



Mixology



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Citrus in Cocktails

Lemon and lime have long been staples behind the bar, providing the bright acidity that balances sweetness and highlights the flavors of spirits.

But today's mixologists are reaching for a wider range of citrus fruits to bring new aromas, colors and flavor profiles to modern cocktails.

From the tart bite of grapefruit to the floral complexity of yuzu, these fruits offer bartenders and mixology enthusiasts creative ways to add depth and character to drinks. Their unique flavors can transform classic recipes or inspire entirely new combinations.

As interest in craft cocktails continues to grow, citrus fruits beyond lemon and lime are becoming essential tools for bartenders and home mixologists alike. Their vivid flavors and aromas add brightness, complexity and a fresh twist to the evolving world of modern cocktails.

GRAPEFRUIT AND BLOOD ORANGE

Grapefruit has become a favorite in contemporary cocktails because of its balance of sweetness and gentle bitterness. Its juice adds a refreshing brightness that works particularly well with tequila, vodka and gin.

Popular drinks such as the paloma rely on grapefruit's crisp flavor to create a light, summery cocktail.

Blood orange brings a different dimension. Known for its deep ruby color and berry-like undertones, blood orange juice adds both visual appeal and a slightly richer citrus flavor. It pairs especially well with whiskey and rum, where its sweetness can soften the edges of stronger spirits.

Both fruits work well in simple syrups and garnishes, allowing bartenders to layer citrus flavor in several ways.

YUZU AND CALAMANSI

Some bartenders are exploring citrus varieties that originate outside the United States. Yuzu, a fragrant citrus fruit widely used in Japanese cuisine, offers an aroma that blends elements of lemon, grapefruit and mandarin. Its juice is highly aromatic and often used in small amounts to add complexity to cocktails.

Calamansi, common in southeast Asian

cooking, is another increasingly popular ingredient. The small fruit resembles a lime but delivers a flavor that combines the sharpness of lime with subtle hints of orange. Its bright, tart profile makes it a natural fit for tropical drinks and modern interpretations of sours.

Because these fruits can be difficult to find fresh in some markets, bartenders often use bottled juices or specialty syrups designed to capture their distinctive flavor.

EXPANDING THE CITRUS PALETTE

Using a wider range of citrus allows bartenders to fine-tune the balance of sweet, sour and bitter elements in a drink. It also opens the door to creative garnishes, infused syrups and flavored bitters.

Home cocktail enthusiasts can experiment in similar ways. Freshly squeezed grapefruit juice, a splash of blood orange or a few drops of yuzu concentrate can elevate familiar recipes such as margaritas, spritzes and whiskey sours.

Aperitifs and Digestifs

Across Europe, meals have long been framed by two small but meaningful rituals: the aperitif before dinner and the digestif afterward.

In recent years, these traditions have been finding new life in restaurants, cocktail bars and home entertaining, as drinkers rediscover the pleasure of slowing down and savoring the moments that surround a meal.

Both aperitifs and digestifs are designed to complement the dining experience, but they serve different purposes. Aperitifs are meant to awaken the palate and stimulate the appetite, while digestifs are traditionally enjoyed after a meal to help settle the stomach and bring the evening to a gentle close.

OPENING THE MEAL WITH APERITIFS

Aperitifs are typically lighter, lower in alcohol and often slightly bitter. The subtle bitterness is believed to encourage appetite by activating the palate and preparing it for food. Many classic aperitifs come from Italy and France, where the practice of enjoying a pre-dinner drink remains an important social tradition.

Popular aperitif ingredients include vermouth, Campari, Aperol and other herbal or citrus-based liqueurs. These



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ingredients often appear in well-known cocktails such as the negroni, the Americano and the Aperol spritz. Sparkling wine also plays a role in aperitif culture. A glass of prosecco, champagne or a light sparkling cocktail can provide a refreshing start to a meal, especially during warmer months.

The appeal of aperitifs lies not only in the flavors but also in the ritual itself. In many European cities, people gather before dinner for a relaxed drink with friends, often accompanied by small snacks. This pause between the day's work

and the evening meal encourages conversation and sets a welcoming tone for what follows.

ENDING WITH DIGESTIFS

Digestifs, served after a meal, tend to be richer and more concentrated in flavor. These drinks are often herbal, spiced or aged spirits believed to aid digestion, though their appeal today is as much about tradition and taste as it is about function.

Common digestifs include brandy, cognac, amaro, grappa and herbal liqueurs such as Chartreuse. Their complex

flavors — ranging from bitter-sweet herbs to warm spice and dried fruit — can complement the lingering flavors of dessert or coffee. Unlike aperitifs, which are meant to refresh the palate, digestifs often invite slower sipping. Served in small glasses, they offer a quiet way to conclude a meal and extend the evening's conversation.

A TRADITION FINDS NEW FANS

The renewed interest in aperitifs and digestifs reflects a broader shift toward more mindful drinking and appreci-

ation of traditional cocktail culture. Many bars now feature dedicated aperitif menus or highlight classic European liqueurs that were once less familiar to American drinkers.

At home, incorporating these traditions can be as simple as offering a spritz before dinner or a small pour of amaro after dessert. Whether enjoyed before or after the meal, these drinks serve the same purpose they have for generations: enhancing the experience of gathering at the table and marking the rhythm of a well-spent evening.

Infusing Spirits at Home

Infused spirits have become a popular feature of craft cocktail bars, where bartenders add layers of flavor by steeping fruits, herbs or spices directly in liquor.

The same technique can be done easily at home, offering cocktail enthusiasts a way to customize drinks with unique ingredients and seasonal flavors.

The process is simple: a base spirit such as vodka, gin, rum or tequila is combined with fresh ingredients and allowed to rest for several hours or days while the flavors blend. With a few basic guidelines, home infusions can be both safe and rewarding.

CHOOSING INGREDIENTS AND SPIRITS

Clear spirits such as vodka and gin are especially popular for infusions because their neutral or botanical profiles allow added flavors to stand out. Rum and tequila can work well, particularly when paired with tropical fruits or warm spices.

Fresh ingredients typically produce the most vibrant results. Citrus peels, berries, pineapple and stone fruits can bring sweetness and brightness, while herbs such as basil, mint and rosemary add aromatic notes. Spices like



cinnamon sticks, cloves or vanilla beans can contribute warmth and complexity.

Preparing ingredients

carefully helps ensure a clean infusion. Wash fruits and herbs thoroughly, and peel citrus to avoid bitterness from

the white pith. Whole spices are generally preferred over ground versions, which can cloud the liquid.

THE INFUSION PROCESS

Most home infusions begin by placing ingredients in a clean glass jar and covering them completely with the chosen spirit. Seal the jar and store in a cool, dark place while the flavors develop.

Infusion times vary depending on the ingredients. Soft fruits may release flavor within a day or two, while herbs often require only a few hours to prevent overpowering the spirit. Spices can take several days to produce a balanced result. Checking the mixture periodically allows home mixologists to stop the infusion once the desired flavor is reached. At that point, strain the liquid through a fine mesh sieve or cheesecloth and transfer it to a clean bottle.

USING INFUSED SPIRITS IN COCKTAILS

Once strained, infused spirits can be used in the same way as their original counterparts. A strawberry-infused vodka can brighten a summer spritz, while jalapeño tequila adds a spicy twist to margaritas. Vanilla rum pairs well with tropical drinks, and rosemary gin can bring an herbal note to a classic gin and tonic.

Labeling bottles with the ingredients and date can help keep track of flavors and freshness.

Home infusions offer an accessible way to expand cocktail options with distinctive flavors that make everyday drinks and special gatherings feel more personal.

Creating a Perfect Drink

Behind every memorable cocktail is a careful balance of flavors.

While recipes may vary widely, most well-crafted drinks rely on the same underlying structure — a thoughtful relationship between sweetness, acidity, bitterness, alcohol strength and dilution. Understanding this basic equation is the secret to creating drinks that feel harmonious rather than overwhelming.

A cocktail that leans too heavily in one direction can quickly lose its appeal. Balance allows each ingredient to play a role without dominating the glass.

THE CORE FLAVOR ELEMENTS

The foundation of many cocktails rests on the interaction between sweet and sour. Citrus juice, typically lemon or lime, brings acidity that brightens a drink and cuts through the intensity of alcohol. Sweeteners such as simple syrup, honey or agave nectar soften that acidity while adding body.

The “strong” element usually comes from the base spirit, such as whiskey, gin, rum or tequila, which provides the cocktail’s backbone and distinctive character. The goal is not to hide the spirit but to support it with complementary flavors.

Bitterness adds complexity

and depth. This element may come from aromatic bitters, citrus peel oils or ingredients such as amaro and certain aperitifs. Even a few drops of bitters can change how the other flavors interact, creating a more layered drinking experience.

THE ROLE OF DILUTION

Dilution is often overlooked, yet it is one of the most important components of a balanced cocktail. When drinks are stirred or shaken with ice, a small amount of water melts

into the mixture, softening the alcohol and helping the flavors integrate.

Without dilution, many cocktails would taste overly sharp or intense. The cooling effect of ice enhances the perception of balance, allowing subtle flavors to emerge. Different techniques influence dilution levels. Shaken cocktails typically incorporate more air and water, creating a lighter texture that works well for drinks containing citrus or fruit juices. Stirred cocktails,

such as the martini or Manhattan, tend to remain smoother and more spirit-forward.

FINDING THE RIGHT PROPORTIONS

Many classic cocktails follow simple ratios that demonstrate the principle of balance. A common structure for a sour-style cocktail is two parts spirit, one part citrus and one part sweetener. From there, bartenders may adjust proportions slightly

depending on the ingredients involved.

Experimentation is part of the process. A splash more citrus can brighten a drink, while a few extra drops of bitters may deepen its complexity. Ultimately, balancing a cocktail is both a science and an art. By understanding how sweet, sour, bitter, strong and dilution interact, anyone can begin crafting drinks that feel cohesive, refreshing and satisfying — one carefully measured ingredient at a time.



Sweeteners that Shape a Drink

Sweetness plays a crucial role in balancing cocktails.

While citrus and spirits often receive the spotlight, the sweetener used in a drink can significantly influence its flavor, texture and overall character.

From traditional simple syrup to more complex ingredients like honey or maple syrup, today's mixologists have a wide range of options to shape the final profile of a cocktail.

Choosing the right sweetener can enhance certain flavors, soften strong spirits or introduce subtle new notes that make a drink distinctive.

THE CLASSIC: SIMPLE SYRUP

Simple syrup is the most common cocktail sweetener because of its versatility and ease of use.

Typically made by dissolving equal parts sugar and water, it blends smoothly into cold drinks without leaving undissolved crystals.

Because it has a neutral flavor, simple syrup allows the other ingredients in a cocktail to shine. It is a staple in classics such as the daiquiri, mojito and whiskey sour.

It's easy to customize simple syrup. By simmering it with ingredients such as citrus peel, ginger or herbs, bartenders create flavored syrups that add sweetness and aromatic complexity.



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NATURAL SWEETENERS WITH CHARACTER

Other sweeteners bring their own distinctive flavors to a drink. Honey, for example, offers floral notes that pair well with citrus, bourbon or herbal ingredients. Because honey is thicker than simple syrup, it is often diluted with a small amount of warm water to create “honey syrup,” which blends more easily into cocktails.

Maple syrup adds rich,

caramel-like sweetness and works especially well with darker spirits such as whiskey or aged rum.

It lends warmth and depth to drinks served in cooler seasons.

Agave nectar, derived from the same plant used to make tequila, has become a popular choice in cocktails that feature tequila or mezcal. Its mild flavor and smooth sweetness make it a natural companion to those spirits.

EXPLORING FLAVORED SYRUPS

Flavored syrups open even more creative possibilities.

Fruit-based syrups made from berries or tropical fruits add vibrant color and brightness, while spice-infused syrups featuring ingredients such as cinnamon or cardamom introduce warmth and complexity.

Many bartenders experiment with botanical syrups that include herbs, flowers or tea. Lavender, rosemary and

hibiscus syrups are common examples that transform a simple drink into something more distinctive.

For home mixologists, experimenting with different sweeteners is an easy way to discover new flavor combinations. A small change in the type of syrup used subtly shifts a cocktail's balance, proving that sweetness is not just about sugar—it is an essential ingredient that shapes the character of the drink itself.

Seasonal Fruit in the Glass

Summer brings an abundance of fresh fruit, and many mixologists take advantage of the season by incorporating it directly into cocktails.

Ripe berries, juicy peaches, melons and other stone fruits can add natural sweetness, vibrant color and bright flavor that bottled ingredients often can't match.

Berries are among the easiest fruits to use. Strawberries, raspberries and blueberries can be muddled in the bottom of a glass to release their juices before spirits and mixers are added.

They pair well with vodka, gin and sparkling wine, creating drinks that are both refreshing and visually appealing.

Peaches and nectarines offer a slightly richer sweetness. Their soft texture makes them ideal for purees that blend smoothly into cocktails. Peach flavors work especially well with bourbon, rum or proscoco, and they can also be frozen and blended into chilled summer drinks.

Melons such as watermelon and cantaloupe bring a crisp, hydrating quality that complements lighter spirits. Fresh melon juice or small cubes added to a shaker can give



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cocktails a clean, cooling taste.

Using fruit at peak ripeness helps maximize flavor while reducing the need for added sweeteners. With a few simple techniques, seasonal produce can turn a classic cocktail into a drink that captures the essence of summer.

Try some of these cocktails that mix fruit with a special summer-release beer. All recipes are courtesy of Bell's Brewery. Each recipe serves two.

MELON MAGIC

Ingredients

Oberon Sunshine Lemonade Shandy
4 ounces watermelon juice
4 ounces cold lemonade
Lime, for garnish

Directions

Combine watermelon juice and cold lemonade. To taste, top with Oberon Sunshine Lemonade Shandy. Garnish with a lime wedge, and serve immediately.

*To make watermelon juice, freeze watermelon in cubes and

blend it when frozen.

MANGO MOMENT

Ingredients

Oberon Sunshine Tropical Shandy
4 ounces frozen mango, blended
4 ounces cold mango juice from concentrate

Directions

Combine blended frozen mango with cold mango juice. To taste, top with Oberon Sunshine Tropical Shandy. Serve immediately with a paper straw.

VERY CHERRY

Ingredients

Oberon Sunshine Cherry Limeade Shandy
4 ounces frozen cherries, blended
2 ounces triple sec
1.5 ounces simple syrup
Lime, for garnish
Cherry, for garnish

Directions

Combine cherries with triple sec and simple syrup. To taste, top with Oberon Sunshine Cherry Limeade Shandy. Garnish with a lime wedge and cherry on a skewer. Serve.

Ice Can Shape a Drink

Ice may seem like the most overlooked ingredient in a cocktail, but for bartenders, it is anything but an afterthought.

From the shape of a cube to the clarity of the water it is made from, ice forms how a drink looks, tastes and evolves from first sip to last.

Understanding the art of ice can elevate even a simple beverage, whether you are ordering at a bar or mixing drinks at home.

SHAPE MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

Not all ice is created equal. The size and shape of ice determine how quickly it melts, which directly affects dilution — a key factor in balancing a drink.

Large cubes or spheres melt more slowly than smaller, irregular pieces. That makes them ideal for spirit-forward drinks like an Old Fashioned, where too much dilution can weaken flavors. Crushed or pebble ice, on the other hand, melts quickly and is often used in cocktails such as a mint julep or tiki drinks, where a lighter, more refreshing texture is desired.

Bartenders choose ice shapes intentionally. A tall, narrow Collins glass might call for



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long, column-style ice to minimize air pockets, while a short rocks glass benefits from a single large cube that chills without overwhelming the drink.

CLARITY AND TASTE

Clear ice is more than just visually appealing. It is also a sign of purity.

Cloudy ice typically forms

when air bubbles and impurities are trapped as water freezes quickly. These impurities can subtly affect taste, sometimes adding unwanted

flavors or odors. Clear ice, often made through directional freezing methods, freezes slowly and pushes impurities out, resulting in a cleaner, more neutral chill.

High-end bars often use specialized equipment or techniques to produce crystal-clear ice, sometimes carving it into custom shapes. While this level of precision is not necessary at home, using filtered or boiled water can improve both clarity and flavor.

THE BALANCE OF DILUTION

Dilution is not a flaw — it is a feature. When ice melts, it softens the intensity of alcohol and helps blend flavors together. The key is controlling how quickly that happens.

A well-made cocktail is designed with dilution in mind. Bartenders may stir or shake a drink with ice to achieve the right amount of water before serving it over fresh ice. Serving a drink on poorly chosen ice can upset that balance, causing it to become too watery too quickly or remain overly strong.

Temperature also plays a role. Colder ice melts more slowly, which is why properly stored ice — free from freezer odors and kept at a consistent temperature — performs better in a drink.

In the end, ice is not just a way to chill a beverage. It is an essential ingredient that shapes the drinking experience.