

About Alcoholism - Alcoholism Information, Research, and Treatment
What's Not Cooking?
AA Grapevine August 1990

Don't blame Julia Child for leading you astray: We all were convinced that the alcohol in the sherry she so liberally added to dishes would cook away, with only the wine's flavor left behind. But now, it turns out, we can't have our brandy and eat it too, because alcohol, as recent research reveals, has tremendous staying power.

At the request of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food scientist Evelyn A. Augustin of Washington State University in Pullman, along with her husband, Jorg A. Augustin of the Food Research Center at the University of Idaho in Moscow, recently tested six recipes to determine the fate of the alcohol called for. Their results, reported at the latest annual meeting of the American Dietetic Association, were a big surprise to everyone. They found that the burgundy in pot roast Milano, for example, doesn't completely disappear even after two and a half hours of simmering on the stove; that a dish of scalloped oysters, baked at 375 degrees for 25 minutes, retains 45 percent of the alcohol in the dry sherry used; that Grand Marnier sauce, which is removed from the heat when the called-for liqueur is added, gets hot enough to lose only 15 percent of its alcohol.

Especially surprising, though, was what happened--or didn't happen--to the brandy in the cherries jubilee. The recipe calls for dark sweet cherries to be mixed with corn-starch and heated in a chafing dish to thicken. One quarter of a cup of brandy is then ignited in a separate pan and poured over the cherries. But even this intense flaming process, the Augustins discovered, burned off no more than 25 percent of the alcohol. They tested the recipe several times, and on each try the flame died, while 75 percent of the alcohol survived.

Lears

Is Your Goose Cooked? How one AA handles alcohol in food

Sometimes attention slips for a moment and other things can get in the way of what is really important. It can happen so suddenly that before you know it there's a mess on your hands. I've found that I'm uncomfortable with foods prepared with alcohol, even when the alcohol has presumably been all cooked away. Some people whose recovery I respect don't seem to have the same problem. My sponsor's recommendation when I discussed the matter with him was: "Do whatever you need to maintain a comfortable recovery. You and you alone are responsible for taking care of yourself." So over the years when I'm at a restaurant where cooking with alcohol may be involved (our local diner doesn't qualify!), I tell the server, "I have a medical problem and can't have anything that has alcohol in it. Please check with your chef for me." Restaurants are happy to comply with my request and I'm able to enjoy my meal without any problem.

Then there was last Saturday: dinner with friends at an Italian restaurant with me all-too-conscious that evening of my doctor's recent warning to watch my cholesterol. As I read the menu, my attention was focused on the fat content of the various offerings, so pasta in the house specialty sauce seemed a good choice. Alcohol was far from my thoughts--as it turned out, too far--and I forgot to make my usual request to the waiter.

I took the first mouthful of the sauce and the second and the third. Then, one of my friends casually remarked, "The last time I had the sauce here it was so full of wine I really didn't like it!" Uh-oh, I thought.

I left the table immediately and went to the server's station where I checked, and sure enough the sauce had been liberally laced with wine. Although I was assured that "it had all been cooked off," I nevertheless had a new and alcohol- free dinner selection brought to me.

The next day, I talked to my sponsor about what had happened. I wondered whether all the wine had really cooked off--recent studies show that it takes a powerful lot of cooking before the alcohol added to food evaporates in the cooking process. And if it hadn't, had I damaged my sobriety? My sponsor assured me that I hadn't. I had made a mistake by forgetting my usual custom at restaurants but, as he put it, "If you relapse it won't be a mistake! It will be the result of your conscious decision to return to alcohol. Now," he continued, "what have you learned from this experience? And stop beating up on yourself for your mistake!" he added quietly. He knows me well.

What did I learn from my mistake? It has taught me again the importance of priorities, of putting first things first. My life and well-being depend on my staying away from alcohol, in whatever form it might be. I live in a society in which alcohol seems to be everywhere, not only in expected places (such as bars and glasses) but also in unexpected places such as over-the-counter medications and restaurant-prepared foods. But no matter what form it may take, if I ingest alcohol it may trigger that now-sleeping compulsion to drink which could lead to my death. For my own safety and peace of mind, I choose not to put alcohol into my body in any form whatsoever, and that for me includes foods in which, supposedly, it has partially evaporated in the cooking process.

I alone am responsible for taking care of myself and maintaining my own safe and comfortable recovery: I learned this important lesson when I first came into the program and thought I would never forget it. But I had to learn it again, at the restaurant last Saturday. Although I may have many different concerns and interests, for my life's sake I cannot afford to forget that staying away from alcohol must remain a first and basic priority.

Jamie C.
W. Henrietta, New York
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Alcohol Does Not Cook Off

Imagine preparing Boeuf Bourguignon or Grasshopper Pie without wine or liquor. Most chefs would shudder.

Many gourmet cooks think that wine and spirits add essential flavor to dishes and that the alcohol evaporates in the cooking process.

Not true, according to researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

After testing six recipes, including main dishes and desserts, government nutritionists found that significant percentages of alcohol and wine poured into hot and cold dishes remain even after cooking.

Although the overall alcohol content of the recipes tested by the government remains small, the new finding may serve as a warning for people who want to bar any alcohol from their diet.

"It was assumed until now that everything would be gone after cooking," said Jorg Augustin, professor of food science and biochemistry at the University of Idaho, who prepared and tested the recipes selected by the USDA.

"We hadn't given it much thought before - but we found that the retentions varied quite a bit," he said.

Recipes that required less cooking time retained the highest percentage of alcohol.

A Brandy Alexander pie, made with 3 tablespoons of Brandy and 1/4 cup of Creme de Cacao, retained 85% of the alcohol. Cherries jubilee, made with 1/4 cup of Brandy and flamed for 48 seconds, retained 75%.

Main dishes such as scalloped oysters, prepared with 1/4 cup dry Sherry poured on top of the casserole and baked for 25 minutes, retained 45%. A chicken dish prepared with 1/2 cup of Burgundy stirred in and then simmered for 15 minutes retained 40%. A Pot Roast, prepared with one cup of burgundy and then roasted for 2 1/2 hours, retained only 5%.

Rena Cutrufelli, a USDA nutritionist, said that the agency will review its recipe files to adjust for the finding. The agency has not issued any recommendations based on these preliminary findings for people concerned with alcohol intake, such as recovering alcoholics or pregnant women, she said.

"We were just trying to prove or disprove the assumption that no alcohol exists (after cooking)."

Cutrufelli said, "I don't think for this small a picture you can say what affects people."

A spokeswoman for the Washington-based American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists said the group has not responded to the study. "We don't really know how much alcohol is enough to cause problems," said Kate Ruddon. "But we do know it can cause fetal alcohol syndrome and other problems, we just recommend that women avoid it."

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence also recommends that recovering alcoholics avoid foods cooked with wine or liquor. The taste alone could spark a desire to drink again.

"It depends on the individual," said Jeffery Hon, a spokesman for the New York-based council. "It may be more risky for some individuals, and it also depends on how much is used in the dish."

Chris Spolar

Alcohol left in food after cooking!

This information was initially established by FDA research; a study was subsequently published in the April 1992 edition of the Journal of the American Dietetic Association (JADA). The citation is on PubMed, but the JADA issues prior to 1993 are not available online. Library citation is: J Am Diet Assoc. 1992 Apr;92(4):486-8. The authors are: Augustin J, Augustin E, Cutrufelli RL, Hagen SR, Teitzel C. [Department of Food Science and Toxicology, Food Research Center, Moscow, ID 83843.]

Cooking With Alcohol

Q. When cooking with beer or alcohol, does all of the alcohol evaporate?

A. No. The following chart should be helpful.

PREPARATION METHOD

No heat application, immediate consumption (Alcohol Retained 100%)

No heat application, overnight storage (Alcohol Retained 70%)

Alcohol ingredient added to boiling liquid, and removed from heat (Alcohol Retained 85%)

Flamed (Alcohol Retained 75%)

Baked, approximately 25 minutes, alcohol ingredient on surface of mixture/not stirred in (Alcohol Retained 45%)

Baked/simmered, alcohol ingredient stirred into mixture:

15 minutes (Alcohol Retained 40%)

30 minutes (Alcohol Retained 35%)

1 hour (Alcohol Retained 25%)

1.5 hours (Alcohol Retained 20%)

2 hours (Alcohol Retained 10%)

2.5 hours (Alcohol Retained 5%)

What can I substitute if a recipe calls for beverages with alcohol?

The best, but not always the easiest solution, is to find another recipe without alcohol that will fill the need. If the beer or wine is a major ingredient in your recipe, or if a large quantity is called for, it makes sense not to attempt a substitute. The results could be unpleasant. In such a case, look for another recipe.

Often the alcohol required will be a small amount, such as a couple of tablespoons, and in this case there are several substitutions:

In recipes having plenty of seasonings, plain water may be substituted. Both the alcohol and a substitute may be omitted if the liquid isn't needed for a gravy or sauce.

When cooking with fish, an equal amount of bottled or fresh clam or fish stock may be substituted. Just remember, bottled clam juice and some fish stocks are high in salt. Some people use white grape juice with fish.

Other substitutes include chicken or beef broth. Juice such as lemon, lime, apple or cranberry are all possibilities.

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