

## Vinegar For Life (and Olive!)

Ranch is out. Thousand Island is for Big Macs....Italian and French? Those are for people who aren't worried about the dollar vs. Euro exchange rate. Vinegars in all shapes, flavors and sizes are making an expeditious entrée into chef's kitchens and everyday pantries—moving beyond traditional balsamics and onto our palates conjuring memories of strawberry fields forever and tropical moonlit nights.

Consider for a moment some historical facts about vinegar, the word itself coming from the French word “vinaigre”, meaning “sour wine.” Its uses and offerings go back thousands of years: Hippocrates is said to have prescribed it for certain ailments, Helen of Troy bathed in vinegar to relax (!), Ceasar's armies drank vinegar to avoid dehydration and people rubbed vinegar over their skin as a germ protectant during the Bubonic Plague. The Babylonians are the first to have actually used vinegar as a preservative for pickling food.

Finally, fast forward to our technologically advanced 21<sup>st</sup> century and discover that all the cool electronic kitchen widgets, stainless steel must-haves, Vikings, Wolves and Kitchen-Aids don't hold the most primitive candle to...vinegars! Convince yourself even to pry away from your tedious reliance on balsamic. Balsamic *is* incredibly delicious...but the “real” stuff should contain the words “aceto balsamico tradizionale” on a bottle and it will have

been aged for at least 10 years—some even for 50 or even 100 years.

Authentic balsamics are super expensive due to their tedious production.

Trebbiano white grape juice is aged by continual transferring from different kinds of wooden barrels that impart distinctive flavors and dense coloring.

Truly to be savored, yes, but balsamic is becoming common and these are *uncommon*, ground-breaking times...

Suppose you replace lemon, called for in any recipe with pomegranate, mango, pineapple, blood orange, strawberry, fig, raspberry, passion fruit or green apple with ginger, infused champagne or balsamic fruit vinegars. Try replacing 1/3 of the water with your favorite Global Gardens fruit vinegar when making rice—my favorites for rice are the Pear with Tamarind, Mango and Fig Balsamic. Shake the all natural, fruity goodness from the bottom of the bottle before adorning your next meal with a reduction made by simply bringing the fruit vinegar to a fast boil, then watching it thicken to your heartbeat's quickening desire, reducing to about 50%. Drizzle this simple but exquisite concoction over veggies, brie cheese, seafood, chicken, pork, beef, gelato(anything!) for a new sweet and sour tangy thrill. There is such a mystique about reduction glazes while, honestly, all they take is about 15 minutes and a bit of vigilant stirring so they don't stick to the bottom of your pan.

Add a tablespoon of any of the above infused vinegars to water when you are par boiling ribs or meat for stews; even the toughest meats will become fork-cuttingly tender! Homemade breads and rolls will shine with playful twinkles when brushed, just before they are finished baking. Make a cake super moist by adding a tablespoon of, say, pomegranate vinegar to chocolate cake mix—or mango, strawberry, raspberry, fig?

Now, take a can of tuna fish; boring? No more! Use two tablespoons of your favorite fruit flavored vinegar; add capers, cilantro, boiled egg, salt and fresh ground pepper...even some chunks of the fruit itself if you have it. Voila—nicoise salad transforms before your pupils by adding boiled redskin potatoes and some farmer's market salad greens.

Fruit vinegars “should be” stored in a cool dry place. When they come in pretty bottles I keep them on the counter and they get used up in no time, staying super fresh if they are not exposed to direct light. Most commercially produced fruit infused vinegars are filtered—or put into dark bottles. I use clear glass and non-filtered fruit in my champagne-infused vinegars because the colors are simply sumptuous, reminding me of their fresh beginnings. Shaking them up once in awhile (not necessary if you use them about 1x/week) will keep them fresh; I do not suggest putting them in the refrigerator because the acid from the vinegar will maintain the stabilization...and—horrors!—they will be forgotten amongst the mayo,

ketchup and your great aunt's persimmon, pumpernickel chutney that never made it past the thermostatic control.

Fruit vinegar possibilities are endless but my space here is limited. Last, never least—please know that beloved olives (and pimento peppers) will keep indefinitely when covered with vinegar and refrigerated; mmmm, how about blood orange vinegar over some green olives sprinkled with dried herbs and honeyed orange rinds; I'm in olive! And I hope you will be too.

Theo Stephan makes over a dozen fruit-infused champagne vinegars that can be tasted at the Global Gardens® destination store which also features extra virgin olive oils and 50 food products inspired from worldly travels.

The store is open 10-5 daily, 2477 Alamo Pintado Ave., 2 blocks west of HWY 154, 2 blocks east of the downtown Los Olivos flag pole.

Contact Theo for more information:

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