

Waldmeisterbowle (Maibowle)

Waldmeisterbowle is one of those delectable drinks whose season is short. Essentially a white wine flavored with sweet woodruff, a perennial herb, the drink can be made only when the herb is in flower, as the leaves have no fragrance at other times of the year. Tradition has it that *Waldmeisterbowle* is drunk on May 1 in Germany and on June 11, St. Barnabas' Day, in England.

According to legend, sweet woodruff formed the virgin's bed. It was certainly used in mattresses and herb pillows and was hung in wardrobes and linen cupboards. On drying, it has the sweet smell of new-mown hay.

RECIPE

Ingredients

- 2 bunches of sweet woodruff, including flowers, stems and leaves (a handful = 1 bunch)
- 1 cup sugar
- Juice of 1 orange and 1 lemon (or of 2 lemons)
- 3 bottles light (dry, not sweet!) white wine (e.g., Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, or Pinot Grigio)
- 1 small bottle (half quart) club soda or dry champagne

Procedure

1. Wash woodruff leaves (including stems and blossoms), dry them, squeeze (lightly crush) them and place them in a small glass or ceramic bowl. Let the woodruff "wilt" for several hours until it is dry or nearly so.
2. Mix the woodruff with 5 tablespoons sugar, plus juice of 1 orange (or 1 lemon), and enough wine to dissolve sugar. Cover and let stand in cool place for 2 hours.
3. Then add the rest of the sugar, a bottle of wine and juice of lemon. Cover the bowl and let stand in cool place till needed. (Four to 6 hours or even overnight is okay.)
4. Strain the whole mixture, pour into serving pitcher, and add the rest of the wine.
5. Immediately before serving, add the club soda or champagne.

Note: May wine does not have to be drunk the same day. You can refrigerate the wine mixture and then top up the pitcher or individual glasses with club soda or champagne right before serving.

Sweet woodruff is cultivated here in the Washington, DC, area as a ground cover and is available at local nurseries.