

Terpon's Cup

from Carin Huber

Difficulty

Bottle Short of a Six Pack

Ingredients

8 c/1.75 l vodka, divided
2 honeydew melons, medium-sized (aka muskmelons)
10-12 whole allspice berries, divided
2 c/400 g sugar, divided
2 c/475 ml water, divided

You Will Also Need

- two 2-qt/1.75 l jars with tight-fitting lids
- one 6-quart/5.7 l bowl or pot (no aluminum!)
- clean muslin
- funnel
- clean bottles with tight-fitting lids or corks
- patience

Chef's Notes

• Pick the ripest honeydew melons you can find. They should have a lightly sweet odor, even uncut, and the skin should give under the pressure of your fingertips just a little. If you can't find ripe melons at the supermarket, try your local farmer's market. If you still can't find ripe melons, buy two that look nice, take them home and wait up to a week before cutting into them for your cordial.

• During the straining process, I like to have a clean pie plate nearby where I can put things that I'm in the process of using, like ladles and muslin, but must put down for a moment. This keeps them uncontaminated, and keeps me from making a sticky mess of my kitchen.

• I recommend using two jars because almost a gallon of vodka and fruit is heavy and difficult to hold up for very long. You will make an enormous, sticky mess, as well as wasting your efforts, if you drop the muslin bundle during the straining process. Dividing the cordial ingredients much reduces the chance of this happening.

• All your equipment should be very clean before use. The alcohol in the vodka will kill most unwanted biological matter, but I have had a cordial mold during the infusing process before.

Makes approx. 3 quarts/2.8 litres, depending on a number of variables. Prep time: 20 minutes. Infusing time: 4 to 6 weeks. Cooking time: 5 minutes.

Directions

Prepare :

Place your cutting board inside a jellyroll pan or other tray with low sides, to collect the juice that runs from your melon as you cut it. Cut one of the melons in half. With a spoon, scoop out and discard the seeds, retaining as much of the juice as reasonably possible. Pour the juice into one of the jars.

Cut the melon halves in half again, then into half inch (1.25 cm) slices. Cut the rind from the slices, taking a good quarter inch (.6 cm) of flesh along with it. You want to avoid getting any of the denser, less flavorful flesh that lies just inside the skin. If the fruit offers any resistance at all to the knife, you're cutting too close to the skin. Discard the rind, or, if you can't stand to waste the flesh that's still on it, set it aside to snack on later.

Dice the soft inner flesh of the melon small, much smaller than you would for a fruit salad, and place it in the jar. Pour the juice that has collected in the tray under your cutting board in the jar as well. If you have a manual potato masher or a big sturdy spoon that will fit into the jar, you can give the fruit a little smushing, to release even more of the juice, but it's not crucial.

Repeat with the other melon and the other jar.

Toss half of the whole allspice into each jar, then divide the vodka between the jars as well. Put the lids on tightly, and give the contents a swish and a slosh.



Terpon's Cup (cont'd)

Infuse:

Put the jars in a dark, cool place, and leave them there to infuse for four to six weeks. Every day or two, take the jars out and give them another slosh, to keep things mixed up and mingling. While you have them out, inspect the contents for mold or any other surprise science fair experiments. If you find anything you weren't expecting, throw the failed cordial out, clean the jar and other tools thoroughly, and try again.

After four to six weeks, open the jars up and take a whiff. The liquor should smell very strongly of the melon.

Strain:

Line the large bowl with a piece of clean muslin. The muslin should be large enough to hang well over the sides of the bowl. Carefully pour the contents of one jar into the muslin. Gather the corners and edges of the muslin up in your hands, and pick the bundle of fruit and vodka up, so that the liquor runs from the bottom of the bundle into the bowl. When the flow slows to a dribble, gently squeeze the bundle to express more of the liquor. Don't mash the fruit, just encourage the liquor to leave it. When you find that you have to use some muscle to express the liquor, stop. Discard the fruit from inside the muslin, keeping the muslin well clear of your compost bin. Try to get most of the fruit off the cloth, but don't get picky about it.

Rinse the empty jar with hot water and dry it out. Return the strained liquor to the jar. Lay the muslin back into the bowl, making sure to keep the fruity side up, and repeat the straining process with the other jar of fruit and vodka.

Optional: I don't usually worry about it, but you may decide that you want your cordial perfectly clear. It is lovely to see the light shine through the delicately colored liquid, and it's an especially nice touch when giving the cordial as a gift. To achieve this, put the jars of strained liquor somewhere they won't be disturbed for a few days, and wait for the melon particulates to settle out. When most of the liquid is clear, with cloudiness at the bottom of the jars, it's time to decant.

Decant:

Get your big bowl out again. Very gently, begin pouring out the liquor into the bowl. Try not to slosh the jar, or the sediment will get stirred up, and you'll have to wait another few days for it to settle again. Watch carefully as you pour. As soon as you see a thread of cloudiness approach the mouth of the jar, stop pouring.

[What to do with the cloudy liquor left in the jar? It can be as much as a quarter of your total amount, and it's wasteful to discard that much vodka. You can let it sit undisturbed for another day or two, and see if it will settle further, but that requires yet more patience with a project that's already taken a over month to make. You could go ahead and sweeten it for drinking anyway, though it may have an odd texture with that much sediment in it. Maybe you could save it for fruity blended drinks, where the texture will work well with the other ingredients. Or you could super sweeten it, making a flavored syrup for an adult ice cream topping. Experiment a little.]

At this point you have flavored vodka. Feel free to stop here, in favor of concocting new and unusual cocktails with your honeydew vodka. Maybe a melontini? If, however, you prefer a sweeter drink, read on.

Sweeten:

Stir the water and sugar together in a pot over medium heat, until the mixture comes to a boil. Turn the heat down to a simmer and continue to cook and stir the syrup for a minute or two, just long enough to make sure the sugar is all dissolved. Remove the syrup from the heat, and let it cool to room temperature.

In the large bowl combine the flavored vodka from both jars with one cup of the syrup. Stir it in gently, but thoroughly. Ladle a little - just a taste - into a cup, and test it for flavor and sweetness. If it's not sweet enough, add a little more syrup and taste again, until it's as sweet as you like. Discard any remaining cordial in your tasting glass each time - never put it back in the bowl with the rest of it. Also, always ladle the cordial from the bowl to the glass, don't dip your glass into the bowl. Keep it all as clean as you can.

Any remaining syrup can be saved to sweeten iced tea, or anything else you like sweet, but don't want sugar granules sitting at the bottom.

Bottle and Serve:

Funnel the cordial into individual bottles, and cap or cork tightly.

Raise a glass to Aphrodite, in Terpon's name.

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