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Blackberry Shrub

In colonial times, a vinegar based drink called “shrub” was very popular. It was made with crushed in-season berries, sugar or honey, vinegar, and cold water-- sometimes a splash or two of rum was added. Refreshingly sweet and tart, the drink was a perfect beverage for cooling off after a long, hot day in the fields. This recipe uses ginger ale or club soda to give the drink a bit of fizz. Try a glass of it with barbecued ribs or chicken. The vinegar base will balance the sweetness in the BBQ sauce perfectly. Shrub syrup can also be used as a glaze for grilled pork or chicken (baste the meat with it during the last 5 minutes of grilling) or as a base for a vinaigrette (whisk together one tablespoon shrub syrup with 3 tablespoons of olive oil and season with salt and pepper).

To make the Shrub Syrup

1 pint fresh, very ripe blackberries (can substitute in-season strawberries or raspberries), rinsed
1 cup apple cider vinegar
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup water

Place the berries in a large non-reactive bowl.

Pour the vinegar over them. Cover the bowl with a paper towel and set it aside on the counter for 1 hour.

Transfer the vinegar and berries to a large saucepot. Add the sugar and water to the berries. Bring the mixture to a boil.

Reduce the heat to low and simmer the mixture, covered, for 10 minutes. Turn off the heat, keep the lid on, and let the mixture cool completely.

Once cooled, strain the berry mixture in a cheesecloth lined strainer, pressing out as much liquid as possible with the back of a wooden spoon. Discard the cheesecloth along with the berry seeds and skins.

Pour the syrup into a quart glass jar. Cover tightly with a non-reactive lid. Store the syrup in your refrigerator where it will last for two months.

Makes approximately 2 cups of shrub syrup.

To make the Shrub

2 tablespoons shrub syrup
2 tablespoons rum, optional
4 ounces ginger ale or club soda

Fill an 8 ounce glass halfway with crushed ice. Add the syrup, rum (if using), and fill the glass with ginger ale or club soda. Stir and serve at once.

Makes one drink.

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