

Dandelions: From spring weeds to winter wine

by Marie Biondolillo

The dandelion has got to be the most unfairly maligned plant in America. Although this cheerful weed has a reputation as the scourge of gardeners, it has far more uses than more commonly cultivated plants. Its leaves can be used for salads and stews; its roots may be added to medicinal tonics or ground to make coffee; and its flowers can be made into delicious jams and wines.

Dandelion Wine

Ingredients

2 quarts dandelion heads
1 gallon water
4 citrus fruits (such as lemons, oranges, or tangerines)
5 cups sugar (you can use a combination of white and brown sugar, or even substitute some of the sugar for honey or chopped raisins)
1 package white wine yeast

Directions

Collect dandelions, being careful not to pick any from areas where chemicals have been sprayed. Separate petals from green flower heads. Place petals in a large pot. Boil water, and then pour over petals. Cover and let stand for 2 days. Strain liquid. Place in pot. Peel and juice citrus, and add peelings and juice to pot, along with sugar. Boil for 45 minutes. Allow mixture to cool to 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Add yeast, cover, and let stand for three days. Strain and pour into an air-tight container. A carboy with a fermentation trap is recommended. After the liquid clears, rack it. Rack wine again at the three-month mark, and bottle. Wait until wine is 6 months old before drinking (one year is preferable).

Note: If you've never made wine before, consult a wine-making manual or home brewing expert before proceeding. C.J.J. Berry's First Steps in Winemaking is highly recommended.

Nearly 60 years ago, Ray Bradbury wrote a short story for *Gourmet Magazine*, detailing a ritual of his boyhood – the harvesting and pressing of June dandelions for his grandfather's dandelion wine. This story grew into a beloved novel, which inspired readers the world over to try their hand at dandelion wines of their own. On a Sunday afternoon in April, my friend Katie and I joined their ranks.

Gathering the dandelions wasn't difficult. As we walked through the neighborhood, we saw them everywhere – blanketing the lawns of run-down Victorians; clustered beneath stands of blooming lilac; roguishly disrupting the tulip beds. We combed through them, looking for the freshest blooms, while fielding questions from surprised neighbors.

A few hours netted us heavy bags of dandelions. Once home, we discovered that the trickiest part of the process would be separating the petals from their heads. Most dandelion wine recipes caution you to remove the green heads and leaves, as these can impart bitterness to your wine. Even with the help of friends, processing the dandelions took several hours.

Next, we rinsed the petals, and then submerged them in boiling water. After a two-day soak, we



The detail of a dandelion (left). PHOTO BY TIANNA SCHNEIDER
The dandelion heads are picked and the petals then separated (above). PHOTOS BY KATIE RICKARD

strained this solution, and then re-boiled it with citrus peelings and juices, as well as lots of sugar. After cooling this mixture, we re-strained it, and added wine yeast. This solution is currently fermenting in my basement. Once this initial fermentation is complete, it will require a second straining into an air-tight container so that fermentation

can be completed. When the liquid appears clear, it will need to be siphoned into another container, so that any sediment can be removed (this is called "racking"). The wine should be racked again after three months and then bottled, and then aged or at least three more months before drinking.

We won't be able to taste the

wine until winter, but that's fine – winter is exactly when we'll need the reminder of lazy spring Sundays.

Marie Biondolillo, of Bellingham, writes about food and pop culture for YouAreWeAre.com. She also blogs about entertainment news for WeekinRewind.com.



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