

GinMonger Presents

THE GIN REPORT



The Guide To Everything You Need
To Know About Gin

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Gin 101: The Guide to Gin

Gin is in the midst of a powerful resurgence. Driven by the high-end boutique gins, with their mix of exotic and refreshing botanicals, Gin is becoming fashionable again. It is the choice drink for those who value style, traditional and sophistication in their drink. It is the quintessential cocktail drink, one that has a long and checkered past as well as a very optimistic future. This Guide to Gin will provide you with a comprehensive overview of Gin, including; the history of Gin, the regions where it is produced, the distillation process, the flavoring agents and the different types and styles of Gin.

Gin: What is it?

By definition, Gin is made from a neutral white spirit (primarily grain, usually rye or wheat) that is flavored with juniper berries and other botanicals. All gins are required to have juniper berries as a common ingredient. What gives each gin a distinctive character and flavor is the distillation process and use of different botanicals.

The History of Gin

You may have heard of nicknames for Gin such as “Blue Ruin”, “Dutch Courage”, and “Bathtub Gin”. A little history of Gin will explain the basis for these nicknames and more....

Gin was produced as far back as the early 16th century during the Dutch War of Independence. While there is some dispute as to the exact dates and origin of Gin, most historians can agree on its original purpose and use. Gin was first produced and sold in Chemist shops for medicinal purposes. It was used as a treatment for a variety of ailments from stomach problems to gallstones and gout. The flavor was awful, so to improve the taste, the Dutch decided to flavor it with juniper, which enhanced the flavor

and formed the basis for its current name. The term Gin is derived from the words “genievre” and “jenever”, (the French and Dutch words for juniper).

“Dutch Courage”

During the Dutch War of Independence, British Troops, who were fighting against the Spanish, would drink Gin to give them “Dutch Courage” during the long battles in the damp weather. It was said to help keep them warm and give them the fortitude to continue fighting. Eventually, as their tours would come to an end, the troops would return home and bring this new beverage with them. This would help fuel its growth and popularity in England.

“Blue Ruin”

By the late 1720’s, the people of England were consuming close to 5 million gallons of Gin annually, with an estimated 25% of all homes in London involved in the sale or production of Gin. Its primary consumers at this time were the poor. For them, beer and wine weren’t strong enough, brandy was too expensive, rum was for sailors, but gin easily accessible, cheap and extremely effective. However, the Gin of this time was nothing like Gin of today. Its sole purpose was to facilitate inebriation. The taste was so bad, it had to be sweetened with sugar, just to make it even slightly palatable. Abuse of Gin and rampant drunkenness became a major problem and Gin’s role in the situation led to the nickname “Blue Ruin”.

By 1736 the government had to pass the Gin Act to try to control production and use by making it extremely expensive. However, this act was very difficult to enforce and was routinely broken and resulted in riots breaking out on a regular basis. By 1742 the act was considered unenforceable and was repealed. A new policy was created that licensed retailers, provided reasonable excise duties and provided higher, but reasonable prices.

“Bathtub Gin”

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The rise of gin in the United States really did not occur until the prohibition days of the 1920's, when Moonshine and Bootlegging were the answers to the closed distilleries. For Bootleggers, whiskies were hard to produce because they required storage and aging in oak casks. Gin, however, was easy to make and did not require any aging. All that was needed for gin was a large container, such as a bathtub (hence the nickname "bathtub gin"), raw alcohol, juniper berry extract, spices and some other flavors. Once again, the gin produced from this method was of very low quality and poor taste. It was this poor taste that gave rise to the practice of mixing cocktails to hide the awful taste of the gin. At the end of 1933, Prohibition was repealed and the production of bootleg gin came to an end.

The end of prohibition in the United States, along with the multitude of English tax changes, government policies and reforms provided an avenue for respectable firms to get into the business of producing and retailing gin, which ultimately led to the evolution of the higher quality gin. Over time, additional reforms were put in place and the gin distillation process became more refined. Gin has since evolved into a drink with delicate balance and subtle flavors. This helped transform it from favorite drink of the poor to the drink of the sophisticated and high society.

The Distillation Process

While the exact approach differs from producer to producer, the fundamental process to making Gin consists of three steps. Its base is a clear, distilled grain spirit (or occasionally a molasses based spirit) that has no flavor or color. The flavor comes from the various botanicals that are added, as well as the unique distillation process applied by the producer. The three step process is as follows:

Step 1: Distill the base spirit.

The grain alcohol is distilled in a column still to a high proof, flavorless spirit.

Step 2: Distill the spirit again with the botanicals.

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The second stage is what differentiates a high quality gin from a lower quality compound gin. The lower quality versions are typically produced by soaking the botanicals and juniper berries in the base spirit and distilling the mixture a second time. The higher quality versions are flavored in a more unique manner. The alcohol vapor is passed through a chamber that holds the botanicals and juniper berries. This vapor will extract the essential oils and aromatics from the botanicals as it passes through the chamber and on to the condenser.

Note that a small still or use of small batches results in a higher quality Gin and is best able to capture the essences of the botanicals. This allows the Gin to maintain the balance of ingredients needed to create depth and character.

Step 3: Add water and bottle

Pure water is added to bring the strength down to the legal requirement before the final product is bottled. Gin is ready to be bottled straight from the still.

Unlike Whisky, it does not need a period of time for maturation

The Flavor of Gin

The primary flavoring agent in Gin (and Genever) is the Juniper Berry. The Juniper Berry is a highly aromatic berry that comes from the Juniper bush, a low evergreen that grows in Europe and North America. Since all Gins contain the Juniper Berry, what makes each Gin unique and versatile is the use of different, and often exotic, botanicals. There are approximately fifty different botanicals used in different Gin brands, the list includes:

Lemon and Orange Peel

Angelica Root

Coriander

Anise

Caraway Seeds

Orris Root
Licorice Root
Cinnamon
Cassia Bark
Rose Petals
Iris
Poppy
Bitter Almonds
Calmus
And many more.....

There are no requirements for how many or what type of botanicals are used in Gin. Different producers use as little as four to up to nineteen of these botanicals. The exact use and proportion of these botanicals is left up to the producer, and the quality and character of the gin will depend on the skill of the distiller when formulating the recipe. The premium gin producers tend to formulate the aromatic ingredients on the basis of the essential oil content in the raw botanicals to assure greater uniformity and consistency.

Varieties and Styles of Gin

When most of us think of Gin, what comes to mind is London Dry Gin. However, there are several other varieties and styles including, Genever, American Gin, Plymouth Gin, Old Tom Gin and Sloe Gin

English/ Dry/ London Dry Gin:

London Dry Gin (sometimes called “English” or “Dry Gin”) is the dominant English style of Gin. This Gin is exceptionally versatile and can be served straight or used in mixed drinks.

Genever:

Genever is the fuller-bodied Dutch cousin to Gin and actually tastes more like a whisky than a traditional gin. The primary difference is in the base spirit. While the base of Gin is primarily grain (usually Rye or Wheat), the base of Genever is primarily malt wine (a mixture of Rye, Wheat, Corn and Barley). Genever style Gins are produced in Belgium, Holland, and Germany. They are available in two styles, young (“jonge”) and old (“oude”). Old Genever tends to be sweet and aromatic, while young Genever has a lighter body and drier palate. They are usually served straight and chilled.

American Dry Gin:

American Dry Gin (often called “soft gin”) is lower in proof and less flavorful than London Dry Gin. It is generally used in mixed drinks.

Plymouth Gin:

Plymouth Gin is a more earthy and junipery style of gin than London Dry Gin, which has more citrus elements. There is currently only one distillery that produces Plymouth style gin, BlackFriars Distillery. It is considered to be the original base of the first dry Martini and can be served straight or used in mixed drinks.

Old Tom Gin:

Old Tom Gin is similar to the style of sweeter gin that was popular in 18th Century England. It was the original gin used in the Tom Collins. It has not been available in the United States for quite some time, but still can be found in England.

Sloe Gin:

Sloe Gin is not really a gin; rather it is a sweet liqueur with a Gin base. It is flavored with blackthorn plums (“Sloes” are the small purple fruit produced by the blackthorn) and aged in wood barrels. It is most commonly served in a Sloe Gin Fiz.

Regions Where Gin is Produced

Gin was first produced in Holland and quickly moved to England where it grew in popularity. Today, gin is made in areas where British and Dutch influences have historically been strong. It is produced in England, Scotland, Holland, Germany, The United States, France, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Spain. Below are the styles produced in a few of these countries:

England

The English tend to primarily produce London Dry Gin from column stills. English Gins tend to have a citrus flavor, due to their choice of botanicals (dried lemon and orange peels, among others). They generally have a high proof and are usually consumed chilled or as a mixed drink

Spain

The Spanish primarily produce London Dry Gin from column stills. They consume it as a mixed drink as well, but often with cola rather than tonic.

United States

The United States is actually the world's largest Gin market. Like Spain and England, the majority of the Gin produced in the U.S. is London Dry Gin produced in column stills.

Belgium and Holland

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Belgium and Holland produce Genever, which is made in pot stills. Genever is aged in oak casks for one to three years and has a much fuller body. These Genevers are chilled and served straight.

Germany

Germany produces Dornkaat, which is a Genever style gin produced in Frisia (a region on the eastern edge of the North Sea). This is a very light version of Gin, lighter in body than both London Dry Gin and Genever. In Germany, Dornkaat is chilled and served straight.