

ELDERFLOWER WINE

In early summer elderflowers are there for the picking in nearly every hedgerow, during May, June and early July. The flowers give fragrance and flavour to a simply made white wine – recipe below.

If you've collected the equipment together then it's not much more effort to make five gallons as just one – a decision you're unlikely to regret later.

It is better to get the wine started, and the initial vigorous fermentation over with, before introducing the elderflowers. So get your 'must' going 3 days – week beforehand.

Basic recipe for 1 gallon (multiply up for greater quantities)

Chopped sultanas	8ozs
sugar	2 - 3 lbs
yeast nutrient	1 tsp
citric or blended acids	1 tsp per gallon / as needed
wine yeast	

In a large saucepan heat a pint of water, stir in half the sugar until dissolved then leave to cool.

Chop the sultanas (a food processor is good for this). Drop immediately into fermentation bucket containing 4 pints of tepid water. Stir in sugar syrup and yeast nutrient. Add yeast (follow instructions on packet). Give everything a good stir, snap on the lid and leave in a warm place.

A day or two later the fermenting 'must' should be bubbling away nicely. Add the rest of the sugar as syrup and stir. Make up to a full gallon with tepid water. Stir in acid.

Add the elderflowers – see below.

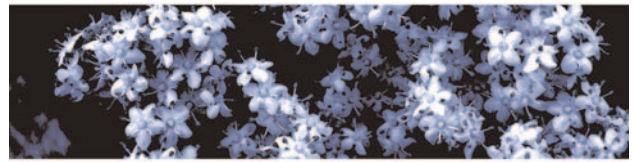
Pick your elderflowers on a warm dry day. Choose those which are fully out, still creamy-white and not going brown. If you're making 4-5 gallons fill a couple of carrier bags.

The flowers need to be stripped from their stalks, something much easier to do the day after picking. You need about a pint of blossoms per gallon. Use too many and you will cross the line from delicate fragrance to tom cat.

* The elderflowers need to be put loosely in an muslin cloth, the edges gathered together and tied so that the flowers can't escape. Add a heavy weight to keep the bag from floating. The weight should be non-metallic (unless stainless steel) a heavy glass bowl / ashtray / paperweight is perfect. With cleaned and rinsed hands gently squeeze the bag every day or so. Remove after 5 days. Taste at this stage and decide (with due caution) whether to add any more acid.

Keep the fermentation bin somewhere warm but not in direct sunlight. In a couple of weeks the wine will have thrown down a sediment. You should syphon the wine off into demijohns leaving the sediment behind. Make up quantity to a full gallon by adding water. Then leave until bubbles have ceased to pass through airlock. Your wine should also now be clear and ready to bottle. Without disturbing any sediment syphon wine into sterilised bottles.

Corks and a proper corker are worth investing in - otherwise use bottles with screw on tops and screw on tightly. Elderflower wine is good at 3 months, better at 6. But it has been drunk much earlier. In our experience you get good years and really good years.



Necessary equipment

- Fermenting bucket with airtight lid
- Demijohns and airlocks
- Syphon tube
- Large funnel
- Muslin or similar; 2 pieces approx 3x3ft
- Sterilizer compound
- Large bowl (large mixing bowl is ideal)
- Large plastic measuring jug
- Saved wine bottles + new corks
(6 bottles per gallon - use screw tops if you don't want to invest in a corker)

Nearest home winemaking shops –

Brewer's Droop 36a Gloucester Road, Bristol & **Homebrew Centre** The Courtyard, 37 High Street, Keynsham + look online



notes:

Sterilise all equipment prior to use but also rinse well. Only use glass, plastic or stainless steel containers and utensils.

Keep notes – it's easy to lose track of how much sugar you've added

You can also invest in a little book of Ph testing papers and a hydrometer. These will help you measure acidity and alcohol more accurately.

Contain your mess by standing equipment on trays and have old towels etc on hand for mopping up.

You can substitute some the chopped sultanas with grape juice concentrate. This will give extra body to the wine, improving taste and keeping qualities.

** This method has been adapted from WHT Tayleur's 'Homebrewing & Wine-Making' pub. 1973 Penguin – long out of print. Other books will tell you to pour boiling water over the flowers.*

There is plenty of advice and other recipes online and many books on winemaking. If you want greater perfection and predictability, search out more information than is to be found on this sheet.