

Making Your Own Wine

Written by Terry Connor

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Back in the late 80s, when I was working in Boston, I had a boss who selected winemaking as his hobby. Gino was the right guy for the hobby because he was blessed with those essential ingredients called patience and lots of extra cash.

Gino found out that I was interested in wine so he invited me over to his home to check out his winemaking scene. I was completely floored! What I expected was a two-bit operation with a few buckets of grape juice. What I witnessed was a first class domestic winemaking operation accompanied by Gino's most recent production of over 150 bottles – in this case white wine. It was a revelation to see his setup. He had space, the proper equipment, packaging materials and a super secret place where he purchased his grapes. This was the one secret he would not reveal. I guess they call it "protecting your source." In those days, should you ever need grapes, the farmers market in Providence, Rhode Island was excellent. But Gino wasn't talking. He did, however, send me home with three bottles of his Chardonnay. I remember them as being quite good.

Gino made wine at his home the old fashioned way – his grandfather taught him. Nowadays all you need to do is go to the Internet, select a site for winemaking and follow the instructions. It is that simple. What I would like to do is emphasize some of the important points that simply cannot be ignored.

The first point is to clean and sanitize your winemaking equipment. It is a boring job, but it is the most important task in the winemaking process. It's the grunt work – not the fun or creative part. First you clean the equipment by removing all visible dirt or foreign elements. This applies to all your equipment, whether new or used. If your equipment is used, you have a frame of reference. If it's new, inspect it very carefully. Why? Because the winemaking kit was probably shipped from a warehouse, and warehouses by their very nature are a source for dirt. Follow up on the cleaning process by sanitizing. Sanitizing is a natural process wherein you will use a chemical solution as recommended by your kit supplier. Using the sanitizing solution will prevent the growth of spoilage organisms that will invade the wine. Should any spoilage organisms get into your wine, it could make you very grumpy and difficult to get along with.

Next we want to select the grapes. The first item on this list is to pause and remember where

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we are. South Carolina is able to supply small quantities of Chardonnay, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc and, of course, the grape called Scuppernong, from which we get Muscadine. We are forced to purchase fruit outside of our state and have it shipped in. The best way to accomplish this is to establish a relationship with a supplier that offers fresh fruit and concentrated juices. As a home winemaker, you will need both. Suppliers that offer these products are located throughout the US offering reasonable shipping charges. Some of the work has been done for you by the suppliers. They advise their customers when to place orders for fresh fruit, schedule it in, and ship to the customers' destinations all in a timely manner that keeps the fruit fresh. No more running to Bi-Lo for an emergency grape fix. In the case of concentrated juices, not to worry as they are available year round.

The goal for making wine at home, or any place for that matter, is called Vinosity. This is getting the finished wine to possess the characteristics that make grape wine so enjoyable; aroma, body, and the way it tastes in the mouth after swallowing.

WINESPEAK

So, there you have it. Follow the directions, pay strict attention to cleanliness, get quality fruit, and you are on your way to becoming a vintner. Think Patience! Wine historians have gone back as far as 8000+ years and found records of wine being made. The earliest records were found in what is now the country of Georgia. The "records" were probably more of the physical evidence type – as in containers that showed traces of wine residue. Fast forward to 4100 BC and we find evidence that an actual winery was operating in Armenia. Maybe 4100 years from now we will find evidence of a winery that operated in a place called Beaufort, South Carolina.