

“Plenty of Sugar at Command:” Raspberry Vinegar from 1854 | The Backwoods Kitchen
Episode #1
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Script

While lemons didn’t grow abundantly in Upper Canada in the 1850s, we did have Raspberries. Welcome to the Backwoods Kitchen, I’m your host Holly Benison, and I’m so pleased to welcome you to the first episode of my thesis series. On today’s show, I’ll be preparing a refreshing summer drink that rivals Lemonade in any Victorian backwoods popularity contest - Raspberry Vinegar.¹

Catherine Parr Traill isn’t the only cookbook author to have a recipe for raspberry vinegar, but it is particularly attractive for Settlers due to the abundance of forageable berries in Ontario woods - and of course, you could also plant berry bushes in your kitchen gardens. Furthermore, berries of all varieties had been part of the traditional diets of many Indigenous nations, with Blueberries and Cranberries being native to Canada.² Drinks like this were popular in the summer for keeping cool, and as a non-alcoholic drink option for families, children and guests.³ This affordable drink was cheap to produce as Maple or Apple Cider Vinegar were items that could have been made in the home, and raspberries could be foraged, grown in kitchen gardens or purchased for cheap.⁴ In another cookbook from the same era, *The Frugal Housewife*, author Lydia Marie Child makes note that “in a country where raspberries are abundant it is good economy to make it answer instead of Port or Catalonia wine,”⁵ emphasizing the drink as an ‘affordable luxury.’ Variations of this drink, alcoholic or otherwise, remained popular well into the 20th century.⁶

Onto the recipe - Believe it or not, this drink can take up to 72 hours to make, with most of that time allocated for the raspberries to infuse. The recipe itself is rather straightforward, and

¹ Catherine Parr Traill, *The Female Emigrant’s Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic*. Edited by Nathalie Cooke and Fiona Lucas (McGill-Queen’s Press, 2017), 350.

² Dorothy Duncan, *Nothing More Comforting: Canada’s Heritage Food* (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2003), 119.

³ Traill, *The Female Emigrant’s Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic*, 350.

⁴ Traill, *The Female Emigrant’s Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic*, 85.

⁵ Lydia Marie Child, *The Frugal Housewife: Dedicated to those who are not ashamed of Economy*. (Boston: J.H Eastburn Printer, 1829), 49.

⁶ Canadian Aviation and Space Museum, “Raspberry Vinegar Recipe,” Ingenium Canada, <<https://ingeniumcanada.org/aviation/education/try-this-out/raspberry-vinegar-recipe>>

to paraphrase from the book we let a quantity of raspberries infuse in the vinegar for 24 hours, refresh the berries and repeat twice more. Finally, when you have drained the fruit a third time, add in the sugar and boil the mixture for ten minutes. Allow it to cool and bottle it for future use. This drink is even cheaper to produce if you use what Traill calls ‘homemade sugar,’ meaning Maple, instead of imported white sugar.⁷

I’ve already let the berries infuse for 48 of the recommended 72 hours, so we will continue on with the second half of the recipe. Catherine Parr Traill might be shocked to know how much more expensive raspberries are nowadays, and a once cheap luxury has elevated its status to just luxury.

If you saw the introductory episode you’ll know that I’m looking for your suggestions to research and film a future episode! I’d like for this series to be an exploration of Canadian cooking and will try my best to incorporate your ideas into a community submission episode later in the show! Leave your ideas, suggestions or queries in the comments and let’s get a conversation going!

But before we get into that, how about a taste test!

Ad libbed [transcribed]

For the sake of comparison, I will be trying the raspberry vinegar straight and then I’m going to water it down. Traill recommends diluting it in a jug of water for serving in the guide anyway - so this is just to get an idea for what the flavour is in the concentrate, and then when it’s meant to be served properly.

It’s good - it just hits you with, it’s super sour right at the beginning, and then you start to feel some of the acidity from the vinegar in the throat.

I’m going to water it down now, and I think - you can already see it’s taken on a nice pink colour - I think this will probably taste a lot better, how it’s intended. That’s very nice

Cheers to September berries! Certainly, give this one a try, it’s probably very different from what you’re used to. If you’re looking to experiment with Canadian culinary history, try out Raspberry Vinegar. Until next episode, cheers!

⁷ Traill, *The Female Emigrant’s Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic*, 85.

Appendix One: Original Recipe

To every quart of good vinegar put two quarts of raspberries: let them stand for twenty-four hours; drain them off through a sieve, but do not squeeze them; add the same quantity of raspberries to the strained vinegar a second time; let them stand as before; drain and add a third quantity; when you have drained the fruit off a third time, measure the liquor into a stone covered-jar, and to each pint of juice add a pound of lump sugar: set the jar in a pot of boiling water, and let the vinegar boil for ten minutes, stirring it to mix the sugar well through: when cold, bottle it for use: it is all the better for standing some months before being used.

A cheaper sort might be made with fine moist sugar, or with crushed sugar, but must be well scummed. Raspberry vinegar makes an excellent fever drink, a small quantity being mixed in a tumbler of cold water: it is very refreshing in hot weather and is made in considerable quantities by those who have wild raspberries growing near the clearings, and plenty of sugar at command.⁸

Appendix Two: Translated Recipe

6 cups Vinegar of Choice (I used maple vinegar for the added sweetness, apple cider vinegar also works)

2 cups Raspberries (per infusion cycle)⁹

4 cups Sugar

- In a large bowl, soak raspberries in the first quantity of raspberries in vinegar for 24 hours. Repeat once or twice more for increased colour and flavour intensity.*
- Strain the berries in a sieve or through a layer of cheesecloth.
- Begin the concentration process: Add the infused vinegar into a pot and stir in your quantity of sugar. Bring to a boil and cook for 10 minutes. Skim the surface as necessary.
- Pour into a clean/sterilized bottle once tepid.

*You can move on to the next step after the 48-hour mark. Traill recommends three infusion periods, but this is flexible depending on your time and available resources.

⁸ Traill, *The Female Emigrant's Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic*, 85.

⁹ 4 cups for 24 hours, 8 cups for 48 hours, 12 cups for 72 hours.

Appendix Three: Contextual Information from the *FEG*

Huckleberries, Raspberries, Cherries, or any Small Fruit,

may be dried either in a cool stove, or before the fire, or in a warm, sunny window; but fire-heat is the best, as the sun is more apt to draw the flavour from the fruit, and increase the acidity.

Boil huckleberries, currants, and bilberries for half an hour, or longer; spread them out on tin pans, and let them dry in the oven, or below the stove, or out of doors; cut into squares, when dry enough to move; turn the pieces and let them dry on the underside; sift a little white sugar upon each piece, and pack by pressing the fruit-cakes closely: keep in dry bags or boxes: stew down one or more of these cakes as you want them for use. These dried fruits are very useful in sickness: a portion of one of the cakes put into a jug, and boiling water poured on, makes a delightful acid drink: black currants cured this way, are very good. The drink taken warm is a fine remedy for a cold or sore throat.

Many persons use the dried fruit of currants or huckleberries, as a substitute, in cakes and puddings, for the Zante currants.¹⁰

Raspberries

This fruit is most abundant in Canada where a clearing has once been made. The birds sow the seeds. The raspberry seems to follow the steps of the settler, and springs up in his path as if to supply the fruit which is so needful to his health and comfort. Ripening in July, the raspberry affords a constant and daily supply for his table, till the beginning of September. Large quantities of this fruit are sold in the towns by the bush-settlers' wives and children, who get from 4d. to 5d. a quart for the berries.¹¹

A dish of raspberries and milk, with sugar, or a pie, gives many an emigrant family a supper. The black raspberry makes the best pie, and this fruit dries better than the red, as it is sweeter and richer in quality: it can be greatly improved by culture.

Raspberry vinegar, too, is a cheap luxury to those who have homemade vinegar and home-made sugar.¹²

¹⁰ Traill, *The Female Emigrant's Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic*, 84.

¹¹ d. refers to pennies/pence in this case, coming from the Latin 'denarius,' used by the British currency system. Converting the 1850 value of 4d. roughly equates to £1.34 in 2017 dollars, or \$2.25 Canadian.

¹² Traill, *The Female Emigrant's Guide: Cooking with a Canadian Classic*, 85.

Works Cited

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