# Back To Basics: How To Make Vinegar At Home

*Vinegar: the delicious, magical, germ-killing cleaning agent and wondrous elixir that cures what ails you.*

Since you're a smart prepper, you may have plenty stockpiled, but wouldn't it be much easier, and prepper-friendly, if you could just make vinegar at home from ingredients that you already have on hand? Well, you can. As a matter of fact, it pretty much makes itself if you just combine a few basic ingredients and leave it alone.

You can make vinegar from just about anything that has sugar or starch in it. As a matter of fact, you can make it straight from sugar, but it's a bit more difficult. Today, we're going to discuss the details of making apple cider vinegar from start to finish. The process transfers pretty easily to all other fruits that you may want to use.

## Rules to Making Your Vinegar Project Successful

There are only four important guidelines to successfully making vinegar and as long as you follow the simple directions and abide by these rules, you'll be using your own vinegar in no time.

1. Make sure that your equipment is clean. You don't want wayward bacteria affecting the process.
2. Don't use metal or plastic containers. They affect the process and the flavor and can derail the whole project.
3. If you're comfortable with the temperature, your vinegar probably is, too. If it's too hot, the good bacteria will die. If it's too cold, the bacteria will go

dormant. Either way, you're not going to get vinegar. 70-80 degrees Fahrenheit is about perfect and you can go as low as 60.
4. Store your future vinegar out of direct light to avoid killing necessary bacteria. You can do this by storing in a dark place or by using a dark jar or crock to ferment it in.

## What You'll Need to Make Vinegar

{adinserter usdeception}Just like with most homesteading projects, you don't need any super-fancy equipment to make vinegar at home.

For the sake of thoroughness and preparedness, we're going to talk about the entire vinegar-making process from apple to vinegar, though there are a couple of shortcuts that you can take if you have hard cider, starter, or vinegar on hand. Since you may have none if SHTF, we'll start from scratch so this list is inclusive.

1. Fresh juice from unblemished apples that have been thoroughly cleaned before pressing. Use sweet apples because it's the sugar that causes the fermentation. Fall apples such as Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Gala, Jonagold and Fuji apples are all good ones. Taste them. If they're fairly sweet, they'll work. You can also use store-bought juice as long as it has no additives and isn't pasteurized. You can also use apple scraps – cores and peels – as long as the apples are organic.
2. An airlock cap. You can buy these at any winery or make them from a piece of wine cork or corn cob. Drill a hole in the cork or cob and insert a snug-fitting piece of tubing long enough to go from the juice out through the hole and into a jar of water. A couple of feet should do.

You don’t need an airlock cap if you’re starting with hard cider or wine already because the second fermentation stage NEEDS plenty of air. For that matter, you don’t need it for the first phase but it speeds the process up considerably because carbon dioxide can escape without letting in any air that will slow down this stage of the fermentation process.

3. Glass or enameled earthenware jug(s)/bottle(s).
4. Cheesecloth or an old T-shirt (for us preppers who like to repurpose things).
5. Rubber band or string to secure cheesecloth or T-shirt on top of jug during the second fermentation.
6. Jars or bottles with lids for storing the finished vinegar.

OK, now that you have what you need, let’s get started.

# Making Hard Cider from Apple Scraps

Let your scraps turn brown then fill your jars up with them and cover with water, filling to the top. Put your airlock cap on. If you’re using the homemade version, run the hose to a jar of water. Place in a dark place and allow to ferment for about 4-6 weeks.

A gray foam will form on the top of the cider; this is normal. It’s harmless. You’ll know the juice has turned to cider when there’s no more air (bubbles) coming through the tube. This means that all of the sugar has turned to alcohol. There will be a thick layer of silt, called lees, in the bottom and the juice will smell like alcohol.

Strain the cider through cheesecloth, an old t-shirt or a coffee filter. Now you’re ready to make vinegar.

*If you don’t use an airlock device, you may want to use a wider-mouthed jar or crock so that the vinegar fermentation will go faster. Alternatively, you can watch for bubbles to

stop during the cider fermentation, then strain the cider from the fruit and fill the jugs back up half way to finish the cider-to-vinegar fermentation so that you have more surface area exposed to air.

*Video first seen on Wall Street Journal.*

## Making Hard Cider from Apple Juice

The process is basically the same except that you use juice instead of peels and water. Just fill your bottle or jug with juice and follow the same procedure as above.

Note: If you're worried that your juice isn't sweet enough, you can fix that by dissolving a couple of teaspoons of sugar per gallon of juice/water into the mix.

Speeding things up: Many people use a starter such as yeast or vinegar but this isn't really necessary because there are enough of the good bacteria in the air to cause fermentation without the additions.

You can use them, though, if you want to speed things up a bit. If you're using wine-making yeast, use 1 cake per 5 gallons of juice. If you're using vinegar, use a 1:4 vinegar to juice ratio.

Note: You don't have to use an airlock lid for this process but if you don't, it will take up to 6 months or so for the juice to turn to vinegar if you don't have a starter.

Still, if you don't have access and you want vinegar in a SHTF situation, you can always wait for your first batch to be finished, then use the mother or some of your vinegar to make speedier batches after that.

# Making Apple Cider Vinegar at Home from Cider

Now that you have your cider, you're ready to start the vinegar making process. This is the easy part: just put your cider in jugs, cover the top with cheesecloth or a piece of old t-shirt, and place it in a dark, warm place. It'll do its own thing and turn to vinegar on its own.

Since air is required for this process, you should only fill your jars to the widest part of the vessel, allowing as much surface area to be exposed as possible. You can also stir it daily, or regularly, to speed things up a bit.

You'll notice that the thick, gray or white gelatinous foam will form on top again during this process. This is called the "mother" and can either be discarded or used to speed up the process of making vinegar at home the next time.

The speed of this process depends upon temperature, whether or not you're using a starter, and how much air the bacteria has access to, but expect this fermentation phase to take 3 weeks to 6 months.  Just keep smelling it and once it smells vinegary, taste it and let it ferment til it tastes strong enough to you.

There's a special kit called a titration kit that you can use to measure and adjust the acidity of the vinegar, and there is of course the old-fashioned method, but that's an entirely different article! It's important though that your vinegar be at least 5% acetic acid if you're going to use it for preserving foods.

# Storage

If you want to keep your vinegar for more than a few months, you need to pasteurize it and store it in clean, sealed

containers. Do this by bringing it to 170 degrees for 10 minutes. This will also burn off any residual alcohol left in the vinegar. Store in sealed bottles or canning jars and it'll stay good practically indefinitely.

Note: In place of apples, you can use grapes, berries, or any other high-sugar food to make vinegar. The process is basically the same. Ferment it to an alcohol state then ferment the wine or cider to vinegar.

Now you have another useful piece of knowledge to add to your bag of prepper or homesteading tricks: how to make vinegar at home!



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