

## ***Balsamic Vinegar***

*Source: Consortium of Modena*

A product steeped in ancient tradition, balsamic vinegar is produced from the “must”, or unfermented juice, of grapes typically grown in the province of Modena.

Documented as far back as medieval times, balsamic vinegar was offered as a precious gift to popes, nobles, kings and emperors, and has always been prized and enjoyed for both the medicinal and therapeutic properties long attributed to it, and for its ability to enhance the aroma and flavour of culinary offerings.

### **Types**

As documented in the 1839 manuscript of Count Giorgio Gallesio, the great Italian scholar, there have always been two types of balsamic vinegar, and these are today termed:

- **Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena DOP:** this is produced exclusively with cooked grape must, by means of a very slow process of fermentation and ageing which involves the use of an age-old technique of transferring the vinegar down through successively smaller barrels made of different kinds of wood. Although restricted to a select group due to its high cost, this rare and precious product is today appreciated by gourmets all around the world. It was granted DOP (PDO - Protected Designation of Origin) protection system by the European Community on 17/04/2000, and is available exclusively in the characteristic 100 cc bottle, which has come to represent the product itself.
- **Aceto Balsamico di Modena,** which has traditionally been the Modenese everyday vinegar, is produced using a combination of grape must, concentrated grape must and cooked grape must which are acetified with wine vinegar and left to ferment, mature and age in fine wooden barrels. This procedure has long been used to produce a less expensive vinegar for everyday use, which in recent years has become increasingly renowned and appreciated at an international level.

This is the product normally found in supermarkets and in specialist food shops.

### **Production.**

Production is, and always has been, characterised by four stages: the harvesting of grapes, pressing, the cooking of the must, ageing.

In autumn, when the grapes are fully ripe, they are harvested; a process entailing meticulous selection of the best grapes from the top local vineyards. Soft pressing is used to obtain the grape must, which is then simmered slowly in open cauldrons until it reduces down to the desired consistency.

Fermentation takes place during long ageing in barrels. This is unquestionably the most delicate, decisive phase in terms of the characteristics of the end product. At the same time, it is considered to be the most personal phase, during which individual producers often follow ancient procedures passed down by word of mouth from father to son for generation after generation.

### **Culinary use**

After ageing by means of a slow, natural acetification process, balsamic vinegar acquires a characteristic rich dark brown colour and a typical sharp yet sweet, piquant flavour.

The most widely acknowledged characteristic of Balsamic Vinegars of Modena is their ability to enhance the aroma and flavour of dishes in which they are used.



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The differences between the production processes of the two vinegars, Aceto Balsamico di Modena and Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena, endow them with very different characteristics in terms of bouquet, flavour and aroma.

Depending on the type, they can therefore be used as a condiment (**Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Modena**) or as an actual vinegar (**Aceto Balsamico di Modena**), in salad dishes, on grilled meat and fish, in marinades, with cheeses and desserts. The final effect depends proportionately on the quality of the vinegar used.

### **Medicinal properties**

Although the law does not permit any declaration of medicinal properties with regard to food products, recent scientific studies would today appear to confirm the beneficial and therapeutic effects that popular medicine has attributed to balsamic vinegar since ancient times.

The acidity of balsamic vinegar, which is less acidic than gastric juices, stimulates saliva production and aids digestion. The simple sugars present constitute instant energy for the body and mind, with excellent fortifying properties. The countless trace minerals present aid metabolic function. Polyphenols in general and resveratrol in particular have marked anti-oxidant activity and act as free radical scavengers, affording valuable protection against cardiovascular disease.