Elderflower wine

Recipe No. 18 — for 10 l of must and about 8.5–9.5 l of dry wine.

Flowers offer new aromas to explore. We prepare a hot infusion, strain it and ferment only the liquid.

What are we aiming for?

A dry floral wine of about 11.5–13% alcohol. Fermentation usually takes 2–4 weeks; clearing and ageing 4–8 months. Colour depends on the flowers and must parameters. Timings and yield are approximate.

Ingredients

• Flowers from 40–60 medium-sized flower heads.

• Approximately 2–2.2 kg of sugar, according to measurements.

• Drinking water to make 10 l of finished must, including infusion and syrup.

• A whole 5 g sachet of White Wine Yeast HAT and a whole 10 g sachet of ALCOMAT Nutri-Duo.

• CIAC to adjust acidity according to measurements.

• PIRO Ferm for protecting wine after fermentation, according to instructions and pH.

• 25 ml of water and 25 ml of must for rehydration.

The target 10 l includes dissolved sugar. Measure additives other than yeast and ALCOMAT Nutri-Duo separately.

Equipment

• A food-grade fermenter of about 15 l for 10 l of prepared liquid, with a lid and airlock; leave room for foam.

• A 6–8 l saucepan for the infusion and a fine sieve to separate the flowers.

• A vessel fitted with an airlock for continued fermentation and smaller vessels matched to the volume during ageing.

• A hydrometer with a test cylinder and a thermometer.

• A pH meter and an acidity test kit.

• Scales and equipment for measuring additives accurately.

• A siphon tube and products for cleaning and sanitising equipment.

• Wine bottles and suitable closures.

1. Select the flowers

Use only correctly identified Sambucus nigra flowers. Do not substitute lilac or another species. Remove green stalks as thoroughly as possible; do not add leaves, bark or berries.

Collect fresh, sound, fragrant flowers in an unpolluted place, away from busy roads and unknown pesticide applications. Discard mouldy and wilted flowers. If identification is uncertain, do not use the plant.

2. Clean and prepare the equipment

Remove insects and debris. Elderflowers may be spread on a clean tray for 30–60 minutes to let insects leave. Rinse briefly if necessary and drain; do not soak for long.

Clean and sanitise the equipment. Use only correctly identified Sambucus nigra flowers. Do not substitute lilac or another species. Remove green stalks as thoroughly as possible; do not add leaves, bark or berries.

3. Prepare the infusion

Add flowers to about 4 l of boiling water. Return to a gentle boil and heat for 2–3 minutes. Turn off the heat and steep covered for about 20–30 minutes.

Do not extend extraction over many hours. Excessive extraction or green parts can introduce bitterness.

4. Strain and add sugar

Strain through a fine sieve or bag. Do not squeeze hard. Initially dissolve 1.8 kg of sugar in the warm infusion. Add water to about 9 l. Cool covered.

5. Adjust acidity and prepare 10 l of must

The diluted infusion usually needs acidification. Measure acidity and pH. An approximate starting point is 5–7 g/l titratable acidity expressed as tartaric acid. Check your kit's units.

Add CIAC in small weighed portions, dissolving it in the must, mixing and measuring again. Do not automatically use the whole sachet. pH and titratable acidity are different parameters.

Sugar target: 20–22 °Brix, gravity 1.083–1.092. Add gradually. Top up with water to 10 l and measure all parameters again. Record additives and original gravity.

6. Add nutrient and yeast

Bring the must to about 18–20 °C.

Dissolve the whole 10 g sachet of ALCOMAT Nutri-Duo in a small portion of must. Pour into the fermenter and mix.

In a separate sanitised vessel, combine 25 ml of water and 25 ml of prepared must at 25–30 °C.

Add the whole 5 g sachet of ALCOMAT White Wine Yeast HAT and leave for about 20–25 minutes, following the product instructions.

Gradually add small portions of liquid from the fermenter to bring the prepared yeast closer to the must temperature. Pour in the yeast and mix gently.

Add nutrient to the must, not to the yeast rehydration liquid. Close the fermenter with an airlock and leave room for foam.

7. Ferment

Maintain a stable temperature of about 18–20 °C. If there are no signs of activity after 48–72 hours, check temperature and measure gravity. Falling gravity confirms fermentation.

After about two weeks, begin checking for completion. Gently degas the sample and account for the hydrometer's calibration temperature. Do not return the sample to the batch.

Take three readings at intervals of 2–3 days, keeping the batch at fermentation temperature. The result should remain unchanged and indicate completed fermentation.

In dry wine, gravity often falls below 1.000, but one reading does not confirm the end of fermentation.

If the reading stops significantly above the expected level, check for a stalled fermentation. Lack of airlock bubbles is not sufficient confirmation.

8. Rack the wine

After fermentation has finished and coarse sediment has settled, siphon into a clean, sanitised vessel. Do not draw up the sediment.

Minimise splashing and contact with air. Choose a vessel that leaves little headspace above the wine. Continue to use an airlock.

Adjust PIRO Ferm protection according to the product instructions, pH and free SO_2 level, if measured.

9. Leave to clear and age

Store in cool, dark conditions. Rack when noticeable sediment forms. Allow 4–8 months, adapting the time to clarity and taste. Young aromas may be intense, but excessive flowers do not always mellow sufficiently.

10. Bottle the wine

Bottle when the wine is clear, fermentation has finished and its parameters are stable. Use clean, sanitised bottles and suitable closures. Minimise air contact.

This recipe produces a dry wine. For an off-dry or medium-sweet version, plan a separate sweetening stage and suitable stabilisation. Do not add sugar immediately before bottling without protection against renewed fermentation. PIRO alone does not guarantee protection of sweetened wine.

How can you estimate alcohol content?

If no sugar or water was added after the original reading, use this approximation:

Alcohol [% vol.] ≈ (original gravity − final gravity) × 131.

Example: (1.087 − 0.995) × 131 ≈ 12.1% alcohol.

The result is approximate. Use the measurement taken after adjustments and before adding yeast.

Frequently asked questions

Which flowers are suitable? Use only correctly identified Sambucus nigra flowers. Do not substitute lilac or another species. Remove green stalks as thoroughly as possible; do not add leaves, bark or berries.

Do the flowers stay in the fermenter? No. Strain them out before fermentation.

Can I use dried flowers? Different proportions are needed. Do not replace fresh flowers with the same weight of dried ones.

Do we add Pectolase? This strained infusion without fruit does not call for it.

Is acid needed? Usually yes; determine the dose from measurements.

What causes bitter or green notes? Possible causes include green parts, bitter petal bases, excessive extraction and heavy squeezing.

Do I use whole sachets of yeast and nutrient? Yes. Use the whole 5 g sachet of the specified yeast and the whole 10 g sachet of ALCOMAT Nutri-Duo. Measure other products separately.

Do I add all the sugar at once? Do not add it automatically. Add gradually and check measurements before fermentation.

Does 10 l of must mean adding 10 l of water? No. The volume includes juice or infusion, water and dissolved sugar. Fruit occupies additional space.

The airlock is not bubbling — has fermentation failed? Check gravity and temperature. Falling gravity confirms fermentation even if gas escapes through a leak.

How do I recognise the end of fermentation? Take three gravity readings at intervals of 2–3 days. They should be stable and show that the sugar has fermented. An unusually high result requires investigation.

Can I use a refractometer? Once alcohol is present, the reading needs appropriate correction. A hydrometer is easier for beginners.

Why is the wine not sweet despite added sugar? Yeast converted the sugar into alcohol. Sugar added before fermentation is for strength, not a guarantee of sweetness.

The wine remains cloudy — is it spoiled? Cloudiness alone does not mean spoilage. Give the wine time, assess its aroma and surface, and identify the cause before using another treatment.

Sediment has formed at the bottom — is this normal? Yes. Yeast and fruit components settle. Rack off noticeable sediment while minimising air contact.

Mould has appeared on the surface. What should I do? Do not taste or bottle this batch — discard it.

What affects flavour most? Fragrant, correctly identified flowers, gentle extraction, acidity and stable temperature. Serve at about 8–12 °C. Record additives and measurements. Making your own wine is enjoyable and can become a rewarding hobby.