

Cheers! Celebrate the season with a gin cocktail

Christina Jordan, For FLORIDA TODAY 12:04 a.m. EST November 20, 2015



(Photo: Christina Jordan/For FLORIDA TODAY)

Gin for the holidays sounds like a recipe for a family disaster.

Opinions run high with those who dislike the aromatic juniper-infused spirit, but there are those who love gin.

It's actually a very diverse spirit, thanks to many new gins on the market that don't rely so much on juniper for flavoring, but use floral botanicals, citrus, spices and even vegetables. Gin is not just the original flavored vodka.

The juniper and other ingredients are redistilled back into the neutral grain spirit. This process infuses the botanicals into the spirit giving it a rich, full bodied flavor.

There are three main types of gin and at least five lesser known types. London Dry is what you will see on most liquor store shelves. It is juniper based with lots of citrus flavor. The taste is a little drier than other types. This makes it an excellent choice for a traditional gin martini.

Some common varieties of London Dry gin are Beefeater, Tanqueray and Bombay Sapphire. But try other lesser-known brands like Brooklyn gin. It is one of the smoothest gins on the market.

The second type of gin is Plymouth gin. It's like London Dry, but a touch sweeter and is only made in Plymouth, England. This is best used in Gin & Tonics. Plymouth brand is fantastic and with a little searching can be found locally.

Then there are the New Wave gins. These have less focus on the juniper and a wide array of unusual botanicals, spices, citrus, flowers and vegetables making up their flavor profile.

Hendrick's is the best known, using cucumber as a main component.

There's even a gin distilled in Florida. St. Augustine New World Gin has a touch of juniper, citrus, fresh herbs and amazing spice notes like cassia bark and angelica, according to its website.

Aviation Gin is another New Wave gin. It is distilled with cardamon, lavender and anise along with juniper.

These New Wave gins mix well in a wide variety of cocktails. They add a twist to classic gin cocktails like the Gimlet, Martinez, Bees Knees and the Martini.

But feel free to get creative and try these in other cocktails. Take your brunch mimosa of orange juice and champagne, add gin and a dash of grenadine. You have a Buck's Fizz. This classic British cocktail was invented at the Buck's Club in London in the 1920s.

The wide selection of gins available inspired me to get creative with an original recipe. I wanted to take the juniper flavor, which reminds me of the holidays, and pair it with other winter spices for a cozy cocktail to sip while writing holiday cards, wrapping presents and entertaining relatives.

I also wanted to use the great Florida citrus that we have in season right now.

Here is my contribution to turn those gin haters in your family into gin lovers.

The recipe below uses a Spiced Simple Syrup. I made this by grating fresh spices into my already-made simple syrup. I used fresh grated allspice, nutmeg, cloves and cardamom. You can play with the amounts in your version. For stronger spiced versions, use half a teaspoon of each spice. It's important to use fresh grated spices, because already-ground versions have a desiccant in them that will form a film on the top of your cocktail.

Jordan is an advocate for quality cocktails and a member of the Straw Hat Barmen.

'Tis the Season Spiced Gin Cocktail

1 ounce Fresh Florida orange juice

1 ounce spiced simple syrup

2 ounces gin

2 dashes Angostura Bitters

Crushed Ice

Fill an old-fashioned glass with crushed ice and set aside. Mix all other ingredients into a cocktail shaker, add ice and shake vigorously. Strain into glass with crushed ice. Garnish with orange peel.

Note: To make simple syrup, boil equal parts water and sugar until the sugar melts. Let cool before using.