

WINTER WARMER

Ok, we're on the last leg of winter, so hang in there, there's not long to go. On nights that I really feel like it, a good lift me up is always the smell of mulled wine coming from the kitchen

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I often associate mulled wine with my time living in Europe, when a mug of the hot alcoholic beverage was a must to warm the body and soul while strolling the open air Christmas markets in winter. If I close my eyes, I can still hear the crisp snow under my boots as I head in the direction of the inviting aromas.

The origins of mulled wine are believed to be traced back to around 400BCE, when Hippocrates made the drink as a tonic and served it to people for health benefits. I like to support this time-proven theory – mulled wine is good for you! The drink was then carried through to the Roman times who used the drink to warm themselves through the winter months. As history has it, Romans went everywhere, and so did mulled wine, giving origins to the many variations of fruit and spice flavoured beverages we know today, including sangria, gluhwein, glögg and other blends of vermouths and ports heated with spices.



Since my time at the European Christmas markets, I've tasted mulled wine in countries all over the world and it has become one of my favourite beverages in the cooler months. One of the things I love so much about it is the fact that every corner of the world has a special trick up their sleeve to make the recipe their own and unique in some sort of way. By this method of trying and testing all the different offerings, I have myself developed a special recipe that becomes a winner at every winter party I host. See the recipe in the Up to Taste section.

Before you hit the shops for the ingredients, though, let's have a quick chat about what to do and what not to. One of the biggest mistakes people make when trying to make their own mulled wine is they boil it way too hard. The thing is, alcohol in any beverage starts to evaporate at around 75 degrees, which is below normal boiling temperature. This is why in commercial quantities mulled wine is often made in temperature-controlled urns where you can set the wine to stay below that critical point. In real life though, I have learnt a trick that works a treat, if you still want to get the benefit of extracting the fruit flavours, while keeping the alcohol content in tact. It works by splitting the wine into two parts – the first part is sacrificial in a sense of alcohol content, and is used to boil the flavours of fruit out into the drink. The second part is the one I add right at the end and it never gets boiled; just heated to a warm temperature.

One of the things I get asked the most is what wine to use? Seriously, any red wine will do. This might be the only time you ever hear me say this, but you don't need anything fancy, as you'll be putting most of the flavours of mulled wine in through adding fruit and spices. I do suggest going for something rich and juicy though, so you get that nice, thick colour full of tannins. For my recipe I've got a couple of bottles of Barossa Shiraz from the 'specials' baskets at my local. Total spend, under \$12. [U](#)



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Mulled wine is the perfect winter warmer; Mulled wine has a long history; Enjoying the beautiful and fruity flavours is a winter highlight

UP TO TASTE!

WINE CHICK'S SPECIAL MULLED WINE RECIPE

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- 2 bottles of dry red wine (1 go for Shiraz, but any flavoursome red is good)
- 1 orange
- 1 lemon
- 1 apple
- 1-2 cinnamon sticks
- 3-5 star anise cloves
- ½ cup of brown sugar
- ¼ cup of brandy (optional)

WHAT TO DO:

1. Slice the orange and lemon, arrange covering the bottom of the saucepan you'll be using.
2. Dice the apple and throw on top.
3. Sprinkle herbs and sugar on top.
4. Add just enough wine to cover the fruit – important to not add all the wine at the beginning as the alcohol will evaporate. Think of this as our sacrificial wine that we will boil the alcohol out of.
5. Boil on low to medium heat for 15-20 minutes for the flavours to develop.
6. Add the rest of the wine, keep the heat low and start looking for small bubbles.
7. You don't want to bring this to a complete boil as you will lose the alcohol. Once you see small lines of bubbles starting to rise to the top (kind of like champagne bubbles), you're done! At this point the temperature should be just below 75 degrees.
8. Optional: For an extra kick, add a quarter, to half a cup, of brandy for extra internal warmth.
9. Enjoy!