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A Concise Guide to Brandy

Brandy is a distilled wine that has been boiled or "burnt," as the Dutch would call it. In fact, the Dutch translation for brandy, *brandewijn*, literally translates to "burnt wine."

Brandy, an alcohol that wasn't always consumed for pleasure, has a long, honored history. The medicinal use of brandy began with the Arabs sometime in the seventh or eighth century. Brandy (in the form in which it is now known) came to Europe in the 14th century and was widely distributed throughout the continent by the 16th century. It had a late start in America; it wasn't until the 18th century that brandy was introduced in California.

Later, in the 19th century, the Irish took the distillation of brandy to a new level with the invention of the column still, a device that created a higher and more refined concentration of alcohol in the finished product. In today's world, brandy is distributed and consumed nearly worldwide.

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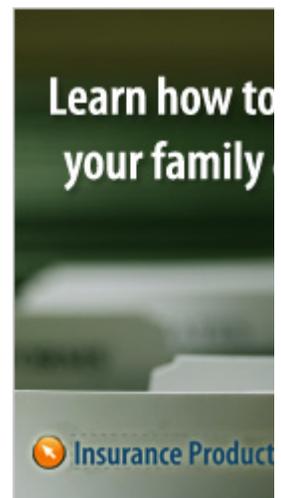
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How Brandy is Made

Brandy is a spirit made from grapes, pomace (the solid remnants of pressed fruit) or fermented fruit juice. Once distilled, the length of the aging process and the matter in which it is aged vary depending on the manufacturer. For example, grape brandy is made from pressed grapes and is usually aged in wooden casks



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for several years.

Pomace brandy is made from the leftover solids of pressed fruit that have been mashed into a pulp and then stored for months in glass bottles. Fruit brandy is made from whole fermented fruit or distilled from fruit juice. It is then usually aged in steel, clay or glass for an average of six months.

Types of Brandy

Though all brandy originates from one of three bases - grape, pomace or fruit - there are various types of brandy within each group. Here are the most widely known:

- **Armagnac**, named after a French province, is the oldest brandy known to France and is commonly known as the best quality brandy - second only to Cognac. Aged in oak casks that are local to the region in which it is made, this grape brandy is best enjoyed as an accompaniment to dessert or a leisurely after-dinner cigar.
- **Calvados** is an apple-flavored fruit brandy from Normandy, France. The apples from which this brandy is made are carefully selected to create a perfect sweet/tart taste combination. Calvados can be served as an *aperitif* to rouse the appetite, in between meals or after dinner as a *digestif*.
- **Cognac** is a French grape brandy named after its town of origin in France. Cognac is known as the highest quality of brandy, as it is distilled twice using copper stills and aged a minimum of two years in oak barrels. This process gives it a mature, mellowed flavor meant to be enjoyed unadulterated by any type of mixture.
- **Eau de Vie** is the French term for a colorless fruit brandy that is, unlike other types of brandy, served chilled. With the original fruit taste intensely preserved, it has been used for hundreds of years in Europe as an after-dinner *digestif*, or digestive aid.
- **Flavored Brandies** are fruit brandies that have had sugar and food coloring added to them. Peach brandy, cherry brandy and apricot brandy are a few examples. This type of brandy is mostly used in mixed drinks.
- **Palinka** is a Hungarian or Romanian fruit brandy that can be made from apples, pears, plums, apricots and/or cherries. This type of brandy has a cruder taste than most and is usually drunk straight up, as a shot.

Preparing and Drinking Brandy

Well-aged brandy is often best enjoyed on its own. A high-quality brandy should be stored and served at room temperature. If you are drinking brandy neat (not mixed with anything), brandy glasses should be chosen with great care, and a brandy snifter is

usually preferred. With its broader base and narrower rim, the shape of a brandy snifter allows the flavor of the brandy to move to the top of the glass.

For the full experience, try the following:

1. Hold the snifter in your palm, allowing your hand to warm the temperature of the brandy.
2. Bring the snifter up to chin-level, and take a few shallow breaths through the nose, sniffing the "bouquet."
3. When sipping, take a few drops and hold it on your tongue - this allows you to taste the attitudes of the brandy without being overwhelmed by the taste of the alcohol.

Brandy Drinks

For those who prefer to mix brandy, brandy cocktails come in many flavorful varieties. The most popular cocktails that use brandy include the:

- Brandy Alexander
- Brandy Sour
- Hot Toddy
- Sidecar
- Stinger
- Zombie.

Try out a few of the above with the following brandy recipes.

Brandy Alexander Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 oz. brandy
- ½ oz. brown crème de cacao
- 2 oz. cream
- nutmeg.

Directions

1. Combine ingredients in a shaker, along with ice.
2. Shake well and strain into a cocktail glass.
3. Top with nutmeg.

Sidecar Recipe

Ingredients

- granulated sugar, to taste
- ½ oz. brandy
- 1 oz. Cointreau or triple sec
- 1 oz. lime juice
- lemon wedge.

Directions

1. Wet rim of cocktail glass and dip in sugar.
2. Combine brandy, Cointreau or Triple Sec and lime juice with ice in a cocktail shaker.
3. Shake and strain into the cocktail glass, garnishing the cocktail with lemon.

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