

## **The World of Vinegar ... Much Larger and Different Than You May Think**

Throughout history, from the most ancient of times, vinegar has proved to be the most versatile of products. Biblical references tell us the Mediterranean people have been enjoying vinegar for over 7000 years. Ancient Greeks and Romans used it extensively. Hippocrates recommended vinegar for its medicinal uses as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Today vinegar is “Helpful Hints by Heloise” favorite household item! From washing windows to polishing brass, to killing weeds, to freshening baby clothes, to a meat tenderizer, to soothing a sore throat or sunburn, vinegar has countless uses, not even considering it as a vital part of a salad dressing, sushi, the condiment industry (ketchup, sauces, etc.), pickling, etc. That’s impressive for a product that was a result of an accident! (Wine fermented, when left exposed to air, became “vin aigre”, meaning sour wine.)

Here in the U.S., the mainstays of the vinegar industry are white distilled, cider, malt and wine vinegars (a distant fourth). Specialty vinegars are becoming more popular here, as they have been for centuries in Europe. Balsamic vinegar has been a vital part of the Mediterranean cuisine for centuries. People of that region have been singing praises of balsamic vinegar since ancient civilizations. It was used as a “balm” to soothe cuts and burns, as well as being used as an integral part of their diet. Recent studies, including the most recent from the University of Sydney (Australia), show that consuming four teaspoons of balsamic vinegar daily lowered blood sugar by as much as 30%. Other types of specialty vinegars include rice wine vinegar, fruit vinegars, sherry vinegar, and flavored vinegars (herbed, fruit infused, etc.)

A brief description of the most prevalent types of vinegars:

**Wine Vinegars** are as old as wine itself. They may be made from white or red wine, sherry or even champagne, and should bear the color and flavor hallmarks of the wine used. Wine vinegars are preferred in French and Mediterranean cuisines.

**Malt vinegar** is produced from malted barley. Its slightly sweet, mild flavor is used as a condiment, especially with fried foods.

**Distilled vinegar** made from grain alcohol, is completely clear with a stronger vinegary flavor and higher acid content than other vinegars. It is preferred for pickling and preserving.

**Cider vinegar** is produced from unpasteurized apple juice or cider. It is pale brown in color with a mild acidity and fruity aroma. Cider vinegar is particularly popular in the United States.

**Rice vinegar** is a clear, slightly sweet product brewed from rice wine. Its flavor is clean and elegant, making it useful in a variety of dishes.

**Flavored vinegars** are simply traditional vinegars in which herbs, spices, fruits or other

foods are steeped to infuse their flavors. They are easily produced from commercial wine or distilled vinegars, using any herb, spice or fruit desired. The use of flavored vinegars is extremely popular but definitely not new. Clove, raspberry and fennel vinegars were sold on the streets of Paris during the 13th century. Making fruit-flavored vinegars was also one of the responsibilities of American housewives during the 18th and 19th centuries. (Berry flavored vinegars were particularly popular in Victorian times.)

**Balsamic vinegar** (It. aceto Balsamico) is newly popular in the United States, though it has been produced in Italy for more than 800 years. To produce balsamic vinegar, red wine vinegar is aged in a succession of wooden barrels made from a variety of woods-oak, cherry, locust, ash, mulberry and juniper-for at least 4, but sometimes up to 50, years. The resulting liquid is dark reddish-brown and sweet. Balsamic has a high acid level, but the sweetness covers the tart flavor, making it very mellow. True balsamic is extremely expensive because of the long aging process and the small quantities available. Most of the commercial products imported from Italy are now made by a quick caramelization and flavoring process. Balsamic is excellent as a condiment or seasoning and has a remarkable affinity for tomatoes and strawberries.

**Note:** The Cider Vinegar that is offered at THE OLIVE AND THE GRAPE is raw, organic, unpasteurized, with the mother. The Wine Vinegars are fermented using the Orleans Method of Fermentation, dating back to the Middle Ages in Orleans, France. Our Aged Balsamic Vinegar, is just that, pure balsamic vinegar, properly aged, product of Modena, Italy. They are NOT a product of a rapid caramelization process. Most vinegars purchased in typical grocery stores today are vinegars by legal acidity definition only. They are not quality condiments as ours, and as they are meant to be in Europe.

If you want to learn more about vinegars, check our class schedule (Class/Event Page), as Vinegar Classes are offered throughout the year.



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