

TRENDS in Mixology



Home Bar Hardware

Stocking a home bar can be intimidating. The tools can look like Medieval torture instruments. And there are just. so. many. Read on to find out what you need for a well-stocked home bar that will impress your guests.

BOTTLE OPENER/ WINE KEY

The first thing you'll want to do is pop some corks and tops. Make sure you have a good, sturdy bottle opener and corkscrew. If you're pressed for space, you can easily find inexpensive two-in-one tools. If you're geared more toward showing off for company, go for a simple bottle opener and splurge on any one of the available high-tech wine openers. Visit your local home goods or kitchen store and ask for demonstrations before picking the one right for you; some of the more high-tech wine tools can run into the hundreds of dollars.

SHAKER

Look for a sturdy, metal shaker that includes a strainer and cap. Bonus if the cap is also a jigger, or measuring tool for your liquor. Shaking itself can be an art form — way more than just tossing the shaker around a bit. A good shake can affect the taste of your cocktails. The best way to learn? Search out a good local bar, bring a good tip, and make a bartender friend.



POURERS AND OTHER GEAR

If you use a lot of liquor, it might be worth your while to invest in a set of pourers to take the place of caps and corks, making for a smooth, professional pour.

You'll also need a strainer if your shaker didn't come with one and a jigger for the same reason, or if you entertain and make multiple cocktails.

A Hawthorne strainer comes with a coiled wire edge to keep out ice cubes and chunks of fruit.

If you're into cocktails with a lot of botanicals, you might invest in a muddler and mixing glass, also good for stirred cocktails. If you're stirring, look for a twisty metal bar spoon to achieve that perfect mixing technique.

GLASSWARE

Don't mix a perfect, handcrafted cocktail and pour it in a red Solo cup. Just don't. Instead, make your way to your local home goods or kitchen store and invest in a good set of quality glassware.

Clear is best for simple, clean presentation showing off the ingredients

and color in your cocktails. If you serve a good deal of wine or entertain, make sure you include a variety of wine glasses — red, white and champagne — and get tumblers and pint glasses for a good start. Hurricane or other fancy cocktail glasses can come in handy if you serve tall, bright, fruity drinks.

Bourbon vs. Whiskey

You find yourself bellied up to a bar and you want to order a drink. Do you order bourbon or whiskey?

It's a trick question. Either way you get a whiskey, but you might not get a bourbon. All whiskey is liquor fermented from a grain mash — usually corn, wheat, barley or rye — and aged in a barrel or cask, but bourbon is special. And legal.

WHAT IS BOURBON?

According to the Code of Federal Regulations, bourbon

whiskey cannot exceed 160 proof from a fermented mash of not less than 51 percent corn, rye, wheat, malted barley or malted rye and stored at not more than 125 proof in charred new oak barrels. The charring is important. It gives bourbon its signature reddish hue and smoky flavor. No charred barrel, no bourbon.

Historically, bourbon has the strongest roots in Kentucky,

and most U.S. bourbon is still made there today, although Tennessee also has its own style of bourbon. More than a fortifying drink, bourbon also has a historical use as medicine for cough and congestion.

BOURBON IN THE BAR

Bourbon can be served a variety of ways. Neat is by itself, in a tumbler, with no fussiness such as ice (on the rocks),

water, fruit, soda or sugar or anything else. Neat bourbon is usually suited to a better quality drink; ask your local liquor merchant for options available in your area.

Bourbon also finds a home in a number of cocktails, such as this Old Fashioned.

OLD FASHIONED

2 teaspoons simple syrup (equal parts sugar and water, boiled to form a

syrup)

- 1 teaspoon water
- 2 dashes bitters
- 1 cup ice cubes
- 1 jigger bourbon
- 1 slice orange
- 1 maraschino cherry

1. Pour the simple syrup, water and bitters into a tumbler. Stir to combine.

2. Add the ice. Pour the bourbon over the ice and garnish with fruit.

Makes 1 drink.

Taming Tequila

Way back in the dim, dark recesses of time, an enterprising Aztec fermented the sap of the agave to make iztac octli, or white drink.

When the Spanish came to the New World, they called it pulque and, when they ran out of brandy, began to ferment and distill their own drink: tequila.

By the 1600s, tequila was a taxable product. In 1758, Jose Antonio de Cuervo y Valdes was given a license by King Ferdinand VI to plant agave for tequila and in 1795, the Cuervo family got a license to distribute it.

WHERE DOES TEQUILA COME FROM?

Tequila comes from the blue agave, specifically the plant grown around the city of the same name in Mexico and in the highlands of Jalisco. Highland and lowland plants have distinctly different tastes. Highland tequila is sweeter and fruitier, while lowland tequila tastes greener and earthier.

The plants are tended by jimadores, who rely on knowledge passed down from generation to generation. The jimadores tend the agave carefully, preventing flowering and allowing the plant to ripen to maturity. There are no machines here. The plants are tended as they have been for hundreds of years — by hand.

The pinas, or the tender hearts

of the plants, are then harvested and dried in an oven, then shredded on a wheel called a tahona. Agave juice is fermented into mosto, or a low-alcohol wort, and distilled into ordinario and then again into silver tequila. The silver tequila can be aged in casks into gold tequila, which has a golden color and a mellow flavor.

HOW TO DRINK IT

In Mexico, tequila is usually served neat. Outside the country, it's more popular to shoot it with salt and lime, or serve it in cocktails, such as this classic Tequila Sunrise, sure to be a hit at brunch.

TEQUILA SUNRISE

3 oz. orange juice
1 shot tequila
1/2 oz. grenadine syrup
Ice

1. Pour tequila and juice over ice in a glass. Try a nice decorative glass such as a large wine glass or hurricane glass. The color variations in this drink are meant to be shown off.

2. Add the grenadine. It will sink to the bottom, creating that shocking color that will impress your guests. Do not stir. Serve and enjoy.



Home Bar Software

Now that you've got your tools and a few bottles of good liquor, it's time to think about the extra flavors. Here are a few food items to keep in your home bar for making perfect cocktails every time. These should be available at your local fine grocer.



© FOTOLIA

OLIVES

Where to find them: If your local grocer has an olive bar, you're in luck. Grab a variety of plastic bowls and go to town. Otherwise, you should be able to find good jarred varieties of olives on the shelf.

Everyone knows the dirty martini, a martini with plenty of olive juice and garnished with a skewer of green olives. Jazz it up (and practically make it an hors d'oeuvre) by using blue cheese-stuffed or feta-stuffed olives. You can also add a variety of olives to a Bloody Mary, including onion-stuffed or garlic-stuffed green olives.

CHERRIES

Where to find them: At your finer grocery stores.

Go beyond the basic maraschino with Luxardo cherries. Garnet red and glistening, Luxardo cherries are distilled in a cherry liqueur. Almond with a seductively soft, candied texture, Luxardo cherries take a drink from blah to elegant in a flash. Use them anywhere you'd normally plunk a neon red American maraschino. Beyond the bar, drop them on vanilla ice cream or on any other dessert that needs a dash of luxe.

OTHER FRUITS AND VEG

Where to find them: The pro-

duce aisle. Or, if you live in a town with a farmers market, seek out seasonal, organic produce from local farmers. They'll appreciate the business and you'll appreciate the taste.

Many cocktails call for a wedge of citrus or, for something like a Bloody Mary, a good stalk of celery. Cut fresh produce for your bar the day of use, and keep it cool in a bar fridge or on ice for the duration. Wilted celery or other greens can be revived with a soak in ice water. Citrus and other juicy fruits should be cut and stored in their own juice so they don't dry out. Cut fruit such as strawberries immediately before use.

HERBS AND OTHER BOTANICALS

Where to find them: Fresh herbs can be found in the produce section at your local grocer. Keep cool after buying. If they have roots, keep them moistened.

Herbs aren't just for cooking. They add a dash of green to many cocktails. Good choices for the home bar are basil (a dark purple basil, if available, adds an interesting dash of color), thyme, rosemary sprigs and cilantro (Italian parsley if you can't bear the taste of cilantro). They can be served as sprigs for garnish or muddled into the cocktail itself.

Beer Behind the Bar

Sure, you can just serve beer as is, but it makes a lovely cocktail, as well. Look for interesting regional brews that can add a local flavor and interesting twist to your mixes. The experts at your local liquor store or fine grocer can help you find the best bases for these cocktails.

BUL

The bul (bool) is a Cuban drink that mixes ginger beer and ale. It's crisp, refreshing and perfect for a hot summer's day.

2 12-oz. bottles ginger beer, chilled
2 12-oz. bottles pale ale, chilled
4 oz. fresh lime juice
Lime slices for garnish

1. Pour the beers into a pitcher with the lime juice. Add the lime slices and ice. Pour into tumblers and serve.

Makes one pitcher.

SNAKEBITE

Originating in the U.K., the snakebite is equal parts lager or stout and cider. A good, solid drink for a night in. It goes down easy, though, so pace yourself.

1/2 pint apple cider
1/2 pint lager or stout

1. Pour equal parts into a pint glass. Serve.

Makes one drink.

SHANDY

A shandy is equal parts beer and another drink, usually lemonade, carbonated or otherwise. There are a variety of regional shandies served all around the world, such as the panache in Switzerland, Belgium and France; the portegraff of stout and lemonade

in Australia; or the shandygaff, a British mix of beer and ginger beer or ginger ale. Try this kicked-up orange twist on the typical shandy from DeKuyper.

6 bottles Belgian-style wheat ale
1/4 cup tequila
1/2 cup orange liqueur
2 cups orange juice
2 oranges, sliced

Fresh rosemary and thyme

1. Combine the tequila, liqueur, juice, oranges and herbs in a pitcher. Slowly pour in four bottles of beer.

Stir.

2. Refrigerate until chilled. When ready to serve, add remaining bottles of beer.
Makes one pitcher.



© FOTOLIA

Wine Behind the Bar

Just as beer can make an interesting cocktail, so can wine. Start with a good quality wine. Bring your recipe to your local fine grocer or liquor store and the experts there can choose the best bottle to fit your budget.

SANGRIA

This is the beverage you think of when you think of wine cocktails. A fruit punch typically made with sweetened red wine, it has Spanish roots and is traditionally made with Spanish Rioja wine. It also can be made with dry white wines. The fruit used in sangrias varies regionally but can include peaches, pineapple, pear, apples or melon.

STRAWBERRY SANGRIA

4 cups (20 oz.) frozen strawberries in syrup, thawed
1 can frozen strawberry orange juice concentrate
2 bottles white wine, chilled
4 12-oz. cans lemon-lime soda
Fresh strawberries, halved, for garnish

1. Puree strawberries, then mix with fruit juice and wine in a pitcher. Chill.

2. Just before serving, add the soda. Garnish glasses with halved strawberries.

Makes one pitcher.

SPARKLE IT UP

Sparkling wines like champagne and prosecco also bring a delightfully refreshing fizz. Classic sparkling cocktails include the French 75 (cognac or gin, champagne, lemon juice and sugar) and the mimosa (equal parts sparkling wine or champagne and



citrus juice, usually orange).

FRENCH 75

2 oz. champagne or sparkling white wine
½ oz. lemon juice
1 oz. gin
2 dashes simple syrup

Lemon slice, for garnish

1. Combine all ingredients in a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously, then strain into a champagne glass. Garnish with lemon slice.

Makes one drink.

SPRITZER

A spritzer combines chilled white wine and sparkling water. It comes from Germany and Austria. In the U.S., a spritzer can mean a non-alcoholic drink; take care when ordering.

CLASSIC SPRITZER

1/2 cup very cold sparkling water
1 cup very cold white wine
Lime slice, for garnish

Combine in white wine glass and top with sparkling water, if needed. Garnish with lime. Makes one drink.

Experiment with Recipes

Now that you've got your hardware, your software and a basic knowledge of a few kinds of cocktails, it's time to get started on your own recipes. Scared? Don't be. Here are some basics for making your own cocktails.

START SMALL

Don't try to make a whole pitcher; try a single drink. Begin with a recipe you already know well and have made several times. Then switch it up. Use a different spirit. Try a different herb or simple syrup. Keep it simple at first, then build up as your confidence grows. Don't be afraid to have fun, and if it doesn't turn out as expected, you've only used a little of your bar stock.

2:1:1

Remember this ratio. It stands for two parts base spirit, one part sweet and one part sour. The sweets are things such as fruit juice and simple syrup. The sour can be bitters, lemon or lime juice. Make your own simple syrup and build in a flavor, such as mint. Squeeze your own lemon or lime juice for the best taste.

MODIFIERS

Build on your 2:1:1 base with muddled herbs or fruits, ginger ale, soda or tonic water. Again, start slow with your flavor and build from there. Remember that you can always add to a recipe, but you can never take away.

If you're muddling herbs, be mindful of your technique. If crushed too much, some herbs, such as mint, can turn bitter. Fruit and herbs that are



© FOTOLIA

crushed too much also can ruin your presentation. Use a light hand.

Speaking of presentation, a rimmed glass can score major

points and add flavor, as well. To rim a glass, sprinkle your medium of choice (usually sugar or salt, but you also can mix in cayenne pepper or just

about any granular spice) onto a small plate. Run a slice of lemon or lime around the rim of your serving glass, then lightly press the outside edge

onto the plate. Shake off any excess. Pour your cocktail slowly so as not to disturb the rim. If you're chilling your glasses, rim them first.