



Flavored Vinegars

Vinegars have been made and used to flavor food for thousands of years. In fact, traces of vinegar have been found in Egyptian urns dating back to 3,000 BCE. Vinegars are made by allowing bacteria called *Acetobacter aceti* to ferment diluted wine, ale, fruits or grains. This creates acetic acid, which gives the liquid a sour flavor. The vinegar we buy in the store is from 4-6 percent acetic acid and 94-96 percent water.

Flavored vinegars can add variety to your family's meals, and making them is an easy and safe process, provided a few simple precautions are followed. All you need are herbs, vinegars, juices, fruits, spices and sugar.

INGREDIENTS, SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT

Be sure to choose a high-quality, commercially produced vinegar to use as the base. Several types of vinegars that will give you different flavors are available.

- **Distilled white vinegar** is clear in color and has a sharp, acidic taste by itself. It is the best choice for delicately flavored herbs.
- **Apple cider vinegar** has a milder taste than distilled white vinegar but the amber color and fruity taste may be preferred with some flavors. Apple cider vinegar blends best with fruits.
- **Wine and champagne vinegars** are generally more expensive than distilled and cider vinegars, but they are more delicate in flavor. White wine and champagne vinegars work well with delicate herbs and lighter-flavored fruits. Red wine vinegars can work well with spices and strong herbs like rosemary, but they will mask the flavor of most herbs.



- **Rice vinegar** is a mild, slightly sweet vinegar used occasionally for flavoring.

Other specialty vinegars can be used, such as ume plum, sherry, balsamic and malt vinegars, but their strong or distinct flavors require care when matching with other ingredients.

Be aware that wine, rice and specialty vinegars contain some protein, which provides an excellent me-

dium for bacterial growth if not handled and stored properly. For added safety, use only commercially produced vinegars.

Favorite fruits for flavoring vinegars are raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, peaches, pears and the peel of lemons and oranges. Wild Alaska berries, such as blueberries, huckleberries, thimbleberries and nagoonberries, among many others, are excellent choices. Favorite vegetables include garlic cloves, jalapeño or other peppers, and green onions. Many herbs, such as rosemary, thyme, basil and tarragon, are also used.

Thoroughly wash and dry all fruits, berries, vegetables and herbs before use. Whole berries can be used and small fruits may be left whole or halved. Larger fruits and vegetables should be sliced or cubed. Allow 1 cup of fruit, vegetables or berries per pint of vinegar to start, but feel free to reduce or increase to suit your taste. Aromatic vegetables like garlic and peppers should be cut but left in large pieces if you do not want them to pour out with the vinegar during use. They should also be used sparingly, based on your taste and the strength of the vegetable's flavor. Sprigs of fresh herbs — or dried herbs — can be used.

Edible flowers, such as nasturtiums and chive blossoms, can also be used to flavor vinegars. For example, nasturtiums produce a peppery-flavored vinegar with a beautiful orange color.

MAKING FLAVORED VINEGARS

To make flavored vinegars, you'll need glass bowls or plastic food-safe containers, measuring cups and spoons, and cheesecloth for straining. Canning jars with two-piece lids and a boiling water canner will be needed if you wish to preserve your flavored vinegar without refrigeration to give it as shelf-stable gifts.

If using glass jars or bottles, make sure they are free of cracks or nicks and can be sealed with corks, screw-on caps or two-piece canning lids. Lids should be non-corrosive metal, plastic, or new, sterilized corks.

Begin the preparation with clean equipment and supplies. If using glass containers for steeping, sterilize them by heating in boiling water for 10 minutes. Place your chosen base vinegar in a saucepan and



bring to 190° Fahrenheit, or a point just short of boiling. Pour hot vinegar over flavoring ingredients in a sterilized glass container and steep in a cool, dark place. Flavored vinegars take at least 10 days for most flavors to develop and about 3 to 4 weeks for the greatest flavor to be extracted. However, desired flavors are a matter of personal taste. Crushing, “bruising” or chopping berries, fruits, herbs and vegetables before adding them to the vinegar can shorten the flavoring process. To check product development, place a few drops on a piece of bread and taste to evaluate flavoring. If it is too weak, leave it to steep longer. If the flavor is too strong, dilute with more of the foundation vinegar.

Because vinegars are highly acidic, mold rarely occurs during steeping, but make sure all equipment is clean before starting and keep the vinegar covered during the steeping period to keep mold spores from contaminating the product. If the steeping or finished vinegar ever has mold on it or in it or shows signs of fermentation, such as bubbling, cloudiness or sliminess, throw it away without using any of it for any purpose.

Simple herb vinegar: For each pint of distilled white or wine vinegar, place 3-4 sprigs of fresh herbs or 2-3 tablespoons dry herbs in a jar and pour almost-boiling vinegar over the top. Allow to steep in a cool place for 3 to 4 weeks. At the end of this time, strain the vinegar through cheesecloth and discard the herbs. The flavor has been extracted and the herbs may be unattractive at this point. You can put fresh herbs in the vinegar for an attractive presentation.

For refrigerated storage, pour the vinegar into sterilized bottles or jars. For shelf-stable storage, pour vin-

egar into pint-sized canning jars with two-piece lids and process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes.

Herbal mix vinegar: For each pint of distilled white or wine vinegar, make a bouquet from three sprigs each of fresh parsley, rosemary and thyme. Lightly crush and place in jars. Pour almost-boiling vinegar over the top and allow to steep in a cool place for 3 to 4 weeks. When steeping is done, follow the “simple herb vinegar” finishing and storage directions.

Flower blossom vinegar: To make vinegar with edible flowers, fill a sterilized jar or bottle with blossoms and pour almost-boiling vinegar over them. Let sit undisturbed for 10 days to 4 weeks to develop flavor. You can remove or keep the flowers, as you choose. Keep vinegars made with this method tightly covered in the refrigerator until all the vinegar is used.

Lemon-dill-peppercorn vinegar: For each pint jar of distilled white vinegar, use the spiral peel (colored part only) of 1 lemon, 4 sprigs of fresh dill and ½ teaspoon of whole black peppercorns. Place the fresh dill, peppercorns and lemon peel in a jar. Pour almost-boiling vinegar over the top and let steep for 3 to 4 weeks. This is especially good in marinades for fresh seafood or in salad dressings. Keep vinegars made with this method tightly covered in the refrigerator until all the vinegar is used.

Variation: Use ¼ cup chopped fresh mint instead of the dill and peppercorns to add a mint flavor to fresh fruit.

Raspberry vinegar: For 6 cups of white wine vinegar, put 1 pint of raspberries in a nonreactive container. Pour almost-boiling vinegar over berries and steep for one hour. Shake gently and cover. Steep for 4 days, shaking occasionally. Strain the berries out and transfer the vinegar to jars, flasks or bottles. Keep tightly covered in the refrigerator, or for shelf-stable storage, pour vinegar into pint-sized canning jars with two-piece lids and process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes.

Blueberry basil vinegar: Combine 4 cups of blueberries and 1 cup of white wine vinegar in a glass bowl. Lightly crush blueberries and add 3 more cups of vinegar. Crush 1 cup of basil and add to vinegar along with the zest from one lemon. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and let steep in a cool, dark place for 4 weeks, stirring every 2 or 3 days. Strain vinegar through several layers of cheesecloth. Keep tightly

covered in the refrigerator or, for shelf-stable storage, pour vinegar into pint-sized canning jars with two-piece lids and process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes

Lingonberry orange vinegar: Combine 1 cup of lingonberry juice and 1 cup of sugar in a large saucepan. Heat over medium heat until all the sugar is dissolved. Add 3 cups white wine vinegar and ½ cup lingonberries. Add 2 sticks cinnamon and 4 whole cloves, tied in a spice bag. Bring the vinegar to a boil and reduce heat and simmer, covered, 10 minutes. Remove spice bag and place an orange slice in each jar. Keep tightly covered in the refrigerator, or for shelf-stable storage, pour vinegar into pint-sized canning jars with two-piece lids and process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes

STORING AND USING FLAVORED VINEGAR

Freshly steeped flavored vinegar should keep for up to 3 months in cool storage, but refrigeration is best for maximum retention of freshness and flavors. Store jars of water-bath processed flavored vinegars in a cool, dark place until opened. Date the bottles or jars when they are opened. Fruit vinegars in particular may start to brown and change flavor after 3 months in cool storage, though refrigeration may extend the quality for 6 to 8 months. Always keep vinegar bottles tightly sealed. After 6 months, taste open bottles and jars of vinegar before using to make sure the flavor is still good.

Vinegars can be combined with a small amount of oil and used as salad dressings, in marinades and as a refreshing beverage when combined with club soda. Experiment with your favorite herbs and fruits to develop your own recipes, or try these favorites.

RESOURCES

Andress, E. L., & Harrison, J. A. (2020). So Easy to Preserve (Publication No. B 989). University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

“Using Alaska’s Wild Berries and Other Wild Edibles,” University of Alaska Cooperative Extension Service, FNH-00120

“Flavored Vinegars,” Clemson Cooperative Extension Service, HGIC 3470

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