

Recent Ramblings: Winemaking

Once upon a snowy winter night in 1999, my grandpa passed away. Grandma and Grandpa moved off the family farm in 1986 when my uncle took over the dairy. Grandpa continued to live there after she succumbed to cancer in 1988, and- for the most part- kept it as she had it. While he hardly used more than 2 dishes, 1 pot and the vacuum occasionally, the house still full from their lifetime together.

Many hands making light work, my aunts, uncles, Papa, Mom, and us cousins set to work on cleaning out the house one Saturday. Those with the strongest backs were relegated to work on hauling up everything stored in the basement to be sorted and divvied or donated. Christmas decorations, tools, canning components and jars, pantry goods, etc.

On the basement floor under the shelves bearing Christmas decor were 3 glass jugs of yellowish liquid. A little wary after finding some questionable chemicals between the saw-gas and some paint, we called for backup. Upon further investigation, my dad proclaimed it to be gold. He obviously remembered more about Grandma making dandelion wine than anyone else did, so it made its way- carefully- onto the floor of the back seat of our car and cradled by other soft objects that would be finding a home with us. That evening, while no one watched, Papa hid the wine.

When I moved into my own apartment, Mom's gift to me was a recipe book. I learned quickly that it was not all-inclusive and found myself frequently calling home to collect additional food memory how-to's and cooking techniques. But one of the original recipes was the Dandelion Wine.

Winemaking is for people with more patience than time to drink.

Not that I have a plethora of either, but the scales are definitely tipped toward time slipping away. Fast forward through a degree, wedding, a house remodel, 6 jobs, 2 kids and 8 dogs later (aka 2024): What could I do to capitalize on the loss of time with one hour here and one hour there? Why, collect dandelion flowers for the wine, of course! My daughter helped. 😊

I had called my dad with questions about this recipe to see what he could recall from Grandma making it. He said that Grandma would make a batch every year. During special occasions, even the kids would get a glass! He thought this batch- that he still has- was from 1976; the last she made before she got cancer. And... after Tallyn and I had spent 3 weeks collecting, trimming and freezing the dandelion heads, he basically said that the flowers were just for color. They really didn't add anything to the wine other than to provide a better name than "Lemon-Orange-Rasin Wine With a Boatload of Sugar." Fabulous. Well, given how carefully he guarded Grandma's wine, I was going to make it how she made it and maybe end up (after 1 year's time- per the recipe) with liquid gold.

He and Mom came out for a visit this past spring (2025) and, while too sweet for my tastes, both of them said it tasted just how it should.

This spring, however cool, did not produce a hard fruit-blossom-killing frost as in most years. So in addition to the blackberries coming on 2 weeks early, they trickled into ripeness over the course of about

6 weeks. The peach trees, even after pruning, still lost branches under the weight of their bounty. And the peaches are BIG this year. Between baseball and softball size.

So, you know, Waste Not. I got a little 1-gallon wine-making kit complete with the chemicals, yeast, primary and secondary containers, siphon hose, and recipe book for every kind of fruit known to man. You're only supposed to begin with 2 pounds of fruit flesh, but I probably had closer to 4. (Because... why not?)

I collected the biggest, softest, purplest (most purple?) peaches I could find. I sat under another tree that I'd planted in 2003 that was one of the best decisions I made after moving here between "degree" and "wedding". And I peeled them. I peel them when I just want to enjoy one in the moment, and I definitely didn't want fuzz in my wine.

And as I'm peeling, I'm rehashing moments. I'm taking far more care than necessary to peel these peaches- and pondering life. Then, juice running down my arms, I took out the pit (also referred to as the "stone" because it's as hard as one during this stage) and rolled it over in my hand.

These peaches are like our life experiences.

The skin is our circumstances.

The pit or seed- the hardest part to get over- is the intense emotion that these circumstances create in us.

But then there's the fruit. Now, the purpose of fruit in real life is to nourish the seed as the fruit decays, and to call in animals to carry away the seed to be -ahem- fertilized and deposited elsewhere after the fruit is eaten. Ideally, this seed becomes productive and creates new life.

But what if the enormity of the seed or pit overwhelms in these circumstances and we never see the fruit?
I've seen avocados with huge seeds and very little meat at all.

But in order for the pit to exist at all, there must be fruit.

What if the fruit is the blessing? **Because** of the circumstances and **in spite of** the pit?

No matter how big the pit or seed and how little the fruit, there must be a fruit. BOTH are needed to make something new... or to be productive. To not have the experience go to waste.

Nothing is wasted.

But... in all circumstances, no seed can develop completely into something productive if the ground isn't ready to receive it.

Lord, help me with my thought processes as I work with the blackberries!!