

# the Basics of cordial making

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By Carrie B. Wilkey - cwilkey@teadame.com



Would you like to impress your friends and family with some tasty beverages? Would you like to make and give some unique gifts for special events or holidays? Do you like to play the part of a scientist and experiment with new flavors? Are you curious about cordials, but not sure what you'll be getting yourself into if you try to make one?

Look no further! Here is some basic cordial information to help you decide whether or not you want to attempt to create a tasty and unique beverage. Cordials, also known as liqueurs, are simple to make – you just need a little bit of patience, some basic kitchen tools and ingredients, as well as some creative ideas for cordial flavors.

## what is a cordial?

In the most basic of terms, a cordial is an alcoholic beverage with a high sugar content and flavorings such as fruits, nuts, herbs, spices or creams. Many cordials start with base alcohols such as vodka, brandy, whiskey, rum, gin and even pure grain alcohol. My personal preference is white brandy (Christian Brothers) or vodka, because retaining the pure flavors of the fruits or other flavorings tends to work best with these two bases. Pure grain alcohol works well, too, but may be difficult to find in many parts of the country.

According to a variety of cordial resources, most cordials range from 17-30 percent alcohol by volume, some as much as 50 percent. Because of this, I recommend buying good quality alcohol that is free from off flavors or flavors that you don't like.

## List of tools or ingredients needed

- Fresh, clean fruit (frozen may be used in some instances)
- Various nuts, herbs, spices or other flavorings
- Notebook or journal for documenting and saving your recipes
- Strainer or colander for filtering large solids (fine mesh strainer)
- Coffee filters, cheesecloth or clean unbleached muslin for filtering small solids
- Wooden spoons or ladles for mashing fruit
- Food coloring (optional)
- Glass measuring cups

- Metal measuring spoons
- Funnels
- Aging containers
  - ◆ Wide-mouthed glass jars with lids
  - ◆ Wine or other bottles with tight-fitting lids
  - ◆ Assorted decanters, cruets and decorative bottles (readily available at second-hand shops)

## cordial making made simple

Here is a very basic overview on how to make cordials right in your own kitchen. Using a combination of seasonal fruits, herbs, spices or nuts, you may come up with some delicious cordials to share with friends and family.

Starting with your base alcohol, add fruit, herbs, spices or other flavorings and set aside for 2-4 weeks in a well-sealed jar or wide-mouth bottle. You should add enough alcohol to cover all of the fruit and other items. The fruit will need to be able to “swim” in the container, while staying completely covered with alcohol. Store the mixture away from sunlight.

After an appropriate time has passed (usually about 30 days), strain the solids from the liquid until the liquid is free of particles. Add sugar syrup (simple syrup - see recipe below) to taste and let the cordial mixture rest for at least 2-6 months before serving. If you have the patience, put your bottle of cordial in the back of a cabinet and forget about it for at least a year.

I have a rose petal cordial that is 17 years old – very smooth and quite delicious. Many of my cordials are in the 3-7 year-old age range and are just right for serving to friends and showcasing at competitions or other tasting events.

Be sure to measure all ingredients and document them in a notebook or journal so you can recreate your cordial in the future. If you are unsure about combining certain flavors, look up recipes in cookbooks or on the Internet to see what sorts of combinations are used. Some combinations worth considering are: cranberry and orange; ginger and pear; apple and cinnamon; or strawberry and mint or rosemary.

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## uses for cordials

Cordials may be used for more than just drinking. Here are some areas where you may want to consider experimenting with your finished cordials:

- Appetizers
- Drinks
- Entrees
- Soups
- Salads
- Vegetables
- Desserts and Candies



Consider experimenting by pouring them on ice cream or using them in cooking. Some cordials may be used in place of wine for sauces or other flavorings when baking.

## simple syrup

1 c. white granulated sugar  
1/2 c. water

You may substitute brown sugar or honey for the white sugar. For whatever amount of syrup you need, the ratio will nearly always be 1 part water to 2 parts sugar for one recipe of simple syrup.

Boil the water and sugar together for about 5 minutes, at a full boil, or until all the sugar dissolves and the syrup is clear. Cool the syrup before adding it to the alcohol, as heat evaporates the alcohol.

## Basic Recipes

The following are cordial recipes that I have developed over the years. Feel free to adapt them to your own tastes.

### elderberry Brandy

2 c. white brandy  
2 c. elderberries  
1 tsp. orange peel (dried)  
1 tsp. lemon peel (dried)



Steep all ingredients together in tightly sealed jar or bottle, away from direct sunlight for at least 30 days. Gently shake the mixture daily. After 30 days, strain all solids and add simple syrup to taste.

### pineapple Basil

2-20 oz. cans pineapple slices and juice  
3 T. freshly chopped basil leaves  
2 c. vodka

Steep all ingredients together in tightly sealed jar or bottle, away from direct



sunlight for at least 30 days. Gently shake the mixture daily. After 30 days, strain all solids and add simple syrup to taste.

### strawberry rosemary

4 c. chopped strawberries  
1-1/2 c. white brandy  
3-4 sprigs fresh rosemary



Wash, stem and use paper towel to dry the strawberries, then chop and place in jar. Pour brandy over the strawberries, and add the rosemary sprigs. Steep in covered jar for 3 months. Gently shake the mixture daily. After 3 months, strain all solids and add simple syrup to taste.

## Resource List

Here's a list of books that I've found to be wonderful resources for recipes and additional cordial information.

### The Compleat Anachronist #60 – Alcoholic Drinks of the Middle Ages

By Mark Shapiro, Published March 1992

### Making Liqueurs for Gifts

By Mimi Freid, Storey Publishing Bulletin A-101

### Kitchen Cordials

By Nancy Crosby & Sue Kenny, last published in 1996

### Herbal Cookery – Herb Recipes from a Kitchen Garden

By Dixie L. Stephen Hearts & Tummies Cookbook Company, ISBN 1-57166-094-1

### Making Wild Wines & Meads

By Pattie Vargas & Rich Gulling, Storey Books, ISBN 1-58017-182-6

### A Sip through Time – A Collection of Old Brewing Recipes

By Cindy Renfrow, ISBN 0-9628598-3-4

### Homemade Liqueurs

By Dona and Mel Meilbach, ISBN 0-8092-7582-1

### Cordials from Your Kitchen

By Pattie Vargas & Rich Gulling, Storey Publishing, ISBN 0-88266-986-9

The Madison Herb Society Cookbook  
Published in 1995

