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# Vinegar 101

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## The power that is Vinegar

A good vinegar is one helluva culinary tool. It sauces, pickles, and marinates with equal aplomb. It stabilizes, preserves, transforms sweet to pleasantly tart. Vinegar is important, necessary even, and unfortunately it is taken for granted. We figure if you know a bit more about the intricacies of a good quality vinegar, one that is lively and full flavored, it will receive the respect it deserves.

Briefly, vinegar is fermentation of natural sugars to alcohol and then secondary fermentation to vinegar. So, vinegar can be made from any product that has sugar including fruits and grains.

## What is Wine Vinegar?

Simply, wine vinegar is a “cask of wine that’s past it’s prime” The French describes this as “vin aigre” (sour wine). This sour wine can be flat and acidic or it can be created by the Orleans Process and therefore round, full of flavor and sophisticated.

## The Orleans Process...

As with extra virgin olive oil, artisan breads, and aged cheeses, one of the essential ingredients is time – time for the wine to convert to vinegar, then time for the vinegar to age and mellow. The Orleans Process begins with Drilling holes in the top of a wooden barrel, filling the barrel 2/3 full of fine wine, then adding the acetobacter. This acetobacter laced wine will slowly be exposed to the oxygen and the transformation to vinegar begins. Six to nine months later we have a vinegar that still has the characteristics of the wine but with a smooth tartness. This process can be – and usually is - dramatically accelerated by forcing air into casks of cheap wine and in about three days you’ll have the kinds of vinegar we are all familiar with – tart, sour, flat. Vinegar made with the Orleans Process, however, - and all the wine vinegar we sell at Katzinger’s is made this way - has a multitude of flavors and still a pleasant smoothness in your mouth. These are vinegar with distinctive flavors, nuances and depth.

## Some of our favorite wine vinegars:

### Martin Pouret Cabernet and Chardonnay vinegars

One of the last French vinegar producers to still use the Orleans process (and the last in the city of Orleans), Martin Pouret has been making some of the best, most respected wine vinegars in the world for the last 206 years. Their Cabernet vinegar is a deep fruity red and their pale champagne-colored Chardonnay is tart but not sour. Both are full of body and character and can be used in anything from soups to dressings to marinades.

**Marine Cider Vinegar by Terres Rouges in France** – what a trip this vinegar is – steeped in seaweed, herbs and fleur de sel it adds that indescribable special tang to any seafood but also dresses up beans, corn, tomatoes and even fruit.

### **Sherry Vinegar**

Sherry vinegar has a light, sharp, unmistakably clear flavor. The Spanish counterpoint to the Italian Balsamics, sherry vinegars are made from palomino grapes using the solara system in which the vinegar is aged in white oak barrels which are stacked in a pyramid shape running seven across and five up. Vinegars of different ages are transferred up from the bottom which contains the youngest vinegar. Every year a small amount of the older batch is left in the bottom barrel to be blended with the new.

\*Fun Fact: All bodegas where sherry vinegar is made are built to face southeast, towards the sea. It's said that salt from the sea air affects the flavor and aging of the sherry vinegar.

### **Our favorite Sherry Vinegar is Grant Capirete 50 year aged sherry vinegar.**

Silky smooth and tangy while hinting of blackberries and almonds, this Spanish vinegar has an intense sherry flavor that both complements and highlights vegetable and fruit salads. It is truly a superior product which is also available in a younger, 20 year aged version.

### **Banyuls Vinegar**

Banyuls vinegar is a little known secret rarely seen outside of the small town of Banyuls in southwestern France. Made of Banyuls wine (a fortified wine in the same family as sherry or port) it is aged 6 years in oak barrels then another 6 months in the warm sun.

### **Our favorite Banyuls vinegar is La Guirelle Banyuls Vinegar**

Smooth, soft, subtly spiced and slightly sweet, this vinegar is loaded with delicate flavors from almonds to dark chocolate to berries to fine aged sherry. It is ideal for dressings and complements summer vegetables like nothing else.

### **Balsamic Vinegar**

Rich, full flavored, deliciously fragrant and very versatile, balsamic vinegar is made from the juice of the trebbiano grapes using an exceedingly complex procedure. The juice is aged in a succession of different types of wooden barrels. Over time (sometimes as much as 100 years or more!) it slowly evaporates, the flavor concentrating and the resulting vinegar is deep, purple-brown in color with a simultaneous sweet and tart flavor. Don't be fooled by the balsamics found in your grocery store that do not possess the same luscious qualities as fine aged ones do. We encourage you to experience our balsamics – inhale the aroma, swirl the bottle and watch the syrupy contents coat the sides, then dribble just a drop on a fresh strawberry to taste. We're sure you'll be astounded at just how thoroughly luscious it is.

### **Our Favorite Balsamic is Villa Manidori**

Sweet, thick and syrupy with an intense aroma and rich flavor to die for, Villa Manidori is aged 10 to 20 years on a family owned estate in Modena, Italy, it is perfect for glazing meats, dressing salads, drizzling gingerly over ice cream or berries or just sipping. Try a thimbleful in a glass of sparkling water for a wonderfully refreshing summer beverage.