

Press and Mortar Blog

[After Version]

Balsamic

Balsamic vinegar, my everyday "go-to" vinegar, is the norm in my household. Growing up, if balsamic vinegar were unavailable, we'd default to red wine vinegar, apple cider, and malt in the cupboard. Chefs and home cooks love vinegar's versatility as it continues to enter our kitchens and daily lives.

There are four grades of balsamic vinegar: artisan, condiment, commercial, and imitation.

- Artisan vinegar follows the Italian law of DOP, or *Denominazione di Origine Protetta*, meaning *Protected Designation of Origin*, and aged beyond twelve years for consideration in this category.
- Condiment vinegar doesn't have to follow Italian law, but it must be under twelve years old to carry an IGP label of Modena on the bottle.
- Commercial and imitation vinegar have the lowest grades and are economically reasonable, although the quality differs significantly from a DOP. These two are staples in the professional kitchen. Five-star chefs use them to infuse flavors into decadent appetizers like seared fois gras upon a bed of balsamic onions. They begin with a gallon of this inexpensive vinegar, reduce it to a sweet caramel glaze, and then use it as a bit of sweet acid to cut the fat or brighten a dish.

Chef, what is white balsamic? And how can I use it?

White balsamic, made with Trebbiano grapes, is golden in color and mild in taste. White balsamic is best with salads and marinades since the flavor is slightly sweet, with a crisp finish, leaving the palette clean.

I enjoyed one vinegar infused with peaches that brought me to my knees. It was so syrupy and sweet that all I could imagine was a flaky pastry with a peach-infused marmalade. I considered adding duck, making it a lovely, sweet, and savory treat. Ultimately, there are so many ways to use this type of vinegar.

Chef, how do I make a balsamic glaze?

Use industrial-grade vinegar, add a few cups to a pot, and put it on low heat. Watch it since it can overboil and create a mess. The longer it warms, the more reduced it becomes, ultimately becoming a glaze.

Where is the balsamic vinegar capital?

In Modena, Italy, of course! Barrels of vinegar, treated like wine, remain in an attic or barn where the temperature remains steady during the summer and winter.

Modena, a massive contributor to the culinary industry, also includes one of my all-time favorite tenors, Luciano Pavarotti! His contribution to Italian opera was epic. So, add some Puccini and make your charcuterie board by adding some good cheeses. Next, place some balsamic on the side or enjoy it as a snack by drizzling some onto tomatoes or strawberries.

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