

That
little ol'
wine-
maker
...you?

by Debby Fairley

"The first thing Noah did after he got off the ark was to plant a vineyard and start making wine. Noah was a very wise man."

That's Roger Welsch talking in his Nebraska Free University (NFU) winemaking students. Winemaking he tells them, is the fastest-growing hobby in the United States. "It sure beats the hell out of collecting stamps," he said.

In 1970 the sale of light wines in Nebraska rose 40 per cent. The first 11 months of 1971 there was an increase of 42 per cent. And although hard liquor still outsells wine three to one, its sales rose only about three per cent last year.

As wine drinkers increase, so do winemakers. One of the reasons, says Welsch, is the current boom in "pop wines." Boone's Farm Apple, Strawberry Hill, Cold Duck, Cold Bear and Ripple—they're all "great if they get kids away from the beer and bourbon routine," says Welsch.

Besides, he adds, after awhile that kind of wine begins to cloy, and kids start looking for better wines. And then they run into another good reason for doing it yourself—high prices at the liquor stores.

It's silly to buy a bottle of wine for \$2.50 when you can make one just as good for less than 50 cents, he said. For people who can pick or grow their own fruit, the price may drop as low as a nickel a bottle.

Although grapes are the traditional fruit for wine, "you can ferment just about anything," Welsch says—"birch sap, prickly pears, sumac berries. . ."

Other possibilities are apricots, apples, bananas, plums, peaches, honey, rhubarb, strawberries, elderberries and oranges.

Both Welsch's store, "Winos Finos," and Wine-Art, a recently opened winemaking supply store in Lincoln, stock many of these in juice concentrate form. Wine-Art also carries the raw materials for dandelion, fig and rose hip wine, along with African passion fruit juice.

Business has been good, according to Jim Pennebaker, the store's manager. In the two-and-a-half months since Wine-Art opened, it has gone through six supply shipments—the equivalent of emptying the store six times.

"During the Christmas season, we had to close at 2 or 3 every afternoon because the walls were stripped," he said.

Most of Wine-Art's customers are farmers who grow their own fruit or doctors making wine just for the fun of it, Pennebaker said. Students make up about 30 per cent of the customers, he said. "but we think we'll be getting more—they're the ones who need to save the money."

A poverty-stricken college student might need to buy only a 50 cent packet of wine yeast, says Brian Hamilton, a Wine-Art employee and UNL student.

Wine's basic ingredients are juice, sugar and wine yeast. Most people already have sugar at home, he said, and if they're not too particular about the quality of their wine, regular store-bought grape juice will do for the juice. Wild or home-grown fruit is better and cheaper.

Then two containers are needed—an open "primary" container and a closed "secondary." Both Wine-Art and Welsch recommend a large plastic trash can for the primary, but smaller metal ones will work too. The secondary is usually a glass jug which can be picked up for the price of the deposit at grocery stores.

That's basically it. But even if the winemaker buys the most expensive concentrates and adds a few chemicals, the price will rarely go as high as a dollar a bottle, if made in five or ten gallon batches.

There is a catch, though. By federal law, only the head of a household may legally make wine, and then he is limited to 200 gallons a year. The wine may not be moved from the household where it is made and it may not be consumed by any but the family of the maker.

"Women's lib should get on this," says Welsch. "Women can make wine legally only if they have a kid or dependent."

Single men also cannot make wine legally, nor can divorcees or widowed persons unless they have at least one dependent living with them.

Fortunately, says Welsch, the law is not strongly enforced. "Last year there were 104 licenses issued in Nebraska. Now you know that somewhere in Omaha there is one square block where 104 Italians are making wine."

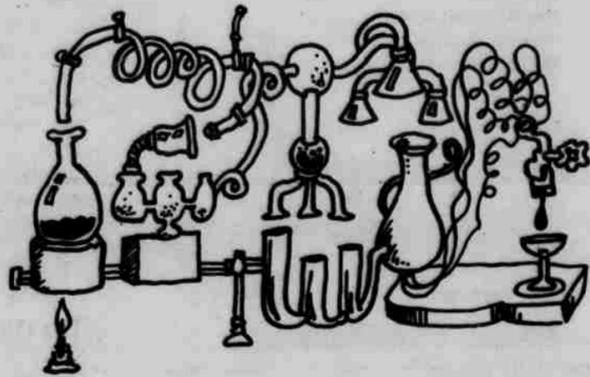
Beer-making, however, is out-and-out illegal for everyone. Therefore, when Welsch talks about brewing beer, he speaks in the subjunctive: "I tell them how beer could be made if it were legal to make it."

Although making beer requires a few more ingredients than wine, very good results are possible with even simple recipes, according to Pennebaker.

"A kid from Wesleyan made some einbocher beer that is the best stuff I've ever tasted—and I've had it in Germany and Holland," he said.

Both Pennebaker and Welsch stressed that wine and beer-making are very simple. "You don't have to be a technologist to do it," Welsch said. "Remember it's been done for thousands of years by some pretty simple peoples."

"And it sure beats drinking Tang."



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