

COOK'S

ILLUSTRATED

In Search of the Ultimate Drizzling Vinegar

When it comes to drizzling vinegar over berries or a piece of grilled fish, do you have to shell out hundreds of dollars for a traditional vinegar aged for at least 12 years? To find out, we conducted another tasting that included a traditional balsamic approved and bottled by the Reggio Emilia vinegar consortium; Lucini Gran Riserva (winner of our supermarket tasting); and two high-priced commercial balsamics—the kind sold in gourmet stores.

The not-so-surprising news? The 25-year-old Cavalli Gold Seal Extra Vecchio Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale di Reggio Emilia, at \$180 for 3 ounces, topped nearly everyone's list, with tasters waxing poetic about its "pomegranate," "caramel," "smoky" flavor that "coats the tongue" and tastes "amazing." In such rich company, our supermarket winner couldn't compete. Lucini finished last.

But the big surprise was the strong performance of the high-priced commercial vinegars I purchased at gourmet stores. They were nearly as good as the 25-year-old vinegar and cost just \$3 to \$4 per ounce. Tasters praised the Oliviers & Co. Premium Balsamic Vinegar of Modena (\$27 for 8.5 ounces) as "fruity, raisiny, and complex," with notes of "wood, smoke, flowers," and described the Rubio Aceto Balsamico di Modena (\$35 for 8.5 ounces) as "floral" and "aromatic." Made with aged grape must and, in the case of the Oliviers & Co., good wine vinegar, these gourmet commercial balsamics are reasonably priced options if you want to drizzle balsamic vinegar over food and don't want to pay a fortune. —LM.



THE GOOD STUFF

The \$60-per-ounce traditional balsamic vinegar (left) was tasters' favorite, but two reasonably priced gourmet brands (right) were nearly as good—and they cost just \$3 to \$4 per ounce.