

BALSAMIC VINEGAR

ITALYABROAD.COM GUIDE



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Learn the secrets to identifying proper balsamic vinegar.

Supermarkets and delicatessens' shelves are full of Balsamic Vinegar ranging from less than £2 per bottle to several hundreds, all with the same name on the label. With our guide we will try to answer some of the questions you may have as well as giving tips when choosing one.

What is a balsamic vinegar

Balsamic vinegar, in Italian Aceto balsamico, it is a common name to indicate a dark, concentrated and flavoured vinegar made from grape must, it can be aged or unaged. It is a dark, thick liquid with a complex flavour that is both sweet and sour. Balsamic vinegar was created in Modena and Reggio Emilia, in Emilia Romagna, and has been produced there for centuries. The traditional method of making balsamic vinegar is a long and labour intensive process. The first step is to cook the grape must, which is the juice of freshly pressed grapes, until it reaches a thick syrupy consistency. The aceto is then aged in a series of wooden barrels made from different types of wood, including chestnut, oak, cherry, and mulberry. As the vinegar ages, the water slowly evaporates, concentrating its flavour and sweetness. The aging process can last for many years, and the longer the vinegar ages, the more complex and expensive it becomes. Balsamic vinegar is also a healthy condiment and a good source of antioxidants, it has been shown to have a number of health benefits, including reducing the risk of heart disease, cancer, and stroke. In Italy, there are three protected balsamic vinegar: the "Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena", the "Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Reggio Emilia" and the "Aceto Balsamico di Modena". The two traditional balsamic vinegars, protected by the European Union's Protected Designation of Origin, are made from reduced grape must, mosto cotto in Italian, aged for a minimum of 12 years in wooden casks, made of different woods, and produced respectively in the province of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Emilia Romagna, while the less expensive Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (Aceto Balsamico di Modena) made from grape must be blended with wine vinegar, can be produced in either Modena or Reggio Emilia despite its name being "di Modena", and has a Protected Geographical Indication status.

Traditional balsamic vinegar DOP is rich, smooth, deep brown in color, and with complex flavour and both Traditional Balsamic Vinegars can only be sold in "registered bottles of 100ml" where the only difference is in the producer label.

The Reggio Emilia Consortia differentiate the different ages of their balsamic vinegar (Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Reggio Emilia) by the color of their label. A red label indicates a vinegar that has been aged for at least 12 years, a silver label for at least 18 years, and a gold label for 25 years or more. Modena Consortia uses a different system, a white coloured cap means the vinegar has been aged for at least 12 years and a gold cap with the designation "extravecchio" (extra-old) for vinegar that have been aged for 25 years or more.

Aceto Balsamico di Modena IGP

Balsamic Vinegar of Modena is the other protected type of balsamic vinegar. Unlike Traditional Balsamic Vinegar, it is made from a blend of grape must and wine vinegar. It may also contain up to 2% caramel for colouring, although higher-quality products typically don't contain it. The minimum ageing period is just 60 days, and it must take place in wooden barrels. To be labelled "invecchiato" (aged), however, the vinegar must be matured for at least three years.

Check the ingredients to understand the quality

Before discussing the ingredients, it is important to understand that the order in which they are listed matters. Ingredients are always presented in descending order of quantity, meaning the first ingredient is the most abundant in the product. The Traditional balsamic vinegar DOP is obtained from grape must, the Aceto Balsamico di Modena IGP can also have other ingredients: concentrate must, wine vinegar and caramel up to a maximum of 2%. Grape must is the best ingredient, and if it is indicated first, it is a very good sign. Concentrated must is used as an alternative or an addition to the grape must because of its lower cost. Wine vinegar gives the acidity. Caramel is used to add colour to the final product and it is found only on the [cheapest products](#). The Balsamic vinegar typical colour is in fact obtained through the aging process and by using cooked must. The ingredient list of a very good IGT Balsamic Vinegar should read as grape must and wine vinegar or if this is not the case, ideally, this is the order, grape must or and concentrated must, wine vinegar and caramel.

Thickness and density

Even with the bottle unopened, the thickness of balsamic vinegar can be observed. This viscosity is primarily determined by its sugar content. During aging, water slowly evaporates from the vinegar, which increases both its sugar concentration and thickness. The density of balsamic vinegar is a key indicator of quality: the higher the density, the better the balsamic. Always check the density when choosing a product. Typical density values for Balsamic Vinegar of Modena range from about 1.09 to 1.24, while Traditional Balsamic Vinegar can reach 1.30 g/cm³ or higher due to its longer aging and higher sugar concentration.

Balsamic vinegar is a delicious and versatile condiment that can be used in a variety of dishes and should be in everyone's kitchen, whether a chef or a salad lover.

Now that you have become an expert, discover our [range](#) of high quality Italian Balsamic Vinegars .