

Preserve Today, Relish Tomorrow



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SHRUBS & SWITCHELS

While vinegar-based beverages may seem to be the current rage, humans have been drinking vinegar in various forms since antiquity, with records going back at least 4,000 years ago to the Babylonians. The sugar-sweetened versions we know today as shrubs can be traced to Turkey (the word *shrub* derives from the Arabic word *sharâb*, meaning "to drink"). By the time that drink made its way to colonial America by the very early 1700's, it was in the modified form of a citrus and sugar syrup blended with either brandy or rum. Drinks known as *fruit vinegar*, consisting of fruit (especially raspberries), sugar and vinegar, became popular here at about the same time and by the mid-1800s also became known as shrubs.

Another early vinegar drink known as *switchel* arose in the Caribbean sometime in the 16th or 17th centuries. Made with vinegar, ginger, water and likely molasses, switchel came to colonial New England by the late 1600's along with the molasses trade. Once there, honey and sometimes maple syrup – sweeteners readily available in New England – replaced the molasses. It was served to farmers, especially during hay-harvesting time, and thus switchel came to be known as "hay-maker's punch."

For various reasons, by the end of Prohibition shrubs fell out of favor. Now, with the advent of the craft cocktail and food preservation/DIY movements, shrubs are finding a renaissance. Whether you're interested in making refreshing non-alcoholic adult soft drinks or creating a hot new cocktail, shrubs are versatile beverages that are easy to make at home and that can help you preserve the bounty of fresh, local fruits and herbs.

Did You Know?

Research has shown that sour-tasting beverages are more thirst quenching. Why? Sour flavors stimulate salivation more than other flavors. Having a wet mouth helps you feel more hydrated, even once you've stopped drinking.

Tools & Supplies for Making Shrubs

Most of the tools you'll need to make shrubs are probably already in your kitchen: a mixing spoon; measuring cups and spoons; vegetable peeler and citrus zester; a good knife; funnel (optional but helpful); and a potato masher (also optional but helpful).

Specialty equipment include a fine-mesh strainer (made of plastic or stainless steel); fine weave cloth or paper coffee filters for straining liquids that have fine sediment that a strainer won't catch; labels (either paper labels or freezer or painter's tape); and perhaps a bottle brush if you plan on using narrow-topped bottles.

Covered bowls or jars will be necessary for mixing your shrubs, and you'll need glass canning jars or bottles to store the finished product. Storage containers should be scrupulously clean: wash them in hot soapy water and then rinse thoroughly. Be sure to carefully wash lids and caps as well. Taking the extra step of sterilizing the jars or bottles may help prevent

contamination and extend the shelf life of your shrub, and is easy to do: simply place your jar in a deep pot (lined with a rack or trivet), fill with water to at least one inch above the top of the container, cover and bring to a full rolling boil over high heat. Once the water is at a boil, start timing and boil for 10 minutes at altitudes 1000 feet or less; add 1 minute for each additional 1000 feet of elevation. Remove the jars with tongs or jar lifters while they are still hot, tip out the water and shake out any excess. Fill the jars while they are still warm.

Shrub Ingredients

Fruit (and sometimes Vegetables): Use produce at its peak of freshness for the best taste. Since the fruit will be chopped and then strained, “seconds” (produce with imperfections) will work just fine. Frozen berries can give good results as well. Wash all fruit and vegetables (see the food safety section above) and drain well, and be sure to discard any moldy produce. If using citrus, choose unwaxed fruit or remove the wax before zesting the skin.

Sweeteners: Basic sugars, like white cane or raw cane, work well in shrubs and provide the most clarity and neutral sweetness. Other sugars, such as brown, turbinado, maple, coconut, etc., can also be used successfully, but keep in mind that each will bring its own flavor profile and may affect the color of the finished shrub. Also be aware that some sugars are sweeter than others (for example, maple sugar is twice as sweet as white granulated sugar).

{ *TIP: To make turbinado and other large-crystal sugars easier to dissolve, whirl briefly in a spice mill or coffee grinder.* }

Other sweeteners such as honey, molasses, and maple syrup may also be used, however these sweeteners can be strongly flavored. Honey in particular is sweeter than sugar and can make liquids cloudy, so use restraint and adjust to taste.

Vinegar: White distilled vinegar has a harsh taste and is not recommended for shrubs, but most any other vinegar will do. Choose your vinegar to complement the type of fruit (or vegetable) you’re using for your shrub, and feel free to experiment with blends of different vinegars. If you perform the initial vinegar infusion outside of the refrigerator, be sure to choose a vinegar with at least 5% acidity (the acidity level can be found on the label).

Apple Cider Vinegar: This is a great all-purpose vinegar that works with many fruits, especially pome fruits, peaches and plums.

White Wine and Champagne Vinegars: These vinegars work well with stone fruits and other delicately flavored fruits.

Red Wine Vinegar: This vinegar works well with cherries and berries, and is good blended with other vinegars for a smoother taste.

Balsamic Vinegar: Balsamic is very rich and may overpower some fruits, but it does pair well with strawberries and cherries. White balsamic is a good option for stone fruits.

Rice Vinegar: This vinegar is less acidic and has a milder flavor than most wine vinegars. It is good with herbs and some vegetables. It generally is less than 5% acidity however, so be sure to infuse any shrub using rice vinegar in the fridge.

Herbs & Spices: Use very fresh herbs and discard any bruised or damaged leaves. Wash gently (see the food safety section above) and dry thoroughly. For additional safety, herbs can be sanitized by dipping them in a bleach solution (1 teaspoon of plain chlorine bleach in 6

cups of water) and then rinsing thoroughly under cold water and patted dry with a clean paper towel. Dried herbs can often be substituted for fresh (use about half the amount).

When it comes to spices, just like in cooking, freshness counts. Check to see that your spices are not stale. When crushing or grinding whole spices, it's best to do so just before using.

The Basic Procedure for Making a Shrub

There are several methods for making shrubs, but in this class we'll be using the cold process, which is not only easy but because there is no cooking involved, results in a shrub with a full, fresh fruit flavor.

The basic process involves making a fruit syrup by combining fruit and sugar and letting that macerate for about 24 hours, straining off the solids, and combining the syrup with vinegar. It's that simple!

A common "formula" for shrub is a ratio of 1:1:1 fruit/sugar/vinegar (equal parts of fruit, sugar and vinegar). Another basic ratio is 2:1:1 fruit/sugar/vinegar (2 parts fruit, one part sugar, and one part vinegar). There is no set rule, so follow your taste buds – you may prefer your shrub on the sweet side or on the tangy end of the spectrum. Review the recipes below for the basic process and use them as a springboard for your own creations.

Shrub Storage

Shrubs should be stored in the refrigerator, where they will keep for up to a year. Always check your shrub before consuming it, and if there are any signs of mold, or if the shrub starts to look bubbly, cloudy or slimy, throw it away. **When in doubt, throw it out.**

SHRUBS & SWITCHEL RECIPES

Apricot Shrub

A very basic fruit shrub, which can be modified by adding spices or herbs to the vinegar.

Recipe slightly adapted from: Shrubs by Michael Dietsch

1 lb. apricots, pitted and sliced

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup apple cider vinegar

1. Mix apricots and sugar together in a bowl. Mash with a potato masher or the back of a big spoon.
2. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for 24 hours.
3. Pour the apricot mixture through a fine-mesh strainer into another bowl, pressing on the fruit to extract the liquid. Discard the solids (or save them for another use).
4. Add the vinegar to the fruit mixture, stirring well to make sure all of the sugar has dissolved.
5. Transfer the shrub to a clean jar or bottle and seal with a lid or cap. Label and date the jar or bottle.
6. Place the jar in the refrigerator, and wait one week before using.
7. Keep the shrub stored in the fridge for up to a year.

Raspberry Shrub

*Another basic fruit shrub, this one using the 1:1:1 formula and a blend of vinegars.
Recipe slightly adapted from: Wild Drinks and Cocktails by Emily Han*

2 cups raspberries
1 cup Champagne vinegar
1 cup red wine vinegar
2 cups sugar

1. Lightly crush the berries with a potato masher or the back of a big spoon.
2. Transfer the crushed berries, including their juice, to a 1-quart mason jar.
3. Pour both vinegars over the fruit and stir to mix. Make sure the berries are completely submerged under the vinegar.
4. Cover the jar and store in a cool, dark place for 1 week. Shake the jar daily, and check to make sure that the berries stay submerged under the vinegar.
5. Strain the raspberry-vinegar mixture through a fine-mesh strainer into another glass jar or bottle. Discard the solids.
6. Add the sugar to the vinegar and stir well.
7. Place the jar in the refrigerator for 1 week, stirring or shaking daily to dissolve the sugar.
8. Keep the shrub stored in the fridge for up to a year.

Peach-Ginger Cinnamon Shrub

*Fresh peaches get spiced up with the addition of ginger and cinnamon.
Recipe slightly adapted from: Shrubs by Michael Dietsch*

6 ripe peaches (about 1 ½ lbs), pitted and cut into chunks
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup grated ginger
1 cup sugar
1 cinnamon stick
1 cup white wine vinegar

1. Crush the peaches in a bowl. Add the grated ginger and sugar and mix well.
2. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for 24 hours.
3. Meanwhile, place the cinnamon stick and vinegar in a glass jar or other nonreactive container. Cover and allow to infuse for 24 hours.
4. Pour the peach mixture through a fine-mesh strainer into another bowl, pressing on the fruit to extract the liquid. Discard the solids (or save them for another use).
5. Remove the cinnamon stick from the vinegar, then add the vinegar to the strained fruit mixture. Stir well to make sure all of the sugar has dissolved.
6. Transfer the shrub to a clean jar or bottle and seal with a lid or cap. Label and date the jar or bottle.
7. Place the jar in the refrigerator and wait one week before using.
8. Keep the shrub stored in the fridge for up to a year.

Sungold Tomato and Basil Shrub

A pretty golden-orange shrub that's on the savory side with the addition of fresh basil. Other tomatoes can be substituted.

Recipe slightly adapted from: Shrubs by Michael Dietsch

1 lb. Sungold tomatoes
½ cup turbinado sugar
15-20 fresh basil leaves (about ½ ounce)
½ cup apple cider vinegar

1. Cut the tomatoes in half. Add them to a bowl along with the sugar and mix well.
2. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for up to 2 days.
3. Meanwhile, gently bruise the basil leaves to release their essential oils. *(To bruise basil leaves, place a leaf in the palm of one hand, and with the other give the leaf a sharp slap.)* Place the leaves and the vinegar in a glass jar or bowl, cover, and store in a cool, dark place for up to 2 days.
4. In a large glass jar, combine the tomato mixture (including any accumulated juice) and the vinegar mixture. Stir or shake well to combine.
5. Place the jar in the refrigerator for one week.
6. Pour the tomato-vinegar mixture through a fine-mesh strainer into a bowl, pressing lightly to extract the liquid. Discard the solids.
7. Transfer the shrub to a bottle or jar and store in the fridge for up to a year.

Honey Switchel

¼ cup apple cider vinegar
1 tbsp minced or grated ginger
1 tsp lemon juice
2 tbsp honey, or to taste

1. Add all ingredients to a one-quart mason jar. Fill to about 1 inch below the rim with fresh filtered water. Stir well to combine all ingredients.
2. Cover the jar and let sit at room temperature or in the refrigerator overnight.
3. Pour the switchel through a fine-mesh strainer to remove the ginger into another jar or storage vessel.
4. Drink the switchel as is or served over ice. You can also mix it with a bit of sparkling water. Store leftover switchel in the refrigerator for up to a week.

HOW TO USE YOUR SHRUBS

For a refreshing soft drink, use a teaspoon or more to taste to a glass. Add ice and top with sparkling water or club soda (or still water if you prefer). To make a simple cocktail with your shrub, mix $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce shrub and 2 ounces of your preferred liquor in a glass. Add ice if desired, then top with club soda or sparkling water. Adjust to taste, then enjoy responsibly.

Shrubs can be used for more than just drinks. Drizzle over ice cream for a sweet & tangy topping, or use it to make a vinaigrette.

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Resources:

National Center for Home Food Preservation. <http://nchfp.uga.edu>

Dietsch, Michael. *Shrubs: An Old-Fashioned Drink for Modern Times (2nd Ed.)*

Han, Emily. *Wild Drinks and Cocktails: Handcrafted Squashes, Shrubs, Switchels, Tonics, and Infusions to Mix at Home*

Coopey, Erin. *Infusing Flavors*

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