

All Liquored Up!

Now that I have your attention.....sorry, to disappoint you, but this is not a personal anecdote, instead it is about the use of herbs and alcohol for mostly pleasure, but with some added health benefits along with some recipes for making some tasty, interesting and definitely a little different home-made herbal liqueurs.

Flavoured alcohols have been around since at least the 13th century. The distillation of wine into *qua vitae* and the subsequent flavoring of these spirits with herbs and spices has been found in the "Boke of Wine", by Catalan Arnold de Vila Nova (1240). He and other alchemists believed in the restorative and life giving properties of these waters. Raymond Lully, one of Vila Nova's students was so convinced of their attributes that he proclaimed that their production was a divinely inspired gift from Heaven.

By the 14th Century, the drinking of these liqueurs had become very popular in Italy and also spread into France. A Tuscany native, Catherine de Medici, is often credited with bringing them with her to France. There is some discussion as to whether or not she was the first to introduce them to France, but there is no doubt that she certainly increased the popularity and acceptance of these drinks among the nobility of France.

Between the fourteenth and early seventeenth centuries most of the production of these liqueurs was from the alchemists and monastic orders. Benedictine, as the name indicates dates to the Benedictine monk Dom Bernatdo Vincelli, in the Abbey of Fecamp about the year 1510. The recipe for Chartreuse was originally an 'Elixir de longue Vie', given in 1605 to a Carthusian monastery near Paris, by a captain under Henri IV. Original recipes for the herbal liqueurs of Aiguebell, Carmeline, and La Senancole, were also monastic elixirs, primarily Cistercian.

Not all production of liqueurs was limited to monasteries, by the middle to the end of the 16th century several distilleries had been formed which were producing commercial quantities of liqueurs. These included the Dutch distillery of Bols, founded in 1575 and Der Lachs, a German distillery which began producing Danzig Goldwasser in 1598. The first of the liqueurs produced by Bols was an anisette liqueur whose production began shortly after the founding of the distillery.

The word 'liqueur' is derived from the Latin *liquefacere* which means to melt or dissolve. This refers to the methods of flavouring the alcohol base of the liqueur. There are several methods of obtaining the flavour from fruits, herbs and spices, they are maceration, distillation and percolation. The result is the same, the desired flavour is dissolved in the alcoholic base. The choice of method used depends on the source from which the flavour is being extracted and on the particular flavour desired from the flavouring agent. Some flavouring agents will yield different flavours from the same fruit, herb or spice, depending on the method of extraction used.

Maceration refers to the steeping of aromatic/flavouring agents which have usually been bruised in water or alcohol for a time in order to extract the essence. This method is the most suitable for the home liqueur maker and works well with most herbs and fruits. It should be noted however, that citrus liqueurs are generally not made from the fruit juice but rather from oils and flavorines extracted, usually by percolation, from the rind of the fruit. **Distillation** refers to the distillation of the flavouring agent which has already been macerated. This produces a small amount of very potent essence which is added to the base alcohol.

Percolation is the process by which the base alcohol or water is allowed to drip through the flavouring agents or, it is heated and the steam passed through the agent prior to recondensing.

One of the most notorious of the herb liqueurs is Absinthe- made using Wormwood, it was banned from sale for a long time due to its "ability" to create hallucinations if consumed in large volumes. This liqueur has often been associated with some of the greatest writers, musicians and artists during the 17th & 18th centuries, as well as contributing to some of their demises as well! Just within the last couple of years it has returned to the shelves in your local liquor store, I am not sure if it is still made using the original ingredients.

Another is "Parfait Amour", one of my personal favourites, especially if served warm. This French aphrodisiac liqueur is made using a combination of herbs and spices, including cinnamon, coriander, thyme and mace, for their "warming-up" effects, great on a cold day too!

Just another of the many ways to enjoy the pleasures of Herbs! Happy Sipping!

Berry & Herb Liqueur

Basic recipe- try experimenting with different fruits, herbs and spices!

Ingredients:

4 cups 1litre 40% Alcohol-Vodka, Brandy etc.

2 cups 500ml fresh berries-raspberries, blackberries, blueberries

3/4 cup 375ml fresh herbs, cut-thyme, mints etc.

2 T 30ml spices, ground-anise, ginger

1 cup 250ml fragrant leaves-lemon verbena, scented geraniums

1 cup 250ml sugar

½ cup 125ml water

Method:

1. Place the berries, cut herbs, spices and fragrant leaves in a large glass jar. Pour the alcohol over, then cover jar. Allow to steep in a dark location for 1 month-shake daily.
2. Strain using cheesecloth and place strained liquor in a clean jar.
3. In a sauce pan over medium heat boil the sugar and water until totally dissolved and allow to cool.
4. When cool, slowly add the sugar solution to the strained alcohol, tasting to achieve desired sweetness. Then bottle and age for 1 month. Enjoy!

One Amore Thyme

My version of "Parfait Amour"

Ingredients:

6" Cinnamon Stick-broken

1T(30ml) Thyme-fresh

¼ Vanilla Pod

1 tsp(5ml) Coriander Seed-lightly ground

½ tsp(5ml) Mace-powdered

peel only of 1small lemon

600ml Vodka

225g Pure Honey

300ml (2/3 cup) Water

Method:

1. Place all herbs and spices in a glass jar, pour Vodka over, cover tightly and allow to steep for 3 weeks-shake daily.
2. Strain using cheesecloth and place liquor in a clean jar.
3. In a saucepan over heat, warm the honey and water until dissolved. Allow to cool, then add to strained Vodka.
4. Bottle and cap tightly. Allow to age 1 month. WOW