

Wines like grandma used to make

BY CARLA DAVID



of advice from a more experienced winemaker, we proceeded to cut, pit and mash our plums, adding only water, sugar and wine yeast. Within a few months, after watching our brew ferment to completion and age slightly, we had 24 bottles of a lovely, fruity, dry white wine which we thoroughly enjoyed and shared often.

Why make a country wine, you may ask. Well, why not? The results can be as good or better than a purchased wine, and with minimal effort and cost, you can create your own unique and delicious wines. Not only will you be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor but by making wine you also will be taking part in a tradition that is found in nearly every culture around the world. And truly, there is value in the things we create for ourselves and joy in sharing them with others.

When some people think of wine, they think of grapes. Even history traces wine and the grapevine as one. While wine made from grapes may be considered the only true wine, “country” wines—wines made from alternative materials including fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs and nuts—can give grape wines a run for their money. Keep an open mind, have an adventurous spirit and you may find yourself quite surprised at what country wines have to offer!

It was ten years ago that my interest in making wine was piqued. I was living on 40 acres of land in Williams, with over 100 mature fruit trees, and too much good fruit to let go to waste. A fellow community member and I decided we’d try making our first wine together, from the abundant supply of plums falling at our feet. With a bit

One of the best reasons for making country wines is that they can be made from almost any edible plant material. I prefer to make them from fruits, berries and flowers, but I’ve heard many a story of tomato wine, garlic wine, and even a seaweed wine that is marketed in Germany! Fresh or frozen fruit makes no difference, so you can make wine in all seasons of the year.

With the summer and fall bounty of fresh fruit in our region, opportunity knocks. Blackberries, peaches, apples, pears, raspberries, blueberries, elderberries, cherries, thimbleberries, huckleberries, melons, strawberries, figs...there are so many options! Whether you go out collecting for yourself, or support a local farmer, just make sure to use ripe, sound fruit, and if you’re wildcraft-

ing, be sure you’ve identified correctly, tread lightly, and harvest materials with respect and a view toward future abundance.

Winemaking can be as complicated or as easy as you desire, with the type of equipment reflecting the degree of involvement. Homebrewing supplies can be purchased locally at BlackBird Shopping Center, Grains Beans ‘N’ Things, or Herman’s Homebrew. There is, of course, a wealth of information online, including recipes, forums, and other resources. Books are also available and several local homebrew clubs meet regularly to taste and exchange ideas and information.

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There is a lot of mystery in winemaking; that the very simple inputs of fruit juice, water, sugar and yeast can yield such a profoundly different product in which the yeast has consumed the sugars leaving as by-products, alcohol and carbon dioxide, is a fascinating and magical alchemical wonder. Winemakers have joked that their job is only to create the right environment for the real winemaker—the yeast—to do its work.

Country winemaking can present different challenges than wine made from grapes. Grape winemaking can be easier than country winemaking because grapes can have the perfect balance of acids, sugar, tannins, body, and even yeast on their skins. Country winemaking requires some skill and patience to create desirable, balanced levels of acids, sugar, tannins and body. There are many ways to achieve this balance, whether you choose to use an acid blend powder (a blend of citric, tartaric and malic acids derived from natural sources), or a citrus juice addition, or even grape juice concentrate. Tannins are present in oak leaves, black

tea and the skins of grapes and raisins, so any of these can be added to your wine, as well as a commercially available tannin powder. Sugar can be any type you have or prefer, although cane sugar is said to be the most neutral in terms of imparting any other flavor to the wine. Honey has the advantage of adding body to the finished wine, so this, too, may be a consideration in choice of sugars to use. Whatever you do, take detailed notes so that if you are happy with the taste, you can recreate it, and if you are not, well, you’ll have an idea of where to start making some changes!

The hardest part of making your first batches of wine is waiting for it to be ready to drink. This can take as little as a few months, but more often, given a year, or even two, your wine will open up, soften, and smooth out immensely. It’s worth the wait! What better reason than this to have wine brewing continuously throughout the year. The pleasure of wine is ageless. Whether enjoyed with a meal, at a party, or in front of a crackling fire with a special person, a good wine is sure to be remembered long after the glass is gone.

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Carla David of Wild Wines has been making wine for ten years, primarily from locally gathered wild plants, including rosehips, elderberries, and dandelions.



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