

One of the many pleasures of a life in the country is the abundance of free food and the makings of fine drink. Sitting here at my desk, glass of Dandelion wine in hand, the golden glow of the flickering firelight passing through the pale amber nectar drifts my mind back to the Spring and the picking and preparation that led to this magic moment. Anyone who has ever made their own wine or beer will understand my feelings but nowadays of course, wine nearly always refers to a Chateau produced store bought liquid, made from grapes grown in some exotic far away land. However until very recently, many other varieties of fruit and even flowers were used by enterprising brewers. Dandelion, Red Clover, Rosemary and Rose flowers were all used and all have their own distinctive nose, flavour and effect Herbs were used for their traditional medicinal values, the wine-making process being me rely the method of preservation.

Dandelion for the digestion and liver

Cowslip to help with sleep

Clover flowers as a tonic and mild euphoriant

These herb wines are very simply made, with minimal amounts of time and equipment and once tried and successfully imbibed, they can become an integral part of your routine and life style. After all, what better way is there to take your medicine than in a glass of fragrant ambrosia? Hoping that I've caught your interest, (excuse me while I pour myself an other glass!), perhaps you'd like to give flower wines a try.

Here to help you on your way is my own tried, and very well tested, recipe.

Ingredients:

Two quarts of Red Clover or Dandelion flower-heads. (Or any other type of edible/medicinal flower. Good ones to try are Calendula, Rose, Violet, Elderflowers, etc; Use your own judgement, the recipe is good for almost any

combination of flowers and herbs).

One Kilo of sugar & 3 lemons.
Four ounces un-coated raisins or sultanas.
One packet Champagne type wine yeast.

You will also need some equipment, most of which can be found in the kitchen, viz:
One, two or three gallon container, (stainless steel, earthenware, glass or un-chipped enamel).

A one gallon glass flagon, Fermentation lock, campden table and syphon tube.

(These can be obtained quite inexpensively from any home-brewing store).

Now for the...Method:

Pick the flowers on a sunny morning after the dew has dried. They are best picked after several days of full sun but Mother Nature is not always so obliging. Choose only the best flowers and discard all green parts at the base of the flowers. (They will make the wine bitter). Collect two full quarts of flowers for each gallon you wish to make. (This is a good job to give to the kids on a sunny Sunday afternoon. You won't see them for at least an hour.) It is very important that you collect only from areas that have not been sprayed with garden or agricultural pest sprays. Avoid all roadside flowers as they contain high levels of pollutants.

It is important before starting in the kitchen to ensure that all the implements and containers used are scrupulously clean. Make up a sterilizing solution using the campden tablets, (follow the instructions on the pack) and then thoroughly rinse and clean everything you intend to use. This is the most important operation in home wine making, get it right and your wines turnout perfectly every time, screw-up and your friends will find all sorts of reasons for why they can't pop over to watch the game, join the barbecue, etc; etc;

Anyway, we are digressing. Back to the wine.

Clean the flowers of insects and dirt and place them into the largest container. Add the juice from the three lemons and the washed raisins or sultanas, and immediately pour over them six pints of boiling water. Stir it all up with a sterilized spoon, cover the container with a sterilized lid and leave to stand for twenty four hours.

Next day, lift up the lid and take a peek at the dead flowers and other bits, floating in the water. Hmmm...Give it all a good stir and then strain out the liquid into a clean sterilized container. Rinse out your original container with some sulphite solution and then immediately pour the strained liquid back in. Add the sugar and two pints of boiling water, stirring well so as to dissolve the sugar, and then add the yeast, which has been prepared beforehand as instructed on the package. Stir it again, cover and put it away in a warm spot where the temperature stays around 70-80 degrees. Now forget all about it for one month.

The month has passed and you rush like the wind to take a look at your wine. Urgghh!! It smells weird and looks weirder, but don't worry, every thing should work out fine. This is where the syphon, flagon and fermentation lock come into the picture. First sterilize all your equipment with a sulphite solution and rinse thoroughly. Then syphon the contents of your brewing bin into the flagon. This will give you your first taste, but don't despair it gets much better! Set up the fermentation lock as per the manufacturer's instructions, pop it on top of the flagon and now take it back to that warm out of the way place where you hid it before.

Now comes the hardest part of the whole show. You have to forget all about this big bottle of fermenting nectar for at least six months. Don't be tempted to peek inside, smell or God forbid! taste your new concoction. Don't even think about it! That day is still in the far future.

Six months have passed. November arrives and the nights are getting longer.

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Remember the wine?? It's now ready to be bottled. You'll need about six or seven bottles for each gallon. Use only those bottles that are designed to hold pressure, i.e. Champagne or sparkling wine bottles, even those thick heavy old-fashioned cola bottles. Use a sulphite solution to sterilize the bottles, corks and caps, and using a sterilized syphon tube, carefully syphon the clear liquid from the flagon into the bottles without disturbing the sediment in the flagon. Tastes pretty good now eh!

To make your wine just a little sparkling add no more than a half teaspoon of sugar to each bottle. Seal the bottles well and let them stand in a warm place for three days. Then place them in the coolest part of the house and wait six more weeks. It will then be just about ready to drink. Of course like many wines it will taste better if left longer, (about a year is best).

But of course we're all only human and so must inevitably try out the fruits of our labour. Invite around your true friends, break out the best glasses and then carefully open your first delicately cooled bottle, without disturbing the sediment on the bottom. Pour carefully into each glass, filling them all in one delicate movement, again so as not to disturb the sediment. Sit back, raise your glass in a toast and sip this delightful ambrosia. Revel in the complements and congratulations of your friends, for they are truly deserved. And think of the coming Spring and the fifteen gallons that you plan to brew.

Good luck!!!