

strawberry black pepper syrup

Makes 3¹/₄ to 4 cups

TIME COMMITMENT
less than 1 week

In truth, this is actually two recipes: it yields a fruit syrup that is a stunning Day-Glo red starter for bubbling cold beverages, and also its by-product—my most favorite strawberry jam to date. Absolutely do not discard the macerated fruit left over from making the syrup; when tossed in a food processor or food mill with a squeeze of orange juice, it's a jam that can be stored fresh in the refrigerator for a few days or canned for later. (The same is true for the other two syrups in this chapter: they give you syrup AND yummy jam.) Note that if you can this syrup, the flavor will indeed become cooked, though it still makes a good soda.

About 2 pounds ripe organic strawberries, washed, hulled, and halved (7 cups)

3¹/₂ cups sugar

3 tablespoons orange juice (about 1/2 orange)

2 tablespoons crushed black peppercorns

INSTRUCTIONS In a giant mixing bowl, combine the berries with 2 cups of the sugar, being sure to coat each berry in sugar completely. Cover the top of the berries in a blanket of the remaining 1¹/₂ cups sugar. Let the berries macerate for 12 hours, stirring occasionally to help the sugar dissolve. (Setting this up after dinner and stirring periodically before bedtime is sufficient.) The berries will shrink in size and release their juice and the sugar will dissolve in the liquid. If necessary, cover the bowl loosely with a kitchen towel tied with string to protect the sweet syrup from insects.

After maceration, stir again to dissolve as much sugar as possible from the bottom of the bowl. Set a fine-mesh sieve over a bowl and drain the syrup into it, stirring the fruit (but not pressing on it) to release as much liquid as possible. Reserve the fruit for another use (like jam or pie filling) and taste your syrup. Heaven.

Stir in the orange juice and the peppercorns and transfer the mixture to a clean, odorless glass jar with a secure lid. Refrigerate for 5 to 6 days to allow the peppercorn flavor to develop.

HOW TO STORE IT Store, refrigerated, for up to 1 month. For long-term storage, pour into canning jars and process for 10 minutes (see directions for canning on page 28). Canned, it will keep for 1 year.

PLUS: strawberry black pepper soda (two ways)

INSTRUCTIONS Stir ³/₄ cup Strawberry Black Pepper Syrup into 1¹/₂ cups sparkling water (or any quantity in a ratio of 1:2). Add ice cubes and enjoy. Shot of gin optional. To make carbonated soda, see How to Carbonate It, opposite page. Drink within 3 days. Note that soda left for longer than that, even at cold temperatures, is in danger of becoming explosively overcarbonated.

HOW TO CARBONATE IT

In a clean glass bottle of any size with a tight-fitting lid, combine syrup and tap water in a ratio of 1:2—for example, a 750 ml bottle can hold a little more than 24 ounces, which means 8 ounces of syrup and 16 ounces of water. Add to the mix a scant pinch of active dry yeast, cap tightly, and shake well to combine. Label and date the bottle. Allow it to get gassy at room temperature for 1 to 3 days until carbonated. The best way to test for carbonation is to create one small “testing” bottle of soda that should be checked daily for proper carbonation. To do so, decant 1 to 2 ounces of your soda into a separate bottle, rescrewing the cap tightly after each check. Once the soda has achieved the right level of bubbles, move the bottle to the refrigerator and let the soda chill.

