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Definition: **gin** from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

[archaic *geneva*, from Du. from O.Fr. from Lat.,=juniper], spirituous liquor distilled chiefly from fermented cereals, malted and unmalted, and flavored with juniper berries. It originated in Holland (thus the name Hollands, or Holland, gin) but is now manufactured also in other countries, chiefly England and the United States. A type of gin developed in England is known as London gin; it is more highly distilled than Holland gin. Dry gin has been highly rectified. Old Tom gin is sweetened for use as a liqueur. Sloe gin is flavored with fresh sloes instead of juniper.

Summary Article: **Gin**

From *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Alcohol*

Gin is a distilled spirit originally introduced in the Netherlands that has become popular around the globe. With a distinctive taste coming from juniper berries, gin is popular in cocktails and is also drunk with a mixer, such as tonic water. During the 18th century, gin became wildly popular in the United Kingdom, beginning a relationship with that nation's denizens that continues to this day. The availability of relatively inexpensive and high-quality gin was a leading factor in the growing popularity of cocktails and the development of the “cocktail culture” of the early 20th century. One of the most widely distributed of all distilled spirits, gin is available at a variety of price points, from inexpensive gin sold in supermarkets to premium varieties that are coveted by those who enjoy craft cocktails. The process by which gin is made varies somewhat from distiller to distiller, although these processes are continually evolving. As new markets for distilled spirits develop, gin appears likely to continue to grow in popularity.

Background

Franciscus Sylvius, a Dutch physician, is often given credit as having invented gin during the 17th century. An early defender of the theory of circulation of blood in the human body, Sylvius was highly regarded as an anatomist, chemist, and physiologist. The founder of one of the first academic chemical laboratories, he is honored at Leiden University with the Sylvius Laboratory, which houses many of the chemistry and natural science faculty. Certain evidence suggests that gin may have been in existence before this, but it is undisputed that by the late 1600s, hundreds of Dutch and Flemish distillers were combining malt spirits or wine with various botanical flavoring agents, including anise, caraway, cassis, cinnamon, coriander, cubeb, the peels of grapefruits and lemons, nutmeg, and juniper berries.

Juniper berries are technically seed cones produced by junipers and they possess a distinctive flavor and odor reminiscent of pine needles. Juniper berries are a diuretic and were believed during the 17th century to serve as an appetite stimulant as well as a remedy for pain caused by arthritis and rheumatism. These beliefs may have resulted in the initial distillation of gin, but its lasting popularity stems from an appreciation of its taste and scent by those interested in imbibing alcoholic beverages.

The name *gin* derives from the Dutch word *jenever*, the French word *genièvre*, and the Italian word *ginepro*, all of which mean “juniper.” In Britain, during the Restoration (approximately 1660 through 1688), gin had become somewhat common and was readily available. After the ruler of the Dutch Republic, William of Orange, assumed the English throne with his wife, Mary II, gin surged in popularity

throughout the United Kingdom and its colonies abroad. During the Glorious Revolution, gin benefited when the British government permitted its unlicensed distillation while simultaneously imposing a hefty duty on all imported distilled spirits. With gin suddenly much less expensive than the alternatives, thousands of gin shops sprang up around the United Kingdom, often using for distilling low-quality grain that was unfit for brewing beer.

During the first half of the 18th century, the Gin Epidemic that hit Britain resulted in gin becoming extremely popular, especially among the poor. Of the roughly 15,000 establishments in London that sold beverages, half were gin shops. This influx of gin led to serious problems with public intoxication and drunkenness. These problems increased the death rate, especially around London, and led to calls for a response to the influx of cheap gin. The British parliament passed numerous bills during the first half of the 18th century in an attempt to ameliorate this problem, some of which were more successful than others. For example, the Gin Act of 1736 imposed stiff taxes on retailers of gin, in an attempt to make the distilled spirit less readily available. The public, however, resisted this attempt and engaged in riots and other behaviors that led to the immediate reduction of such duties, all of which were abolished by 1742.

The Gin Act of 1751, however, was much more successful in curtailing the rampant alcoholism and resulting crime caused by the availability of cheap gin. This act prohibited distillers from selling gin to unlicensed merchants and increased the fees those vendors were assessed. As a result of the 1751 act, many small gin shops were eliminated. The larger establishments that remained in operation were concerned with maintaining their licenses, which meant they curtailed or eliminated sales to obviously intoxicated patrons.

Cheap gin that was distilled in Britain during the 18th century differed in significant ways from that available today. In an effort to reduce the costs of production, many distillers used turpentine to flavor their gin, which resulted in resinous overtones that interacted with the juniper berries. Many producers of gin also distilled their product in the presence of sulphuric acid, which added additional aromas to the gin. During the 19th century, another variation, known as Old Tom gin, added sugar to the distillation process, which resulted in a sweeter, softer style of gin. All of these variants faded away by the mid-20th century. Dutch gin, which is distilled using malt wine, is a distinctive and different style of gin that still exists.

Current Production and Varieties

A variety of methods of producing gin exist and are in use today. Choices regarding which method to use are often based upon the desired taste, cost, or a combination thereof. Unlike those associated with certain other alcoholic beverages, the methods of distilling gin have evolved significantly over the years, with many modernizations taking place over time. Today, three major methods of production exist that result in three varieties of the distilled spirit: pot-distilled gin, column-distilled gin, and compound gin. Each variety has its advocates, and taste and cost are the primary bases for such preferences.

Pot-distilled gin represents the earliest style of gin. During the production process, a fermented grain mash (malt wine) is pot distilled, the product of which is then redistilled using various botanicals to induce flavor and aroma. "Double gin" refers to gin for which the second step of the process is replicated to add additional botanicals. Pot-distilled gin has an alcohol by volume (ABV) percentage of 68 percent, which is lower than other varieties, although double gin has an ABV of 76 percent. Pot-

distilled gin is frequently aged in wooden casks or tanks, resulting in a heavier, malty flavor that some associate with whiskey. Holland gin, Geneva gin, and *kornwijn* (malt wine) are the most common types of pot-distilled gin.

Column-distilled gin is produced by first distilling relatively high-proof (96 percent ABV) spirits from a fermented wash using a refluxing still. A refluxing still, sometimes called a Coffey still or a column still, uses two columns in the distillation process. The first column, known as the analyzer, has steam rising and wash descending through several levels. The second column, known as the rectifier, carries the alcohol from the wash, allowing it to circulate until it condenses at the desired strength. The fermentable base used for column-distilled gin can vary widely, and commonly used materials include grain, grapes, plain sugar, potatoes, sugar beets, sugarcane, or any other material of agricultural origin. The resulting highly concentrated spirit is next redistilled with juniper berries and other botanicals in a pot still. The gin that is produced is lighter in flavor than that obtained using the traditional pot-distilling method alone. Column-distilled gin is labeled “distilled gin” or “London dry gin.” Column-distilled gin is the most popular variant of gin.

Compound gin is produced by adding essences, botanicals, or other natural flavors to neutral spirits without redistillation. While less expensive than pot-distilled or column-distilled gin, compound gin is not as highly regarded as that produced using the other methods. All gin uses juniper berries, but a variety of other botanicals are used to produce individual gins. Many use citrus elements, such as grapefruit, lemon, lime, or bitter orange peel for flavoring. Additional spices commonly used to flavor gin include almond, angelica root, anise, baobab, cassia bark, cinnamon, coriander, frankincense, grains of paradise, saffron, savory, and others. The distinct flavors these botanicals produce have led to some interesting developments. During the British colonial era, quinine, which was used to combat malaria, was mixed with sparkling water to form tonic water. Because many considered the tonic water to taste unpleasant, it was mixed with gin, which masked the flavor of the quinine. This led to the tremendous popularity of the gin and tonic, a cocktail that remains popular today. Although referred to as gin, liqueurs such as sloe gin use gin as a base into which other flavors are infused.

Prohibition Era

In 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution went into effect, banning the sale of alcohol, an era known as Prohibition. Lasting until 1933, when the amendment was repealed, Prohibition changed American drinking patterns dramatically. Although states in the southern and western United States initially enforced the ban on alcohol, many urban areas and northern states did not do so. Demand for alcohol led to a growing black market through which alcohol was smuggled into the United States, and bootleggers distilled illegal alcohol for sale to the public. Such criminals as Al Capone grew rich selling illegal alcohol to the public.

In popular culture, many associations with gin stem from those periods when the drinking of it was held in disrepute, such as during the Gin Epidemic and the Prohibition era. The term “gin mills” originated during the 18th century but is still in use to refer to a seedy drinking establishment, as is its derivative, “gin joints.” Those who are hopeless drunks are sometimes referred to as “gin-soaked,” and in the United Kingdom “mother's ruin” is still used to refer to gin. Some of the more colorful excesses from Prohibition have continued to make an impact upon language, with “bathtub gin” used to refer to homemade distillation by amateurs and “speakeasy” indicating an establishment that illegally sells alcohol or other substances. Although fictional spy James Bond is most frequently associated with drinking

vodka martinis, he also is credited with creating the vesper, a cocktail containing gin, vodka, and Kina Lillet in the 1953 novel *Casino Royale*.



A vesper cocktail, inspired by Ian Fleming's James Bond, served in California in 2010. The vesper usually includes gin, vodka, Kina Lillet, and a lemon twist.

Ironically, gin rose to popularity in the United States during Prohibition. This is because gin proved easier to produce illicitly than other spirits, relying as it did upon readily available materials and lacking the need to be aged. This shifted consumption patterns from whiskey to gin. The harsh taste of much of the bootleg gin required consumers to combine it with other flavorings, including juices, honey, and other liquors, to mask its flavor. This practice led to the emergence of the “cocktail,” where gin and other distilled spirits were mixed with other substances to create a new flavor. From the 1920s through the 1950s, cocktails became very popular, with gin being one of the most popular ingredients in many of these. Although cocktails receded in popularity during the 1960s and 1970s, they enjoyed resurgence during the 1980s, one that has continued to the present. Although cocktails are once again popular, gin's place as the most prominent ingredient in these has been superseded by vodka.

Brands and Cocktails

While gin can be distilled anywhere, it is most frequently associated with those brands that are still produced in the United Kingdom. Some of the more popular English brands of gin include Beefeater, Bombay, Gilbey's, Gordon's, Plymouth, and Tanqueray. Each of these gins uses its own distinctive blend of botanicals, with some blends resulting in a drier gin while others produce a fruitier, more aromatic spirit. Each style has its advocates, and a variety of competitions are held annually to determine the “best” gin. Certain blends are more popular for gin used in cocktails while others are preferred when the spirit is used with few masking flavors. Beefeater, for example, was first produced in 1820 and soon gained a reputation as a robust, full-flavored gin.

Bombay Original Dry London Gin, distilled for over a century, is distilled using eight botanicals and is considered floral in aroma, while its sister, Bombay Sapphire, uses ten and is triple distilled. Gilbey's gin, created in London during the 19th century, was the first to be produced in the United States and has been made in the country since 1938 by special license. Gordon's London Dry Gin was first produced in 1769 and remains the most popular brand sold in the United Kingdom. Plymouth gin, which can only be produced in the city of Plymouth, is a slightly less dry gin than its rivals and has more muted juniper effects than the others. Tanqueray is a London dry gin, which, while not that popular in the United Kingdom, is a leading brand in the United States and southern Europe. Gins sold in the United States tend to have a higher ABV (47 percent) than those sold in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (40 percent). Gin was one of the earliest distilled spirits used to make cocktails, many of which remain classics that have lasting popularity. The martini, one of the most well-known of all cocktails is made by combining gin and dry vermouth over ice and pouring it into a chilled cocktail glass and garnishing it with an olive. Variations on the martini include the Gibson (same ingredients but served with a pickled onion rather than an olive). Drinks such as the Tom Collins and the gin fizz are also popular, with gin being mixed with lemon juice, sugar, and carbonated water. Gin is also served mixed with lime juice (a gimlet) or tonic water (a gin and tonic). More complicated cocktails include the Singapore Sling, which combines gin with Heering, a cherry liqueur, Cointreau, Bénédictine, grenadine, pineapple juice, lemon juice, and bitters, and the White Lady, which mixes gin with Cointreau and lemon juice. Although cocktails wax and wane in popularity, for the past three decades they have seen unabated growth. As consumers continue to experiment with different flavors, gin has seen something of a renaissance, with many younger drinkers trying classic cocktails made with gin. As liquor sales grow in the developing countries, many of which have British ties, gin sales seem poised to continue to grow.

See Also: Advertising and Marketing, History of; Cocktails and Cocktail Culture; Gin Advertising; Gin Cocktails; Gin Epidemic in England; Prohibition

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