

TASTING WHITE WINE VINEGARS

Twenty *Cook's Illustrated* staff members tasted 10 brands of white wine vinegar four ways: straight up (sucked through sugar cubes to minimize palate fatigue), tossed with canola oil on lettuce leaves, cooked in a simple beurre blanc sauce, and in a brine for green-bean pickles. Tasters rated each sample for acidity, harshness, and complexity. Brands are listed below in order of preference. Acidity levels are based on package information. Ethyl acetate levels, given in milligrams per liter, were determined by independent lab tests.

RECOMMENDED

BEST ALL-PURPOSE

ACETAIA BELLEI Aceto di Vino Bianco "Oro"

➤ \$2.49 for 17 ounces

Acidity: 6% Ethyl acetate: 72 mg/l

Tasters were impressed by this Italian vinegar's floral, fruity notes and "overtones of tart apples." The moderate ethyl acetate levels helped it maintain "an elegant balance" in all applications.



FOUR MONKS White Wine Vinegar

➤ \$1.89 for 12.7 ounces

Acidity: 5% Ethyl acetate: 119 mg/l

This low-acid American brand was many tasters' favorite. The "extremely sweet and gentle" vinegar won high marks for "mellow but interesting herbaceous flavors" and "tart sour-apple" notes.



BEST FOR COOKING

COLAVITA Aged White Wine Vinegar

➤ \$2.99 for 16.9 ounces

Acidity: 6% Ethyl acetate: 260 mg/l

"Nice and smooth, with the perfect level of tanginess," wrote one panelist. Several tasters noticed a "subtle sweetness" and fruity perfume in this Italian brand. The second-highest concentration of ethyl acetate bothered some tasters in the vinaigrette.



BEST FOR VINAIGRETTES

MAILLE Vinaigre de Vin Blanc

➤ \$2.99 for 8.5 ounces

Acidity: 7% Ethyl acetate: trace

Won fans for its "deep, lingering, caramelized" notes and complex, "malty" flavors, but this French vinegar was intense. "It burns my throat, like Marsala," said one taster. Others noted "balsamicky" flavors.



SPECTRUM NATURALS Organic White Wine Vinegar

➤ \$4.69 for 16.9 ounces

Acidity: 6% Ethyl acetate: trace

This Italian vinegar had the most diverse flavor profile in the lineup. The "dark, fermented-tasting, richness" and fruity overtones were enriched by flavors of "caramel," "oakiness," and "nutty, earthy mushrooms."



RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

LAURENT DU CLOS White Wine Vinegar

➤ \$3.99 for 16.9 ounces

Acidity: 6% Ethyl acetate: 191 mg/l

This fruity French contender was the green-bean-pickle champ, but the ethyl acetate levels sapped its charms in the vinaigrette. "Pleasant" overall, but with a "run-of-the-mill" flavor profile.



MONARI FEDERZONI 1912 White Wine Vinegar

➤ \$3.29 for 16.9 ounces

Acidity: 7% Ethyl acetate: 123 mg/l

The "astringent," "box wine" notes in this Italian brand turned off some tasters, but others liked the "crisp, clean taste." The acidity was a tad on the strong side: "I taste a lot of wine here, but it's fairly harsh—makes my eyes blink."



NOT RECOMMENDED

CARAPPELLI White Wine Vinegar

➤ \$3.19 for 17 ounces

Acidity: 7.5% Ethyl acetate: 713 mg/l

This Italian vinegar was the most acidic of the bunch and had almost three times the ethyl acetate of any other brand tested. "Is this nail-polish remover?" complained one panelist. Tasters detected strong, artificial fruity notes.



MAITRE JACQUES White French Wine Vinegar

➤ \$3.19 for 16.9 ounces

Acidity: 6% Ethyl acetate: trace

Sweet fruitiness was marred by "musty wine" flavors and an overpowering harshness that two tasters likened to "gasoline." This vinegar has a "bitterness that bites back," said one panelist.



REGINA White Wine Vinegar

➤ \$2.99 for 12 ounces

Acidity: 5% Ethyl acetate: 24 mg/l

The "bland" flavor profile of this American brand tracked with its low acidity. "Like distilled white vinegar with a spoonful of fruit extract," said one taster.

