



\$15 a month and your first month free

mypeople™ enjoy a simply better phone service

[learn more](#) 

MemberCenter

[Register/Log In](#)
[Forgot Log In?](#)
[Request Activation](#)
[My Classifieds](#)
[Help](#)
[About Us](#)
[Contact Us](#)

[Home](#)
[Local & State](#)
[Nation & World](#)
[Politics](#)
[Business](#)
[Sports](#)
[Lifestyles](#)

[Arts & Entertainment](#)
[Family & Community](#)
[Food & Fitness](#)
[Home & Garden](#)
[Postcards](#)
[Religion](#)
[Sunday Journal](#)
[What's Up](#)
[Bangs](#)
[Beck](#)
[Book Reviews](#)
[Carolina Cook](#)
[Gearino](#)
[Good for You](#)
[Jackson](#)
[Snow](#)
[Stein](#)
[Zane](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Obituaries](#)
[Multimedia Gallery](#)
[Weather](#)
[Archives](#)
[Print Edition](#)
[Blogs](#)

[Shopping](#)
[Classified](#) [Find|Post](#)
[Jobs](#) [Find|Post](#)
[Autos](#) [Find|Post](#)
[Homes](#) [Find|Post](#)
[Rentals](#) [Find|Post](#)



[Movies](#)
[Dining & Clubs](#)
[Weddings](#)
[Travel](#)
[Search](#)
[Education Guide](#)

Lifestyles

Topics: Arts & Entertainment | Family & Community | Food & Fitness | Home & Garden | Religion | Sking

Columnists: Bangs | Book Reviews | Good for You | Gearino | Jackson | Carolina Cook | Snow | Specialty of the House | Stein | Weekend Gourmet | Zane

Published: Nov 30, 2005 12:30 AM
Modified: Nov 30, 2005 10:36 AM

Making spirits bright

For impressive but easy holiday gifts, infuse liquor with flavors

Debbie Moose, Correspondent

Lemon-flavored vodka, coconut-flavored rum, sour apple martinis -- restaurant bars are becoming more like kitchens these days.

Flavored liquors are a big part of the resurgence of the cocktail. Infusions are an easy way to add more flavor to drinks without adding sugary mixers. And they're so simple to make that, starting now, you can easily have several ready for holiday entertaining or gift-giving.

Making your own also can be less expensive. Depending on the price of the vodka, rum or gin you select for infusion, you can save \$3 to \$4 a fifth. And you can go wild with your own distinctive flavor combinations.



If life gives you lemons, make limoncello for the adult beverage fans on your gift list.

Los Angeles Times Photo by Francine Orr

[MORE PHOTOS](#)

Bartender Doug Koppenhaver at Bogart's in Raleigh traces the infusion craze back to a single source: "Sex and the City."

Story Tools

 [Printer Friendly](#)

 [Email to a Friend](#)

 [Enlarge Font](#)

 [Decrease Font](#)

RECIPES

[Coffee](#)
[Liqueur](#)

[Berry Aquavit](#)

More Lifestyles

- [It's all in the details](#)
- [Christmas countdown](#)
- [Lovely vessels rise from shreds](#)
- [Top Drawer](#)
- [Warm thoughts](#)
- [Hidden gems in Chapel Hill](#)

"It really popularized that stuff," Koppenhaver says. "[The characters] used to drink Cosmos and Flirtinis. Young ladies really ate that up."

Bogart's infuses 14 flavors of vodka, plus a pineapple rum and five-olive gin, in house. Some of the most popular are vodkas infused with strawberries and with sour apple or watermelon flavors of Jolly Rancher hard candies. The sour apple candy infusion is the base of the bar's sour apple martini, which also includes commercial lemon vodka and sour mix.

At Lantern in Chapel Hill, bar manager Kristen Johnson's exotic infusions are less about party drinks and more about creating cocktails that complement the Asian-influenced restaurant's menu.

"I want to use fresh ingredients, because fresh product is what the restaurant prides itself on," Johnson says.

"People don't want powdered sour mix anymore. They want things that are handmade and to

Advertisements

View Print Ads

know where things are from."

Some recent cocktails on her menu include The Cunning Kimono (jasmine flower-infused vodka with a little honey and a lemon twist) and Meyer Lemon Drop (lemon-infused gin with Meyer lemon juice and sugar). Vodka infused with dried hibiscus flowers, which turns a vivid, deep magenta, is so popular that Johnson has to constantly replenish the stock.

Johnson raids the Lantern kitchen for ideas, and kitchen staff members come to her aid. They prepare many flavored sugar syrups for the bar, including one cooked with fresh ginger.

Cinnamon, cardamom, Kaffir lime leaves, dried orange peel and Thai basil have all found their way into infusions. One favorite is gold rum infused with a couple of cinnamon sticks, half a vanilla bean (scraped and scrapings included), two or three Thai chiles and about four black peppercorns, which is used in a cocktail mixed with pear nectar.

There was a time when it seemed as if everyone had a bottle of homemade coffee liqueur steeping in a dark pantry.

Today, that spot belongs to the popular limoncello. The Internet is full of recipes for this lemon peel-infused vodka, which originally was an Italian liqueur made with special Italian lemons.

Vivace, a restaurant set to open in Raleigh's North Hills in December, plans to center its bar menu on house-made limoncello. Frazier's in Raleigh has offered limoncello martinis.

Infusion cooking

If you'd like to have everything coming up lemons -- or other flavors -- at home, it's really easy.

Some infusions, such as the candy ones, take mere days -- long enough for the candy to dissolve into the vodka. Others, such as limoncello or ones using fresh fruits, take several weeks.

There's debate on the quality of vodka, gin or rum to use. Some think it doesn't matter and use the cheapest because of the added flavors; others think you should still use quality liquors and consider potato vodka to have the purest flavor. If you're experimenting with a flavor combination, start with the less expensive stuff, at least until you perfect your infusion, then see if you can tell a difference. But 100-proof vodka will bring out flavors faster than lower proofs.

Bourbon, scotch and other liquors with distinctive flavors on their own will not work well for infusions. Also, grain alcohol has too rough a flavor, even after infusion.

You can drop such things as spices or candies directly into the bottle, but you'll need to strain through cheesecloth when using to prevent small particles from getting into your drink. For fruit peels, fruits or cucumber, it will be easier if you use clean, dry quart-size Mason jars. And they're good if you don't want to make an entire fifth of a particular flavor. But wash and save the empty liquor bottles (soak off the labels) for storage of the completed infusion or for gift-giving.

Johnson offers this tip for coming up with flavor combinations: Place flavorings in a shot glass, fill it with the liquor and let it sit for 15 to 30 minutes. Taste at that point, and you'll have a good idea of what the finished version will be like.

Thoroughly wash any fresh items you use -- fruits, peppers, herbs, peels, etc. -- but they should be dry before infusing. If you want to try jasmine or hibiscus infusions like Lantern's, check the label and make sure to get teas that consist of only that flower. Don't get flowers mixed with green tea or other herbs. Dried hibiscus is often available in the Mexican food aisles of larger supermarkets, and pure jasmine tea can be found in Asian markets. About a teaspoon of either should be enough to flavor a fifth of vodka.

When removing citrus peels, avoid the white pith, which can be bitter. The smaller the shreds of peel, the more oils will be exposed to the liquor and the faster the flavor will transfer.

Some infusions, such as limoncello or fresh fruit ones, will benefit from the addition of simple syrup. As the name indicates, this is easy. Combine equal parts water and white sugar in a saucepan and place over low heat. Cook, stirring, until the mixture is clear and is not gritty. Then raise the mixture to boiling and boil for about a minute. Cool and refrigerate.

Any infused liquors with simple syrup added should be stored in the refrigerator or freezer.

You can add even more flavor to your cocktails by infusing simple syrups as well. Slices of peeled fresh ginger, cinnamon sticks and vanilla beans are intriguing options. Put them in at the beginning and cook, then strain out before storing or using. Don't use anything vegetable or leafy or ground spices.

Limoncello lowdown

There are as many recipes for limoncello as there are martini glasses in a bar. Basically, you remove the zest from 15 to 20 lemons, depending on the size, and place in a glass jar. Some recipes include the zest from one or two limes, to simulate the slightly more bitter flavor of the Italian lemons. Use a vegetable peeler or, if your wrist can stand the repetitive motion, a microplane grater (remember, none of the pith). Pour in a fifth of vodka. Let sit in a dark pantry, shaking every few days, for at least two weeks.

Some recipes put in simple syrup along with the peels and let it all steep together. You may be better able to adjust the sweetness level of the limoncello to your taste by waiting until after the peels and vodka have steeped to add the syrup.

When the peels seem to have lost their color and the vodka has turned yellow, the mixture is done. It should smell fragrantly lemony. Strain the mixture through cheesecloth, pressing to remove all the oils, into another clean glass jar. Stir in another fifth of vodka. Take 2 cups of simple syrup (2 cups sugar to 2 cups water) and add until the limoncello is as sweet as you like it.

If you store limoncello in the freezer (you saved the bottles, didn't you?), it pours in a delightfully semisolid state.

Serve it straight up as an aperitif. It's great in iced tea, too.

Flavor fantasy

For the candy infusions, you'll need 40 to 50 watermelon- or sour apple-flavored Jolly Ranchers per fifth of vodka.

The candy will dissolve (shake occasionally) within a few days, so if the flavor is not strong enough, add more.

Let your imagination go wild. Make a great vodka for Bloody Marys by infusing with hot peppers (a couple will probably be enough), a few slices of bell pepper and garlic. An easy combination is cucumber and lemon peel in gin, which goes well in a cocktail with fresh lemon juice and a little sugar. Check combinations such as these after a week or so for flavor, and let steep longer, if necessary.

Think of lemongrass, star anise or orange peels -- your flavor options are limited only by your pantry and creativity.

Create a special cocktail to match your dinner party menu. Or take something other than the usual bottle of wine as a hostess gift this holiday season. You're sure to be remembered.

Coffee Liqueur

beverage

This is a version of the familiar classic infusion.

4 cups water

8 cups sugar

1 1/2 cups instant coffee crystals

4 1/2 cups 100-proof vodka

2 vanilla beans

Mix water, sugar and coffee crystals in a saucepan. Heat and stir until dissolved. Cool to room temperature. Add vodka. Pour mixture into 4 bottles. Cut vanilla beans in half lengthwise and drop half a bean into each bottle. Cap.

Let sit in a dark pantry. After 2 weeks, strain, remove beans and rebottle.

Note: You can use decaffeinated coffee.

FROM WWW.CDKITCHEN.COM

Berry Aquavit

beverage

This fresh fruit infusion requires a long steeping time.

1 cup raspberries, blueberries, lingonberries or black currants

1 liter potato-based vodka

2 tablespoons simple syrup

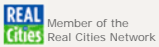
Put berries in a clean, wide-mouth glass jar with tight-fitting lid large enough to hold berries and vodka. Add vodka and seal. Keep vodka bottle; wash, soak off label, and wash and save cap.

Let sit at room temperature 6 to 8 weeks.

Strain and stir in simple syrup. Transfer to the original vodka bottle and reseal with cap. Label and keep in freezer.

ADAPTED FROM 'AQUAVIT AND THE NEW SCANDINAVIAN CUISINE' BY MARCUS SAMUELSSON (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN, 2003).

All rights reserved. This copyrighted material may not be published, broadcast or redistributed in any manner.



© Copyright 2005, The News & Observer Publishing Company
A subsidiary of [The McClatchy Company](#) 
[Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Parental Consent](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [N&O Store](#)

