

Homemade Strega©-Style Liqueur - The Witches' Herbal Liqueur of Benevento

Yield: About 5 cups / 1.2 liters **Prep Time:** 15 minutes **Infusion:** 10-15 days **Resting:** 3-4 weeks

Ingredients

For the Herbal Infusion

- 2 cups (500 ml) 190-proof food-grade alcohol
- Peel of 1 untreated lemon
- Peel of 1/2 untreated orange
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 4 whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1 teaspoon anise seeds
- 5-6 juniper berries, lightly crushed
- 4-5 fresh sage leaves
- 1 small rosemary sprig
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/2 vanilla bean, optional

For U.S. readers: use Everclear 190 Proof (95% ABV) wherever legally available. If only Everclear 151 Proof (75.5% ABV) is available, you can still use it, but the finished liqueur will be slightly less alcoholic unless you reduce the amount of water.

For the Syrup

- 2 cups (500 ml) water
- 2 cups (400 g) granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon saffron threads, or 1 small packet good-quality saffron

Instructions

1. Prepare the Citrus

Wash and dry the lemon and orange well. Using a vegetable peeler, remove thin strips of peel, avoiding as much of the white pith as possible. Too much white pith can make the liqueur bitter.

2. Add the Herbs and Spices

Place the lemon and orange peels in a large clean glass jar. Add the cinnamon, cloves, fennel seeds, anise seeds, juniper berries, sage, rosemary, bay leaves, and vanilla bean if using.

3. Add the Alcohol

Pour the food-grade alcohol or Everclear over everything, making sure the herbs and spices are submerged. Seal the jar tightly and place it in a cool, dark cupboard for 10-15 days. Gently shake the jar once every day.

4. Strain the Infusion

After the infusion period, strain the alcohol through a fine-mesh strainer. Discard the herbs, spices, and citrus peels. For a beautifully clear liqueur, strain it a second time through cheesecloth or a coffee filter.

5. Make the Syrup

Combine the water and sugar in a saucepan. Heat gently, stirring until the sugar is completely dissolved. Remove from the heat and let it cool completely. Never add hot syrup directly to high-proof alcohol.

6. Add the Saffron

Once the syrup is cool, add the saffron and let it infuse for about 10 minutes. The syrup will take on a rich golden-yellow color.

7. Combine

Slowly pour the cooled saffron syrup into the filtered herbal alcohol. Stir gently until completely combined.

8. Bottle

Pour into clean glass bottles and seal tightly. Clear bottles with cork stoppers give it a traditional homemade Italian look.

9. Let It Rest

Let the bottles rest in a cool, dark place for at least 3-4 weeks. If you can wait 6-8 weeks, even better. The flavors become smoother, rounder, and more harmonious as the liqueur matures.

Nonna's Tips

- Do not use too much rosemary, sage, bay leaf, or cloves; their flavors become very concentrated in alcohol.
- Use good-quality saffron. A little goes a long way.
- Filter twice for a crystal-clear finished liqueur.
- The longer it rests, the smoother it becomes.
- You can experiment with tiny amounts of lemon balm, mint, star anise, cardamom, coriander seeds, or angelica root.

How to Serve

- Slightly chilled
- At room temperature
- Over one large ice cube
- In a small cordial glass after dinner
- In desserts such as sponge cakes, pastry cream, ricotta fillings, tiramisu, zabaglione, or ice cream

Storage

Keep the bottles tightly closed in a cool, dark place, away from direct sunlight, heat, and frequent temperature changes. Once matured, this type of high-alcohol homemade liqueur can generally be kept for many months.

Nutrition Facts

Approximate values per 1 fl oz (30 ml) serving: 105 calories; 0 g fat; 10 g carbohydrates; 10 g sugars; 0 g protein; 1 mg sodium. Nutritional values are approximate and vary according to the alcohol used, final dilution, and quantity of sugar.