

# The science of turning plants into booze

By Chris Mooney, Mother Jones

It's the 4th of July, and you love your country. Your likely next step: Get ready for the fireworks and drink a lot of beer.

But that last word ought to trouble you a little. Beer? Is that really the best you can do? Isn't it a little, er, uncreative?

Amy Stewart has some better ideas for you. Author of the New York Times bestselling book "The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create The World's Great Drinks", she's a master of the wild diversity of ways in which, since time immemorial, human civilizations (virtually all of them) have created alcoholic drinks from the sugars of their native plants.

"We have really good evidence – like analyzing the residue on pottery shards– really good evidence of people making some kind of alcoholic beverage going back at least 10,000 years, and probably much longer than that," says Stewart on the latest episode of the Inquiring Minds podcast.

In other words, human beings pretty much always find a way when it comes to getting hammered. Indeed, you could argue that learning how to do so was one of the first human sciences. In a sense, it's closely akin to capturing and using solar energy: Making alcohol, too, hinges upon tapping into the power created by the sun.

"It is not much of an exaggeration to claim that the very process that gives us the raw ingredients for brandy and beer is the same one that sustains life on the planet," writes Stewart in "The Drunken Botanist".

