

Making a Wine Kit

(Basic steps, notes, and references)

Q: How does one make a wine kit?

A: Making a kit wine is less labor-intensive than making wine from fresh grapes. Many kits are all-inclusive. They contain all the additives you'll need, pre-measured. The recipes are easy to follow and the results are predictable. Recipe options allow you to add more concentrate for a bigger, grander wine. You can also choose to add less water than a concentrate recipe suggests.

The following information was excerpted (in-part) from Erik Matthews' *WineMaker* article, [Your First Wine from A Kit](#). The online article provides further detail on EACH section noted below.

Buying the Kit: There are four main types of wine kits: pure juice; fully concentrated grape juice; partially concentrated grape juice; and kits that combine juice and concentrate. The approach to making wine from these kits is similar. The only difference is that the pure-juice kit requires no additional water. These kits are the most expensive due to juice's comparative purity, costly transport (it weighs more than concentrate) and storage requirements (it should be refrigerated).

Juice vs. Concentrate: Some kits contain one, some the other and some both. Pure juice kits are made from freshly crushed grapes; the juice (and possibly some grape pulp) is vacuum-sealed in food-grade pails. Concentrate is pure grape juice with 30 to 70 percent of its water vacuumed out; it's then sealed in cans or bladder packs.

Basic Equipment: Gallon jug, primary fermenter, measuring cups, measuring spoons, long-handled plastic (food-grade) spoon, hydrometer & sample cylinder, siphon hose (5 feet), two glass carboys (19 liter or 5-gallon) [**Highest comment:** Here I believe a 6½ gal plastic pail & lid should be used in place of one of the 5 gal carboys], airlock and rubber bung, large food-grade plastic funnel, & a wine thief. [Optional - a bottle filling tube].

Getting Ready: Before you begin, be sure you have everything you need. When you're starting a batch, the timing of tasks is critical. So it's good policy to have all equipment pre-sanitized and rinsed. Some sulfite solutions are not meant to be rinsed away. In these cases, another quick treatment just before using that piece of equipment is fine.

A note on sanitization: You should gently but thoroughly scrub and rinse any equipment, especially a container that will house your wine for any extended periods, immediately after you've emptied it. Getting into this practice will make the (already) tedious task of sanitizing equipment much easier. Resist the temptation to delay the cleaning job until you need the equipment; the chances of contaminating a subsequent batch are greater this way. If you are a first-time winemaker, follow the recipe exactly. Later, you may wish to change, add or eliminate ingredients and steps.

Starting the Batch: Please refer to the reference article [[Your First Wine from A Kit](#)].

Monitoring the Batch: Fermentation temperatures can be a personal choice. Usually, red wines are kept at 80°F to start-off, to foster colonization (or multiplication) of yeast cells before they begin the fermentation process. Once fermentation has begun, it is fairly common to bring that fermenting red into an environment between 70°F and 80° F. Whites should begin between 72° F and 75° F and then be brought down to 68° F to finish fermenting. Note: Don't go below 68° F or you'll risk a "stuck" fermentation.

Racking The Wine: This is a process that is completed three to four times during the creation of your wine. The main purpose is to draw the wine off the sediment into a fresh, sanitized carboy. The last two rackings will also introduce sulfite powder to fight any oxidation brought on by your wine's contact with air.

Fining and Filtering: Fining is a process that aids in the settling of particulate matter in a finished wine. Not all wine kits call for fining, as they are formulated to proffer predictable results. Plus, some ingredients already help to clarify the wine - tannins and oak chips, mainly

Bottling the Batch: Bottling is very easy. There is a broad selection of bottle styles and sizes to match the wine of your choice. For each five-gallon batch, you will need the equivalent of 26 standard 26-ounce (750 ml)

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bottles. Take your carboy of wine and place it on your work table. You should splurge the few extra dollars for a bottling attachment that is placed at the pliant end of the siphon hose. This hard plastic device has a simple flow valve that simplifies filling each bottle to the level desired (optimally, one-half inch below the bottom of the cork, once placed in the bottle).

Sanitize your bottles. Place the hard plastic end of the siphon tube into the carboy (not the end with the flow valve attachment - the other end). Have a few bottles ready and a helper, if possible. Siphon the wine as you did before, during the racking tasks. After you fill the bottles, cork them. Confer with your merchant regarding the need to 'prep' your corks (some corks require a cursory soaking in hot water to make them easier to place in the bottle) [HighTest comment: There are mixed opinions on whether natural corks should be soaked or boiled]. Your retailer can doubtless lend you a good floor corker, the easiest type to use.

Aging the Wine: There is no perfect time to drink your wines. Wines go through a continuous metamorphosis during maturation and demonstrate several personalities during their lives. "Bottle shock" is a recognized part of a wine's bottle maturation. This is the indeterminate period immediately following bottling when a wine doesn't seem to show many (or any) of its charms. The act of bottling has stunned the wine; indeed, many wine writers and other aficionados refer to this as a "dumb phase." This is the main reason why many recipes usually recommend that you first sample the bottled wine no sooner than one month after bottling.

HighTest's Comments:

- 1) When making kit type wines, it is not recommended that you attempt to adjust the pH or TA levels as these kits have been designed with the appropriate balance in mind.
- 2) Follow the kit instructions. Often these instructions will say to perform a certain step when the SG reaches a specific value and that it should take XX days to reach that point. Use the time as a rough estimate as several variables can affect the fermentation rate. However, the SG at which the next step is to be performed is to be followed. If it says to do something at 1.020, and the SG is 1.030 then wait until it's at 1.020

Other WineMaker References:

- 1) [Choosing the Right Kit](#)
- 2) [Make Your Kit Wine Shine](#)
- 3) [Great Wines From Kits](#)

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