



living with old roses

the still room

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I had absolutely no idea that the old-fashioned still room was so-named because it housed a still! That's what you get for relying on romantic novels for your education - those heroines only took to the still room to set jellies while some man or other made his mind up to wed them.

The upsurge and belief in scientifically advanced 'patent medicines' during late Regency and Victorian times spelled the end of making home herbal remedies in the still room, and many of the skills and recipes from that time have been lost. In some cases this has been a good thing, as a few of those "kill or cure" potions were well named. However, in the process we have also lost the ability to make our own rose water.

Creating a still in your own kitchen is surprisingly easy and relatively safe, because we are dealing with rose petals and water rather than flammable liquids. All you need are rose petals together with a lidded stock pot, half a clean brick, a bowl, water, ice, and twenty minutes in the kitchen to completely fill your house with rose perfume and produce genuine rose water.

And making rose vinegar is even easier - a glass jar with a plastic lid and a warm window sill is all you need.

how to make and use rose water

Place the brick in the stock pot, surround with spray-free petals (we used **Kazanlik**), and fill with water to the top of the brick. Place the small bowl on top of the brick, and put the lid on the stock pot **upside down**. **Fill the lid with ice**.

Heat the water until just boiling, then simmer gently for about 20 minutes. Allow to cool.

Carefully remove the lid from the pot - you should find the bowl inside contains rose water.

- Add half a cup of rose water and a cup of coconut milk to a bath for total luxury

how to make and use rose vinegar

Choose a dry day to pick spray-free roses coming into full bloom. Strip off the petals, discarding any white heel, and place in a glass jar. Cover with white or apple cider vinegar, and place on a warm windowsill for ten days, then strain off the vinegar, into a clean, dry stoppered bottle.

- Add drops *sparingly* on strawberries to bring out the flavour of the fruit.
- Use in recipes which call for vinegar
- Soften and scent towels by adding a splash to the rinse cycle when washing
- Try this Victorian headache remedy: take to your couch with a handkerchief soaked in rose vinegar pressed to your forehead.

