

MIXOLOGY

# A Dash AND A Drop



# The Secret to Great Cocktails: Herbs, Bitters, Fruits and Syrups

A well-equipped mixologist will have a number of gadgets and tools behind the bar: strainers, shakers, spoons and very likely, a collection of bitters, syrups and aromatics.

Quite often, these are the details that can elevate a good cocktail to a great one, whether it's a fresh piece of fruit, a home-grown herb, the right aromatic or a colorful garnish. And that goes for home bartenders and hobbyists as much as it does the pros.

## BITTERS

**It's been said that bitters** are to cocktails as salt is to food. Bitters help accentuate certain flavors, and can even bring their own characteristics to a carefully crafted cocktail.

A mainstay of cocktails since the 19th century, the herbal mixes have been used to calm stomachs for centuries but now they're essential ingredients in many classic drinks. A dash of bitters can transform a cocktail, adding dimension and depth.

Made from alcohol infused with barks, fruit peels, roots, spices, herbs, flowers or other botanicals, bitters have evolved and enjoyed a resurgence along with the interest in hand-crafted cocktails. Among the most well-known are Peychaud's and Angostura, but Vermont is home to its own producers. Urban Moonshine in Burlington is among a growing number of companies encouraging customers to give bitters a try. Founded in 2008 in Jovial King's kitchen, the idea was to make herbal medicine more accessible. Initially available at farmers' markets, Urban Moonshine's brand of liquid herbal extracts are now nationally distributed. Flavors range from citrus and cider to maple and assorted herbal varieties.

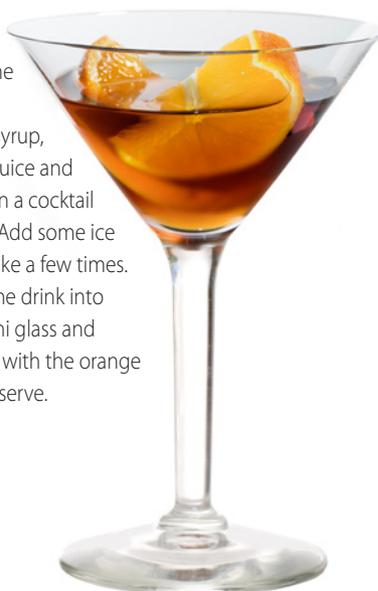
While bitters can serve medicinal purposes, they also go well in a variety of cocktails. The Old Vermont, created at Drink, in Boston, makes the most of a style of bitters designed to evoke a sense of the Green Mountain State.

### The Old Vermont

*courtesy imbibemagazine.com*

- 1¾ ounces gin
- ½ ounce grade B maple syrup
- ½ ounce fresh lemon juice
- 2 dashes Urban Moonshine maple bitters
- Ice cubes
- 1 orange slice for garnish

Combine the gin, maple syrup, lemon juice and bitters in a cocktail shaker. Add some ice and shake a few times. Strain the drink into a martini glass and garnish with the orange slice to serve.



The Manhattan is a perfect example of what bitters can do to improve a cocktail. First appearing in the 1884 "Modern Bartenders' Guide," the Manhattan is a classic that presents the perfect opportunity to experience the layers bitters bring to a cocktail.



### The Manhattan

*courtesy foodandwine.com*

- 2 ounces rye whiskey
- 1 ounce sweet vermouth
- 2 dashes Angostura bitters
- Ice
- Maraschino cherry, for garnish

Fill a pint glass with ice, and then add the rye, vermouth and bitters. Stir well, and strain into a chilled coupe glass, garnish with the cherry and serve.



Written by Bill Burke



## HERBS

**Herbs and exotic spices** have long played a role behind the bar, bringing a depth of character and flavor straight from the garden to the glass. Many liqueurs list herbs as primary ingredients: Jägermeister is created from a blend of 56 herbs, fruits and spices, gin takes its instantly recognizable flavors from a range of botanicals like juniper, orris root and angelica. Green Chartreuse (made from more than 130 plants and herbs), and French Bénédictine (crafted from 27 botanical ingredients) offer a solid base from which to build your herbal concoctions.

While juleps and mojitos may be among the first to spring to mind in this category, there are a diverse collection of cocktails that lend themselves perfectly to an herbal influence.

### Muddling 101

Muddling is essentially pressing the ingredients against the side of a glass. To muddle soft herbs, use a small wooden tool with a flat end. (A wooden spoon works well.) Put the herbs in a glass and then press the wooden tool and twist lightly so the herbs are crushed, releasing the flavors and aromas.

### Cucumber Basil Gin Fizz

*courtesy thegirlonbloor.com*

- 3 medium to large basil leaves
- 3 cucumber wedges
- ¼ lime, peel removed
- 1½ ounces gin
- ¼ cup lemonade
- Club soda
- Ice

Put the basil, cucumber and lime in the bottom of a glass and muddle, either using a muddler or the handle of a wooden spoon. Add lemonade, gin and ice. Top with club soda. Garnish with a sprig of basil.



# 1800

## TEQUILA



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## SYRUPS

Created from spices, herbs, fruits and more, syrups are another simple way to enliven cocktails. Hardwick-based Sumptuous Syrups, founded in the spring of 2009, makes premium farm-to-bar cocktail syrups in small batches using the highest quality fruit, vegetables and herbs. The company's goal: to forward the sustainable mixology movement through fair compensation and expanding markets in the pursuit of tasty and exciting libations.

Using another popular Vermont product, the **Barr Hill Bramble** combines one of the state's finest spirits with bitters and Sumptuous Syrup's blackberry-flavored addition to create a unique cocktail.

### The Barr Hill Bramble

*courtesy sumptuousyrups.com*

- 1½ ounce Barr Hill Gin
- ½ ounce crème de violette
- ½ ounce fresh lemon juice
- ½ ounce Sumptuous Blackberry Syrup
- 2 dashes Urban Moonshine Maple Bitters
- 6-8 fresh blackberries
- 2-3 ounces soda water

Stir gin, crème de violette, lemon juice, Sumptuous Blackberry Syrup and bitters with ice. Pour into a Collins glass and top with soda. Garnish with fresh blackberries, stir and serve.



One of the more common ingredients in a well-made cocktail is simple syrup — a staple at any bar typically used to sweeten a drink. Traditional simple syrup is made from one part water to one part sugar, though there are variations, including rich simple syrup — two parts sugar to one part water. Rich simple syrup normally has a thicker texture and can add more body and mouthfeel to your cocktail.

### Simple syrup

- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup water

Add the sugar and water to a small saucepan over medium heat. Stir until sugar is dissolved, then strain into a jar and seal tightly. The simple syrup will keep for a month, refrigerated.

A red car is shown driving on a road. A large graphic of a hammer and a nail is overlaid on the scene, with the text 'DRIVE HAMMERED GET NAILED' in large, bold, red letters. The Vermont Department of Liquor and Lottery logo is at the bottom, along with the slogan 'DRIVE SOBER OR GET PULLED OVER'.



Time to put it all together: Brockman's Gin has created a deliciously original cocktail that compliments and enhances botanicals and berries, while showcasing the transformative nature of simple syrup, adding a touch of herbal flavor and testing your muddling skills.

### Brockman's Summer Punch

- 2 ounces Brockman's Gin
- 1 ounce simple syrup
- 1 ounce lemon juice
- 4 raspberries
- 6 blackberries

Add the simple syrup, lemon juice, raspberries and blackberries to a shaker glass and muddle together. Add the Brockman's Gin, fill the glass with ice and shake. Single strain the mixture into a tumbler and top with crushed ice. Garnish with blackberries and a sprig of mint.

#### ON THE COVER

**Salty Dog Sangria** *Makes 8 servings*  
thecookierookie.com

- 2 bottles Rose Wine
- 12 ounce can ginger ale
- 2 cups ruby red grapefruit juice
- 1 cup Stoli Crushed Ruby Red Grapefruit Vodka
- Grapefruit slices
- ¼ cup simple syrup
- Sea salt and grapefruit zest for rim
- 8 sprigs of rosemary for garnish

In a large pitcher, stir together all ingredients except grapefruit slices and stir to combine. Add the grapefruit slices to the pitcher and stir. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Dip each glass in water and grapefruit zest, then coat in sea salt. Fill each glass with ice. Pour the sangria into each glass and garnish with thyme. ☹

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