

HOT MULLED APPLE CIDER

Mulled apple cider is a delicious way to kick off the chilly autumn season. To mull something means to heat and flavor it with spices. Cider can be mulled at a low temperature for a long time or at a simmer for about an hour, depending on your preference. To create mulled cider, apple cider is infused with a combination of cinnamon sticks, fresh ginger, clementines, and other fruits and spices, depending on personal taste preferences. Heat is added, which allows the flavors to infuse the apple cider. If an alcoholic version of mulled cider is what you desire, you can add bourbon and lime to the non-alcoholic recipe to create an easy fall favorite that includes spirits.

One of the easiest ways to make the mulled cider on a crisp fall day is to make it in a slow cooker. You can add all of the ingredients to the slow cooker in the morning before you go to work, simmer it all day, and when you get home, you will have perfectly mulled cider and a great smelling house!

There are some basic rules to follow when making homemade mulled cider. First of all, always start with a base of apple cider, not apple juice. But, why does this matter? Fresh apple cider is essentially unfiltered apple juice. Apple cider contains coarse pulp particles, as well as more vitamins and minerals. It may or may not be pasteurized, which is the process of heating the liquid to a specific temperature to kill bacteria. In contrast, apple juice does not contain any pulp and is pasteurized for longer freshness. If you can use fresh-pressed, unfiltered apple cider, the mulled cider you create will have the best flavor!

After choosing fresh cider or unfiltered apple juice for the base, the next aspect to consider is what ingredients you will add to mull the cider. Fresh fruit makes a great addition when mulling cider. Oranges, either sliced or even just the peels and juice, can add a nice flavor. For a unique variation when using fresh oranges, stud the outside of the orange with whole cloves before adding the orange into the cider. Whole apples can also be added to the mulling cider to add a flavor dimension. If you choose to add fresh apples, select apples such as Granny Smith or Pink Lady because they are sturdy and add sweet and tart flavors to the mix.

Adding spices to mulled cider creates even more complex and delicious flavors. Spices that naturally complement apples are cinnamon, coriander, clove, cardamom, and star anise. I highly recommend that you toast your spices before adding them to the cider. The toasting process deepens the spice flavor and will allow it to bring a higher level of flavor to the mulled cider. However, when mulling cider, feel free to experiment with spices and fruit you enjoy.

Some people may choose to add alcohol to their cider. If you desire a more robust potency of the alcohol, be sure to add the wine or spirits to the mulled cider after it has finished mulling; otherwise, the strength of the alcohol will cook off. Be sure the spiked cider is for adults only if there is alcohol in the recipe.

A homemade mulling spice mix makes a nice seasonal gift for family and friends.

A general rule of thumb is to add 2 Tablespoons of mulled spices to 1/2 gallon of apple cider,

If you are giving spice bags as a present, be sure to include recipe instructions for how to use it.

Mulled cider can also be made on a stovetop instead of the slow-cooker, and there are countless recipes online. Mulled cider makes the perfect fall beverage for your sipping pleasure.

Instant Mulling Spice Mix

Ingredients:

6 cups (2 lbs.) brown sugar (measured loose, not packed)

3 Tablespoons ground cinnamon

2 Tablespoons ground allspice

2 Tablespoons ground dried orange peel

1-2 Tablespoons ground cloves

1 Tablespoon ground nutmeg

Optional: ground anise, black pepper, ground cardamom; crystallized ginger, finely chopped or ground ginger, ground dried lemon peel; to taste

Instructions:

Mix all ingredients with a whisk until well blended and store in an airtight container or baggie until needed.

For a single serving, add 3 Tablespoons of the mixture to 1 cup of hot cider, juice, black tea, or wine.

To serve a group, add 1/2 cup of mixture and 1 cup of water for every 2 cups of cider, juice, black tea, or wine. Bring mixture to a boil and stir until dissolved, then reduce to a simmer. Serve immediately or simmer until ready to serve.