



A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO WHISKEY:

Everything You Need to Know



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Whiskey

Whiskey is popular all over the world in part because there is so much variety to it (and because of how it makes you feel). Historically whiskey may be associated with cowboys, gangsters, or burly men, but more and more [women are finding they have a taste for whiskey.](#)

Whether you're hoping to understand the different types better, want recommendations on great whiskeys to try, need recipes for rye cocktails, or need advice for hosting a whiskey tasting with friends, you are in the right place.

Let's start with the spelling. Both whiskey and whisky can be correct. The word comes from the Gaelic word for "water of life" and legend has it that Irish distillers added an "e" to differentiate their spirits from the ones being made in Scotland.

Whiskey is made from fermented grain mash that is then distilled. There are many different grains that can be used to make many different kinds of whiskey—each has its own characteristics.

Once the mash is distilled it comes out clear (this is moonshine) but is then aged for years (or decades) in casks or barrels to give it its unique colors and flavors. In general, whiskey must be aged for at least two years to be classified as straight whiskey. It does get better with age and bottles over 25 years old can get rather pricey.

Water of Life—Different Types of Whiskey



Paddy's Irish Whiskey

750ml \$19.99

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Types of Whiskey

Irish Whiskey

The Irish have been making whiskey since the 15th century and have gotten quite good at it. [Irish whiskeys](#) are made from a yeast-fermented mash of grains like wheat and barley. They are known for their smooth (but not quite sweet) flavor profiles and are widely regarded as the easiest drinking of all whiskeys. This is a result of the fact that Irish whiskey is almost always distilled three times. They often have floral scents and hints of vanilla. Some Irish Whiskey worth trying include [Jameson](#), [Tullamore Dew](#), and [Redbreast](#).



Oban Little Bay Scotch

750ml \$52.99

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Scotch

About a hundred years after the Irish, the Scots caught on and started making whisky (no “e”) with their own malted barley. It must be 100% made in Scotland to be called scotch today. Scotch is typically distilled twice and is known for its malty flavor. The aging process can also add hints of fruit. When it is made over a peat fire, scotch can have a smoky quality as well. Some scotches worth sampling include [Justerini & Brooks Rare Blended Scotch](#), [Dewar’s White Label Blended Scotch](#), and [Highland Park Cask Strength](#).

[Scotch also makes a wonderful gift](#) to celebrate a life accomplishment, birthday, or great friend for any reason.



Pike Creek Canadian

750ml \$31.99

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Canadian Whisky

Lots of things grow in Canada and so it’s no surprise lots of grains can go into a Canadian whisky. The most common are wheat, corn, and rye. The grains are milled, mashed, fermented, and distilled. It’s the law in Canada that whisky must be aged at least three years. It can be mixed with other spirits like bourbon or even wine, as long as those ingredients were aged in barrels too. Canadian whisky flavors run the gamut from smooth with notes of vanilla, caramel, and toffee to fruity or spicy. Get a taste for Canadian whisky by trying out [Windsor Canadian](#) or [Pendleton Canadian Whisky](#).

**1792 Bourbon**

750ml \$29.99

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Bourbon

Bourbon is a truly American spirit. By law, [bourbon](#) must be made from a mash that is at least 51% corn and be aged in a new oak barrel (we Americans love our corn).

The other common ingredients are wheat, rye, or malted barley. Bourbons are known for having a sweet flavor profile, often including hints of caramel, vanilla, maple, honey, or chocolate. Some bourbons with more rye in them will have a spicier taste. Tennessee whiskey is just the name for bourbon made in Tennessee. Some popular bourbons worth exploring include [Bulleit Bourbon](#) and [Old Forester](#).

**Obtainium Rye Whiskey**

750ml \$59.99

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Rye Whiskey

Want more flavor in your whiskey? Then rye may be for you. Rye whiskey comes from a mash that is at least 51% rye and that gives it a spicier, more aggressive flavor profile. It must also be aged in oak barrels so that flavor is often present too. Rye has seen a surge in popularity in recent years. Want to experience the spicy fullness of a good rye? Try out [Koval](#), [Woodford Reserve](#), or [Knob Creek](#).

America's Spirit—A Few Facts for the Bourbon



Single Malt vs Blended

Whiskey connoisseurs like to debate the merits of [single malts vs whiskey blends](#). Here's what you need to understand to be part of the conversation. Single malts are made from water and malted barley exclusively, from a single distillery. Blends include a combination of grain whiskeys and don't have to come from the same distillery.

A [single malt scotch](#) will be an absolute treat with lots of earthiness. A blend will have a less intense taste, which some may find more pleasing. Because of the restrictions of how it is produced, single malts will cost more than blends.



Single Barrel Selections

Single barrel selections are unique hand selected expressions of whiskey. A single barrel is a premium class of whiskey in which each bottle comes from an individual aging barrel. Most whiskeys come from blending together the contents of various barrels to provide uniformity of color and taste to the individual bottle.

By contrast, some other whiskeys, even ones that are not blends may be combined from more than one batch, or even from differing years to achieve consistency. The whiskey from each barrel is bottled separately, with each bottle bearing the barrel number and in most cases the dates for the beginning and end of aging. Each bottle is usually bottled at cask strength, and no additional water has been added. Each barrel is believed to contribute unique characteristics to the finished whiskey.

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In our case, each barrel is hand selected by our Haskell's team. We will sample through various barrels and select the perfect one we feel has the best characteristics and flavor for a great tasting experience. Single barrels are often given a fun name to commemorate the unique experience. Sometimes an additional alcohol barrel (ie, cognac, wine, sauterne cask) is used to finish the whiskey. Single barrels are not just limited to whiskey. We have [tequila](#), [rum](#), [brandy](#), and multiple wine single barrels, too.

Here are some we love:

[Keeper's Heart - "Along the Watchtower"](#)

[Keeper's Heart Cab Barrel - "The Witch's Hat"](#)

[Clyde Mays 6 Year Haskell's Single Barrel](#)

[Heaven's Door Haskell's Pick "Highway 61 Revisited"](#)

[Barrell Bourbon 10yr Haskell's Single Barrel "Sav Dab" 2021](#)

[Wilderness Trail Bourbon Haskell's Single Barrel Cask Strength](#)





Whiskey Cocktail Recipes

Whiskey is fun to play mixologist with because it can combine with some many flavors to give you exciting drink combinations. Here are some of the classics and a few that are a bit more out there.

Manhattan Recipe

This drink got its start in New York City (big surprise!) in the 1870s. Its Scottish cousin is a drink called the Rob Roy (you replace the rye whiskey with scotch).

Manhattan Ingredients:

- 2 ounces [rye whiskey](#)
- 1 ounce [sweet vermouth](#)
- 2 dashes [Angostura bitters](#)
- 1 dash [orange bitters](#)
- Garnish: brandied cherry or lemon twist

Steps:

1. Mix together the rye (or bourbon), sweet vermouth, and both bitters over ice.
2. When chilled, strain into a coupe.
3. Garnish with a lemon twist or brandied cherry.

Note:

Manhattan's can also be served on the rocks in a lowball glass.

Old Fashioned Recipe

This is a simple way to sweeten up whiskey and has been recognized as the top selling classic cocktail in the world by the journal [*Drinks International*](#) (wouldn't that be a fun place to work).

Old Fashioned Ingredients:

- ½ teaspoon sugar
- 3 dashes [Angostura bitters](#)
- 1 teaspoon water
- 2 ounces [bourbon](#)
- Garnish: orange peel

Steps:

1. Add the sugar and bitters to a glass, then add the water. Stir until the sugar is almost dissolved.
2. Fill the glass with large ice cubes, add the bourbon, and gently stir to combine.
3. Add a zest of orange peel.





Irish Coffee Recipe

This one warms you when you drink it, and re-warms you when it hits your stomach. Of course the Irish have perfected the right way to add whiskey to your favorite caffeine pick-me-up.

Irish Coffee Ingredients:

- 2 sugar cubes
- 6 ounces brewed coffee (recommended to use a medium-roast)
- 1 ½ ounces [Tullamore Dew Irish Whiskey](#)
- Heavy cream, lightly whipped

Steps:

1. Pre-heat a 6-ounce, heat proof glass by filling with hot water.
2. Empty the warm glass.
3. Add two sugar cubes to the glass, pour coffee until the glass is 3/4 full.
4. Stir thoroughly until the sugar is dissolved.
5. Add 1 ½ ounces of whiskey to the coffee.
6. Float a layer of whipped cream over the top of the coffee by pouring gently over a spoon.

Tip: Use heavy whipping cream that's lightly whipped in an upright blender (or a smoothie maker).



Sazerac Recipe

This is a New Orleans original, and a perfect example of how whiskey can be used to make some [excellent strong cocktails](#). The original recipe from 1870 called for absinthe instead of Herbsaint (so feel free to use that if you can get your hands on some).

Sazerac Ingredients:

- 1 sugar cube
- 1½ ounces [rye whiskey](#) (or your favorite bourbon)
- ¼ ounce Herbsaint
- 3 dashes Peychaud's bitters
- Lemon peel

Steps:

1. Pack an Old Fashioned glass with ice.
2. In a second Old Fashioned glass, place the sugar cube and add the Peychaud's bitters to it, then crush the sugar cube.
3. Add the Sazerac rye whiskey (or bourbon) to the second glass.
4. Empty the ice from the first glass and coat the glass with the Herbsaint, (discard the remaining Herbsaint).
5. Pour the drink into the first glass and garnish with lemon peel.

Cinnamon Honey Whiskey Sour Recipe

This is a sweet twist on the classic whiskey sour. Adding sweet flavors, like maple syrup, to whiskey and bourbon drinks is a good way to round out the flavor of your libation.

Cinnamon Honey Whiskey Sour Ingredients:

- 1 ½ oz. [Bulleit bourbon](#) or whiskey of your choice
- 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
- 3 tsp. honey
- Pinch of ground cinnamon
- Ice

Steps:

1. Pour ingredients into a cocktail shaker filled with ice.
2. Shake thoroughly and strain into a lowball glass over a large ice cube.



Mint Julep Recipe

This drink isn't just for derby day. Although they do serve more than 120,000 mint juleps during the Kentucky Derby weekend at the Churchill Downs Racetrack in Louisville each May. It's a sweet taste of spring that you can enjoy any time. Check out the video below this recipe to see how we make Uncle Terry's Mint Julep.



Mint Julep Ingredients:

- Ice
- 1 ½ ounce Bourbon ([Woodford Reserve](#) is a traditional choice)
- 1 ½ ounce simple syrup
- 1 (4-inch) cocktail straw or coffee stirrer
- Fresh mint sprig to garnish

Steps:

1. Fill a glass with crushed ice.*
2. Pour 1 ½ ounces of bourbon whiskey.
3. Add 1 ½ ounces of simple syrup.*
4. Stir.
5. Garnish with a couple sprigs of mint.

**You can add mint to the simple syrup for more minty flavor or muddle the mint in the glass before you add the ice.*

Uncle Terry's Mint Julep





Hosting a Whiskey Themed Event

Want to be more popular? Host a whiskey tasting and tell your friends to bring their friends. Another option is to tightly control the guest list and create an intimate gathering that will live on in the lore of your friends-circle for years to come. Here are the things to make sure your party is primo.

Whiskey Tasting Event Supplies

You could go with one of the above recipes and offer a signature drink at your party. You could let people try whiskeys (scotch) from various countries to see which they prefer. Either way, it'd be wise to have these common mixers on hand so people can pick their favorite way to enjoy the spirit too: ginger ale, [dry vermouth](#), [sweet vermouth](#), soda water, cola, citrus, and plenty of ice.

The go-to glasses for most whiskey drinkers is either an Old Fashioned or rocks glass. Other options include the Glencairn, which allows people to swirl their whiskey and open up its flavors. Some people prefer tulip shaped glasses to feed the aromas right up to them.

The Right Foods to go with Whiskey

Think quality over quantity when you're feeding a group focused on fully appreciating the flavor of a fine bourbon or whiskey. You want things that complement the experience. You will always win with a good cheese tray or charcuterie board. The stronger the cheese the better. Your spread can include fruits like cherries, cranberries, and apricots. Nibbling items like walnuts, almonds, pecans, and dried meats have tannic properties that will go over well too. Add some crackers or salty chips to round things out.



Be the Life of the Party

Here are some information tidbits you can use to entertain your guests, your drinking buddy, or anyone you want to impress with your whiskey knowledge.

- George Washington wasn't just our founding father, he was also one of the nation's largest distillers. [His distillery at Mount Vernon](#) produced 11,000 gallons in 1799. Six of the men Washington enslaved were assigned to the distillery because it was so busy.
- Alexander Hamilton did not win any fans among whiskey lovers. He proposed the whiskey tax that led to the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania in the 1790s.
- Scotch whisky makes up roughly 20% of all the food and drink exports from the United Kingdom.
- During World War II, many distillers switched to making fuel and penicillin to help the war effort.
- A senator from Missouri (where oak barrels are a big industry) introduced the requirement that whiskey must be aged in new oak barrels for at least two years.
- Frank Sinatra was buried with a bottle of Jack Daniel's.
- John Jameson, who founded Jameson's Irish whisky, was Scottish.
- Whiskey represents the letter W in the NATO alphabet.
- Nikola Tesla drank whiskey every day because he thought it'd help him to live to be 150.
- There is a Japanese whisky called Kikori made entirely from rice.