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Grape Pomace is Not an Alcoholic Beverage

Grappa, Marc, Orujo, Brandy, Cognac: Distinguishing the Different Grape-Based Liquors

Friday, January 3, 2025



Grape pomace, the leftover solids from winemaking, is often confused with an alcoholic beverage. Many people mistakenly believe that pomace itself contains alcohol, but in reality, it's just a byproduct of the wine production process. The confusion arises because pomace can be used to produce distilled spirits like *grappa* or *marc*, but the pomace itself isn't a drink and doesn't contain any alcohol.

To understand the distinction, it's essential to know what pomace is and how it differs from the spirits made from it. When grapes are pressed to extract juice for wine, the leftover material includes grape skins, seeds, and pulp. This solid residue is known as

grape pomace. It's a dry, natural mass that contains no alcohol because alcohol only forms during fermentation, which happens in the juice, not the solids. In the winemaking industry, pomace is often repurposed in various ways, including in cosmetics, animal feed, or even as fertilizer. However, one of its most famous uses is as a raw material for making distilled spirits.

In many European countries, particularly in Italy, Spain, and France, pomace is fermented and distilled to produce high-proof liquors. In Italy, the result is "grappa"; in France, it's known as "marc"; and in Spain it is called "orujo". All are clear, strong spirits with a rich tradition in their respective countries. The process involves fermenting the pomace to produce alcohol, then distilling it to separate the alcohol from the solids. The resulting spirit is transparent, potent, and typically consumed as a digestif.

This is where the confusion begins. In regions where these spirits are popular, people often use the same term to refer to both the pomace and the distilled liquor. For example, in Spain, the term *orujo* can refer to either the grape residue or the spirit made from it. In Italy, *grappa* refers strictly to the distilled spirit, but the process is the same. This linguistic shortcut often leads to the mistaken belief that the raw pomace itself is an alcoholic product.

In the U.S., the most familiar spirit made from pomace is *grappa*. As American consumers become more interested in artisanal spirits, there's a growing appreciation for these traditional European liquors. However, it's important to recognize that the raw material—grape pomace—only becomes a spirit after fermentation and distillation.

Another common point of confusion is the difference between pomace-based spirits —like *grappa*— and *brandy*. Both come from winemaking, but they're made from different parts of the grape. *Grappa* is made by distilling the solid grape residue, while *brandy* is made by distilling wine. Essentially, *grappa* comes from the skins, seeds, and pulp, while *brandy* comes from the fermented juice.

Brandy also typically undergoes aging in oak barrels, which gives it a deep amber color and complex flavors. *Grappa*, by contrast, is traditionally bottled immediately after distillation, resulting in a clear, fiery liquor. However, some aged *grappas* are becoming more popular, offering smoother flavors with hints of vanilla or spice from the barrels.

It's also worth clarifying a few related terms. *Cognac* is simply a type of *brandy* that must be made in the Cognac region of France, following specific production methods.

In short, grape pomace is not a drink and contains no alcohol in its raw form. It only becomes a spirit through fermentation and distillation. Understanding this distinction can help clear up the misconception that pomace itself is an alcoholic product and highlight the rich traditions behind some of Europe's most beloved distilled spirits.