, the pressure will rise and the gas will escape via the relief valve and you will be left with only 2 volumes, which is kinda flat by lager standards. OK for real ales etc but not for the standard Aussie expectations of fizz.

You can do better with lager yeasts and controlled temperatures down to 8 or 9... you could even carbonate up to close to 2.7-2.8.

If you insist on giving it a go...

Prime your beer with an appropriate amount of sugar for the carbonation level you want. Seal the lid of the keg and install the end plug into the bulkhead fitting. Shake it up and stand it in a 15°C location for 3 or 4 weeks (it will take longer to carbonate at the lower temperature) if it's a lager, put it in a 10°C location instead.

Before serving, chill the keg down for a few days in the fridge, de-pressurise it, remove the end plug and attach your beer line and tap. If you are really careful not to disturb the keg, with the first beer or two you pour, you might be able to suck all the yeast out of whichever of the kegs "feet" the diptube is in, and you will be able to pour clear beer from there. Otherwise its cloudy brew for you.

**Don't even think about removing the safety valve to get around the natural carbonation issue...** that would leave you with the possibility of a 7kg bottle bomb... do you really want your family and friends standing around that at your next BBQ?

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Anyway, that's about all the different ways I can think of to use one of these little plastic numbers. Hopefully I've covered the option you want to use, if not, shoot me a message and I'll see what I can think up.

Happy Drinking

Thirsty