

Whiskey • Brandy • Gin • Rum • Tequila • Vodka • Liqueurs

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## Whiskey: The Basics

Whiskey is a spirit, aged in wood, obtained from the distillation of a fermented mash of grain. Whiskey is produced in four countries: the United States, Canada, Scotland, and Ireland. The whiskeys produced in Canada, Ireland, and Scotland take on the name of their countries. Whiskeys produced in other countries, even though they may taste similar, cannot legally be called Canadian, Irish, or Scotch.

Whiskeys vary in alcoholic strength, from 110 proof American bottled in bond whiskey, to 70 proof Canadian whiskeys, sold only in Canada. Most whiskeys sold in the United States are either 86 or 80 proof, depending on the distiller and brand. Prior to the 1960s, most whiskeys were bottled at a higher proof. Today, modern drinkers prefer lighter-tasting whiskeys. Federal law requires that the label on each bottle be plainly marked with the proof of the liquor.

What is Proof?

**Proof: the amount of alcohol in any distillate, and represents 50 percent alcohol by volume. A combination of half alcohol and half water is scored as 100 proof or 50 percent alcohol.**

The term “proof” came out of the pioneering era of distillation. In the beginning, to determine the strength of liquors, distillers would mix equal quantities of the spirit and gunpowder and then apply a flame to the mixture. If the gunpowder failed to burn, the spirit was too weak; if it burned too brightly, it was too strong. However, if it burned evenly, with a blue flame, it was said to have been proved. Hence the word proof.

Pure alcohol, like the kind used in laboratories, is 200 proof, being 100 percent alcohol. A combination of half alcohol and half water is scored as 100 proof or 50 percent alcohol. Proof is a measure of alcoholic strength, not necessarily of quality.

Kinds of Whiskey

### **American Whiskey**

American whiskeys are rigidly defined by law, and governed accordingly. They include bourbon, corn, sour mash, Tennessee, blended, straight, bottled in bond, and rye.

The history of American whiskey and America parallel each other. Whiskey was an integral part of everyday life in the Colonial days. It helped comfort the settlers during hard times and was enjoyed at the end of a rough day. It was also used to cure snakebite, ward off disease, and ease pain both superficially and internally.

### **Canadian Whisky**

Canadian whisky is a distinctive product of Canada made under government supervision in accordance with the regulations governing the manufacture of whisky in Canada. Canadian whiskeys' are whisky blends. The most distinguishing characteristic of Canadian whisky is its light body.

### **Scotch Whisky**

Scotch whisky is a distinctive product of Scotland, made in compliance with the laws of Great Britain. There are two types of Scotch whiskies sold in the United States. The first type is blends of malt and grain whisky. These are the most popular because they are made in large quantities and the least expensive.

The second type is single malt. A single malt Scotch comes from one distillery and made from only one malted barley. Single malt Scotches are expensive because they are made in limited quantities.

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## **Brandy: The Basics**

Brandy is a potable spirit, distilled from a fermented mash of grapes or other fruit. Most brandy is distilled from wine. White wine, made from white grapes, is used most often. Wine that has recently finished its fermentation process makes the best brandy. An aged wine, even if it is of superior quality, won't make a good brandy.

Brandies are produced wherever grapes are grown.

### **Different Types of Brandy**

Cognac comes from France, and Metaxa is from Greece. Brandies produced in California must be made from California grapes, and they have to meet rigid standards set by the distillers. California brandies account for over 75 percent of the brandy sales in the United States.

In many parts of Europe, brandy is made from fruit. Kirsch, from Germany, is cherry flavored, and Mirabelle, from France, has a plum flavor. To the brandy base, which contains the alcohol, they add an extract or concentrate of the fruit and sweetening syrups. The labels on fruit brandies must indicate the kind of fruit used, such as apricot brandy, cherry brandy, peach brandy, or blackberry brandy, etc. Almost all brandies are aged in oak barrels from three to eight years.

### **Cognac: The Most Famous of all Brandies**

Cognac should be mentioned more specifically because it is the most famous of all the brandies. It is produced in the Cognac region of France, which is an area north of Bordeaux, bordering the Atlantic Ocean, with the city of Cognac near its center. The region is divided into seven districts, ranking in order of the quality of the cognac made in each district. In order, they are: Grande Champagne, Petite Champagne, Borderies, Fins, Bois, Bons Bois, Bois Ordinaries, and Bois a Terrior.

**It is important to understand that all cognac is brandy, but not all brandy is cognac.**

A brandy may only be called cognac if it is distilled from wine made of the grapes that grow within the legal limits of Charente and Charente Inferieure Departments of France. Brandies distilled from wines other than these are not legally entitled to the name cognac, even though they may be shipped from the city of Cognac.



## **Gin: The Basics**

Gin is distilled from grain and receives its unique flavor and aroma from juniper berries and other botanicals. Every gin producer has his own special recipe, which is under strict quality control. The flavor of gin will vary with the distiller. Gin was first produced in Holland by Dr. Sylvius, a Dutch physician, during the 17th century. He named it Genievre, the French word for the juniper berry. It was the English who shortened the name to gin. Brought from Holland into England by English soldiers, who called it “Dutch Courage”, gin soon became the national drink of England and has so remained.

Gin can be made two ways, by either being distilled or compounded. All leading popular brands sold in the United States are distilled. Compounded simply means a mixture of neutral spirits with juniper berries. Distilled gin is distilled completely.

Dry? Extra Dry?

Virtually all gins in the United States use the word “dry.” You will see it on brand labels that may read, “Dry Gin,” “Extra Dry Gin,” “London Dry Gin,” or “English Dry Gin,” but they all mean the same thing--lacking in

sweetness. Originally, “London Dry” meant gin produced in London, but the name “London” is considered to be generic, and therefore it is often used to describe gins produced in the United States.

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## Rum: The Basics

Rum is produced wherever sugar cane grows. Many countries, such as the United States, South Africa, and even Russia, produce rum, but it is only the Caribbean Islands that produce rum in quantities sufficient for worldwide export. The islands in the Caribbean each produce a distinctive type of rum, the result of the base material used, the method of distillation, and the length of maturation. Generally, the islands where the Spanish language is spoken, such as Puerto Rico, produce light, dry-tasting rums. The English speaking Caribbean islands produce dark, heavy-tasting rums.

**By definition, rum is any alcoholic distillate made from the fermented juice of sugar cane, sugar cane syrup, sugar cane molasses, or other sugar cane by-products, distilled at less than 190 proof, that also possesses the taste, aroma, and characteristics generally attributed to rum.**

### A Pinch of Sugar History

Sugar cane was brought to the Caribbean by Christopher Columbus on his journey from the Azores Islands. The climate was perfect for growing sugar cane, and soon it was being grown on every Caribbean island. The Spanish colonists who followed Columbus brought with them the art of distilling and began distilling the juice of the sugar cane into an alcoholic beverage, which became known as rum. Most authors believe the word “rum” is

derived from the old words rumbullion (rumpus) or rumbustion (uproar), certainly appropriate words when referring to the first rum drinkers.

## Various Types of Rum

Rums can be broken down into various classifications. The light-bodied ones are dry and have only a very light molasses taste. They are available in two varieties: white, which is by far the most popular, and gold, which is a mixture of light and dark. The gold is sweeter and has a more pronounced molasses taste. The two favorite light rums come from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Another classification is heavy-bodied rums that are much darker and sweeter. They have a pungent bouquet and a heavy molasses taste. The dark rums differ because of slower fermentation and special maturation processes.

Well-known dark rums come from Jamaica, Demerara, Martinique, Trinidad, Bermuda and New England.



## Tequila: The Basics

Tequila, the primary spirit of Mexico, has its own special flavor that is almost tart and leaves the tongue clean and tingling. In the 1970s, tequila became the fastest growing spirit in sales, as vodka did in the 1960s. Tequila is obtained from the distillation of the fermented juice (sap) of the mescal plant, called pulque.

**The only source for Tequila is the mescal plant, which is a species of the agave plant.**

The mescal plant is a cactus that takes between twelve and thirteen years to mature. Its long leaves, or spikes, are cut off at harvest time, leaving only the bulbous central core, called the pina, meaning pineapple. The pinas, which weigh from 80 pounds to 175 pounds each, are taken to the distillery where they are cooked in pressure cookers for several hours. They are then cooled and shredded, and the juice is pressed out. The fermentation process is completed in huge wooden vats. The fermented juice is then twice distilled in traditional copper-pot stills.

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## Vodka: The Basics

Like whiskey, vodka is distilled from a fermented mash of grain, but they differ in the methods of distillation. Whiskey is distilled at a low proof to retain flavor. Vodka, however, is distilled at a high proof, 190 or above, and then processed even further to remove all flavor. Most American distillers filter their vodkas through activated charcoal. Also, whiskey is aged, and vodka is not.

What is it made from?

A few vodkas are made from potatoes. Most vodka is not. Almost all vodka is made from grain, the most common being corn, rye, and wheat. There are many countries that claim they invented vodka, among them Poland and Russia. Some historians claim the Poles were producing it as early as the 8th century AD, for use as medicine. It wasn't until the 15th century AD, that both the Poles and the Russians were drinking it every day.

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## Liqueurs (or Cordials): The Basics

The words liqueurs and cordials are used interchangeably. Liqueurs were first developed by the Christian monks of the middle ages. They were developed to help the sick. The monks added secret combinations of honey, seeds, herbs, spices, roots, and bark to distilled-base spirits and offered them as remedies.

### **After Shock**

Cinnamon liqueur imported from Canada. Initially tastes like hot cinnamon.

### **Amaretto Di Saronno**

Imported Italian liqueur made from apricot stones, which produce an almond flavor.

### **B & B D.O.M.**

Imported liqueur from France. A combination of Benedictine and Brandy that started out as a popular mixed drink until the French decided to bottle the two together.

### **Campari Aperitivo**

Aperitif imported from Italy. Aromas of fruit pits and botanicals. Slightly bitter flavors of fruit.

### **Chambord**

Black raspberry liqueur from France made with small black raspberries, other fruits, herbs and honey.

### **Chartreuse Green**

Herbal liqueur made by the monks of the Carthusian order in the French Alps.

**Cointreau Liqueur**

Imported orange liqueur from France. Similar to orange curacao. Clear in color. Flavor of fresh orange peels with a slight hint of spice.

**Romana Black Sambuca**

Imported licorice flavored liqueur from Italy. Black color.

**Drambuie**

Imported liqueur from Scotland. Made with aged Scotch-over 15 years old- and blended with heather honey and herbs.

**Frangelico**

Hazelnut Liqueur imported from Italy. A mix of hazelnuts, berries, and herbs. Flavors of hazelnut and butter.

**Goldschlager**

Clear cinnamon schnapps from Switzerland with flecks of gold leaf floating in the bottle. Sweet-sour cinnamon flavors.

**Grand Marnier**

Made with cognac, essence of wild oranges and delicate syrup, the mixture is aged in oak casks prior to bottling.

**Irish Mist Liqueur**

Imported liqueur from Ireland. A blend of heather and clover honey and herbs.

**Jagermeister**

Imported liqueur from Germany. Intensely herbal, citrus nose.

**Liquore Galliano**

Imported liqueur from Italy. Aromas of roots, herbs, flowers, and cedar.

**Metaxa Ouzo**

Imported liqueur from Greece. A combination of grapes, herbs, and berries including aniseed, licorice, mint, wintergreen, fennel, and hazelnut.

**Pernod Anise**

The recipe for Pernod is a slight variation of the original recipe for absinthe; an herbal elixer made from 15 exotic herbs steeped in alcohol. Licorice flavored and yellow-green color.

**Midori Melon**

Imported honeydew melon flavored liqueur. Light, fresh melon taste.

**Yukon Jack**

Canadian liqueur. White-wine-like appearance. Flavors of orange and spirit.

**Kahlua Coffee Liqueur**

America's number one imported liqueur. Aromas of coffee beans. Flavors of coffee and semisweet chocolate.

**Tia Maria Coffee Liqueur**

Imported coffee liqueur from Jamaica.

**Bailey's Irish Cream**

Cream liqueur imported from Ireland. A blend of real cream and Irish whiskey.

**Melon Liqueur**

Sweet melon flavored.

**Brown Creme De Cacao**

Brown color. Rich cocoa flavor.

**White Creme De Cacao**

Clear color, taste the same as the Brown Crème De Cacao.

**Creme De Menthe Green**

Dark green color. Mint flavor.

**White Creme De Menthe**

Clear. Natural mint flavor.

**Creme De Banana**

American banana flavored liqueur. The 'Creme' means that this liqueur is sweeter than most liqueurs or schnapps, not that it is blended with cream.

**Creme De Noyaux**

Made from fruit stones (pits) that gives it a nutty, almond flavor. Similar in flavor to Crème De Almond

**Creme De Cassis**

Black currant flavored liqueur .

**Peppermint Schnapps**

Peppermint flavored liqueur. Schnapps is less sweet than a liqueur or a fruit creme.

**Peach Schnapps**

Peach flavored. Most schnapps are generally low in proof and contain a lower sugar content than other cordials.

**Root Beer Schnapps**

Root Beer flavored schnapps made in the U.S.

**Buttershots Schnapps**

Cordial that has intense butterscotch aromas and flavors.

**Fire Water Cinnamon Schnapps**

Hot cinnamon schnapps, like fireball candy. 100 proof.

**Anisette**

American liqueur with the aroma and flavor of licorice from the anise seed.

**Orange Curacao**

Orange flavored (only natural ingredients are used) liqueur. Made from orange peel.

**Blue Curacao**

Orange flavored. Made from orange peel. Blue color.

**Triple Sec**

Orange flavored liqueur. Orange peels are used for the flavoring. Similar to curacao, but more refined.

**Southern Comfort**

A blend of bourbon and peach liqueur. Made from bourbon and peach liqueur in which fresh peaches were marinated.