Herbal Vinegars

What is Vinegar?

Vinegar is a common derivative of apples or grapes. It is made using a two step fermentation process turning the liquid into alcohol, and then turning the alcohol into dilute acetic acid (4-6%). Pure, naturally fermented vinegar is non toxic, and tolerated by just about anyone.

Vinegar has many health benefits:

- it contains starch, gum, and all of its starting materials' inherent mineral salts. Vinegar made from apples is especially rich in potassium which plays a major role in human metabolism, respiration and blood conditioning, as well as nervous system vitalisation.
- It is a refrigerant, which diminishes thirst and promotes the flow of saliva
- It lowers blood glucose and so is useful for pre-diabetics
- Acetic acid improves uptake and absorption of minerals
- It is a good alternative for those who don't take alcohol
- The 'mother' of the vinegar (the cloudy sediment you see at the bottom of the bottle of natural vinegars) is full of vitamins and probiotics which help regulate gut flora and promote healthy digestion
- Externally it is antiseptic and cleanses and tones the skin

Naturally produced vinegars will often be sold with a label saying 'containing "The Mother" and will have an amorphous mass floating at the bottom of the bottle. The Mother is a cloudy sediment of strand-like chains of connected protein molecules that congeal at the bottom of the bottle, which can be passed on from batch to batch as an inoculant that allows continued high quality vinegar making.

Why Make A Herbal Infused Vinegar?

Vinegar has a long history of use as a preservative and solvent for making herbal extracts since the day of Hippocrates. Medicated vinegars are some of the oldest herbal preparations, and have appeared in pharmacopoeias of many countries throughout history. A notable example is Four Thieves Vinegar used to ward off the plague in Europe, which was a vinegar infused with Camphor, Cinnamon, Clove, Garlic, Nutmeg, Peppermint, Rosemary, Rue, Sage and Wormwood. Vinegars fell out of mainstream use as they don't preserve medical products indefinitely, unlike alcoholic tinctures. But vinegar is inexpensive and nutritious and worth reconsidering! Herbal vinegar extracts are especially useful as alcohol free alternatives for children, and others abstaining from or sensitive to alcohol.

Making Herbal Vinegars

Herbal infused vinegars are incredibly easy to make. You simply have to macerate your chosen culinary or medicinal herbs into your preferred vinegar. Dried herbs will make medicinal vinegars which keep for longer as they will contain less water, but fresh herbs

are more able to impart their nutritive minerals into the vinegar.

Which Vinegar Should I Use?

There is an abundance of different kinds of vinegars, which vary widely across cultures: malt vinegar, white vinegar, apple cider vinegar, wine vinegar, rice vinegar etc. As a general rule, use milder flavoured vinegars for delicate flavoured herbs, and stronger flavoured vinegars with more intensely flavoured herbs. Our favourite to use is apple cider vinegar because of its pleasant taste.

Infused Herbal Vinegar Method:

1. Chop or grind your herbs to a coarse powder and fill ¼ of a sterilised jar with the herb(s). Pour apple cider vinegar over the herb until the jar is filled to the top. Cover tightly and allow to infuse for 14 days in a cool, dark place. Shake the jar daily

2. Strain the vinegar and allow the sediment to settle overnight. Then decant the clear liquid into another sterilised jar. Store for up to 6 months in a cool, dark place.

3. If you wish, an additional step is to turn your vinegar into an ‘oxymel’ or a mixture of honey and vinegar. Before bottling, simply add honey to sweeten the extract which will also aid its preservation. Try adding one quarter of the volume of the vinegar in honey, and you can add more if you prefer it sweeter.

Herbs which are well suited to extracting into vinegar:

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Cleavers (*Galium aparine)* Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), Rosehips (*Rosa canina fructus),* Garlic (*Allium sativum*) & Wild Garlic/Few Flowered Leek (*A. ursinum, A. paradoxum*), Elderberries (*Sambucus nigra fructus*), Blackberries (*Rubus fructicosus*), Pine (*Pinus sylvestris),* Chickweed (*Stellaria media),* Plantain (*Plantago spp.),* Yellow Dock Root (*Rumex crispus),* Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium),* Mallows (*Malva spp).*

Uses for Herbal Infused Vinegars

Herbal vinegars are versatile and can be used for many purposes: a spoonful daily as a medicine, in salad dressings, seasoning, add to water as a drink, use as a deodorant, cleaning products, hair rinses and so on.

Preservation & Storage

If kept long, and frequently exposed to air, infused vinegars can become unpleasant, smell, putrify and lose their acidity. The best way to keep them is in a cold dark location with a tight lid on the container, and with limited exposure to air. It will keep well if no further water is added. i.e. best to use dried herbs rather than fresh if you intend to store your vinegar for a long time. If using fresh, then adding honey, molasses or sugar later on will help the preservation process.

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