

A woman with long, wavy red hair is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a pink and white striped halter-neck top. In her hands, she holds a clear glass filled with a light-colored beverage, garnished with a slice of lime and a red straw. The background is a dimly lit bar with various bottles on the counter and red and white striped awnings hanging from the ceiling.

Mixology - The Basics

How to Become a Better Bartender

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How to Become a Better Bartender

Lesson 9

First and foremost, don't be afraid; granted, it's not easy but once you're hooked on the Mixology concept, you will have a blast. This short introduction is about what a bartender should think about when they are considering graduating to the next level. These lessons were created to give a new bartender the ability and understanding to get to the next level, not to teach you the ingredients of how to make a specific drink. The cocktails mentioned in this lesson are provided to give you an idea of just how much knowledge is out there... *and all you have to do is pay attention and Google it.*

The really great part of deciding that becoming a mixologist could be in your future, is the realization that a lot of the basic groundwork has already been done for you. The makers of many of your liquors have been very creative and have given you an amazing start to the world of Mixology. An organic Vodka infused with cucumber and mint... a rum infused with a touch of maple syrup, bitters with a taste of vanilla... *can it get any easier for a "want-to-be" Mixologist?*

My friend Pam had 20+ years as an amazing bartender. The bar she had been working at for the last ten years had closed and she was on her way to an interview. At the end of the interview session, she was told that they were looking for a "real" bartender... a Mixologist...and she wasn't qualified. In this moment in time, Mixology was the new, exciting, buzz word.

Needless to say... Pam did not take this blow to her ego well, and after leaving the interview, she pulled up to a red light... and froze. It took several people to leave their cars and remove her from the driver's seat of her car. The Police and Paramedics were called, her car was towed, and she woke up in a hospital bed. The end result was what the doctors referred to as a mini-stroke.

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It took her several weeks to recover enough to start looking for work again but not as a bartender. She was the best bartender I have ever known, but she was now looking for a management position. Several years later, she gave up the general management position she was at and spent her time building a successful catering company.

The sad part of this story is that Pam had all the tools at her disposal to accomplish what she needed to do to get that job. She was an accomplished chef and had a small catering company as a side hustle. Her knowledge of food, combined with her twenty years of experience as a bartender, gave her everything she needed... to call herself a Mixologist. A few tweaks to her resume highlighting her food knowledge and combining it with her drink knowledge was all that she would have needed to do.

Tip of the day: As a general rule, all successful bartenders have a pretty big ego. do yourself a huge favor and leave your ego at the door when you leave for work. pam was an amazing bartender, but the blow to her ego changed her life.

It was a busy night at the biggest nightclub in the city; and the three bartenders, Larry, Moe and Curly were killing it behind the bar. It was a perfect moment in time, when all three got a Vodka Martini requested and they all realized that there wasn't a bottle of Dry Vermouth anywhere in the club; and the bar manager was nowhere to be found. After a few moments, the next available option would have been Triple Sec, but the bar manager neglected to order that as well. In his defense, it was a college bar and martini drinkers were rare.

Larry didn't miss a beat and told his customer that he was going to receive an extra dry martini, and that way he wouldn't even have to pick up a bottle of Vermouth. Moe also kept cruising and just substituted a little Gran Marnier and told his customer that he was going to upgrade him because he was such a good regular customer... *wasn't that special*. When Curly saw the reactions of his fellow bartenders, he decided to get one up on them. After pouring his Vodka in the mixing tin, he substituted a dash of Grand Marnier with a dash of Blue Curacao... and delivered an extremely high-end martini that not only looked awesome but tasted amazing.

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There are several [styles of orange liqueur](#), and while they all have the same basic citrus taste and are suitable substitutes for each other in most instances, there are subtle differences. Cointreau is a premium brand of triple sec that's stronger, drier, and less sweet than most triple sec. Curaçao is very similar and focuses on dried bitter orange peels. Grand Marnier uses brandy, giving it an amber color and darker flavor profile. The majority of orange liqueurs use neutral spirits, which is why they're clear or have a slight orange color.

Three different bartenders with three different options, and they were all right. They are all considered a Vodka Martini. Without Dry Vermouth... Triple Sec, Blue Curacao, Grand Marnier and Cointreau, are all acceptable alternatives. The orange-flavored liqueurs are all interchangeable and excellent options whether using Vodka or Gin. When it comes to Mixology, *your only limitations are your imagination.*

What's the difference between a bartender and a mixologist? They are two words often used interchangeably, but there are important distinctions and decisions you need to understand. Mixologists and bartenders are two different occupations but if you can master both skillsets, then you'll be a crucial part of any bartending team.

Bartenders are very customer-focused; and the expectation is that you'll make customers feel welcome and comfortable, with a friendly greeting, a smile and upbeat attitude, while serving great drinks and combining it with amazing customer service. A Bartender is there to listen to people while entertaining them... as they are telling you their stories. At the same time, as a bartender, you're still fully expected to create brilliant drinks for guests whenever they ask. You will often utilize the recipes and ingredients provided by the resident mixologist, but a true bartender can fake it till they make it. Even if they don't know the drink recipe, they are good at talking to their guests... and the guests love any interaction with *their* bartender.

One of the keys to becoming a great bartender is the ability to combine the knowledge you have of making drinks with the skill of keeping customers happy and entertained.

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As a mixologist, you design and produce cocktails which align with the style and ambience created by the establishment that you're working in, while keeping the chef's creations in the kitchen in mind. You look at the type of workplace you're in to make sure that whatever you produce is suitable; from fruity, summer drinks to festive Christmas cocktails. Depending on your location, the time of year may dictate your drink menu.

As your knowledge increases, you may start to create house-made bitters and syrups, creative garnishes and other ingredients that will be needed based on the drink menu you have created, and the food specials offered by your chef. As the Mixologist, taking the time to prepare the bar for the shift ahead will be a lot more work, but necessary to accomplish your goals.

There are some similarities between becoming a bartender vs a mixologist; but whichever you choose, you will need to remember that it's the same business. Your customers will need to be satisfied and happy while fulfilling their requests and delivering amazing drinks while making them feel comfortable so that they keep coming back. Another similarity is that both roles can be hard work. There's rarely time to take a break, a meal, or a bathroom break, as it's fast-paced and can usually involve long hours.

Learn about ingredients like syrups and flavored bitters and the effects that they have on the alcohol you're pouring. Not every bartender will be a mixologist, but it does help to have an understanding of how to build a cocktail. A mixologist will craft cocktails and know their effect on how they pair with food, where a bartender would rather focus on serving and entertaining customers. A bartender typically mixes cocktails while directly interacting with customers, and a mixologist is someone who creates original cocktails or reinvents existing ones. Creating a signature Bloody Mary for a restaurant or a twist on the classic Martini to showcase a new brand of your favorite gin would be considered mixology. Think of mixology as the science of cocktails. Mixologists need a wide knowledge of drinks, ingredients (from egg whites to bitters), and how various flavors interact. It also helps to know the history of cocktails and keep on top of industry trends; every city and state will have their own favorites.

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Of course, there's a huge intersection between the roles of a bartender and mixologist. It's not only possible to be both, but very common. While mixologists can work behind the scenes, such as cocktail menu consultants, they are also very often the lead bartender.

Now, this is just my opinion... and a simple suggestion, but if the goal is to become a "Mixologist", start with the basics, combined with a little bit of history. The cocktails created in the 1800's are amazing, and a really good opportunity to learn. The recipes created in the 1900's have been very well documented, and your patrons will believe you created them... *just for them*. A custom old fashion with blackberries and a touch of vanilla bitters can be created by a different mixologist/bartender in many countries around the world... *who's to say who did it first?*

Of Note: A mixologist is always considered a bartender... a bartender is always considered *just* a bartender until they receive the proper knowledge and training.

The term Mixology can have many definitions; from the bar owner that believes a "perfect" cocktail is the "only" cocktail, and a seasoned twenty-year veteran who just knows how to entertain the patrons, pour drinks, and is faster than most, is just a bartender... to the Mixologist who believes that his shit doesn't stink, and that the twenty minutes it took him to create the "perfect" cocktail was worth every minute. The fact that the other twenty patrons trying to order their beer or wine might be getting a little frustrated, never seems to be an issue to the current Mixologist on staff. Yes... it can be a great show, but there will always be that regular customer that is just there to get a drink. If the Mixologists can leave their ego at the door, then there is a chance that they are both a *Mixologist... and a Professional Bartender*.

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A true Mixologist can pair, correctly, whatever the drink they created, with the food being served. Whether it's wine or beer, or a high-end whiskey, it is important that the food *AND* drink taste good when consumed together. Enjoying an appetizer of mushrooms sauteed in Vodka and served with a Vodka Martini, can be amazing. The intricacies of a complex red wine paired with a roasted lamb shank goes to the next level if the sauce it's served with is enhanced with a touch of the wine you are drinking; or if the chicken being served was poached in the same white wine the guest ordered... *it's a whole new level.*

Becoming a Mixologist is not as hard as it seems, but there are a few basic thoughts to consider. Any food pairing starts with your ability to take a chance and your knowledge of preparing food. If you know how the food is prepared, and how the cocktail is created, then you should be able to make a simplified form of pairing.

For wine, its easy... if it grows together, it goes together; look at where the food and grapes grow. With the amazing, flavored liquors, mixes and bitters that are now available, you can combine similar ingredients in the creation of the cocktail. If you have a creative chef, ask him if he can do the same for the food. If I ordered sauteed mushrooms and I'm drinking vodka, I'll ask the bartender to give the chef two shots, one for him, and one to use in the sauté...there are many thoughts and sciences that can be used but you have to start somewhere. As a Mixologist you can create amazing pairings, but as a relatively new bartender... you may want to consider this as the start of your learning curve.

The following examples are unique in their own way and are considered very popular coast to coast. They are also recipes that may go back over a hundred years... and great examples of how creative bartenders can be.

The Sazerac

The Sazerac is a timeless cocktail that was created in New Orleans in the 1800s and is a simple recipe and a great way to [doctor up rye whiskey](#).

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The recipe requires just four ingredients: rye whiskey, a sugar cube, Peychaud's Bitters, and anise liqueur. It is one of the best examples of a well-balanced cocktail that you will ever encounter, with the anise, [bitters](#) and sugar perfectly accenting a spicy rye. Some may prefer to use their favorite bitters, some a [specific rye](#), and many may have a preference for the anise liqueur. Often, the glass is rinsed with [absinthe](#), and that's what we recommend here. The technique is often disputed, and the ingredients are a matter of personal preference. The official (and trademarked) Sazerac recipe from the Sazerac Company specifically uses Sazerac Rye Whiskey, Peychaud's Bitters and Herbsaint for the anise liqueur.

Many bartenders will tell you that there are a few things to avoid when making a Sazerac. Never shake it, don't serve it on the rocks or in a cocktail glass, but always serve it in an oversize old-fashioned glass; and never let the lemon peel touch the drink. Express the oils over the glass and hang the peel on the rim if you like, or discard.

"The Sazerac is a favorite, great whiskey cocktail. It has been recommended that following the recipe exactly is essential to the drink's success and you should never substitute for the Peychaud's bitters!

The Cocktail's ingredients

- 1 sugar cube
- 3 dashes Peychaud's Bitters
- 2 ounces [rye whiskey](#), to taste
- 1/4 ounce absinthe, or anise liqueur
- Lemon twist, for garnish

Start by filling an old-fashioned glass with ice. Let it sit while you prepare the rest of the drink. In a mixing glass, soak the sugar cube with the bitters and [muddle to crush the cube](#). Add the rye whiskey and stir. Discard the ice in the chilled glass and rinse it with absinthe: Pour a small amount into the glass, swirl it around, then discard the liquid. Pour the whiskey mixture into the absinthe-rinsed glass. Gently squeeze the lemon twist over the drink to release its essence. The older, seasoned bartender may discard it and will rarely drop it into the glass; lay it on the rim as a garnish if you like.

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The Sazerac cocktail may have begun in 1838 when Antoine Amedie Peychaud, a New Orleans apothecary, mixed [cognac](#) with his proprietary Peychaud's Bitters. In the 1850s, this cocktail was the signature drink of the Sazerac Coffee House in New Orleans. That's where it received its name and became the first "branded" cocktail. In 1869, bartender Thomas H. Handy purchased the bar from Sewell Taylor. A few years later, he added Peychaud's Bitters to the portfolio of his growing liquor business, which would eventually become the Sazerac Company.

By the 1890s, rye whiskey took over for the brandy, and Handy was selling bottled Sazeracs. In the 1940s, Herbsaint became the anise liqueur of choice, primarily due to the longtime ban of absinthe in the U.S. (it was lifted in 2007).

Every cocktail that has been around awhile has had many variations. The variations are among the most popular, but by no means are they the only options.

- For dilution, stir the whiskey with small ice cubes, then strain into a clean glass.
- Use a combination of flavored bitters.
- The Sazerac Company has recommended a 1.5 ounce pour of whiskey, but many prefer 2-3 ounces.
- Split the rye whiskey with equal parts of cognac.
- Muddle the sugar cube with a splash of water before adding it to the whiskey.
- Use a dash of simple syrup in lieu of the sugar cube.
- Experiment with different styles of rye whiskey and bourbons.
- Replace anise with other liqueurs (orange bitters with an orange flavored liqueur)

Tip of the day: As you develop your mixology skills, do your research on older cocktail recipes. They may have been created a century ago but would be an excellent starting point as you develop your skills... and your customers would love them.

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Luxardo Cherries

These fancy cherries are something altogether different from the standard Maraschino. The intensity in the flavor makes them worth every penny, and there are some cocktails like the [Manhattan](#) that require nothing but the best: with a Luxardo cherry on top. Bottom of Form

Luxardo cherries are the original cocktail cherry, invented back in 1905. They're small and so dark red they almost look black. Preserved in cherry syrup, their flavor is so intense and complex, you'll give up on Maraschinos entirely. Luxardo cherries have a pop of flavor and they're rich, sweet tart, and fruity, with a nutty amaretto-like finish.

The Luxardo distillery was founded in Croatia in 1821 and was famous for making [Maraschino](#), a cherry liqueur made from Marasca cherries that's used in several classic cocktails. The distillery started selling preserved cherries candied in a syrup made of Marasca cherry in the 1880's; and today these "Luxardo cherries" are manufactured in Italy. Maraschino cherries, the bright red kind are an American knockoff of the original that came about in the 1920's.

A bartender should always question... Luxardo vs Maraschino cherries? When should you use Luxardo cherries, since they're more expensive than the more standard Maraschino? Well, they taste *that good*. The flavor difference is like...eating a rich, dark chocolate homemade brownie vs chocolate chip cookies from a vending machine. Here's when you should use Luxardo cherries in a cocktail:

- When you want an absolutely, sophisticated flavor. The complex sweetness is far more interesting than the slightly sweet maraschino cherries.
- When you've got a simple drink, it can be a great opportunity to use a Luxardo for a completely unique experience.
- When you're drinking a classic cocktail customarily uses one but you want to mix it up a little.

Here is a sampling of a few of the best cocktails with Luxardo cherries. Here are the top drinks that use it as a garnish:

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- A *Manhattan* is a sophisticated whiskey drink was invented in the 1870's and has stood the test of time. With only three ingredients, there's so much going on in one sip! Always garnish with a Luxardo cherry.
- *Bijou Cocktail* is a unique classic cocktail that can impress. This drink was invented in the 1890's and was named for the colors of glittering jewels of the three liquors that make it up and demands that it be topped off with a Luxardo cherry.
- The *Rob Roy Cocktail* is a Scotch lovers take on a Manhattan lover. The Rob Roy is a Manhattan made with Scotch whisky instead of bourbon or rye. One... maybe two Luxardo cherries should be mandatory.
- Named for *Mary Pickford*, a star in the days of silent films, this 1920's cocktail is all about the charm. Take one sip and it's intriguing: pleasantly sweet and sour from the pineapple juice with a slightly funky finish from the Maraschino. There's more to this pretty pink drink than you'd expect!
- *El Presidente* is a 1920's slow sipper that's begging to be part of your cocktail repertoire. This Cuban classic never soared quite as high as the daiquiri or the mojito, but it's something special in its own right.
- *Vieux Carre* is a classic cocktail which comes from New Orleans: the name means "French Quarter" in French. It's strong and made with rye whiskey, Cognac and bitters. Top it off with a Luxardo cherry for a sophisticated finish.
- The *Aviation Cocktail* is a 1900's sour cocktail that's been revived. This purple drink tastes as great as it looks: it's sweet tart, with a hint of cherry and a floral nuance that come from maraschino liqueur and crème de violette.
- *La Louisiane* is a cocktail that hails from New Orleans, made with rye whiskey, absinthe, vermouth and Benedictine. This unique mixed drink is a classic cocktail from the 1800's that most people have never heard of!
- The *Brooklyn Cocktail* is a similarly spirit forward, with a few special twists to add nuance. Maraschino liqueur and dry vermouth add intrigue and round out the flavor in this sophisticated drink...and of course, the classic Luxardo garnish!
- The *Last Word Cocktail* is a pale green gin sour is a classic cocktail from the early 1900's that was all but lost to history. But with the revival of cocktail culture, this one's come back strong! It's equal parts sharp, sweet, and sour; and it's not a Last Word without the classic Luxardo cherry.

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Tip of the day: Your imagination is your only imitation when getting creation. make any change you desire and sample it and if you're still not sure, there will always be a team member that will volunteer.

The Old Fashioned

The typical old fashioned is bourbon, an orange slice and sugar cube muddled with a touch of angostura's bitters, and a splash of club soda. Now... replace the bourbon with a high-end Rye Whiskey and muddle some blackberries, a sugar cube, and a vanilla flavored bitters with a splash of sparkling water.

Tip of the day: When you use your imagination, you can replace any of the ingredients and call it your own.

Splitting Vermouths

Split your Vermouth to make the best cocktails and here's why; what one vermouth can't do, two or more vermouths can.

If you think about what vermouth brings to the table in a cocktail, you're generally looking at a bouquet of botanicals, the product of a proprietary recipe, and that means you're working with a direct expression of one single producer. There's nothing technically *wrong* with that. Every element of its recipe was likely chosen for a reason but tapping into what other vermouths have to offer opens up a whole new world of aromatics and flavors. That's exactly why Mixologists play around with their vermouths, (and bitters), using a variety of techniques, but the concept goes back earlier than you might think. The art of manipulating vermouth has been traced to Gold Rush-era San Francisco, around the mid-1800s.

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However, in the Barbary Coast neighborhood, a 40-square-block red-light district in the city's center, located above the ferry docks and nicknamed The Devil's Acre; is where early vermouth blending may have taken place. In the early 1900's, due to making the cross-country trek from New York to San Francisco, bartenders would get creative. By the time a few vermouths arrived from Italy, most would be less than desirable for a sophisticated palate, and most of these purchased before they left New York.; so buyers did what they've done since the dawn of time: they add ingredients... be it more spices, wine or spirits, to mask flavors.

Melding French and Italian Styles. For Craig Joseph, who manages [Ty Bar](#) at Four Seasons Hotel New York, blends his Italian vermouth for slightly different reasons than his San Francisco predecessors did. For Joseph, it all began with a barrel-aging project, which creates a stark difference between these vermouths when compared to their French counterparts. "I liked the influence of both and decided to experiment using [[French and Italian sweet vermouths](#)] in the same beverage," says Joseph. "The lightness and fruitiness of the French balances the heavier, more bitter Italian, which together rendered 'my' perfect vermouth." By combining French and Italian vermouth styles (both sweet), he was able to foster a flavor profile that might not exist otherwise, especially in one single bottle.

Speaking of perfect, a conversation around mixing vermouths would not be complete without a mention of the long-debated concept that is the "perfect" Martini or Manhattan. This drink style, which splits its vermouth component between both sweet and dry, usually in equal parts, can at times be reminiscent of '90s bartending school curricula, but most skilled bartenders today have their own approaches to making versions that actually taste good. A Martini's ideal vermouth combination is different for everyone, but it should be about creating balance. As another means of adjusting vermouth's flavor profile, some bartenders turn to infusion techniques. For one recipe, a bartender infused dried rose petals for heightened floral aromatics in a Martini variation. Things infuse at different rates, so start overnight and taste as you go. It is important to take risks... be bold... and always get creative.

Tip of the day: If you're looking to start playing around with your vermouths at home, a great place to start is creating your very own house blend, customized to your palate... and keep your Vermouth in the fridge.

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Maraschino Liqueur

Maraschino liqueur is a clear, cherry-flavored liqueur that's used in many [classic cocktails](#). It's made by distilling Marasca cherries, a variety that grows on the Dalmatian coast in Croatia. Large scale production of Maraschino started back in 1759 in Zadar, Croatia, where it's still manufactured today, as well as elsewhere in Europe and the US. Maraschino liqueur was the most popular cherry liqueur beginning in the late 1800's. It's generally used as a secondary flavor to back up primary liquors like gin, rum or whiskey. The flavor is dry with a hint of sweet, with vanilla, sour cherry and almond notes. It adds an incredible complexity to cocktails because of its unexpected flavor. When you add it to cocktails, it adds a hint of brightness and roundness. Maraschino liqueur adds a unique layer of complexity to cocktails and is absolutely worth a purchase for the budding home mixologist. You can drink it straight as a digestif, but it really shines in cocktails.

A few of our favorites...

- [Martinez Cocktail](#) Ingredients: Gin, sweet vermouth, Maraschino liqueur, Angostura bitters.
- [Hemingway Daiquiri](#) Ingredients: White rum, grapefruit juice, lime juice, Maraschino liqueur.
- [Last Word](#) Ingredients: Gin, Maraschino liqueur, Chartreuse liqueur, lime juice.
- [Mary Pickford](#) Ingredients: White rum, pineapple juice, Maraschino liqueur, grenadine.
- [Aviation Cocktail](#) Ingredients: Gin, lemon juice, Maraschino liqueur, crème de violette.
- [Brooklyn Cocktail](#) Ingredients: Rye whiskey, dry vermouth, Maraschino liqueur, Amer Picon or other herbal, citrusy amaro.

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Triple Sec

Making an orange liqueur from scratch is easy and offers multiple ways to customize it to your specific taste and needs. The recipe requires just a few ingredients, and while it isn't the fastest [homemade liqueur](#), it's mostly a hands-off project. This orange liqueur recipe in scan go in several directions to mimic the variety of commercially available options. When made with vodka, the combination of fresh sweet orange and dried bitter orange peels creates a sweetened bitter citrus flavor that's most similar to a [triple sec](#) or orange Curaçao. It becomes a replica of darker orange liqueurs like Grand Marnier if you add brandy to the mix.

To make orange liqueur, you'll begin by infusing vodka with the orange peels for at least a couple of weeks; letting it infuse for an entire month intensifies the flavor. After that time, the infusion is blended with simple syrup to transform the citrus liquor into a liqueur. The liqueur is drinkable right away, though the taste is even better when it's allowed to rest for an additional week or two.

This recipe makes about three cups of orange liqueur and will fill a standard 750-milliliter liquor bottle. You can use it in any cocktail recipe that calls for an orange liqueur, including margaritas or the cosmopolitan and orange martini.

Ingredients

- - 2 ½ cups of Vodka
 - ½ cup fresh navel orange peel (two medium oranges)
 - 2 tablespoons of dried bitter orange peel
 - ¾ cup water
 - 1 cup granulated sugar

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The steps

- Prepare the ingredients
- Remove the peel from the oranges
- In a one-quart jar, add the Vodka, fresh orange peel and dried bitter orange peel... seal and shake well. Leave in a cool dark place for two-four weeks, shaking the jar every two days... to infuse the flavors
- When the infusion is complete, make a simple syrup by combining boiling water and the granulated sugar (reduce to a simmer)
- Strain the orange peels from the vodka using a fine-mesh strainer lined with cheesecloth.
- Rinse out the infusion jar and use it to blend the orange liqueur by adding 3/4 cup of the simple syrup to the orange-infused vodka. Shake very well for at least 30 seconds. Taste the liqueur and add more syrup to sweeten to taste.

It's ready... and when you're ready... for a Grand Marnier substitute, use brandy in lieu of Vodka and using Tequila can result in a liqueur similar to Patrón Citrónge.

Club Soda – Seltzer – Mineral Water - Tonic

As you determine what path to take in your quest to become a better bartender, this section can give you some basic knowledge that may be considered invaluable in your Mixology quest. A simple Vodka or Gin & Soda takes on whole new flavor profiles by just substituting the soda used, and as your knowledge and experimentation increases, you can throw in different flavored bitters... remember, a Mixologist starts with your imagination, your knowledge and experience will come later.

Club soda, mineral water, seltzer, and tonic water all have varying flavor profiles and carbonation levels that will impart different qualities to a drink. Whether you're making a highball or topping one off, it might just be the most all-purpose mixer in your cocktail-making arsenal.

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Club Soda

The choice of most bartenders as a sparkling element, club soda includes added minerals like sodium bicarbonate and sodium citrate, resulting in fine bubbles and a minerally and slightly saline taste that makes it a closer match to sparkling mineral water than to seltzer. Bartenders love the salinity for the way it enhances many cocktails.

Seltzer Water

Seltzer is simply plain water that has been carbonated or injected with carbon dioxide. Its flavor is neutral, but popular brands typically come in a wide variety of flavors, from lemon-lime to hibiscus. Hard seltzer, meanwhile, is made with an alcoholic base such as fermented cane sugar.

Sparkling Mineral Water

Consider sparkling mineral water seltzer's cousin who studied abroad. Bottles like Perrier and Badoit include naturally occurring bubbles from sources like springs and wells; sometimes additional effervescence is added artificially. Flavor profiles and bubble sizes will vary based on the terroir and the minerals naturally present in the source: Natural springs in the Italian Alps give San Pellegrino a touch of salinity, while a limestone spring in Mexico gives Topo Chico its bouncy bubbles and what some consider a slightly citrusy taste.

Tonic Water

You can use most sparkling waters interchangeably in a pinch, but that's not the case with tonic water. Made with a base of soda water, the mixer gets its characteristic bitterness from the addition of quinine, a compound that comes from the bark of the Central American cinchona tree, once beloved for its antimalarial properties.

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Companies like Schweppes and Canada Dry usually add high-fructose corn syrup to balance the bitterness; you might instead try premium brands which employ less-processed sweeteners like cane sugar and agave. Tonic water is a natural match for gin and vodka, but you can use it any time you want to give a drink a bitter, bracing quality. Switch up your G&T with a White Port & Tonic or a Summer Tonic, a refreshing mix of rum, amaro, and aromatic tonic water.

Tip of the day: Make the effort and take the time to sample each one and decide for yourself what you like and dislike. After all, you are the one creating and suggesting these “different” takes on old cocktail recipes; and it’s hard to recommend a drink if you have no idea what it tastes like.