

CREATING YOUR OWN HERBAL LIQUEURS

By Julie Krist for H-S-A Conference 6/5/09

This is a great way to experiment with your own herb blends and who knows, you may create a liqueur that will become famous someday.

INGREDIENTS:

Alcohol: In most cases, the better the quality of your base alcohol the better your finished product.

Vodka - use 80 proof - Good vodka should be colorless, odorless and have no flavor of its own. Smoothness is what you want and you won't get that with 5-O'Clock Vodka.

Pure Grain Alcohol - use 180 to 190 proof which you will dilute half-and-half with water. All brands are the same.

Brandy - Choose a good-tasting brandy, but not fruit flavored which competes with the flavors you are adding. You don't need rare, aged or costly brandies.

Cognac - fine French Brandy from Cognac, France for great tasting Vanilla Extract.

Flavorings: Be sure that the herbs, spices, fruits, flowers and leaves you are using have been grown without the use of pesticides or harmful chemicals. This is when growing your own products really pays off.

Fruits - Make your fruit liqueurs as each fruit comes into season.

Fruit Peel - Also called zest. Wash citrus fruits very well and use only the thin outer portion of the peel and not the white portion.

Seeds, Herbs and Spices - Always use the freshest and best quality available.

Glycerin - Odorless, colorless, syrupy liquid prepared by the hydrolysis of fats and oils. It gives body to thin liqueurs and adds smoothness to the taste. Some liqueurs need more than others, but not more than 1 tablespoon per quart of liqueur. Some liqueurs have enough smoothness on their own so don't add glycerin.

Water: You have the best quality control in liqueur making when you use distilled water, since it has no taste to compete with the flavors you add.

EQUIPMENT: Most of the equipment you need you probably already have in your kitchen.

Aging Containers Glass jars with lids, ceramic crocks with lids, glass bottles with screw-on-lids, corks or glass stoppers.

Strainers: Metal colander, fine wire-mesh strainer, jelly-bag, natural cotton, muslin or linen, cheesecloth and natural/brown paper coffee filters.

Miscellaneous: Wooden spoon, glass or metal measuring cups and spoons and metal funnel. **Note: No plastic as it can impart an "off" flavor to liqueurs.**

DECANTERS AND BOTTLES:

You will need an assortment of bottles and or decanters to hold your finished product.

Cleaning: Be sure your bottles are very clean. Soak in hot soapy water and scrub with a bottlebrush. Rinse thoroughly by slowly filling with boiling water until you are sure that no residue is left. Set aside until they are totally dry.

Lids / Corks: Must be as clean as the bottle they cover. If your bottle has a cork stopper, be sure that it doesn't have a leftover scent from the original product. You can buy new corks and stoppers at hardware stores and that is usually the best way to go. Glass stoppers can easily be cleaned and reused.

Gift Bottles: You can use small bottles from wine coolers and condiments. Look for glass decanters at garage sales. Have your friends save their empty liqueur bottles for you. Of course, today you can also find a great selection of interesting bottles in many stores.

TWO BASIC METHODS FOR MAKING LIQUEURS AT HOME

Simple Sugar Method

2 parts sugar to 1 part water
Boil and stir to dissolve sugar
Cool and add flavor and alcohol
Age, strain and bottle

Steeping Method

1 fifth alcohol
2 cups granulated sugar
4 cups herbs, spices or fruit etc
Steep 6 mo. Tip weekly until sugar dissolves
Cover jar with plastic wrap and then metal lid.

Aging This stage in liqueur making is absolutely essential for good quality and taste in your product. Aging removes the raw edge of the alcohol, gives mellowness and professional quality to your liqueur. These traits only develop with time. Most liqueurs will be at their best after 1 year and will stay at their best for about 3 years. Doubling, tripling or halving the recipe will not affect the aging time.

Straining This is a necessary process in making your liqueurs. Depending on your flavoring ingredients you may begin this process with a metal strainer to remove the large pieces and then repeat using a fine mesh strainer, cloth jelly bag etc. or my favorite brown/natural paper coffee filters. This will take time. Don't rush it by stirring or squeezing the filter to hurry up the flow of liquid. I like to use a coffee filter, which I place in a funnel for support. I then fill it with the liqueur and go do something else while it drains through. Depending on how much sediment is in the filter I may change it after each filling.

Siphoning: This process may be necessary. During aging, some liqueurs form a layer of clear liquid and a second cloudy layer. Straining will not totally solve this problem. Siphoning is much more effective. Use a piece of plastic tubing 20 to 24 inches long. Place one end in the liqueur about ½ inch above the sediment. Suck gently on the other end until the liquid fills the tube. With your finger on the end place the tube in a clean empty bottle and at the same time raise the bottle of liqueur so the layer of sediment is 4 inches above the empty bottle. Allow the clear liqueur to drain off. To stop the flow, lower the full bottle so the liquid levels are the same. Discard the sediment and plastic tube as in the process it has absorbed the flavor of the liqueur.

A book on liqueur making which I have found very useful is **Classic Liqueurs by Cheryl Long and Heather Kibbey**, 2004, Sibyl Pub. ISBN 39781889531069. It gives you the basics of liqueur making and recipes for many well-known liqueurs available on the shelves today.

USES FOR LIQUEURS

Of course drinking these wonderful creations before and after a meal goes without saying. Don't forget to add a dash to your coffee, pour over ice cream or fruit, add to marinades, and de-glaze a pan or use in place of vanilla. You can also pour your liqueur directly into a dish you are cooking and boil 1 minute to impart a mellow flavor. Many of your favorite recipes call for these delightful ingredients. For example, it has been said, "Benedictine is the spice rack in a bottle" and it is used from appetizers to desserts. Check out your local liquor store for miniature bottles if your recipe only calls for a tablespoon or so and you aren't sure that you want to end up with a large expensive bottle that might become a lifetime supply. But best of all is creating liqueurs using your own blends and flavorings to share with your family and friends. I would like to share with you some of the herbal liqueur and beverage recipes that I have created over the years as well as some recipes created by others, which I have come to enjoy.

RECIPES FOR HERBAL LIQUEURS AND BEVERAGES

Black or Red Raspberry Liqueur by Julie Krist

4 cups fresh whole berries

2 cups sugar

1 fifth of vodka (I use Absolut)

Combine all ingredients in a glass jar with non-metal lid. Let stand about 6 months tipping jar about once a week until the sugar is dissolved. Next strain and bottle. Use the whole berries that you have strained out to put over ice cream. Liqueur soaked berries keep very well in the refrigerator.

Homemade Vanilla Extract by Julie Krist

12 vanilla beans, 4 T. Grand Marnier, 1 fifth of very good French Bandy (Buy online for best price) (Don't substitute) (I use Chalfonte V.S.O.P.)

Cut the vanilla beans in quarters lengthwise. Put all ingredients in a ½ gallon jar and let stand at least 3 months (the longer the better). Strain out beans and save. Pour into small gift bottles. Makes 16 -4 ounce bottles for your favorite cooks. Tip: Set the vanilla beans out to dry and then add to your sugar container. This can be drunk as a liqueur or used in recipes calling for vanilla extract

Herb Cordial by Julie Krist

½ cup honey, 2-4" cinnamon sticks, ¼ t. whole cloves, zest of ½ lemon, 1 cup sugar, 1 whole nutmeg, 3 whole allspice, zest of ½ orange, ½ cup water, 7-cardamom pods crushed, ½ vanilla bean cut lengthwise, ¼ t. caraway seeds, 2-½ cups very good vodka

Simmer all ingredients, except the vodka for 15 minutes. Cool. Pour into a glass container along with the vodka. Let stand 3 weeks. Strain and leave until clear. You may need to siphon, if it develops the layer of sediment.

Basil Liqueur from Narni, Italia 1996 by way of Dolly Teece, Golena, MO

30 fresh basil leaves

1-liter alcohol

5 t. glycerin

2 liters water

500 grams granulated sugar

Mix together in a large glass jar. Shake jar everyday for 20 days. Strain and pour into small bottles.

Peaches by the Pitcher by Julie Krist

2 cups fresh peaches plus 1 peach pit ¼ cup sugar
2 T. fresh lime juice 1 liter bottle of chilled seltzer
1 bottle of dry white wine fresh mint leaves for garnish

Peel and slice peaches. Puree peaches with sugar and lime juice. (Note: When peaches are plentiful I make up a number of batches with just these first 3 ingredients and freeze for use later in the year.) Put peach puree in a pitcher and add the peach pit. Slowly add seltzer and wine. Stir and pour into glasses spooning in pulp. Note: This can be made with light canned peaches and no sugar when fresh peaches aren't available.

Mulled Wine or Apple Cider by Julie Krist

1 medium orange ½ cup dark brown sugar 2 t. ground allspice
2 small whole nutmegs 2-2" cinnamon sticks 12 whole cloves
½ gallon of burgundy or dry red wine or fresh apple cider

Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Cut orange in half and scoop out pulp. Place a ball of aluminum foil inside each orange half. Place orange halves on a baking sheet and dry in the oven 4 to 5 hours. Remove foil and dry an additional 15 minutes. Note: I do about a dozen oranges at a time as they keep well.) Combine brown sugar and allspice. Divide the mixture and pack in orange halves. Decorate tops by placing a cinnamon stick down the center making sure there is space for the nutmeg at the top of the stick. Place 3 cloves on each side of the cinnamon stick. Grate the nutmeg flat on one long side and place the grated side down just above the cinnamon stick. You have created a cute little bug, which you now wrap tightly with plastic wrap. Tie onto either a 750 ml bottle of burgundy or dry red wine or a ½ gal of fresh apple cider. Be sure to include the recipe and this will make a great hostess gift. When ready to serve unwrap "the bug" place it in a large pan with the wine or cider and simmer slowly 15 minutes.

Lemon-Rose Cordial by Marian Gonsior

2 cups spring water 3 cups granulated sugar
1 ½ cups fresh Rose Geranium leaves and stems or insecticide-free rose petals packed
1-cup fresh lemon verbena or lemon balm leaves packed or lemongrass chopped
3 cups vodka 1 medium whole lemon

Heat sugar, water, 1 cup of Rose Geranium leaves and stems and ½ cup lemon verbena leaves until boiling. Stir until sugar is completely dissolved, cool and strain through a coffee filter. Add remaining amounts of herb and the lemon slices. Pour into jug and cover top with plastic wrap and cap. Let set 3 weeks, inverting and returning the jar upright every third day. After the aging process, carefully strain the liqueur through a coffee filter into a fancy decanter or wine bottle, which you have sterilized. Fit with a new cork. This recipe is from: *The Everything Christmas Book*, Chapter 13 Gifts from the Kitchen by Marian Gonsior.

Thunder of Zeus in honor of the Gwen Barclay and the late Madalene Hill. This is their version from a recipe in *Herbally Yours*, a cookbook published by the Southern California Unit of The Herb Society of America and as printed in *The Herb Companion* Dec/Jan 1991.

1 liter very good brandy 2 T. whole coriander seed 1 T. whole cumin seed
6 whole cloves 1 - 2" cinnamon stick 2 cups sugar
2 cups water 1 bottle very good dry white wine ½ vanilla bean, split

Carefully warm the brandy to 115 degrees. Bruise the spices and seeds and add them to the hot liqueur. Pour into a bottle, seal, and store in a cool, dark place for at least 1 month. When ready, dissolve sugar in water and add the vanilla bean. Add the aged brandy mixture and white wine, then rebottle, seal and age for another month. Strain through a coffee filter; pour it into bottles, seal and store in a cool dark place until you are ready to enjoy this very special liqueur.