



COCKTAIL HOUR

Hold the Cinnamon

The key to a good mulled wine?
It's all about subtlety.

OVER-BOILED MULLED WINES, made with headache-inducing quantities of sugar, have long given this holiday classic a dire reputation. But across the country, ambitious bars have lately been retooling this winter standby, using fresh ingredients, complex spices, and cocktail smarts to take it from “ick” to “aaaahhh.” One of our favorites comes from Danielle Walker of Walkers Maine restaurant in Cape Neddick, Maine. She infuses a high-quality Austrian red with nutmeg, vanilla, and star anise, highlighting (rather than obscuring) the wine’s natural notes. The result is a subtle, warming drink, perfect for sipping by the restaurant’s 9-foot fireplace.

Walker compares making mulled wine to preparing a vinaigrette: It’s all about balance. “If you find a spice overpowering, balance it with a little sweetness, just as you would balance a vinaigrette with more oil,” she says. Heating wine can bring out its astringent tannins, so she sweetens the drink with local honey and maple syrup and finishes it off with applejack for extra warmth. The result: a concoction you’ll want to sip all winter long—cozy fireplace not included. —MADDY SWEITZER-LAMMÉ

Walker’s Mulled Wine

ACTIVE 30 MIN; TOTAL 1 HR

SERVES 12

Warming the wine gently and sweetening it with honey and maple syrup makes for a soft and silky mulled wine.

- 20 whole cloves
- 8 whole star anise
- 6 cinnamon sticks
- 1 whole nutmeg, smashed
- 2 (750-ml) bottles dry red wine (such as Blaufränkisch, Zweigelt, or Pinot Noir)
- 4 (6- x 1-inch) orange peel strips (from 2 large oranges)
- 2 vanilla bean pods, halved lengthwise
- 2 oz. pure maple syrup
- 2 oz. honey
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (6 oz.) applejack brandy (such as Laird’s) (optional)

1. Heat cloves, star anise, cinnamon sticks, and nutmeg in a small skillet over low, stirring often, until toasted and fragrant, about 5 minutes.

2. Transfer spice mixture to a large saucepan over medium-low; stir in wine, orange peel strips, vanilla bean pods, maple syrup, and honey. Slowly bring wine mixture to just below a simmer, stirring occasionally, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat, and let steep until spices bloom and infuse into wine, about 30 minutes.

3. Return saucepan to medium-low; stir in applejack, if desired, and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until warmed through, about 5 minutes. Pour mixture (through a fine wire-mesh strainer, if desired) into a large heatproof bowl. Ladle mulled wine into glasses.