

# *Rumtopf / Fermented Fruit Documentation*

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## What is it?

Fermented Fruit, or Rumtopf, is fruit preserved in a sweet alcoholic syrup. There are two different ways to produce the syrup:

- 1) **Fermented Fruit:** The syrup is produced by adding yeast to sugar. The yeast converts sugar to alcohol, producing carbon dioxide gas as a byproduct (producing alcohol by fermentation).
- 2) **Rumpot (or Rumtopf):** The syrup is produced by adding sugar to wine, rum, brandy, or other alcohol (known as fortification).

Several years ago, I decided to make fermented fruit as a Christmas gift for a few friends. I found three somewhat similar recipes in my research. After consulting my local Brewmaster on how the recipes worked (“Yeast and Its Eating Habits: Lecture #503”), I selected the *Los Angeles Times Book of Christmas Entertaining* recipe as the base; the recipe given here reflects all three sources.

## How Was It Made?

For my Christmas gifts, I started the fruit in eleven mason jars on November 23. The lids of the jars were left slightly open to allow for the escaping gas; however, this also allowed for invading ants. My local Brewmaster suggested we dump the uninvaded batches together in two 8-gallon plastic beer fermenting tubs with airlocks. We lost two batches to the ants, but the rest (of the fruit - not the ants) lived happily in the tubs; all future ingredients were added en masse. On December 21, the fruit was divided into fifteen apothecary jars.

In February, I decided to enter some of the left over fruit in the brewing competition of Arts Pentathlon. The fermentation had stopped, but a cup of sugar helped reestablish it. (This jar had stood idle for a month with no ill effects.) I added a cinnamon stick and a mint leaf and replaced the cinnamon every month and the mint every week. I transferred the fruit to a mason jar for Pentathlon and included a pound cake (store bought), bowls, and spoons with my entry.

The recipe I initially used was very exact, and I followed it step-by-step (6 cherries, 1 cup pears...stir every other day, add 1 cup fruit and 1 cup sugar every other week...) As I worked with the fruit, I realized this approach was much more strict than necessary. The basics of the recipe are that the yeast converts the sugar into alcohol, preserving the fruit by saturating it.

The fruit for my Estella War entry was started a week before the event (but longer IS better) and was made with the following recipe:

### Fermented Fruit

- 1 can drained **pineapple chunks**
- 2 cans drained **pear slices** (Cut into bite sized pieces)
- 2 cans drained **peach halves** (Cut into bite sized pieces)
- 2 small jars **maraschino** cherries (Add the juice for color if desired)
- sugar**
- 1 envelope **baking yeast**
- cinnamon sticks**
- fresh **mint leaves**

Place the fruit into a jar or crock with a loose fitting lid (loose enough to allow gas to escape but close fitting enough to keep insects out). Add enough sugar to fill the container. Add the yeast, and stir; the moisture in the fruit will liquefy the sugar. Add cinnamon sticks and a few mint leaves if desired. The yeast will start converting the sugar to alcohol. You will see bubbles on the top of the mixture; this is carbon dioxide resulting from the conversion. Stir the mixture several times in the next few days until all the sugar has dissolved, otherwise the sugar will clump at the bottom of the jar.

The fruit is ready to eat when the bubbles stop, or you can let it age for a richer taste. Store in the same loose lidded container in a cool spot. Replace fruit and sugar as you use the fruit from the jar. Replace cinnamon and mint as needed. Serve over vanilla ice cream, pound or sponge cake, pudding, etc.

This recipe makes a great gift or auction item: Put it in a pretty jar (with a loose lid) with ribbon and care and feeding information. (Use some or all of the information at the end of this article.) And don't forget brewing competitions — non-drinkable fermented, fortified items are entered in the “non-potable” category.

## But Is It Period?

**The Ingredients:** My research was done in *The Herbal...* by John Gerald (see Bibliography), 1633 revised edition. The original *Herbal* was published in 1597 and was “based” on an even earlier work. The revising editor marked the passages he changed in 1655, so I think I can safely call this a period source.

Medieval health care included the theory of humors. A healthy body had its humors in balance — not too hot, too cold, too wet, or too dry. Gerard includes information on the humors as well as medical uses of most of the plants in his herbal.

- **Cane sugar** was imported into Europe and, when the Sugar Bakers were finished with it, the sugar was indeed white. Its humor is dry and it cleans the stomach.
- **Peaches** putrefy food in the stomach — but — because they are slippery, if they are eaten first, they make the stomach slippery and cause the food to slide down faster. They are cold and moist to the second degree.
- **Cherries**, if eaten before meat, they will soften the belly very gently. They are cold and moist.
- **Pineapple** was known in England. Gerard’s only comment was that they are sweet and pleasant.
- **Cinnamon** makes food more wholesome and causes good digestion. It is dry and warm.
- **Mint** is wholesome for the stomach and strengthens it and causes good digestion. It is hot and dry in the third degree.
- **Yeast Barm** (scum from top of fermenting ale) was used by the home cook/brewer as the yeast source. By 1655, they were drying the barm to keep for later use.

The humors in this recipe are fairly well balanced. The properties of the ingredients would make this a good first course dish as it would aid digestion of the following foods.

**The Recipe:** In the Middle Ages, raw fruit was not often eaten. It was considered difficult to digest, and it did not store well in that form. Instead, fruit was usually cooked into jams or marmalades, cooked with a heavy sugar syrup, or fortified (rumtopf is very period). This recipe does not include cooking; however canned fruit has been cooked (usually in a sugar syrup) before canning. Modern “maraschino cherries” for example, are cooked with sugar and dyed to improve their color — both of which are period treatments of food. (True maraschino cherries have been preserved in liquor made from fermenting the pulp from the marasca cherry).

This dish could definitely have been made in period and, although I have not found it in the medieval cookbooks I had available to me, I found several sugar and fruit fermented drinks and sugar syrup fruit dishes. I am convinced that it would have been made — if nothing else, by accident when the yeast or barm got too close to the cooling fruit.

**If you have any questions or problems, contact me: Lynnette (Debbie Coyle) at [Debbie.Coyle@gmail.com](mailto:Debbie.Coyle@gmail.com)**

### **Bibliography**

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5. The Los Angeles Times Book of Christmas Entertaining..., by Dawn Navarro, 1985.
6. The Queen’s Closet Opened, by W. M., 1655.
7. To the King’s Taste..., by Lorna J. Sass, 1975.
8. Winemaker’s Recipe Handbook, by Raymond Massaccesi, 1976.

Entries 3, 5, and 8 are sources of the fermented fruit recipes.



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