Salal Berry Vinegar

In the Pacific Northwest, salal grows prolifically in coniferous forests and within landscaped residences. Its deep green waxy leaves sprout clusters of white bell shaped flowers with pink tips, similar to blueberry flowers, with which they are relatives. The plant forms a dense shrub. The almost black, blue berries show up at the end of July and beginning of August. They grow in an organized cluster, lined up on a red or green stem.

When harvesting, it’s best to snip off the whole stem of the berries. Shake off any pine needles, spider webs, or moss before you throw your gleanings into your basket. It makes the job easier, later on, if you have a clean product to work with. Pine needles really make the cleaning process difficult.

To Make Salal Berry Vinegar:

Two pounds of salal berries, stems attached

One tablespoon of sugar

A three-inch cinnamon bark stick

Two quarts cider vinegar

Fill the sink with lukewarm water and soak the berries with their stems on, snaking your hands through the water to aid the process. Clean off any forest detritus (which snuck into your gathering basket!) After you put them in a strainer, snip the berries off the larger stems into your large pot. Smaller stems with two to four berries are fine as they are.

In a pot large enough for your two quarts of vinegar and the salal berries, place both, and add the sugar and cinnamon stick. Simmer on low for an hour. Let cool. Mash the cooked berries up a little with a potato masher or wide whisk.

Place your cooled, cooked mixture, berries and all, without the cinnamon stick, in a large gallon glass, not plastic, jar. Screw on the lid and put a label on it with a date of thirty days hence. Place in a dark cool location. Remember to shake it every day!

Hint: Put an alarm on your phone if you need to.

After thirty days, put on latex gloves. If you have any cuts on your hands the vinegar will sting. In my experience cuts suddenly appear where you thought you had none.

Pull out the clumps of salal and let them drain in a large pot. Extra vinegar will drip off, you can collect it later. Pour out the vinegar into another large receptacle. Wash out the gallon glass jar. Place a coffee filter within a large funnel over the mouth of the clean jar.

Take the dark purple vinegar, pour it through the coffee filter. Let it drip into the glass gallon jar. Pour the vinegar from your dripping berries through. You will go through a few filters before you’re done. They get clogged with the minute seeds, etc. left in the vinegar from the salal. Placed in clear in glass bottles, the color is very pretty, wipe the edge of the rim clean, and cork them shut.

In a cool cupboard or pantry Salal Berry Vinegar will last indefinitely.

Makes a half-gallon.

Salal Berry Salad Dressing

1 ½ C. salal berry vinegar

1 C. olive oil

1 Tbsp. sugar

½ tsp. salt

1/8 tsp. ground black pepper

pinch of cinnamon

4 medium garlic cloves, through a garlic press

3 Tbsp. chopped fresh basil

Place all into a blender and whirl until it’s smooth. It’s best made a day before to marry the flavors. Pour into a bottle and store in the refrigerator. Pull out a half an hour before serving to come to room temperature.