

Carbonating Wine

Bottling – Easy Method

1. Rack the wine from the carboy into a sanitized primary fermenter. Avoid disturbing the sediment. Make your tirage by dissolving 1-3/4 cups (325 mL) white table sugar in 2 cups (500 mL) boiling water. Stir thoroughly and gently into wine.
2. Carefully rehydrate one package of champagne yeast (Lalvin EC-1118 is an excellent choice, but there are others), following these instructions exactly: Stir the yeast into 1/5 cup (50 mL) of water at 100 °F (40 °C). Leave it to stand for 10 minutes, and then stir yeast thoroughly but gently into wine.
3. Siphon your wine into the champagne bottles, leaving one inch (2.5 cm) of space at the top of the neck.
4. If your champagne bottles accept crown caps, cap them now. Otherwise, insert plastic stoppers and wire them down using wire cages and a wire-twisting tool. Remember, using anything other than a proper champagne bottle could result in dangerous breakage: Do not attempt to use non-champagne bottles! (Go back and read the frightening warning again!)
5. Store bottles on their sides at 65–75 °F (19–23 °C) for two months to carbonate. (While traditional champagne secondary fermentations are conducted cooler than this, field results with kit wine show that this can produce inconsistent results.)

Testing

Stand a bottle upright in your refrigerator for one week. Carefully de-cap the wine and taste it to determine if it's finished carbonating. It should be delightfully fizzy and, while still quite green, it should show the crispness and palate-pleasing character of sparkling wine. You may now choose to go straight to the drinking process, or proceed on to the advanced stages of riddling and disgorging.

Drinking (the easy way)

If you don't wish to go through the riddling and disgorging process, which is time-consuming and can be messy, simply store the bottles upright in boxes to allow the sediment to collect on the bottom. Wait two months for the wine to develop in flavor and chill before serving.

When serving, pour carefully, leaving the last half-inch of wine in the bottle, to prevent sediment from being transferred into your glass.

More Difficult Method

Riddling (remuage)

After two months, invert the bottles (place them cap down) in wine boxes to allow the yeast sediment to collect in the neck of the bottle. To assist this sediment formation, raise each bottle about 2 inches (5 cm), twist sharply 1/4 turn, then drop back into the box. This is called riddling, and it should be repeated once a day for two to three weeks. (When riddling, please wear gloves,

long sleeves and a face shield or eye protection.) The inverted wine should then be aged for approximately one month, until it is completely clear.

Preparing your topping wine

Because the sediment collects in the neck of the bottle, you will be able to remove it. This is called disgorging. However, disgorging results in the loss of a small amount of wine, so it's necessary to top up bottles to avoid low fill levels and oxidation. For your topping wine, choose something similar to your sparkling wine base and chill it; you'll need between 50–100 mL (1/5–1/3 cup) per bottle. Ensure that the wine is thoroughly chilled before use.

In French champagne-making, sugar is added to the dosage. However, kit wines have much lower levels of acid than grapes from Champagne do, so adding sugar isn't usually desirable. However, if you have a sweet tooth, check the sidebar for appropriate sugar levels. It's a bit tricky to decide how exactly to get the right amount of sugar in each bottle when you aren't exactly sure how much dosage you'll need, so be prepared to accept a bit of variability.

Freezing

Remove the sparkling wine from the box (still inverted) and place in your freezer, inverted. If you've got room for a wine box in your freezer, this is easily accomplished. If not, carefully prop the bottles up with available materials: pizza boxes, caviar containers, bits of Jimmy Hoffa or whatever you happen to have.

Allow the bottles to chill. Monitor them frequently and, when ice crystals form a solid plug in the neck of the bottle, it is ready to be disgorged. (Do not allow bottles to freeze completely: They will break, releasing wine inside your freezer and causing your wife to belt you with a frying pan).

Freezing can also be done by immersing the neck of the bottle in a solution of ice and salt (brine), chilling the bottle thoroughly beforehand. However, the freezer method works well and very quickly. Just keep monitoring the bottles to make sure they don't freeze solid.

Popping the cork

This is best done outdoors — or in a room where the walls, floor and ceiling can easily be washed — due to possible gushing of the carbonated wine. Please wear gloves, long sleeves and a face shield or eye protection and a rain slicker or poncho when handling the bottles.

1. Remove the bottle from the freezer. Keep it inverted at all times.
2. While holding the bottle upside-down, remove the crown cap or undo the wire and carefully pop the cork. The pressure will free the cork and push the sediment out of the bottle in one step. As it gushes free, cover the neck of the bottle with your thumb and turn it right side up. (You need a quick thumb and a dab hand to avoid losing much wine!) Do this once and you'll see why we recommend doing it outdoors.
3. Once the sediment is ejected from the wine, top the bottle with your dosage (topping wine). Be careful to pour the topping wine down the side of the bottle to prevent foaming.
4. Immediately re-cork with a sanitized plastic stopper. Wire down securely.
5. Age your wine for at least a month before trying it.

Sparkling wine will improve tremendously with age. While it may be tempting to drink it all as soon as it is disgorged, try keeping back a few bottles for a year or more. You'll be delighted with the results.