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Home ▶ Collector Tips ▶ The Beginner's Guide to Types of Whiskey

The Beginner's Guide to Types of Whiskey



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Drinking whiskey has long been seen as a pastime of men in suits, but the tides are changing. With the rise of the craft cocktail bar, the popularity of this classic liquor is reaching far beyond the country club. The guide below delves into different varieties for refined palates and identifies the go-to

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drink for all whiskey lovers — from beginners to experts.

With Father's Day around the corner, having some insight into the traditional drink of dads will help narrow down the best bottle for grandpas, fathers, and husbands. Each description includes a taste profile and pairing suggestions as well as signature drinks.

For the purposes of this article, all forms of distilled fermented grain mash will be referred to as "whiskey". Several countries including Scotland, Canada, and Japan have varied spelling, but for consistencies sake the "e" will be included throughout.

History



Whiskey is created by distilling fermented grains. Evidence of this process can be traced as far back as ancient Mesopotamia. Eventually, this method of creating alcohol found its way into European monasteries. It arrived in Scotland and Ireland sometime between the 11th and 13th century and was beloved by the royals ruling the British Isles.

Grapes were not readily available in Scotland, which led



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locals to focus on perfecting the art of distilling what they had in abundance, which was grain. Over the next few centuries, Scots' love for whiskey was tested several times. In the 18th century, a tax was imposed on alcohol production, leading distillers to come up with creative ways to avoid detection. Many would work only at night when the smoke from the fires would be less visible. Thus the infamous nickname "moonshine" was born.

Whiskey made its way to the new American colonies when Irish, English, and Scottish immigrants made the journey west. In the newly formed United States, distillers again faced backlash from the government and a heavy tax was imposed. The level of anger escalated into the Whiskey Rebellion, and the tax was eventually discarded in 1802.

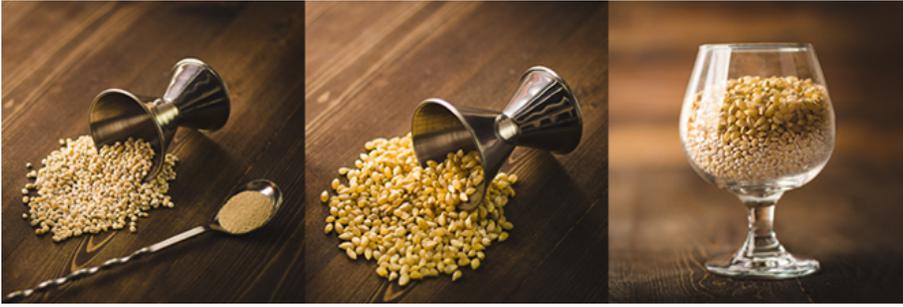
Around the same time, in 1823, the English government also eliminated bans, which led to a period of increased whiskey production. The Prohibition era and the 150-year-long Scottish ban on alcohol drove whiskey underground until the tides changed in the mid-20th century.

Light spirits took over American bars in the 1960s causing established distilleries like Jim Beam and Jack Daniels to focus on international sales. Single barrel and small-batch offerings were a tremendous success in Japan where a unique whiskey market quickly grew.

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Composition of Whiskey



Single Malt – Single malt whiskey is made exclusively with malted barley, water, and yeast.

Grain – The main ingredient in grain whiskey is corn, wheat or both.

Blended – As the name indicates, blended whiskey is a combination of single malt and grain whiskeys.

Types of Whiskey

Scotch



Scotch, like other whiskies, is not something consumed for intoxication. Scotch drinkers savor its potency, rich history

and tradition. Like wines, the regions of Scotland produce unique varieties and flavors. To receive the honor of being called Scotch, the drink must be made from malted barley, be aged for no less than three years and made in Scotland.



Lowland – Only three distilleries are still in operation in the Lowlands. Glenkinchie, Bladnoch, and Auchentoshan produce the lightest and most mild-bodied scotch.

Highland – The Highlands cover the largest geographic area of the five sections. Categorizing the taste is more difficult given the amount of Highland distilleries in operation, but they tend to be light, fruity, and spicy.

Islay – Islay has eight distilleries known for their smoky, peaty taste. They also tend to have a briny taste due to the surrounding sea.

Speyside – Named for the River Spey that cuts through it, this region is home to over half of the Scottish distilleries. Scotch from Speyside is known to be the most complex with sweeter tones and a rich taste.

Campbeltown – Campbeltown has a similar taste profile to Islay with heavy influences from the sea. Only three distilleries still operate in this area: Glengyle, Glen Scotia, and Springbank.

Irish



Irish whiskey has an equally long (if not longer) and turbulent history as Scotch. While varied, a general descriptor would be light, fruity and much less peaty than its Scottish counterpart. Traditionally, Irish whiskey is triple distilled in a copper pot versus the double distillation popular in Scotland. Whiskies in Ireland are divided by classifications.

Single Malt – Single malt is made completely from malted barley in a single distillery.

Grain – This is more light in style, made with corn or grain and produced in a column still.

Single Grain – Single grain are made on a column still of one or a combination of grains like corn, wheat, or rye.

Blended – The most popular of the Irish whiskey categories,

blended whiskey makes up 90 percent of production.

Single Pot Still – Uniques to Ireland, this distillation style involves a blend of malted and unmalted barley.

American



Something that separates a few American whiskey varieties from European styles, is that they are aged in new charred oak barrels and remain under 80 percent alcohol by volume. Under American whiskey, there are six distinct categories with differing taste profiles; however, broadly speaking, American whiskey is sweeter, less smoky, and less peaty than Scotch and Irish whiskey. It has less of a briny or smoky flavor because it is rarely smoked with peat.

Bourbon – Whiskey must be made of 51 percent corn mash to classify as bourbon. Famously, bourbon is produced in Kentucky but is now made from coast to coast in states like New York, Indiana as well as California.

Tennessee – While similar to Bourbon in terms of grains used, Tennessee whiskey it goes through charcoal filtering to mellow the flavor during fermentation and aging.

Rye – By definition rye whiskey must be at least partially composed of rye mash and distilled to no more than 80 percent alcohol by volume.

Wheat – Wheat whiskey is made of 51 percent wheat mash.

American Single Malt – This fast-growing sector of American whiskey tends to be more smoky, aromatic and sometimes honeyed.

Japanese



Japanese whiskies are reminiscent of the Scottish Lowland and Speyside style. They are smooth, delicate, and often perfumed with honey to add sweetness.

Today, Japan is developing a style of its own as popularity and demand grow. Japan and Scotland are to whiskey as what California and France are to wine. While one may have history, tradition and topography on its side, the innovation, technology, and acute focus on crafting taste have catapulted the newbies to the forefront.

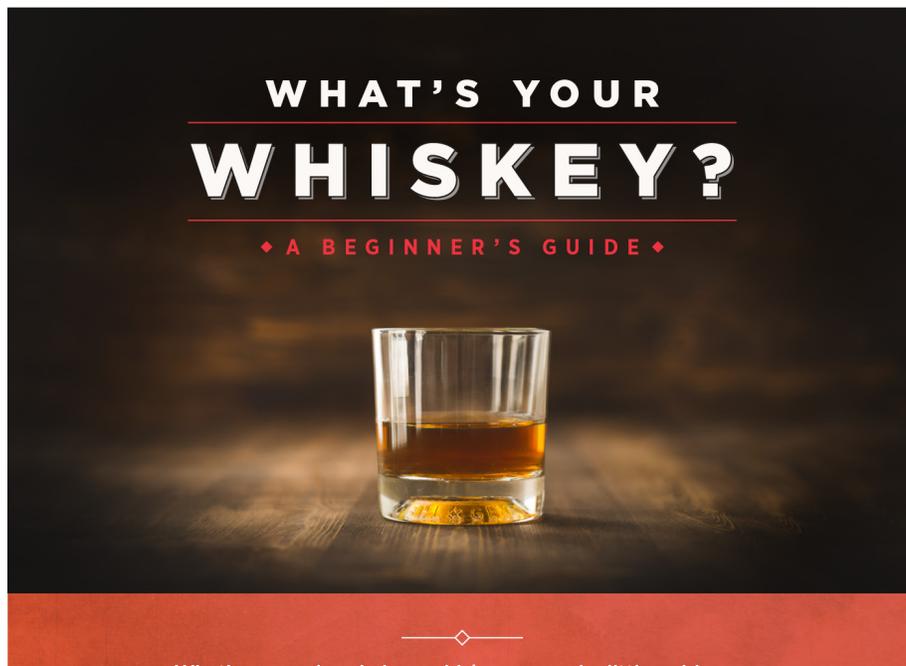
How to Drink Whiskey



Neat – Most whiskey connoisseurs will recommend at least taking your first sip neat, meaning served alone, unmixed and not chilled.

On the rocks – Since whiskey is a potent, high alcohol content liquor, many prefer to dilute it a bit to lower the alcohol by volume (ABV). Those drinkers order on the rocks, meaning over ice.

Experts recommend enjoying whiskey at room temperature as cooling it numbs the flavors slightly. To avoid taking too much of the edge off, try whiskey stones to get to the preferred drinking temperature without diluting.



Whether you already love whiskey or need a little guidance, the tips below will walk you through the six main types and provide taste, popular brands, and cocktail ideas for each.

BOURBON

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COMPOSITION

51 Percent Corn | Distilled below 80% ABV
Matured in American white oak barrels

FLAVOR

Distinctive vanilla and woody flavours

PERFECT FOR

The All-American Dad

POPULAR BRANDS

Maker's Mark, Jim Beam, Wild Turkey,
Woodford Reserve

SIGNATURE COCKTAILS

Old-Fashioned, Whiskey Sour, Mint Julep



SCOTCH

SCOTLAND

COMPOSITION

Barley | Distilled in oak barrels

FLAVOR

Smoky, earthy, with slight fruit flavors

PERFECT FOR

Ron Swanson and his fellow manly men

POPULAR BRANDS

Laphroaig, Macallan, Lagavulin,
Johnnie Walker

SIGNATURE COCKTAILS

Rob Roy, Blood & Sand



IRISH

IRELAND

COMPOSITION

Distilled in Ireland, triple distilled

FLAVOR

Sweet, with notes of honey

PERFECT FOR

The guy who can't stand smoky scotch but
wants to like whiskey

POPULAR BRANDS

Jameson, Michael Collins, Tullamore Dew

SIGNATURE COCKTAILS



SIGNATURE COCKTAILS
Irish Coffee, Irish Car Bomb

JAPANESE

JAPAN

COMPOSITION

Honey sweetness and oak from the barrels

FLAVOR

Complex, delicate, and smoky

PERFECT FOR

The scotch lover looking to branch out

POPULAR BRANDS

Suntory Whisky Toki, Yamazaki, Nikka

SIGNATURE COCKTAILS

Maneki-tini, Hakushu and soda



RYE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COMPOSITION

51 Rye | Distilled below 80% ABV

FLAVOR

Light, spicy, with hint of bitterness

PERFECT FOR

The Classic Cocktail Lover

POPULAR BRANDS

Bulleit Rye, WhistlePig Straight Rye, Knob Creek Rye

SIGNATURE COCKTAILS

Sazerac, Manhattan, Vieux Carré



TENNESSEE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

COMPOSITION

Distilled exclusively in Tennessee and filtered through charcoal

FLAVOR

Mellow, smooth, with hints of charcoal

PERFECT FOR

The friend who loves whiskey and coke

POPULAR BRANDS

George Dickel, Jack Daniel's, Prichard's





invaluable

Sources:

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