

## BALSAMIC VINEGAR FAQ

[Balsamic vinegar](#) is a versatile addition to any kitchen or dining table. Its distinctive *agrodolce* flavor creates a [unique flavor profile for vegetables, salads, cheeses, and meats](#). Found below are frequently asked questions regarding balsamic vinegar.



Many of these answers are included in public forums, but for the sake of convenience these Frequently Asked Questions (“FAQ”) are broken down into several key categories and will be updated frequently as new questions arise.

### SAVVY SHOPPER QUESTIONS

#### ***How does one determine the “quality” of balsamic vinegar?***

The only way you can determine the quality of balsamic vinegar is to carefully read the label. Distinctive P.D.O. and I.G.P. seals should be on the label of a bottle to ensure the authenticity of the product.

Some producers have added colors (Red, Black, Silver, and Gold) or wine leaves (up to 4 wine leaves) to distinguish the quality of their vinegar. With the exception of the more expensive “Traditional” balsamic vinegar which consists of 100% wine must, it is wise to consult the label for any additives (there should be none) and, by all means, buy only from trusted firms.

Be careful with commercially bottled vinaigrettes as most of the time they consist almost entirely of wine vinegar.

***How is balsamic vinegar made?***

Balsamic vinegar is made from Trebbiano and Lambrusco grapes which have been pressed and then reduced by heat in an open vat for some 24 to 36 hours. The resultant wine must or *mosto cotto* is then aged in wooden barrels that are open to the elements with a small rectangular hole in the top of the barrel.

Each year, a certain percentage of the liquid evaporates producing a far more concentrated wine must. Roughly 1/3 of the wine must is transferred each year to a smaller barrel so the grape must be more exposed to the wood. Wine must or *mosto cotto* is then mixed with wine vinegar to produce most of the commercially available balsamic vinegar.

Traditional or DOP balsamic vinegar is made exclusively of *mosto cotto* (no added wine vinegar) and is bottled and sealed under the supervision of the Italian consortium in Modena after 12 (“*affinato*”) or 25 (“*extravecchio*”) years. Traditional or “DOP” balsamic vinegar is sold exclusively in distinctive Consorzio-mandated 100 ml bottles.



### ***How much does balsamic vinegar cost?***

Like wine, the cost of balsamic vinegar varies significantly depending on the percentage of wine must ("*mosto cotto*") to wine vinegar and how long the wine must has been aged in wooden barrels.

A premium grade balsamic vinegar has a high viscosity level (in excess of 1.30) and pours like syrup. A premium 250 ml IGP certified balsamic vinegar will normally sell between US\$30 and US\$40.

Most commercial balsamic vinegars have a viscosity level of around 1.05. The *mosto cotto* has often been aged a just over 60 days and has a high concentration of wine vinegar. These vinegars can often be found for around US\$10 for a 250 ml bottle.

Traditional or [DOP balsamic vinegar of Modena](#) is tested, sealed and bottled by the Italian Consorzio in 100 ml bottles. An authentic 25-year traditional balsamic vinegar can cost in excess of US\$400 for a 100 ml bottle. Traditional balsamic vinegar consists **only** of 100% barrel-aged wine must.

Generally speaking, the higher the proportion of wine vinegar to barrel-aged *mosto cotto* the lower you will find the price. Most balsamic "vinaigrette" consists mainly of wine vinegar. In fact, many commercial vinegars have been tainted with additives such as caramel to emulate the viscosity of *mosto cotto*.

### ***Where can I buy balsamic vinegar?***

[Balsamic vinegar is widely available at many grocery stores](#), specialty food boutiques and online. Personally, I would avoid any product labeled "balsamic vinaigrette" or flavored balsamic vinegar (fig, rosemary, etc.) since you are most likely to be purchasing an inferior product where flavor combinations mask the undeniable quality of aged *mosto cotto*.

The price of balsamic vinegar varies significantly (see above) so it is best to consult the ingredient label and check for certification labels from the Italian Consortium. A quality balsamic vinegar is normally quite concentrated and resembles a syrup rather than a vinegar. One simple test is to tilt the bottle slightly to determine if the content "moves" like vinegar or syrup.

Once you have found a reputable brand that has the taste characteristics you desire, stick with it!

## COOKING WITH BALSAMIC VINEGAR

### ***How do I use balsamic vinegar in vegan cooking?***

[Authentic balsamic vinegar of Modena](#) uses no animal products or animal by-products or additives. As such, balsamic vinegar may be used for all forms of vegan cooking. The *agrodolce* flavor of balsamic vinegar is designed to improve the flavor profile of often under-seasoned vegetables. Just a few drops can bring about major changes.

### ***Can I substitute balsamic vinegar for lemon juice in recipes?***

While you can substitute balsamic vinegar for lemon juice in many recipes, it is not recommended if you wish to retain the authenticity of the recipe. A teaspoon of balsamic vinegar (whatever the quality) is significantly different in both texture and taste than lemon juice.

Nevertheless, if you are combining many separate flavor profiles for a marinade or BBQ sauce then the unique flavor of lemon juice is unlikely to be missed. Personally, I would avoid making a direct substitution balsamic vinegar for lemon juice.

### ***Does heating a quality balsamic ruin its flavor?***

Sadly, many home cooks and quite a few chefs believe that reducing a “quality” balsamic vinegar by heat improves its flavor. In fact, many people buy inexpensive and poorly aged balsamic vinegar with the purpose of reducing it to create what appears to be aged balsamic vinegar.

Barrel-aged balsamic vinegar uses a natural evaporation process as slightly opened barrels are exposed to the elements in Modena and then the resultant wine must concentrate is moved to smaller barrels each year.

Don't ruin the taste of a quality balsamic vinegar by heating it. Would you do it for an expensive bottle of wine? I think not!

### ***Is it safe to reduce a balsamic vinegar marinade after it has been at room temperature for more than 30 minutes?***

Personally, I generally discard a marinade sauce after use. I don't think there is anything inherently wrong or unsafe about reducing a marinade under heat, but the marinade has changed as a result of flavoring the meat – regardless of whether it is for 30 minutes or longer.

If you want to use the marinade for something else – say to flavor rice or quinoa – then make an extra batch and warm (don't boil!). There are many ways to use balsamic vinegar, but we rarely use a quality balsamic vinegar for a marinade.

## HEALTH AND NUTRITION FACTS

### ***What are the health benefits of balsamic vinegar?***

In the past, many people touted the value of balsamic vinegar as curing everything malnutrition to cancer. Sure, some social media promoters continued to promote [nutritional benefits of balsamic vinegar](#) that are not currently supported by clinical studies.

In any event, I think it is fair to say that balsamic vinegar does contain antioxidants and appears to lower cholesterol and blood pressure. Furthermore, it appears to be a great substitute for sugar and appears to stabilize blood glucose because it is low on the glycemic index.

## OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT BALSAMIC VINEGAR

### ***What is white balsamic vinegar?***

White balsamic vinegar differs from the traditional dark balsamic vinegar in that the crushed Trebbiano wine grapes are cooked at a lower temperature and for a shorter period of time to prevent caramelization, which causes the wine must or *mosto cotto* to darken.

“White balsamic vinegar” is a misnomer, it is actually a *condimento bianco*.

The resulting wine must is then aged for a short period of time in wooden barrels or more frequently in steel vats. White wine vinegar is then mixed with the white wine vinegar to produce white balsamic vinegar.

While some people prefer the light color of white balsamic vinegar, it is not regulated by wine growers in Modena and Reggio Emilia and generally lacks the taste and body of authentic balsamic vinegar from the region. While the aging process will differ among growers, I suspect white balsamic vinegar contains far more wine vinegar than wine must.

### ***Is balsamic vinegar “halal”?***

I am not an expert in Islamic Law, but it seems evident that the natural fermentation process of producing balsamic vinegar is halal. Granted, balsamic vinegar is produced from wine

grapes, but its primary role is to flavor food. Authentic balsamic vinegar has only wine must and, often, wine vinegar.



## Next Steps

Please [visit the Gourmet Living Store](#) to purchase our balsamic vinegar of Modena. You won't be disappointed.

For more information and [recipes using balsamic vinegar](#), please visit the [Gourmet Living website](#).