

9 Things: 9 fresh ways to gin up your holidays

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Much as we might like otherwise, few of us have the cash, time or energy to maintain a full bar. And that can be a bummer, particularly as we move through the holidays and are constantly tempted to pour ourselves (sometimes even our guests) something creative and delicious to help make the season merry.

So this year we're taking a fresh approach to the holiday cocktail situation. We're going to limit ourselves to one liquor and build an entire bar's worth of cocktails around that. This way, no worrying about tracking down obscure (and expensive) liquors. Just stock up on the booze and everything else can be grabbed at the grocer.

We decided to build our bar around gin. It's an exceedingly versatile liquor that works well with so many flavors. Its spicy notes also mean it plays well with the heavier foods we tend to eat this time of year. And if gin isn't your thing, most of these ideas also would work well with vodka.

9 FRESH COCKTAIL IDEAS USING GIN

Start with 1 ½ ounces chilled gin:

- Grapefruit: Add 2 ounces grapefruit juice and 1 / 2teaspoon sugar to the gin in a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake and strain.
- Cucumber: In a cocktail shaker, muddle 2 inches of cucumber, then add the gin, ice and the juice of a lime. Shake and strain.
- Strawberry: In a cocktail shaker, combine the gin and 1 ounce of juice from a thawed container of frozen strawberries in syrup. Shake and strain.
- Cran-ginger: In a cocktail shaker, muddle two 1-inch slices of fresh ginger, then add the gin, ice and 2 ounces cranberry juice. Shake and strain into a glass. Top with ginger ale.
- Carrot-mango: In a blender, combine 1 / 4of a peeled fresh mango, 2 ounces carrot juice, and the gin. Blend, then pour over ice.
- Cider chai: In a cocktail shaker with ice, combine 1 tablespoon powdered chai mix, 2 ounces apple cider and the gin. Shake and strain.
- Extra-dirty: In a cocktail shaker with ice, combine ½ ounce spicy pickle juice, ½ ounce olive brine and the gin. Shake and strain.
- Rouge: Muddle a strip of orange zest in a glass, then add the gin and 2 ounces merlot.
- Vert: In a cocktail shaker filled with ice, combine the gin with 2 ounces sauvignon blanc, 1 / 2ounce lemon juice and 1 / 2ounce lime juice. Shake and strain.

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