

SPICED WINE SURPRISE by Cathy Kaufman

This recipe, known as Apicius's *conditum paradoxum*, or spiced wine surprise, is translated from the original Latin by Barbara Flower and Elisabeth Rosenbaum. It is followed by Cathy Kaufman's contemporary adaptation and is provided as a companion piece to her program summary on Ancient Wine (February, 2004) in the Fall, 2004 newsletter.

15 lb. of honey are put into a bronze jar which already contains two pints of wine, so that you boil down the wine as you cook the honey. This is to be heated over a slow fire of dry wood, stirring with a stick while it cooks; if it begins to boil over it is stopped with a splash of wine; in any case it will simmer down when the heat is taken away, and when cooled, re-ignited. This must be repeated a second and a third time; then the mixture is finally removed from the brazier and, on the following day, skimmed. Next 4 oz. of pepper, 3 scruples of pounded mastic, 1 dram each of bay leaf and saffron, 5 roasted date-stones, and the dates themselves softened in wine to a smooth puree. When all this is ready, pour on 18 pints of smooth wine. If the finished product is bitter, coal will correct it

The skimming is unnecessary with modern refined honeys. It is often difficult to find dates with stones, and the recipe works well omitting step 2.

1 bottle white wine
1 cup honey
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon crushed mastic (available at Middle Eastern groceries)
1 small bay leaf
1 pinch saffron
2 dates, with pits if possible

1. Place all but ½ cup wine in a saucepan and add the honey. Stir and heat just enough to dissolve the honey. Add the pepper, mastic, bay leaf, and saffron. Remove from the heat.
2. Remove the pits from the dates if unpitted. Place the date pits in a small sauté pan and gently toast them over a low flame until lightly colored. Add to the wine mixture. (Omit this step if the dates are pitted.)
3. Soften the date flesh in the remaining ½ cup of white wine. Puree in a blender or by pounding in a mortar. Add to the wine mixture. Stir to combine and let infuse for several hours or, ideally, overnight. Strain and serve at room temperature or chilled.