

# **BARTENDER ADVISORY GROUP**

## **TRIPLE SEC**

This “Triple sec” category can be somewhat confusing, depending on who you are asking. Certain brand names are synonymous with different styles, and origin stories are hazy to say the least. Here’s a quick overview of the basics.

Today, the term triple sec is often used as a generic term for any orange liqueur and may denote a low-grade knock-off; using added sugar to mask the poor quality and taste. High-quality triple secs, meanwhile, can be consumed neat or as part of a cocktail; and can be used quite often in Mixology.

### *Triple Sec*

A dry style of orange liqueur, triple sec hails from France. Some attribute the actual name as being a translation of the words “triple dry.” According to Cointreau, the self-proclaimed creator of the product, says it is a reference to triple distillation (which, apparently, doesn’t actually occur in its preparation).

### *Curaçao*

The Lucas Bols distillery was established in 1575, and has been producing liqueurs for more than 400 years. Bols says it had hundreds of liqueur and spirit recipes under its belt by 1820, with Curaçao being one of them; but Curaçao is generally agreed to be the original orange liqueur; and was created in the 19th century by Dutch settlers on the island of the same name. Curaçao is now both a brand and category name. The liqueur is traditionally rum-based but modern iterations are also made with distilled grain spirits.

Made with tropical oranges that were planted by the Spanish, quality Curaçaos are typically sweeter than other orange liqueurs; and will range in strength from 15 to 40 percent ABV. As with all popular beverages, cheap imitations appeared, often including extra sugar to mask poor flavor. This led to the spirit becoming more closely associated with sweetness rather than orange flavor. Most drink enthusiasts prefer to steer clear of the modern-day, artificial Curaçaos in orange, blue, and green hues.

### *Cointreau*

Cointreau is one of the best-known brands of the triple sec style of orange liqueur. The drink was first released in 1875 and is made using a mixture of sweet and bitter orange peels, combined with sugar beet alcohol. Cointreau has a crisp, smooth, orange flavor; and its high-quality production means you can enjoy it neat, over ice, or in cocktails. Cointreau uses three types of orange in its liqueur: sweet, macerated, and bitter. Edouard Cointreau decided to call the concoction “triple sec,” a reference to the triple concentration of the ingredients.

### *Grand Marnier*

Is classified as a Curaçao/triple sec hybrid, made from a mix of Cognac, distilled bitter orange essence, and sugar. It first appeared in 1880, and was originally called “Curaçao Marnier,” in reference to its high quantity of brandy. Like Cointreau, Grand Marnier measures 40 percent ABV, and can be enjoyed neat or in mixed drinks.

*Of Note:* Cognac is a type of brandy from the Cognac region of western France, located south-west of Paris and just north of Bordeaux. The base wine is made primarily from white grapes Ugni Blanc, Folle Blanche, and Colombard. Distillation occurs twice, exclusively in a copper pot still. The result is a clear liquid with roughly 70 percent alcohol.

## ***A Triple Sec Recipe***

Making an orange liqueur from scratch is easy and offers multiple ways to customize it to your specific taste and needs. This orange liqueur recipe can 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 can become a replica of darker orange liqueurs like Grand Marnier if you add Cognac or brandy to the mix.

To make an orange liqueur, you should begin by infusing vodka with the orange peels for at least a couple of weeks; letting it infuse for an entire month will intensify the flavor. The infusion should then be blended with simple syrup to transform the citrus liquor into a liqueur. The liqueur is drinkable right away, though it should be allowed to rest for an additional week or two. The recipe makes about three cups of orange liqueur and will fill a standard 750-milliliter liquor bottle.

### *Ingredients*

- 20 ounces of vodka
- 6 ounces of water
- 30 grams (1/2 cup, unpacked) fresh navel orange peel, from 2 medium oranges
- 10 grams (2 tablespoons) dried bitter orange peel
- 1 cup granulated sugar

### *The Steps to Make It*

- Using a vegetable peeler, remove the peel from two navel oranges.
- In a 1-quart jar, add the vodka, fresh orange peel, and dried bitter orange peel. Seal, shake well, and let infuse in a cool, dark place for 2 weeks (or up to 1 month), shaking the jar every day or two.
- The day the infusion is complete, make a rich simple syrup: Bring the water to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium heat and stir in the sugar until completely dissolved and the syrup is clear. Reduce to a simmer. After 5 minutes, remove the pan from the heat and let cool completely.
- 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.
- Transfer the orange liqueur to a bottle or jar with a tight-fitting lid and use in your favorite cocktail recipes.

### *Tips*

- For consistent results, purchase dried bitter orange peel. It's sold in small bulk packages by retailers that specialize in dried botanicals, including several online shops.
- Avoid using the cheapest vodka for this recipe, particularly if you hope to replicate high-end liqueurs like Cointreau or Grand Marnier. While top-shelf is not required, it's best with a [smooth vodka](#) that you enjoy drinking straight or in mixed drinks.
- Navel orange peels have a nice sweetness that offsets the bitter peel in this recipe. To reduce waste, peel the fruit then cut it in half and squeeze out the juice.
- A vegetable peeler is a quick and easy way to remove large strips of peel and avoid most of the white pith, which will add even more bitterness to the liqueur.

- To make a Grand Marnier substitute, replace one cup of vodka with Cognac or brandy.
- Using tequila instead transforms this recipe into a liqueur that's similar to Patrón Citrónge.

*Of Note:* Alcohol is a natural preservative, but sugar reduces a liqueur's shelf life. It's best to drink your homemade orange liqueur within six months and store it away from heat and direct light. Refrigeration is not required, and you may want to shake it before use. If you notice any crystalizing or off-flavors, make a new batch.

This home-made version, when made with 80-proof vodka, the orange liqueur will be around 28 percent alcohol by volume (ABV, 56 proof). That's similar to the average triple sec and equivalent to a shaken margarita. Using a 100-proof vodka intensifies the flavor and yields a liqueur closer to Cointreau, at around 38 percent ABV (76 proof).