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Why isn't my vinaigrette emulsifying properly?

Asked 9 years, 6 months ago Active 7 years, 11 months ago Viewed 15k times

▲ 8 I made a vinaigrette tonight. Normally, to make one, I put vinegar and oil in a mason jar and shake to mix. This usually seems to emulsify the mixture properly and it holds for a while. Tonight, I made one with 20% red wine vinegar, 20% champagne vinegar, 10% dry sherry, 50% Greek olive oil, and nothing else. I found that after shaking, it started to separate within about 30 seconds, being completely split again after about a minute. Why did this particular mixture not stay in a stable emulsified state?



vinegar emulsion

★ 2

edited Apr 25 '11 at 18:34



Martha F.

7,315 6 30 66

asked Aug 18 '10 at 2:29



yossarian

18.5k 25 86 150

How long is your normal "a while"? – Cascabel ♦ Aug 18 '10 at 2:52

I'm not sure. 10-15 minutes? Long enough to plate dinner, sit down, wait a minute, and then put it on a salad. This one had split by the time I had turned around. – yossarian Aug 18 '10 at 13:06

3 Answers

▲ 10 As Michael mentioned, a shaken vinaigrette is only going to stay together primarily while you're shaking it. If it's been staying together long consider yourself lucky all the other times...this time was what should be "normal".

▼ The more particulate such as herbs, mustard, spices, etc. that you have in a vinaigrette the quicker it will emulsify and the longer it will stay emulsified. The particles of spice and herbs act as physical barriers that help to interrupt the droplets of oil so that they aren't able to coalesce and come together as they can when you have just oil and vinegar/acid.

✓ When doing vinaigrettes by hand using a whisk, start with your acid and add the salt along with anything else, leaving the oil last. Adding salt to the acid component will help it to better dissolve so you get a truer reading on the flavor. When it's added last as it's usually written in most recipes: "season to taste with salt and pepper", the salt usually hasn't dissolved by the time you taste it and you're much more likely to add too much, resulting in a dressing that's a bit saltier than you might like.



The manner in which you drizzle the oil and manner in which you whisk it when doing by hand, are also important factors. When whisking vinaigrettes by hand, drizzle the oil from a higher level so that as it hits the bowl you have a finer stream that's easier to emulsify. Also, use a back and forth "zig-zag" motion rather than a circular whisking motion. The "zig-zag" motion will allow the wires of the whisk to better break up the oil into droplets and emulsify them with the acid. Using a circular motion creates a vortex in the center of the acid where the oil tends to pool, resulting in an oily vinaigrette.

The great part of using an immersion blender (aka stick or wand blender) is that EVERYTHING can go in at once. Use a container that's deeper than it is wide (such as 2 cup liquid measure) so that there's plenty of depth for the liquid. Garlic, shallots and herbs can even go in whole. The immersion blender will blend up your garlic, etc. and emulsify the oil with the vinegar. An immersion blender or a standard blender provide you with a the most stable vinaigrette.

answered Aug 18 '10 at 3:19



Darin Sehnert

17.7k 52 77

1 Normally I use vinegar, salt, pepper, and mustard. Mix those, and then add oil and shake. This gets a nice emulsification. Was it just the lack of initial salt and mustard that caused the problem? – yossarian Aug 18 '10 at 3:30

1 I would say so. I meant to ask if you are normally adding anything other than the oil and vinegar. In your usual method the pepper and mustard are assisting in emulsification. Salt is going to dissolve so doesn't count except for flavor. – Darin Sehnert Aug 18 '10 at 3:42

▲ 7 I'm surprised you generally find that technique will produce emulsification that lasts any significant length of time. I've been know to use the jar & shake occasionally, but usually it only stays mixed for under a minute. Unless: you add mustard, like a teaspoon or so of Dijon mustard. Mustard is a powerful emulsifier and will help stabilize it.

▼ To build a normal emulsion without any help from mustard or other emulsifiers, you must add the drops of oil a little at a time into the vinegar while whisking or whizzing with a blender or stick blender, allowing them to disperse. Otherwise the oil all bonds to itself and it won't get dispersed in the vinegar no matter what you do. Once you've got the emulsion fairly well started, you can add the oil a little faster.



answered Aug 18 '10 at 2:39



Michael Natkin

29.4k 12 76 166

Yes, it will help to have the mustard dispersed before adding the oil. The other thing you can do is start with just 10% of the oil and get the emulsion started, then add the rest. – [Michael Natkin](#) Aug 18 '10 at 22:03



The temperature is, as far as I understand, another important factor. Don't keep the oil and vinegar in a cold place, they mix more easily at room temperature. I can only agree with the mustard tip! Also, egg yolk (I've used it boiled and mashed) is an emulsifier that you could try adding.

answered Mar 21 '12 at 16:34



[Heidi Larsen](#)
627 6 9