

# Cordials & Liqueurs

The terms cordial and liqueur are interchangeable. Liqueurs are a combination of a distilled spirit and flavorings. Many of these products were developed in the Middle Ages as medical remedies, love potions, etc. Cordials and liqueurs are usually sweet in taste. They must contain at least 2.5% sugar by weight. Most contain considerably more. Some liqueurs contain as much as 35% sugar by weight. If the product contains less than 10% sugar by weight, it must be labeled as “dry.” The sugar source may be beet, maple, sugar cane, honey, corn, or a combination of these.

Most cordials and liqueurs contain between 17-30% alcohol by volume. (Or 34-60 proof.) Some liqueurs, however, contain 50% or more alcohol by volume. (Or 100 proof.)

There are three methods to extract the flavors needed to produce a cordial or liqueur:

## 1. **Infusion or Maceration:**

Infusion involves crushing fruits and soaking them in water. Often, this process can take up to a year to allow the fruit's taste to be fully absorbed into the water. This liquid is drawn off and stored in a tank for several days and then filtered. The fruit is then distilled to extract any remaining flavor. Next, the distilled liquid from the fruit and the filtered liquid are combined. Finally, syrup and/or sugar are added to sweeten the product. Maceration is a very similar process to infusion. The difference is that the crushed fruit is soaked in alcohol instead of water. Then, the product is filtered and added to the liquid from the distilled fruit. Finally, the product is sweetened and bottled.

## 2. **Percolation:**

Percolation involves pumping a distilled spirit (like brandy) through an apparatus containing leaves or herbs continuously for a period of time. (Maybe hours, days, weeks, or even months.) The flavoring agent (the leaves or herbs) is then distilled and the resulting product is added to the liquid produced from the percolation process. This product is then sweetened, colored (if needed), and bottled.

## 3. **Distillation:**

Distillation involves using heat to extract flavor. A flavoring agent such as seeds or flowers is soaked in alcohol for hours. Then, it is placed in a copper pot still with additional spirits and distilled. The resulting product is then sweetened and usually colored before bottling.

There are two types of cordials or liqueurs: generic and proprietary.

Generic cordials or liqueurs are produced from universally known recipes. (An example of a generic liqueur is amaretto.) Proprietary cordials or liqueurs are produced from secret recipes. (An example of a proprietary liqueur is Benedictine.) You may occasionally see a liqueur labeled as proprietary.

Note: You may see liqueurs listed as either proprietary or generic in magazine articles or books. I have encountered numerous lists of this kind and some liqueurs have appeared as proprietary on one list and generic on another.

Liqueurs are often labeled either “after dinner drinks” or “aperitifs.” An after dinner drink, as the term indicates, is consumed after dinner with the purpose of aiding the digestion of a meal and/or savoring the meal. Aperitifs are consumed before the meal and are intended to stimulate the appetite.