



Taste of Summer During Winter Months

By Sue Mosbacher, UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County

Winter is in full swing and the warmth of summer seems so far away. Would you like to experience a taste of summer with an easy food preservation technique? Make colorful and delicious flavored vinegars to enhance your meals with fresh or frozen fruit and just a few minutes of work.

Experiment with different flavors using small batches to find your favorite flavors. Reach into your freezer for frozen fruit, grab a bottle of vinegar, sterilize a glass jar, and you're ready to go.

Getting Ready

1. Clean your work area and your hands.
2. Wash glass jars to get the dust out then boil the jars for 10 minutes in a pot with a rack on the bottom to sterilize them. Keep the jars in hot water until ready to fill. Use any size and type of glass jar as long as it will withstand the boiling water. Canning jars work best.
3. Wash the lid(s) in scalding water. This is a good project for used canning lids, plastic lids, or re-usable commercial jar lids.
4. Rinse/peel your fruit if needed; no need to thaw it if frozen. Chop larger fruit pieces into smaller sections.
5. Select your vinegar, making sure it has at least 5% acidity. The acidity is what keeps pathogens from growing and spoiling the food. I prefer using distilled white wine and champagne vinegars because they are more flavorful than plain white vinegar.

Process

1. Heat the vinegar to almost boiling (190°F).
2. Put the fruit in empty, hot, sterile jars. The basic ratio is 1-2 cups of fruit per pint of vinegar. If making a smaller batch, do the math and reduce quantities appropriately. Slightly crush berries to release more flavor.

3. Put lids on clean jar rims. Make sure the fruit/vinegar mixture doesn't touch metal lids. Cool the jar on the counter and then store it in a cool, dry, dark place. It takes at least 10 days for most flavors to develop; 3-4 weeks is best. The smaller the pieces, the faster the vinegar absorbs the flavor.
4. How do you know it's done? Taste it! If you like it, it's ready. If you waited too long and the flavor is too strong, add more vinegar.
5. Strain out the fruit and pour the final flavored vinegar into clean, sterilized jars and cap tightly.

These are the highlights of the process; download detailed directions for fruit and herb flavored vinegars at the National Center for Home Food Preservation at http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/uga_flavored_vinegars.pdf.

Storage and Usage

1. Store tightly sealed jars in a cool, dry, dark place for 3 months in the cupboard and 6-8 months in the refrigerator.
2. If you see any signs of mold, toss the flavored vinegar.
3. Use flavored vinegars in salad dressings, fruit dips, meat sauces, and my favorite - fruit shrubs.

You can find lots of recipes for making shrub drinks that mix everything at one time. The sample recipe below uses pre-made flavored vinegar. When sweetened with sugar and diluted with sparkling water, the taste is crisp and refreshing. I had this drink at a foodie fundraiser and went back for refills on the shrub drink more than I did for the food! It's bursting with flavor and I look forward to drinking it all year long using my stock of flavored vinegars. Enjoy!

Fruit Flavored Shrub Syrup

2 cups fruit flavored vinegar

1-1/2 to 2 cups sugar

Sparkling water

1. Sterilize a glass jar large enough to hold the flavored vinegar and sugar. Wash the lid and ring in hot, soapy water. Rinse well.
2. Heat the fruit flavored vinegar and sugar to just below boiling (190°F). Pour the shrub syrup into the sterilized jar, leaving enough headspace that the syrup won't touch the lid. Wipe the rim and cap tightly.
3. Refrigerate the shrub syrup. Tightly sealed, it can last up to 6 months. Taste it before using to make sure the flavor is still good. Discard immediately if it has mold or any signs of fermentation.
4. To serve, mix 8 ounces of shrub syrup with 24 ounces of sparkling water. Taste and add more syrup or sparkling water, as desired.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmp@ucanr.edu and a Master Food Preserver will return your call or email. The Master Food Preservers are also available to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the UCCE Master Food Preserver website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmp>. Sign up to receive our ENewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!