

## COCKTAILS

A **cocktail** is a style of mixed drink. Originally a mixture of distilled spirits, sugar, water, and bitters, the word has gradually come to mean almost any mixed drink containing alcohol.

A cocktail today usually contains one or more types of liquor and one or more mixers, such as bitters, fruit juice, fruit, soda, ice, sugar, honey, milk, cream, or herbs.

**History.** The earliest known printed use of the word "cocktail" was from *The Farmer's Cabinet*, April 28, 1803: "11. Drank a glass of cocktail — excellent for the head ... Call'd at the Doct's. found Burnham — he looked very wise — drank another glass of cocktail."

The earliest definition of "cocktail" was in the May 13, 1806, edition of the *Balance and Columbian Repository*, a publication in Hudson, New York, in which an answer was provided to the question, "What is a cocktail?" It stated that: "Cocktail is a stimulating liquor composed of spirits of any kind, sugar, water, and bitters — it is vulgarly called a bittered sling and is supposed to be an excellent electioneering potion, inasmuch as it renders the heart stout and bold, at the same time that it fuddles the head. It is said, also to be of great use to a Democratic candidate: because a person, having swallowed a glass of it, is ready to swallow anything else."

Compare the ingredients listed (spirits, sugar, water, and bitters) with the ingredients of an Old Fashioned. Often, the Sazerac is cited as the first cocktail, even though it didn't appear until 25 years later.

The first publication of a bartenders' guide which included cocktail recipes was in 1862: *How to Mix Drinks; or, The Bon Vivant's Companion*, by "Professor" Jerry Thomas. In addition to listings of recipes for Punches, Sours, Slings, Cobblers, Shrubs, Toddies, Flips, and a variety of other types of mixed drinks were 10 recipes for drinks referred to as "Cocktails." A key ingredient which differentiated "cocktails" from other drinks in this compendium was the use of bitters as an ingredient, although it is not used in many modern cocktail recipes.

The first "cocktail party" ever thrown was allegedly by Mrs. Julius S. Walsh Jr. of St. Louis, Missouri, in May 1917. Mrs. Walsh invited 50 guests to her mansion at noon on a Sunday. The party lasted one hour, until lunch was served at 1 p.m. The site of the first cocktail party still stands. In 1924 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis bought the Walsh mansion at 4510 Lindell Blvd., and it has served as the local archbishop's residence ever since.

During Prohibition in the United States (1920–1933), when the sale of alcoholic beverages was illegal, cocktails were still consumed illegally in establishments known as speakeasies. The quality of the alcohol available was far lower than was previously used, and bartenders generally put forth less effort in preparing the cocktails. There was a shift from whiskey to gin, which doesn't require aging and is therefore easier to produce illicitly.

Cocktails became less popular in the late 1960s and 1970s as other recreational drugs became common. In the 1980s cocktails once again became popular, with vodka often substituted for gin in drinks such as the martini. In the 2000s, traditional cocktails and gin are starting to make a comeback.

**Etymology.** There are several plausible theories as to the origin of the term "cocktail." Among them are:

- Barrel taps are known as *cocks* and the term *tails* usually referred to the dregs of distillate left at the end of a run in a distillery or at the bottom of a cask. Colonial taverns kept their spirits (rum, brandy, whiskey, gin, applejack) in casks, and as the liquid in the casks lowered the tavern keeper would combine the *tails* into an additional cask kept for that purpose, to be sold at a reduced price. The patrons would request the "cock tailings" or the tailings from the stop cock of the cask.
- Fighting cocks were given a mixture of spirits by their trainers before a fight. This mixture was known as a *cocks-ale*.
- In Campeche, Mexico, local bartenders used wooden spoons carved from a native root known as *cola de-gallo* (*cock's tail*) to stir the local spirits and punches before serving.

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## COCKTAILS, continued

- In tribal Ireland, clan chiefs would gather to consult on matters such as border disputes, and to discuss cooperative plans when the island's residents were faced with a common foe. These meetings would typically take place in the great hall of the hosting clan. The clan chiefs would seat themselves at a communal table and their mugs of mead would be adorned with a cock's tail to signify their status.
- A tavern near Yorktown, New York was popular with the officers of the Revolutionary soldiers of Washington and Lafayette. The American troops preferred whiskey or gin, the French preferred wine or vermouth. All enjoyed a bit of brandy or rum. Sometimes late in the evenings, in a spirit of camaraderie, the spirits were mixed from one cup to another during toasts. A soldier stole a rooster from the tavern owner's neighbor, who was believed to be a Tory supporter of George III of the United Kingdom. The rooster was promptly cooked and served to the customers, with the tail feathers used to adorn the accompanying drinks. The toasts accompanying this meal were "vive le cocktail" and the mixed drinks were so called ever after.
- Cocktails were originally a morning beverage, and the cocktail was the name given as metaphor for the rooster (cocktail) heralding morning light of day. This was first posited in 2004 by Ted Haigh in "Vintage Spirits & Forgotten Cocktails," and can be distinguished from the theory "take two snips of the hair of the dog that bit you," which refers to consuming a small bit of alcohol the morning after a "binge drinking night" to curb the effects of the symptoms of the hangover, in the belief that these symptoms are the result of a form of withdrawal.
- A cock's tail has feathers in many varied colours as a cocktail has varied alcoholic drinks mixed together.
- Some say that it was customary to put a feather, presumably from a cock's tail, in the drink to serve both as decoration and to signal to teetotalers that the drink contained alcohol.
- Another etymology is that the term is derived from *coquetier*, a French double-ended egg-cup which was used to serve the beverage in New Orleans in the early 19th century.
- In the 1800s it was customary to dock the tails of good horses of mixed breeds. These horses were referred to as *cock-tails*. The beverage known as a "cock-tail," like the horse, was neither strictly spirit nor wine — it was a mixed breed, but a good horse nonetheless.
- After *cokstele* or *cock-stick*, a type of weighted stick used for throwing at cocks as a sport.
- The word could also be a distortion of Latin [*aqua*] *decocta*, meaning "distilled water".
- In the book, *Under the Mountain*, by Margaret Robson, published in 1958, the author states, "James Fenimore Cooper stayed (at Hustler's Tavern) in Lewiston, New York in 1821 while writing *The Spy*. In *The Spy*, Cooper wrote of *cock-tails* being served in Betsy Flanagan's tavern. Cooper researched the novel by using information taken from war veterans and used the owners, Thomas and Catherine Hustler, as the models for Sergeant Hollister and Betty Flanigan. According to Cooper, it was Catherine Hustler who invented the gin cocktail, stirring it with a feather from a stuffed rooster's tail." Catherine Hustler described her drink by saying, "it warms both the soul and body and is fit to be put in a vessel of diamonds." Hustler's Tavern, which stood at the northeast corner of 8th and Center Streets in Lewiston, NY, is no longer standing.

**Derivative Uses.** The word "cocktail" is sometimes used figuratively for a mixture of liquids or other substances that are not necessarily fit for consumption. For example, the usage of such a word could be as follows: "*120 years of industry have dosed the area's soil with a noxious cocktail of heavy metals and chemical contaminants.*"

A makeshift incendiary bomb consisting of a bottle of flammable liquid (usually gasoline) with a flaming rag attached is known as a "Molotov cocktail."

Source: Wikipedia