

A photograph of a dark wine bottle and a large, elegant wine glass filled with red wine, set against a dark, textured background. The bottle is on the left, and the glass is in the center, both resting on a wooden surface. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the glass and the liquid inside.

# TURN THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOR INTO WINE

*Mae Smith*

Wine has been the beverage of choice of many for thousands of years. Using only a few simple inputs – fruit, yeast, water, and time – it is no wonder this beverage has been fermented through the ages.

Most people buy wine at a store, but fermenting wine at home is relatively simple and can be very rewarding.

Wine is usually made with grapes because they have the right balance of sugar, acids, enzymes, and nutrients. Backyard vineyards are not common in many parts of Wyoming, but fall provides a readily available supply of other ripe fruits that can be used.

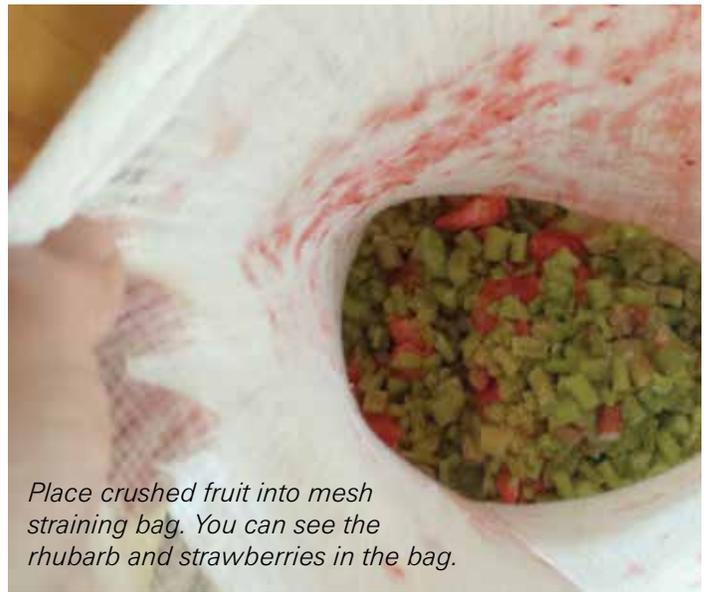
## **Fruit Selection**

Fruit wine can be made from virtually any fruit and some vegetables, too! Common wines include strawberry wine, dandelion wine, and apple wine. The possibilities are limitless. If there is an abundance, go for it. Good fruit makes good wine, so don't start with something you wouldn't enjoy eating.

The key to making good wine with any fruit is to find (or create) a recipe that balances the



*Weigh fruit to match recipe.*



*Place crushed fruit into mesh straining bag. You can see the rhubarb and strawberries in the bag.*



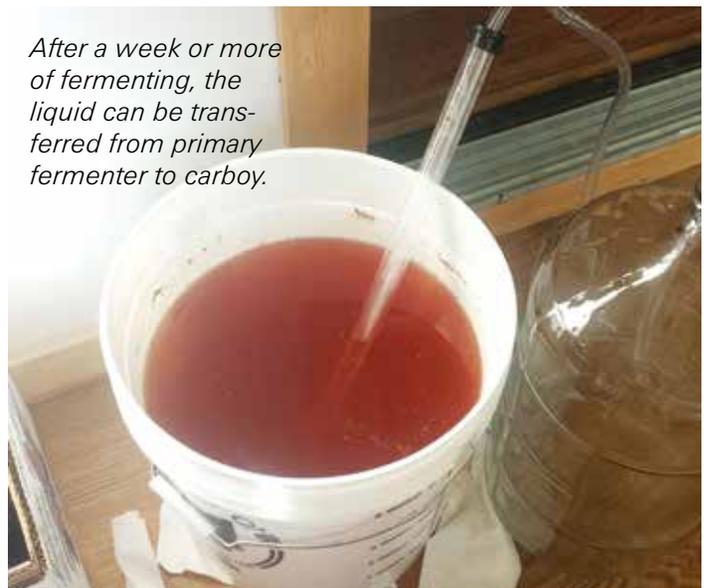
*Add acids, tannin, and enzymes, yeast nutrient, and energizers according to recipe.*



*Add sugar to primary fermenter and stir well.*



*After 24 hours, sprinkle yeast on top of must.*



*After a week or more of fermenting, the liquid can be transferred from primary fermenter to carboy.*



*Wine is racked (transferred between carboys) several more times while avoiding transfer of sediment.*



*Corks for sealing bottles*

sugar content, acids, yeast, and other ingredients. Recipes can be found in winemaking books or online at websites like [www.eckraus.com](http://www.eckraus.com). Five gallons of wine often takes 13-20 pounds of fruit.

## Equipment

Some equipment is needed to begin winemaking. Home brewers also use many of these items. Beginners can purchase a winemaking kit or pieces individually.

Essential items include

- primary fermenter – plastic container used to hold liquid during primary fermentation,
- carboy (large container made of plastic or glass) – holds wine as it ages,
- fermentation bag – holds fruit during fermentation,
- Campden tablets – sulfur-based product that kills bacteria and wild yeast,
- stopper and airlock – seals containers,
- hydrometer – tests sugar content of liquid to gauge stage of fermentation and alcohol content,
- siphon hose – transfers wine between containers,

- bottles, and
- corks.

Other non-essential but handy pieces of equipment are a fruit press, auto siphon, bottle filler, and corker.

## Recipe

- Most recipes include some combination of the following:
- fruit,
- sugar,
- yeast nutrient – nourishes yeast,
- yeast energizer – restarts stuck fermentation,
- pectic enzyme – enhances extraction from pulp and increases wine clarity,
- acid blend – lowers pH and brings out fruity flavors,
- wine tannin – improves flavor and helps wine age,
- yeast, and
- wine stabilizer – stops fermentation if sugar is added before bottling.

A recipe for strawberry wine is 18 pounds of strawberries, 10 pounds of sugar, 1 tablespoon of yeast energizer, 2 tablespoons acid blend, 1 teaspoon wine tannin, a packet of wine yeast, and wine stabilizer if desired.

## Steps

1. Pick fruit and prepare by removing large pits, cutting into smaller pieces, crushing, or bruising. Do not overprocess or use a food processor because it will incorporate bitterness from seeds and skin into wine. Make sure juices are in primary fermenter. Freezing fruit prior to use can help break it down.
2. Place pulp in a fermentation bag and add to primary fermenter along with all other ingredients, according to recipe, except yeast. Add water to desired level. Now add crushed Campden tablets to the mixture (one tablet per gallon of liquid).
3. Cover fermenter with thin, clean towel and leave for 24 hours. At this stage the liquid is called must.
4. Sprinkle wine yeast over juices in primary fermenter. Cover with clean towel again and allow mixture to ferment for 5-7 days. Maintaining a constant temperature of 70-75°F during fermentation is important. Typically, 70 percent of fermentation will happen in this time. You may want



*This corkscrew inserts corks into bottles.*

to read the level of the hydrometer before adding yeast so final alcohol content can be determined. The readings are put into an equation to determine alcohol percentage.

5. Remove fermentation bag containing pulp. Wring out excess juices and discard.
6. Wine can be siphoned to a carboy at this time if fermentation has slowed sufficiently. Hydrometer readings will read less than 1 specific gravity. If fermentation is still active, wine can be left in fermenter. Seal the carboy with stopper and wine airlock to prevent organism contamination. Sediment on the container bottom is spent yeast and pulp, which will be removed from wine (left behind) with each container transfer so the resulting wine is clear.
7. Allow wine to ferment for 4 weeks or more. It will clear during this time. Wine can be transferred between carboys; make sure to leave the sediment behind. This

is called racking. Water can be added to maintain original volume. More racking will result in clear wine free of sediment if sediment is left behind each time.

8. Once wine is clear and hydrometer reads 0.990 to 0.998, fermentation has completed. Stir in one crushed Campden tablet per gallon of wine. This will halt any biological processes so fermentation does not continue in bottle. If wine is too dry for your taste, add a wine stabilizer; then add sugar to desired sweetness.
9. Siphon wine into bottles, making sure to leave any sediment behind. Cork bottles. Age as desired up to a year. At least a few weeks are desirable. You know what they say – wine gets better with age!
10. Who has the patience for letting wine age? Enjoy it!

### **Final Thoughts**

Cleanliness and sterility are important to prevent contamination that would sour and ruin wine. Sterilize



*Voila! Wine is ready to drink.*

equipment and bottles before each use. Do not use bleach! Use sanitizers made for winemaking or use 14 crushed Campden tablets per gallon of water.

Completed wines, such as strawberry wine and rhubarb wine, can be mixed before bottling to make even more interesting flavors. Completed wine takes a while, but multiple batches can be made so wine is available any time of year. Have fun with this process and enjoy the fruits of your labor!

*We'll make no smart-alecky remarks about **Mae Smith** and her winemaking. She is a University of Wyoming Extension educator serving northwest Wyoming and can be reached at (307) 765-2868 or at [maep@uwyo.edu](mailto:maep@uwyo.edu).*