

MIXOLOGY



Elevating the Spirit

Infusions: Out of the Kitchen and Into the Bar

Following their mixology muse, home bartenders are adding arrows to their cocktail quiver by including infusions: spirits enhanced with everything from fruit to herbs.

There are classic pairings like milk and cookies and coffee and donuts that everyone knows. There are others, however, that fly below the radar, like vodka and pickles.

It may sound unusual but, in the world of infusions, it's just another interesting pairing that brings new character and flavor profiles to classic spirits.

In the parlance of the publican, infusing is a technique where ingredients are introduced into a liquid to create new flavors. The infused liquid is allowed to rest for a period of time — anywhere from overnight to two weeks — so the spirit absorbs the flavors of the introduced ingredients. Once it has achieved the desired flavor profile, the ingredients are removed and the spirit is served.

Infusions can add a deeper level of unexpected aromas and tastes to your cocktails, giving creative home mixologists a new palate of flavors to add to their arsenal. Bartenders often use herbs like basil, tarragon, oregano, dill and thyme, and spices such as vanilla bean, ginger and cinnamon. Fruit-based infusions can include lemon, lime, orange, pineapple and pear, among others.

Here's how to elevate your spirits at home, transforming the routine into something new and exciting:

Tools

You'll need to choose a spirit, infusion ingredients (typically fruit, vegetables or herbs), a container such as a Mason jar or a bottle that can be resealed, and a strainer for when the process is complete.

Select a spirit

While clear spirits tend to work most easily with infusions — think vodka, rum, silver tequila or gin — whiskeys can also lend themselves to a little enhancement.

Pros advise against using a heavily peated Scotch or whiskey, though, as it will be difficult to balance flavors. Whiskeyadvocate.com offers a few tips: Infuse bourbon with high-sugar fruit like nectarines, plums or peaches; infuse rye with sage or chocolate — bitter-sweet pure cacao roughly chopped up; infuse Irish whiskey with cardamom and bananas with the peel still on to add complexity. Japanese whisky infuses well with Asian pear and lychee, Islay Scotch with toasted walnuts and blue cheese, white whisky with high-sugar fruits to help balance out the immature flavors, and Tennessee whiskey with berries.

Choose a flavor

Here's the fun part. Many people use fruits, but herbs and even vegetables can be a great part of an infusion recipe. For beginners, following a recipe ensures a fairly easy way to learn what fruit, vegetable and herb combinations work well together.

Ready, set, infuse

Be sure to wash ingredients, blending jars or bottles and tools in hot water thoroughly to sterilize them and to cleanse any impurities. Fill a bottle or jar with your spirit of choice, add the infusion, shake and close tightly. Store the infusion in a cool, dark spot, and shake it a few times daily. Intense ingredients like vanilla, lemon and mint, for example, take a shorter time to impart their characteristic flavors, while milder flavors like strawberries, mangoes and ginger take more time.

Once the infusion is ready, remove the flavoring ingredients. Using a strainer, a coffee filter or cheese cloth, strain the spirit into a decanter — you can use the original bottle, thoroughly cleaned — and it's ready to serve. 

Written by Bill Burke

PICK YOUR SPIRIT

Get started with these recipes using home bar staples. The infused spirit can be portioned out into drinks using the normal measurements — typically 1 ½ ounces per cocktail.



WHISKEY: Apple Pie-Infused Whiskey

courtesy cakenknife.com

- 1 ½ cups whiskey (or bourbon)
- 1 apple, sliced
- 1 cinnamon stick
- ½ teaspoon whole cloves
- 1 ½ teaspoon honey

Add apple slices, cinnamon stick, cloves and honey to a large Mason jar. Add the whiskey so it covers all the ingredients. Seal and store the jar in a dark place to infuse for up to two weeks. Strain and store.

RUM: Pineapple-Infused Rum

courtesy grainchanger.com

- 3 cups fresh pineapple, cut into small chunks
- 2 cups white rum

Put pineapple chunks into a tall, glass, airtight container. Pour rum over the pineapple, covering completely, and seal. Set aside and allow the pineapple and rum to soak together for one to two weeks, lightly shaking and turning the container once per day. Once complete, drain the liquor from the pineapple and store in an airtight container.



TEQUILA: Cilantro and Jalapeño-Infused Tequila

courtesy drizly.com

- Silver tequila
- 1 jalapeno, seeded and sliced
- ¾ cup cilantro leaves

Place the sliced jalapeno and cilantro leaves into the bottom of a 1 ½ pint Mason jar. Fill the rest of the jar with silver tequila and seal with lid. Shake and let sit in a cool, dark place for up to three days, shaking occasionally. After three days, strain the ingredients and store.



VODKA: Chocolate Mint Vodka Infusion

courtesy foodnetwork.com

- 1 bottle vodka
- 4 cocoa beans
- Sprig fresh mint leaves
- Infusion jar or quart-sized Mason jar with lid

Combine vodka and cocoa beans in the jar, tightly seal and store. Agitate the mixture two or three times a day for one week. Six hours before serving, add mint leaves. Strain through a coffee filter into a bottle, seal and store in the freezer. Can be served ice cold without a garnish.

GIN: Cucumber-Infused Gin

courtesy gardeninminutes.com

- 1 large cucumber
- 1 bottle of gin

Fill half a Mason jar with freshly sliced cucumber, about a quarter-inch thick. Top the jar off with gin, seal it and give it a shake. Shake two to three times a day for five to seven days. Strain the cucumbers and use the gin in your favorite cocktail.





Pickle-Infused Vodka

courtesy foodiecrush.com

- 1 ½ cups vodka
- ½ cup kosher dill spears pickle juice
- Pickle spears and vegetables

Add the vodka and the pickle juice together in a glass jar with a lid, and then add one pickle spear and some reserved pickled vegetables. Seal the jar and store in a cool, dark place or the refrigerator for three days.

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One-Step Infusion

For an easier approach, try Vena's Fizz House Cocktail Infusions, produced just over the border in Maine and carried by Vermont Farmstead Cheese Company, in South Windsor, Vermont (vermontfarmstead.com). Vena's Fizz allows people to infuse their spirits without chemicals, preservatives or high-fructose corn syrup. The ingredients, like freeze-dried fruits, herbs and bitter-infused sugar cubes, come in prepared jars. Just add your spirit, set it aside and let the ingredients do their thing.

Among the infusion offerings are Campfire Bourbon Infusion (orange, lapsang souchong tea, vanilla bean, organic cane sugar and bitters), Sea Rose Gin Infusion (organic rose buds, apples, orange, bitters and organic cane sugar), Shipwreck Rum Infusion (strawberry, banana, mango, pineapple, kiwi, citrus, spices, organic cane sugar and bitters) and Sweet Heat Tequila Infusion (strawberries, jalapeño, citrus, organic cane sugar and bitters.)

Working With Wood

Another way to add new and different flavors to your spirit is to age it in oak — which doesn't sound like a shortcut since, like most

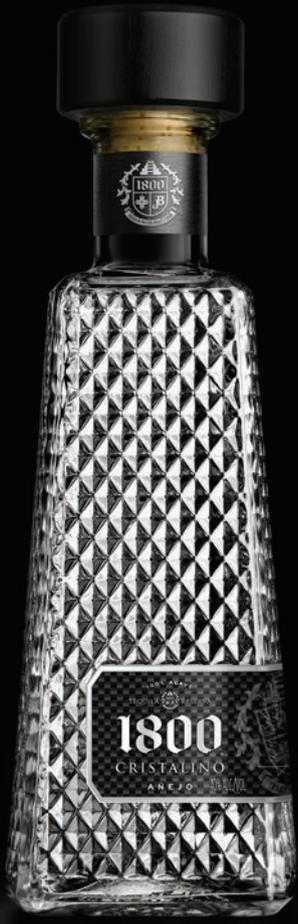
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DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE AND DON'T LET
FRIENDS DRINK AND DRIVE.

ASK YOUR BARTENDER ABOUT MOCKTAILS.




MIXOLOGY: ELEVATING THE SPIRIT

people, you likely don't have your own rick-house to store whiskey barrels. The inventors of the Oak Bottle say they can help.

The Oak Bottle (oakbottle.com), which looks like a wooden wine bottle or thermos, complete with a wood stopper, is an oaking vessel that accelerates the wood aging process. Similar to using a barrel, it needs to be filled with water before the first use, allowing it to swell and seal itself. It can then be filled with a wine or liquor to age anywhere from two hours to two days.

This allows users to infuse aromas and flavors of oak into cocktails, spirits or wine in a fraction of the time traditional aging processes take. Each Oak Bottle is made from 100% American white oak, and can be reused around 60 times. Its creators advise: Pour your favorite spirit into the bottle, let it rest and let the oak do the work.

The amount of time you leave your spirit in the bottle, which comes with a medium toast char, plays a role in what flavors you'll discover. Think caramel, vanilla, baking spices, brown sugar or almonds. As with any infusion attempts, experimentation can lead to unexpected discovery. Here's a recipe to try with the Oak Bottle:



Aged Maple Rye

courtesy thedailymeal.com

- 1 bottle of rye whiskey
- Maple syrup
- Angostura bitters

Take the rye whiskey, add to the Oak Bottle and let sit for at least 24 hours.

Pour 1 ½ ounces into a shaker with ice, add ½ ounce of maple syrup, shake and add a dash of Angostura bitters. Garnish with a twist of lime peel and serve.