

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CARE OF YOUR OAK BARRELS

Before You Get Started

- ◆ Wood cooperage is porous and can never be absolutely sterile. The treatments described here are to be used to clean, detartrate, prevent microbial growth, reduce the population, and retard the growth of undesirable microorganisms.
- ◆ When any chemical is introduced into wooden cooperage, it will penetrate into the wood. The function of citric acid is to neutralize any residual chemical. The neutralizing step is very important and is for a longer duration of time than the preceding step to assure deep penetration and neutralization of any chemical residue. Citric acid is a mild cleansing and bleaching agent and has a “sweetening” effect on the wood.
- ◆ When adding any powder to a barrel, be sure it is completely dissolved in water first. Some chemicals will fall to the bottom and form a deposit as hard as plaster.
- ◆ When adding both citric acid and sulphur dioxide (SO₂ – Potassium Metabisulfate) to a barrel, mix these solutions **separately**. Citric acid is used to keep the water sweet and to lower the pH of the water, so the SO₂ is more active. When a form of SO₂ and citric acid are mixed together, SO₂ will be released. This gas will irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs.

Methods

- ◆ Rinse the barrel with cold water to remove the dust.
- ◆ Then partially fill (1/3) with cold water and add the citric acid (1 gram per liter of water)¹ and the SO₂ (0.2 grams per liter of water)² fill with cold water. Stand barrel on head until the head is tight, turn and repeat for the other head.
- ◆ Lay the barrel horizontally, block so the bilge is clear of the floor. Most barrels are tight and do not leak, but some can and these may take up to five days to tighten.

This is the mildest treatment for preparing a new barrel; this is generally the method of choice for achieving the greatest intensity of oak in red wine.

- ◆ Rinse the barrel with cold filtered water. Make sure to drain it well.
- ◆ After secondary fermentation is completed in the carboys, filter wine into barrels.
- ◆ Place air lock into bung hole.
- ◆ Age wine for 4 to 5 days, and then taste for desired aroma. For a stronger oaking, leave wine in barrel for 10 to 14 days.
- ◆ Your wine is now ready to be bottled straight from the barrel.

¹ 23 grams citric acid = 5 teaspoon

² 5 grams SO₂ (metabisulfate) = 1 teaspoon

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- ◆ Once the barrel is empty, fill it with the citric acid-metabisulfate solution until you are ready to fill the barrel with the next batch of wine.

Note: the citric acid-metabisulfate solution should be changed once every two weeks.