



One little jar of liquid gold—that's
about what it might cost!

Who Doesn't Use Balsamic Vinegar? The Ultimate Liquid With a Myriad of Uses.

In 19th century Italy, when a daughter was born, the mother began a new batch of balsamic so that when the daughter got married, the vinegar would be ready to use—not just in food but as a crucial part of her dowry. That's just how precious this liquid was considered.

In Roman times, it was used as a medicine (talk about an expensive prescription!). Production was limited to the provinces of Modena and Reggio Emilia, in the Emilia Romagna region and it was highly prized. Even today, the production of DOP (Italian designation for a "protected product") vinegars is strictly monitored. They must be made with grapes from the Emilia Romagna region (usually Trebbiano or Lambrusco) and aged for at least 12 years. Anything aged for 25 years or more is considered "extra old" and given a gold label.

These traditional vinegars sell for hundreds of dollars per bottle. If you get your hands on one, don't pour it on your salad. Use it drop by drop. It's known as "liquid gold" for very good reason! Think of it as a finishing touch and never, ever heat it up. It's so good you can drizzle a drop or two (about \$200 worth?) over ice cream!

When buying balsamic, you definitely get what you pay for. So what should you look for? The color must be a deep, rich brown. If you swirl it in a wine glass, it should coat the inside of the glass like syrup. It should smell intense. (Maybe they should open some balsamic vinegar tasting bars.) And the production today is the same as it was hundreds of years ago.

Here's how the vinegar is made.

There are four categories of balsamic:

The Traditional DOP (a protected product). This is the “true” balsamic made with grapes from the Emilia-Romagna Region and the most costly.

The IGP (Protected Geographical Indication). IGP account for about 90% of the bottles produced in Emilia-Romagna, still not cheap. The grapes can come from anywhere in the world as long as they are processed in Emilia-Romagna and aged for at least 60 days (verses the 12-25 years in a DOP vinegar). You can definitely drizzle this one on your salad. You can also reduce it to give it a better flavor. [Click here](#) for a short video on reducing balsamic vinegar.

The "condimento." These are not monitored by the consortium that authenticates DOP and IGP. There are a few artisanal varieties produced in the U.S. but pay close attention to the label, the color, and the thickness. Avoid anything with additives like sugar or caramel.

Now for the last one: **"supermarket varieties"**. If less than \$10 a bottle it's likely a combination of inexpensive white wine vinegar and added sugars. They are imposters!

What's the most common food that this unique vinegar is used for? It's summertime and tomatoes are all over the place. So a Caprese Salad instantly comes to mind. A combination of fresh tomatoes, fresh mozzarella cheese (please, don't use the rubbery, hard, dry kind; go for the soft fresh one), fragrant basil leaves, olive oil, salt, pepper, and of course, our liquid gold vinegar.

Below are a few photos of how many ways you can interpret this salad. But

we prefer the simple way. Take a look at the video below. It will probably make you go to the store for the ingredients. Enjoy this salad on the patio with some crusty bread to sop up the oil and vinegar (no drop goes to waste!) and—of course—a nice crisp, chilled white wine.

[Here's a simple Caprese salad recipe](#)



Caprese on a stick



Non-layered Caprese



Fanciest of them all

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