

Cordial Making for Beginners



June University Session 77

Taught by Lord Brian Crawford, Royal Brewer

Overview

Introduction:

What are Cordials?:

- “Cordial” has a wide variety of meanings. Originally referred to an herbal beverage that was believed to promote heart health.
- “Liqueur” generally refers to a cordial that contains alcohol.
- Modern, legal definition is an alcoholic beverage with a sugar content 2.5% or higher.
- In the SCA refers to a variety of alcoholic beverages, usually sweet, produced by infusion.

History:

- Developed out of herbal medicines.
- First being produced in Italy in the 13th Century
- Produced throughout Europe by the 16th Century
- Continued to be thought of as medicines for much of this time.
- Three Techniques were used in period to produce these beverages:
 - o Distillation of a brewed product, producing something akin to Brandy
 - o Infusion of flavors into a brewed product, followed by distillation.
 - Most common technique for fruit cordials.
 - o Infusion of flavors in to a distilled product.
 - Most commonly used for spice cordials.

Making Cordials:

Fundamental Rules:

- Keep everything clean and sanitized.
- Be Patient
- Take careful notes.

Equipment:

- 1 liter or larger wide-mouth food grade jars with tight fitting lids.
- Course sieve or colander
- Muslin or cheese cloth for straining
- Racking cane (3 to 4 feet of aquarium tubing will work)
- Storage bottle with tight fitting lids
- Decorative bottles for presentation or competition.

Ingredients:

- Alcohol Base
 - o Period recipes call for “Aquevity” usually a grain spirit.
 - o Grain alcohol (if available to you) is the closest equivalent.
 - Vodka can be substituted for grain alcohol
 - o Other spirits can be used, but will add their own flavors.

- Brandy is period and often compliments fruit flavors well.
- Sugars/Sweeteners
 - Recipes calling for cane sugar date back to 1425
 - Refined sugar first appeared in the Middle East around 1430
 - Table sugar is therefore acceptable
 - Brown sugar and honey can also be used, but will add their own flavors.
 - Avoid artificial sweeteners.
 - Sugar doesn't dissolve well in alcohol.
 - A simple syrup of 2 parts sugar to 1 part water alleviates this problem.
- Water
 - Tap water is usually fine, but if your water tastes bad, consider filtering it.
- Flavoring Agents
 - Fruits
 - Period fruits include apples, currants, dates, figs, gooseberry, grape, lemon, medlar, mulberry, orange, pear, plum, pomegranate, quince, raspberry, sloe, strawberry and sweetbriar hips.
 - Dried versions of these fruits are also period
 - Chop or crush fruits to maximize surface area and flavor transfer
 - Spices
 - Most modern spices had reached Europe via the silk road by the end of the 15th century
 - Generally fresh, whole spices have more flavor than ground spices
 - Generally a little will go a long way.
 - To prepare whole spices "bruise" outer surface to help release flavors.
 - Nuts
 - Many nuts are also period
 - Nuts can be either chopped in as is or lightly roasted in a moderate oven before use.

Process:

- Prepare the flavoring agents:
 - Clean and chop/mash fruit
 - Grind or bruise spices.
 - Prepare sugar as a simple syrup.
 - Make sure to allow the syrup to cool.
- Add Alcohol Base:
 - Make sure all ingredients are completely covered by liquid.
 - Mix well.
- Allow to Steep
 - Tightly close container lid.

- Place out of direct sunlight in place with stable temperature.
- Allow flavors to infuse, usually for at least a month
 - You can taste periodically to get a sense of progress.
- Recipe may call for you to stir periodically.
- Remove Solids and Bottle.
 - Use colander or sieve to remove large solids.
 - Filter or rack to remove remaining sediment.
 - Repeat as necessary until all sediment is removed.
 - Bottle in containers with tight fitting lids.
 - Mason jars or corked wine bottles are good
- Age
 - Place out of direct sunlight where temperature is stable.
 - Generally allow to age at least 1 month if not longer
 - Taste test to determine when ready.

The Results:

- Presentation:
 - Corked wine bottle or display bottle
 - Label always a plus.
- Appearance:
 - Should be free of sediment.
 - Should have a color that reflects ingredients.
 - Should have “legs”
- Aroma/Bouquet
 - Should be able to detect all ingredients in the aroma
 - Should be free of off odors
- Alcohol Balance
 - Should have a relatively high alcohol content
 - Shouldn't have a burn, alcohol should be difficult to detect.
- Body/Sugar Balance
 - Should have a relatively high sugar content
 - Should not be watery
 - Should not be syrupy
- Taste/Flavor Profile
 - Should be able to detect all ingredients in the flavor
 - Ideally should be complex
 - Should be free of off flavors

Correcting Issues:

- When in doubt, age it longer.
- Balance issues can be corrected
 - If too syrupy or too high alcohol content, can add fruit juice concentrate
 - If too weak add more alcohol base
 - If too thin add sugar syrup

- Age again after these additions.
- Off flavors that persist likely indicate spoilage, throw it out and start over.

Recipes:

Lord Verney's Vsquebath (c. 1550-1625)

From A Sip Through Time by Cindy Renfrow

Ingredients:

8 cups vodka; 1 lb. raisins; 10 figs; 6 dates; 2 ounces Ceylon cinnamon sticks; 6 sticks licorice root (approx. 1 ounce).

Method:

Slice the figs and dates into medium size slices and remove date pits. "Bruise the cinnamon sticks by placing them in a bag and rubbing vigorously so that the sticks rub against each other and break up the outer surface. Split the licorice root in to quarters to expose the inner surface. Add all ingredients to a large container with a tight fitting lid and mix well. Let stand for ten days, stirring two to three times a day. Rack to remove sediment and bottle. Can be consumed immediately but is better with age.

Hazelnut Liqueur

From Cordials from Your Kitchen by Pattie Vargas and Rich Gulling

Ingredients:

1/2 pound hazelnuts; 1 cup vodka; 1/2 cup brandy; 1/2 cup white sugar; 1/2cup light brown sugar; 1 1/4 cups water; 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract; 1 teaspoon glycerin (optional); Caramel Coloring (optional)

Method:

Coarsely chop hazelnuts in a food processor. Transfer nuts to a clean 1 quart container and add vodka and brandy. Cover and store in cool dark place for six weeks.

Use coarse sieve or colander to strain out solids and discard. Strain again with a fine mesh strainer. Transfer liquid to a clean container, cover, and let stand two days. Rack or filter in to a clean container.

Make a simple syrup by bringing sugar, brown sugar, and water to a boil over medium heat, stirring constantly to prevent scorching. Remove from heat and let stand until just warm. Add syrup, vanilla, and glycerin (if using) to racked liqueur. Add caramel color (if using) drop by drop until desired color is reached. May be served immediately but is better if allowed to age for one to two months.

Apple and Spice Cordial

Ingredients:

1/2 Liter Christian Brothers Frost White Brandy; 1 1/2 pounds Gala Apples; 2 whole cloves; 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon; 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg; 3/4 cup granulated sugar; 1/2 cup water.

Method:

Dice apples into 1/2 inch cubes. Add brandy, apples, cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg to 2 liter container with tight fitting lid. Combine sugar and water, boil for five minutes to produce a simple syrup. Allow syrup to cool and add to other ingredients. Mix well. Let stand for six weeks in a cool dark place. Rack or filter to remove sediment. Can be served immediately but is better when allowed to age on to two months.

Resources:

Atlantian Arts & Sciences Brewing Page:

<http://moas.atlantia.sca.org/wsnlinks/index.php?action=displaycat&catid=259&submit=Go>

Basic Brewing Instructions:

http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/recipes/basic_brewing.html

Cordial Documentation:

<http://web.raex.com/~obsidian/IGGcord.html>

Period Recipes:

A Sip Through Time by Cindy Renfrow. ISBN: 0-9628598-3-4

Modern Recipes:

Cordials from Your Kitchen by Pattie Vargas and Rich Gulling. ISBN: 0-88266-986-9