



LOVE TO BREW

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How to make wine using a wine kit

Wine kits are one of the easiest ways of making wine at home. Even if you've never done home brew before, it's hard to go wrong. Wine kits contain concentrated grape extract, a packet of yeast, some extra chemicals to stop fermentation and clear the wine and instructions. Some may come with extra ingredients, such as oak chips and yeast nutrient.

A quick guide to Wine kit types

Wine kits generally fall into two camps; budget kits which tend to require added sugar, and premium kits which only require water, no sugar needed. The more grape concentrate in the package, the better the quality wine you will produce. Some kits contain as little as 1.5 litres of concentrate for a 30-bottle kit. Others can include as much as 18 litres, although these come at a price premium. Kits are available to make 6, 12 or 30 bottles of wine.

How to make your Wine kit

This guide works for both budget and premium kits, the only difference will be if you need to add any extra sugar. It's worth calibrating your fermentation vessel before you first use it, so that you have accurate measurements, as the printed markings are not always reliable. To do this, either weigh jugs of water (1 litre = 1kg) or use water bottles of a known size, say 2 litres. Use a permanent marker to mark off the values in one or two litre increments.

This guide is based on a 7-day kit. For one-month kits, please double-check the instructions, with regard to the timings for each step.

Step 1:

The most important part of home brewing, before you even think of making any wine, wine, beer etc. is sterilisation. Every single item of equipment you use has to be clean and sterile before use, including tin openers, spoons, fermentation vessel (FV) and so on. Because your unfermented wine (must) is warm and contains a lot of sugar, it is an ideal environment for bacteria or other bugs to grow and the only thing we want to live in the wine is our wine yeast. There are a number of sterilisers you can buy, but VWP is widely used because it is both a cleaner and steriliser. It is chlorine-based, so you do need to rinse all your equipment thoroughly with clean water, to avoid any chlorine smell or taste in your wine. If you bought one of our starter packs, then this will include a small tub or packet of cleaner & steriliser to get you started.

Make up a gallon (4.5 litres) or so of cleaner & steriliser inside your fermentation vessel and give it a good swirl round. You can use a soft cloth to clean the surfaces, but never use a scouring pad or anything that can scratch the plastic. Put your spoons, tin opener and any other equipment in the steriliser for a minute or so, too. It's handy to sterilise the fermentation vessel lid, then



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use that as a sterile surface to rest your spoons, etc. on, once you have cleaned them. Give everything a good rinse with clean tap water to remove any steriliser, before proceeding to the next step.

Step 2:

Open the wine kit can and tip it into the fermentation vessel (FV). Now you need to add cold water, to bring the level up to the total required amount. For a standard 30-bottle kit, you need to top up to 21 litres, but for other kits, check the exact amount as you may need more or less water. 6-bottle kits need to be topped up to 4.5 litres. If you are normally happy to drink your tap water, then you can use this for your wine. However, if you find your water is heavily chlorinated, you may want to use bottled water. We always use bottled water to brew our wine as it tastes much better!

Step 3:

Now that you've added all the extra water, you need to give it a really good stir, to make sure that the concentrate is properly mixed. Use a sterilised beer paddle or spoon and stir vigorously and try to get as much air into the mix as you can. After a few minutes, you should end up with a nice big froth on the top.

Step 4:

Now that everything is thoroughly mixed, it's time to take a hydrometer reading. By comparing this reading with one after fermentation has finished, you will be able to determine the alcohol content of the finished wine. If your fermentation vessel is fitted with a tap, draw off a sample into a trial jar. If your fermentation vessel doesn't have a tap, then use a sterilised turkey baster or pipette to take a sample. Once you have enough liquid in the trial jar, add your hydrometer and give it a spin to remove any bubbles, which could give a false reading. Take a reading from the liquid's surface.

Step 5:

Now it is time to add the yeast. Check the instructions that came with the wine kit. Most wine kit yeasts can be added dry, but some require you to rehydrate them in warm water first. If no rehydration is needed, carefully cut a corner off the sachet and sprinkle onto the top of the must. No need to stir.

Step 6:

Fermenting wine needs to be kept at a specific temperature for best results, the optimum temperature is 18°-20°C, and the maximum is 22°C. If your brewing area is too cold, a heated brew belt may be needed.

Step 7:

The final step is to ensure that the lid of the fermentation bucket, is firmly clipped down (or if using a glass demijohn, ensure the bug is a tight fit) and to fit an airlock, half-filled with water.



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An airlock helps to show that fermentation is active, as it will bubble as CO₂ is released by the fermentation process, although you should always use a hydrometer to check if fermentation is complete. An airlock also helps to keep oxygen, bacteria, fruit flies and other unwanted items out of your wine.

Even though your wine kit instructions say the wine may be ready in 4-5 days, the only sure way to know if fermentation has completed, is to take a hydrometer reading. Your Wine kit instructions will tell you what reading to expect, but it will generally be below 1.000.

Step 7:

Once fermentation has finished, you will need to transfer the wine to a second, sterilised, fermentation vessel, leaving the sediment behind. Lift your fermentation vessel with the wine in and place it on a work surface, so that it is off the ground. Our starter kit comes with some siphon tubing and a rigid plastic tube, with a cup on the end and a siphon tap. Sterilise all of these parts in some sterilising solution and then rinse them thoroughly. Fit the siphon tap to one end, make sure it is closed and then fill the tubing $\frac{3}{4}$ full with tap water. Put the tap end in your sterilised fermentation vessel, and then attach the other end to the rigid siphon tube, and gently lower this into the wine.

Step 8:

Now open the tap on the siphon tube. The water should run out of the tubing, creating suction, and the wine will follow. Once the wine gets to the tap, close the tap. Tip the water out of the bucket, then open the tap and allow all the wine to transfer, leaving the sediment behind. As the wine level gets near the bottom of your first fermentation vessel, gently tip it forward, so that you transfer the maximum amount, but don't suck up any sediment.

Step 9:

The wine should now be de-gassed, to remove the CO₂ which is dissolved in the wine. Using a beer paddle, give the wine a good stir, but try not to splash it about, or break the surface. If using a demijohn, put your hand over the hole in the bung and shake the jar. Leave the wine for half an hour or so, then give it another good stir/shake for a few minutes. You will probably hear a fizzing as the gas comes out. Repeat this a few times until the fizzing stops, then add the fermentation stopper (potassium sorbate) and give it a good stir.

Step 10:

An hour or so after adding the fermentation stopper, add in the first part of the finings and give the wine a gentle stir. Leave for 3 hours, then add in the second part. Now leave for at least two days until the wine has cleared. Once the wine has cleared, siphon into sterilised bottles. If using bottles with corks, allow the bottles to stand upright for 24 hours, before laying them on their sides. Allow the wine to mature for at least a month for best results, before drinking.



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Frequently asked questions

Q. Why isn't the airlock bubbling?

A. Not all fermentation vessels have an airtight lid, so the CO₂ produced by fermentation may be escaping from under the lid seal. The only way to check that fermentation has completed is to take a hydrometer reading.

Q. What is all that froth and foam on my wine?

A. This is made up of yeast, and escaping CO₂ gas. It is perfectly normal and shows that you have a good fermentation. It will normally subside after 1-2 days.

Q. How do I work out the strength of my wine?

A. You will need to take a hydrometer reading (Starting Gravity or SG) before you add the yeast and then a second one at the end of fermentation (Finishing Gravity or FG). Now use this formula:
 $ABV = (SG - FG) \times 131.25$

Q. I added too much/too little water to my wine, have I ruined it?

A. Probably not, so long as you were within 1-2 litres of the required amount (for a 30-bottle kit). If you added too much, the wine will be a little understrength and will lose a bit of its flavour. If you added too little water, the wine will be stronger and have increased flavour. Either way, it's not generally a disaster!

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