

SHRUB, SWITCHEL OR HAYMAKER'S DRINK

From bearlakerendezvous.wordpress.com

The word "shrub" is derived from the Arabic *sharbah*, which means "a drink". "Sherbet" and "syrup" also come from this Arabic root. Also called switchels or haymaker's drink (make hay while the sun shines!), shrub has some origin in 17th England where vinegar was used as an alternative to citrus juices in the preservation of berries and other fruits for the off-season.

The use of vinegar over fruit has a long history stretching back even to the Babylonians, who added the vinegar of a date to water in an attempt to make it safe to drink, and the Romans, for a beverage called Posca, which is a sour wine or vinegar with water and flavoring herbs. Shrub was first a drink for the lower class and was preserved with grain alcohol and mixed with berries or, if available, lemons, cherries, or plums. This concentrate would keep indefinitely, due to the alcohol, and would be diluted with water when ultimately served. The acetic acid in vinegar alone, which does not support bacteria growth, also acts as a preserving agent. Shrubs were – and still are – a delicious way to enjoy seasonal fruit juices year-round. The process for making shrub was known as "a superior efficacy against putrefaction."

The practice of preserving fruit with vinegar carried over into colonial America. Colonial-era sailors carried shrubs, rich in Vitamin C, aboard their boats to prevent scurvy. It also kept the sailors away from the ardent spirits because the beverage would "cheer" but not inebriate.

Adding ginger reduced the potential for bloating and indigestion if one partook of it in excess. Just as it advocated to sip ginger ale when suffering from nausea, so, too, did our ancestors see ginger as having a calming effect on upset stomachs. Those who drank a switchel with ginger could, as Laura Ingalls Wilder explained in *The Long Winter*, "drink until they were not thirsty. Ginger-water would not make them sick."

It was the vinegar that made it so popular in America. Credited with being able to bring down fevers, vinegar was traditionally viewed as having cooling attributes.

Shrubs also gained popularity during the Temperance Movement and many 19th and early 20th century housekeeping manuals contain recipes for them. Nineteenth-century Americans frequently pointed to the Bible, citing passages that indicated that the ancient Israelites had used vinegar-based drinks to cool off. Ruth, for example, was credited with sharing a vinegar-based drink while working in the fields of Boaz. Captain James Dacre, a British captain, who battled with the USS Constitution during the War of 1812, jokingly called for the drink to be prepared for the Americans whom he hoped to capture. But Dacre's fantasy of serving the Americans their own drink as they surrendered went down when his ship, not the Constitution, was sunk.

By the 19th century, American recipes for shrubs used vinegar poured over berries, which was left to infuse anywhere from overnight up to several days. The fruit would then be strained and the liquid would be sweetened with sugar, honey or even molasses, and then reduced to make a syrup. The sweet-and-sour syrup could be mixed with either water or soda water and served as a soft drink, or it could be used as a mixer in alcoholic cocktails. Shrub eventually fell out of popularity with the advent of home refrigeration and the rise of industrially produced soft drinks.

Drinking vinegars, however, have recently come back into vogue. Apple cider vinegar, commonly mixed with lemon and/or honey, is used medicinally as a tonic for weight loss and to dissolve gall and kidney stones. The serving of vinegar-based shrub drinks became popular again beginning in 2011 in American restaurants and bars and then went to Canada and London. The acidity of the shrub makes it well suited as a before dinner drink, or as an alternative to bitters, because unlike cocktails acidulated with citrus, vinegar-based drinks remain clear when shaken.

The basic formula for shrub is 2 cups fruit to one pint of at least 5% acidic vinegar. The best fruits for shrub making are rarely perfect. Farmer's Market "seconds," or any fruit that is abundantly in season and verging over-ripeness, are often used. After thoroughly washing and peeling, if necessary (apples and pears), the fruit is then chopped or lightly crushed to shorten the infusion process.

The type of vinegar used should be carefully considered as well in order to complement instead of overwhelm, the fruit. That old rule about cooking with wine---don't cook with anything you'd refuse to drink---comes in handy here, as shrubs aren't the place for bargain brands or distilled white vinegar, which is too sharp and acidic. That said, distilled white vinegar provides for a clear, sharp flavor; apple cider vinegar tends to be milder with a fruity flavor; wine vinegars, while more expensive, often provide a superior smooth flavor and a balsamic vinegar is often used, and most delicious, when paired with cherries and strawberries.

The fruit/vinegar mix is then sweetened with 1 ½ - 2 cups sugar. Sugar can be granulated, brown or raw. Honey or Agave may also be used. Ginger, Citrus peel, and even peppercorns have also been known to be added for flavor.

The final ingredient in a well-made shrub is an aromatic, usually an herb or spice. This addition is optional, but it's the key to creating a distinctive shrub with multiple layers of flavor. Think back to memorable flavor combinations, both familiar and unusual, that you've enjoyed in your food. If you are intrigued with making your own shrub, consider the following flavor combinations.:

Blackberries:

White wine, apple or champagne vinegar
Lemon verbena or Apple cider vinegar
Peppercorns

Blueberries:

White wine vinegar
Bay leaves or lemon verbena or lavender

Carrots:

Rice vinegar
Ginger or toasted coriander seed

Citrus (Meyer lemon, grapefruit, or blood orange):

White-wine vinegar
Rosemary

Cranberries:

Red-wine vinegar

Orange zest

Or

Apple-cider vinegar

Cloves

Cinnamon sticks

Peaches:

Red-wine vinegar

Cinnamon or basil or lavender

Pineapple:

Coconut or rice vinegar

Sage or long pepper

Raspberries:

Red-wine vinegar

Pink peppercorns

Or

Champagne vinegar

Rose geranium

Rhubarb:

Champagne or white-wine vinegar

Lavender

Or

Apple-cider vinegar

Cardamom

Strawberries:

White-wine vinegar

Tarragon

Or

Balsamic vinegar

Black peppercorns

Tomatoes:

White-wine vinegar

Basil

Or

Red-wine vinegar

Peppercorns

Watermelon:

White-wine vinegar

Basil or mint

The tonic that results from the combination of fruit juice, sugar, vinegar, and spices is a delicious miracle. The two methods for processing are reducing or cold brewing. The syrup resulting from reducing is immediately available for use. It is recommended that the cold brewing method have a minimum of ten days to infuse. When properly prepared, shrub syrups can be stored up to six months.

The Bear Lake Rendezvous Raspberry Shrub Recipe**Ingredients:**

3 cups raspberries, fresh or frozen

3 cups red wine vinegar

1 cup sugar

Instructions:

1. Sterilize a quart jar in boiling water for 10 minutes.
2. In a saucepan, heat the vinegar and sugar until the sugar dissolves.
3. Cool. When room temperature, add the raspberries to the jar and pour the vinegar/sugar liquid over the top. Top with a lid and let sit for a week or two to infuse.
4. When ready, strain out the raspberries and return to the jar or bottle.
5. To serve, pour 1 shot of shrub in a champagne glass and top with chilled champagne, sparkling water, or ginger ale.