

Classic Sloe Gin



Like most of my alcohol infusions, this recipe has no sugar at all. You can choose to add sugar if you like, but I promise you that it has no effect on the infusing process, and if you over-sweeten you can't take some out later.

I strongly recommend making at least two bottles of this. That way you have one ready for Christmas and one to put down to age for next year. The one in the picture above was three years old and needed no sugar adding at all, it was perfectly sweet already.

Ingredients: to make 700ml

- Enough sloe berries to at least half fill a 1 litre jar
- A 70cl bottle of good quality, or filtered gin

To freeze or not to freeze?

Tradition states that it's best to wait until after the first frost to harvest sloes. I can only assume that way back when that became tradition, we had much earlier frosts. Nowadays if you wait for the first frost, you're likely to miss all the berries!

I have heard of people spending hours pricking each individual berry with a toothpick, but fear not, there is an easier way.

Copy nature! Pick your sloes in September, bag them up and put them in the freezer for a few days. This has exactly the same effect as the frost as the ice crystal bursts the berries and releases their flavours and sweetness. You can put the frozen berries straight into the jar; be warned though, if you defrost them first, you'll have a lot of messy juice to deal with.



Method:

Top Tip: Don't scrimp on the spirits. Ideally you want good quality (not flavoured) gin, or cheap gin that has been filtered. The strong flavour of sloes will not be enough to hide the harsh feeling and rough hangovers caused by cheap spirits!

1. Fill your jar at least ½ full with your frozen sloes.
2. Top up the jar with gin, making sure there's enough to cover the sloes.
3. Leave in a dark, room-temperature spot for at least two months, preferably longer.
4. Strain the mixture into your bottle and add sugar or sugar syrup to taste.
5. Pour over ice and add tonic water, enjoy!

If you leave your sloe gin to age you may notice a sediment appearing at the bottom of the bottle. It's nothing to worry about, just the sloe solids that got through your muslin when you filtered. You can either ignore it and pour carefully, or pour into a jug, clean the bottle, and filter it back in again.

One final note, you now have a bowl full of boozy sloes. You could just chuck them on the compost, or you could add them to pies, crumbles, jams, sauces, etc., or pour melted chocolate over them. Don't forget to remove the stone first though!