

# Easy Vodka Sauces for a Gourmet Touch

*by Pamela Fay*

Although vodka is a colorless and nearly odorless alcohol, it can be used in cooking to enhance flavors that you cannot taste otherwise. These flavors are alcohol-soluble and are only released when they come in contact with alcohol. Tomatoes have such an alcohol-soluble flavor. However, alcohols such as wine or brandy have their own distinct flavors to contribute. (ref 1) To avoid the culinary competition, make your sauces with vodka, instead. The alcohol burns off during cooking and you are left with a rich and complex dish to rival one prepared by a gourmet chef.

## **Simple Vodka Sauce**

Most vodka sauces combine olive oil or butter with vodka and canned tomatoes. This is a basic sauce that can be customized to your preference. Add additional herbs such as parsley and basil, or even sausage, if you like. Brown 1 chopped onion in a stick of butter until soft. Add 1 cup of vodka and simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in two 28 ounce cans of crushed tomatoes and 1 teaspoon dried oregano; cook for 30 minutes. Add 1 cup heavy cream and cook for an additional 30 minutes. Serve over pasta or stuffed cabbage.

## **Vegan Vodka Sauce**

To make a vegan vodka sauce or just a more diet-friendly meal, replace the heavy cream contained in most vodka sauces with a non-dairy option. Although you can buy almond milk, make it fresh for best results. Rinse  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of almonds. Add fresh water to cover; soak overnight. Drain the almonds and place them in a high-speed blender with 2 cups of pure spring water. Blend for a minute or so. Strain the milk through cheesecloth or use a nut milk bag. Set aside 2 cups of milk for the sauce. In a medium saucepan, saute 10 cloves of garlic along with 1 chopped onion in 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil until soft. Add 1 28-ounce can of crushed Roma tomatoes and 1 teaspoon of crushed red pepper; simmer for 10 minutes. Add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup nutritional yeast,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of vodka and the fresh almond milk. Simmer for 30 minutes and season with salt, freshly ground black pepper and dried basil to taste.

## **Strawberry Vodka Sauce**

Vodka not only complements tomatoes; it also goes well with fruit. This sauce is a good topper for ice cream or shortcake. Chop a dozen large strawberries. Toss with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup sugar and let sit until the strawberries release a good quantity of juices, about an hour. Heat 2 tablespoons of butter in a medium skillet. Throw in  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of coarsely chopped raw walnuts. Lightly brown and add strawberries and juices. Stir in  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of vodka and bring to a boil. Reduce to simmer and cook for about 5 minutes to let alcohol cook out. Cook the sauce slightly before serving. Try this sauce with cherries or peaches for a change.

## **Vodka Martini Sauce**

Martinis are not just for happy hour. This vodka martini sauce works well with lobster or scallops. Place 1 tablespoon of crushed fresh green peppercorns, 4 chopped shallots and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of vermouth in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil and reduce heat. Allow to simmer

for 5 minutes; reduce until thickened. You should have approximately 2 tablespoons remaining. Over low heat, whisk in 6 tablespoons of butter slowly in ½ tablespoon increments. Stir continuously; the sauce will emulsify. Be sure to keep the heat low to keep sauce from separating. Stir in 1 tablespoon of lime juice, 2 tablespoons of vodka, and 1 tablespoon of chopped parsley. Remove from heat and keep warm until you are ready to serve. Garnish your finished martini sauced dish with sliced green olives. Note that this sauce is not cooked much after the vodka is added so that alcohol still remains.

### **References**

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