



Pucker Up for Homemade Vinegar
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UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County

Homemade fruit and herb vinegars give your food an extra burst of flavor, and condiments and chutneys dazzle and accent your main dishes. Join the UCCE Master Food Preservers on Tuesday, September 9, and Saturday, September 13, for a free class featuring Vinegars, Condiments, and Chutneys.

Use these general guidelines to make your own herb or fruit infused vinegars.

Herbs

Use 3-4 sprigs per pint (2 cups) of vinegar. If using basil, use ½ cup of coarsely chopped leaves. Wash fresh herbs and blot dry; then sanitize them by dipping them in a bleach solution of 1 teaspoon of household chlorine bleach in 6 cups of water. Rinse thoroughly under cold water and pat dry with clean paper towels. If you would like to use dried herbs instead, use 3 tablespoons of dried herbs per pint of vinegar, and skip the sanitizing.

Fruits, Vegetables, and Spices

Flavorings can include raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, peaches, pears, lemon peel, orange peel, garlic cloves, jalapeno, green onions, peppercorns, and mustard seeds, and others. Sometimes the fruit is combined with herbs or spices such as mint, tarragon, and cinnamon.

Wash all fruits and vegetables, and peel if necessary. Cube, slice, halve, or leave whole. Use 1 to 2 cups of fruit per pint of vinegar, or the peel of one orange or lemon per pint of vinegar.

Vinegar

Different kinds of vinegars produce different results. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension explains the difference in vinegars:

“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 may not be desirable. Apple cider vinegar blends best with fruits. Wine and champagne vinegars are generally more expensive than distilled and cider vinegars, but are more delicate in flavor. White wine and champagne

vinegars work well with delicate herbs and lighter-flavored fruits. Red wine vinegar would work well with spices and strong herbs like rosemary, but will mask the flavor of most herbs. Rice vinegar is a mild, slightly sweet vinegar used occasionally for flavoring. Be aware that wine and rice vinegars contain some protein that provides an excellent medium for bacterial growth, if not handled and stored properly. For added safety, use only commercially produced vinegars.”

Method to Flavor Vinegar

Start with clean glass jars or bottles. After washing them in warm soapy water, rinse them, and then sterilize them by immersing them completely in boiling water for ten minutes.

You can choose to lightly bruise your fresh herbs and berries to release the volatile oils and flavors. With citrus peel, use only the colored portion, avoiding the bitter white pith. Try to cut in a continuous spiral for easy removal from the jar after the infusion.

Place your herbs, fruits, and/or spices in hot sterilized jars.

Heat your chosen vinegar to just below boiling, or at least 190-195 degrees Fahrenheit. Pour the heated vinegar over the flavoring ingredients in the jars, leaving ¼” headspace. Wipe rims of jars with a clean, damp cloth. Attach lids and let sit to cool, undisturbed.

Store vinegar in a cool dark place, undisturbed, for at least 10 days but up to 3 to 4 weeks to develop flavors. Bruising fruit and berries can reduce infusion time by about 1 week. If flavor is too strong, dilute with additional vinegar. Strain the vinegar through a damp cheesecloth or coffee filter one or more times until the vinegar shows no cloudiness. Discard the fruit, herbs, and vegetables.

Prepare and sanitize additional jars and lids for final bottling. Pour the strained flavored vinegar into clean sterilized jars and cap tightly. A few clean berries or a washed and sanitized sprig of fresh herb may be added to the jars before closing, if you wish.

Store the flavored vinegars in a cool, dark place. Refrigeration is best for retention of freshness and flavors. Flavored vinegars should keep for up to 3 months in cool storage. Fruit vinegars in particular may start to brown and change flavor noticeably. Refrigeration of all flavored vinegars may extend the quality for 6 to 8 months. After 6 months, taste the vinegar before using to make sure the flavor is still good. If a flavored vinegar ever has mold on or in it, or signs of fermentation such as bubbling, cloudiness or sliminess, throw it away without tasting or using any of the vinegar for any purpose.

Sources: http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/uga_flavored_vinegars.pdf and http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/food_safety/preservation/hgic3470.html .

This year’s annual series of free UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County classes are from 10 a.m. to noon in the El Dorado County Fairground’s Boardroom at 100 Placerville Drive in Placerville. Master Food Preservers are also available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506. For more information about the public education

classes and activities, go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on facebook too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!