



How to: Sweeten Wine

"How do I sweeten my wine?" is one of the most frequently asked questions we get from new winemakers.

Here is what we recommend at BlueStem Winery:

First, do not rush to sweeten!

Sometimes young wine can have an acidic bite which will mellow with time. One of the ways you can mask this bitterness is to sweeten but we believe that you can over sweeten wine if you sweeten too early. If your wine is a little bitter, try leaving your wine in the carboy for several months longer to let it age. Wines will age more quickly when stored *in bulk* anyway so you get the benefit of bulk aging while waiting for your wine to lose its bitterness. New wines can also have what I call a *phenol* (alcohol) taste and this, too, can mellow with time.

Second, when you are ready to sweeten, mix two cups sugar with one cup of water and heat in a saucepan to fully dissolve the sugar.

Third, add a small quantity of simple sugar syrup to your carboy. Stir and then taste. Repeat the addition, stirring and tasting until you get to the sweetness level you desire (or fall off your chair).

Fourth, stabilize your wine by dissolving 1/2 teaspoon of potassium sorbate (per gallon of wine) in a small amount of water and then add this to your carboy and stir.

Now it is time to bottle, right? Actually, we suggest that you not yet bottle your wine.

Many folks call potassium sorbate (also known as wine stabilizer) a *yeast killer*. We prefer to call it a *yeast inhibitor*! Wine stabilizer may in fact stabilize your wine but there is a possibility that it will not! Sometimes the stabilizer (potassium sorbate) may have been on the shelf too long (about 12 months is its shelf life!).

Instead, we recommend that you verify that your wine is stable by adding the potassium sorbate, taking a hydrometer reading (it will be higher than the last time you did so because of the sugar addition) and then letting your wine sit in the carboy for another week to ten days. Then take another hydrometer reading. If the specific gravity has not changed, your wine is stable.

Fifth (and finally), bottle your wine!!