

# Vodka

Vodka is believed to have originated in either Russia or Poland in the 14th century. Its immense popularity was confined primarily to Russia, Poland, and the Baltic States until after World War II. The United States government did not classify vodka as a separate category of distilled spirits until after World War II. Today, vodka accounts for one of every four bottles of distilled spirits sold in America and is the most popular category of distilled spirits.

In Eastern Europe, vodka is usually consumed chilled and straight in small glasses. The rest of the world has primarily used vodka as an ingredient in mixed drinks. However, the new wave of super-premium vodkas has begun to increase America's consumption of this spirit straight or on the rocks.

According to the United States Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, vodka is a spirit without any distinctive character, aroma, taste, or color. There are a number of means to produce vodka, as long as the finished product meet these criteria.

Since vodka is neutral in flavor, it can be made from a number of ingredients. In Russia and Poland, potatoes were traditionally used in the production of vodka. Today, most brands are made from grains, including wheat, barley, rye, or corn.

To make vodka, you must distill a fermented mash of one of the food sources listed previously at high proof. Vodka is distilled around 190 proof (versus 160 proof for whiskies). This eliminates any traces of flavor remaining in the product. Then, the product is usually purified by charcoal filtering. The product continuously flows through the charcoal for at least eight hours. Using modern technology, vodka comes from the still about 95% pure. The charcoal filtering removes most, if not all, the remaining impurities. Some vodka are distilled and/or filtered multiple times to ensure premium purity. Most vodkas are bottled at 80, 90, or 100 proof.

The water used in the production of vodka is very important. Natural spring water is preferred to distilled or treated water, since water constitutes 50% or more of vodka.

Unlike whiskey, vodka in almost all instances is unaged.