

# The Wine-Maker's Calendar - May

Contributed by cab and gil

Bit late this month, so you'll have to pull your fingers out to get them all done...

May, either the start of Summer or the end of Spring, depending on where you are. In these parts its certainly summer, and its the time of year when we're just beginning to move away from flower and herb wines to those made from leaves, shoots, and even summer vegetables.

Although the recipes included are probably most appropriate for May, that doesn't mean you can't make them sooner or later. Ingredients like beech and oak leaves come out when they come out, and you're waiting to pick them young and soft for 'spring' leaf wines (more on early autumn leaf wines later in the year...), and warm Springs have made hawthorn blossom (the May tree) available from March in some places.

I suppose the most iconic country wine to make in May (perhaps all year) is elderflower, and there are hundreds of variations. Included here are three of my own, as well as others contributed by Downsizer members. But feel free to experiment, its a forgiving wine to make!

## Lemon Balm Wine

4 pints lemon balm

1 lb raisins

3 lb sugar

1 lemon

1 orange

1 cup strong black tea

1 teaspoon yeast nutrient

1 gallon of water

Yeast (ideally champagne)

If you buy a tiny little lemon balm plant for a couple of quid then four pints (loosely packed down) sounds like a hell of a lot. But let that go to seed and you'll be delighted to be rid of four pints of the stuff next year. I rue the day that I sowed lemon balm seeds, but there you go. You live and learn. This recipe allows you to use a lot of lemon balm up very fast.

Half the lemon and orange, and put them in a straining bag with your raisins and lemon balm. Boil the water with sugar, tea and yeast nutrient, and pour them onto the straining bag in a sterile bucket. When it is cool, add the activated yeast, cover, and stir every day for a week. Rack into a DJ, and allow it to ferment out as normal.

This is a very pale, but quite strongly flavoured wine. Not one that I make every year, but its worth making once in a while. After three months in the bottle its okay, after a year its great.

#### Sweet Hawthorn Flower Wine

4 pints hawthorn flowers

3 1/2 lb sugar

1 lemon

1 cup strong black tea

1 teaspoon yeast nutrient

water to 1 gallon

Yeast (all purpose wine yeast is fine)

Boil the water, sugar, yeast nutrient, tea and lemon zest together.

Pack the flowers into your nylon straining bag, put that in a sterile bucket, and pour on the boiling liquid. Cover tightly, add the activated yeast when its cool. Give it a week in this primary ferment, racking it into a demijon and ferment out as normal.

#### Elderflower Wine - Cabs Reliable

1 1/2 pints of elderflowers, rubbed from the stalks and pressed down lightly

1 gallon water

Juice of 1 lemon

2 1/2 lb of sugar

1 pound of raisins

1 cup of strong black tea

All purpose wine yeast

There are hundreds of recipes for this; I've made it a number of different ways, all of which turn out slightly different. This is one I've found to be reliable.

Put the elderflowers (rubbed from the flower heads) and raisins into the bag, and make as per the instructions for hawthorn wine (above)

#### Dried Apricot and Elderflower Mead - Cabs Exotic

2 lb dried apricots

2 lb honey

1 cup orange juice

1 teaspoon citric acid

1 pint elderflowers

Water to 1 gallon

1 teaspoon yeast nutrient

Pectinase

Champagne yeast

Many years ago I stumbled upon the idea of gooseberry and elderflower jam. Gorgeous stuff, but then I tried apricot and elderflower, and that is better. So I thought that making apricot and elderflower wine should also be better...

This is the recipe I last used, a couple of years ago, and I'm still working on improving it. Made a glorious golden brew, sweet but not too sweet, with layers of different flavour from the honey, flowers and apricots.

Make as per the hawthorn blossom wine above, but boil for longer and remove scum that floats up from the addition of honey, and chop the apricots and add them to your straining bag. Add the pectinase along with the activated yeast.

Elderflower - Sweet and Gentle

(this recipe, like many others, adapted from CJJ Berry)

Elderflowers 3/4 pint

Sugar 3 1/2 lb

Raisins 1/2 lb

Lemons 3

1 cup strong tea

water to 1 gallon

Wine yeast

Gather the flowers on a dry day. Snip the flowers from the heads with scissors, till you have about 3/4 of a pint. Boil the water and let it cool a little; pour it over the flowers then add sugar and raisins (chopped) and lemon juice. When cool, add the yeast, and allow it to stay in the bucket (stirring daily) for a week or so.

### Spring Leaf Wines - Beech, Oak, etc. (Gils version)

3 pints young leaves

2.5lb sugar

1 litre white grape juice

1/2 mug tea (optional, depending on the leaves)

juice of 1 lemon

yeast

You can make leaf wines for much of the year, and you'll find that at different times they give rather different products - a late summer oakleaf wine is different to a spring leaf wine, for example.

In essence, making these wines is really simple, as they're all the same recipe - here are the guidelines Gil uses:

1. Wash and shred the leaves, put in sterilised bucket (with sultanas if using).
2. Pour on 2 pints boiling water.
3. Dissolve 1/2 kg sugar in 1 pint water and add.
4. When cool, add yeast starter.
5. Ferment on the leaves for 6 days.
6. Strain mix off leaves.
7. Add tea, lemon juice, grape juice, rest of sugar as a syrup and top up to 1 gallon.
8. Leave to ferment out, rack a couple of times, bottle.

Oak makes a fine leaf wine, but they have plenty of tannin in them so don't use the tea. Beech would probably work well, ground elder is so-so, the young shoot tips from brambles are good, and fennel shoots are quite intriguing...

### Gils Infamously Outstanding Nettle Wine

Now, this isn't to everyone's taste. Some people hate it, some absolutely love it (and Gil is more in the 'love it' camp than anyone else you'll talk to). Only one way to find out, eh?

3 pints of nettle tops (loosely pressed down to measure)

1 kg sugar

1 litre white grape juice

juice of 2 lemons

a small piece of root ginger, bashed (optional)

½ a mug strong black tea (pot dregs)

yeast starter

yeast nutrient (optional)

Water to 1 gallon

1. Wash the nettles well in cold water, place in sterilised bucket, and add 1 pint cold water [add sulphite to sterilise if you are being cautious and leave overnight, stirring well to dispel sulphite before proceeding]
2. Add 1 litre grape juice, lemon juice, black tea
3. Boil up 1 pint water, dissolve the sugar in it, [add ginger if using], cool slightly
4. Add to nettle mix in bucket
5. Make up yeast starter, add to bucket
6. Leave to steep for 5-7 days in a warm place, stirring at least daily to push the nettles down into the liquid
7. Strain into a demi-john through a jelly bag or muslin cloth in a funnel, adding more water if needed to make up to 1 gallon, and aiming roughly for a SG of 1090-1100, and put under airlock
8. Leave in a warm place to ferment out &ndash; could go down to SG 990
9. Rack, mature (for about 4 months), and bottle.

Nettle Champagne (Gil finds yet another way to celebrate the nettle)

3 pints nettle tops

1.5lb sugar

1 litre white grape juice

juice of 1 lemon

1/2 mug black tea

yeast starter

1. Put rinsed nettles in sterilised bucket.
2. Add 1.5lbs sugar dissolved in 1.5pts water, which has been cooled, also grape juice, lemon juice, cold tea.
3. SG should be about 1075
4. Add yeast
5. Ferment on the leaf for 5-7 days

6. Strain into a DJ and airlock
7. Put in warm place to ferment out
8. Rack off sediment
9. Rack again 2 months later
10. Using a champagne yeast, make a new starter in a sterilised and well-rinsed wine bottle, stoppered with cotton wool.
11. Add to this small but increasing amounts of the (weak) wine, and feed with teaspoon tips of sugar to keep the ferment going, until you have a 75cl wine bottle full of fermenting stuff.
12. Add this to the racked wine in its DJ, and hope it keeps on fermenting (adding just enough sugar to keep the yeast alive). Wine should be cloudy again.
13. Bottle into champagne bottles, and add 1/2 a teaspoon of sugar to each bottle (and NO more).
14. Cork with plastic champagne corks and wire down securely.
15. Put in a warmish place to complete secondary fermentation (till clear again). Cross fingers bottles don't explode.
- 16 Then transfer to a cool place for storage.

#### Ye Olde Sack

This is a really quaint old fashioned mead variant. Well worth a try.

Fennel Roots - 3 (whole plants in Spring)

Rue - 3 good sprigs

Honey 4lb

Juice of 2 lemons

Yeast and nutrient

Water to 1 gallon

Scrub the roots clean and boil the fennel in the water, with the honey, yeast nutrient and lemon juice. Take the fennel out after half an hour or so, and continue boiling till scum stops coming to the surface.

Pour into your sterile bucket, add the yeast when it has cooled, and after 5 days in primary (long enough for the yeast to settle down) ferment out as ordinary.

#### Lime Flower Wine

You might have more joy finding lime flowers next month, but in these crazy mixed up seasons heres one that might be worthwhile...

3 pints lime flowers, snipped from their stalks

2 lemons

3lb sugar

water to one gallon

wine yeast, yeast nutrient

Make a gallon of over-mashed lime flower tea; so, get a straining bag, put the lime flowers in with zest from the two lemons, dissolve the sugar and yeast nutrient in the water along with the lemon juice, boil it, pour it on, let it stand for half an hour. Add yeast when it has cooled, and let it ferment out as for any flower wine (four or five days in primary, then rack as normal).

Makes a very flowery wine; note that this recipe doesn't call for any tannin, grape juice or raisins, its a very subtle, flowery brew. If you have any questions or suggestions, please raise them on our forum.