

Chapter 15

Vodka

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Distilling vodka from potatoes, grains, and beets
 - ▶ Sampling vodka brands from all over the world
 - ▶ Having fun with flavors
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Vodka, a clear, almost flavorless spirit, is usually thought of as the national spirit of Russia and other Slavic nations. Both Russia and Poland claim the invention of vodka and explain that the name is a diminutive of the word *voda*, meaning “little water.” Slavic countries have been producing vodka for more than 600 years. Vodka is one of the most mixable and versatile of spirits and is used in hundreds of cocktail recipes.

How Vodka Is Made

Vodka was originally distilled only from potatoes, but today, it’s also made from grain — mostly wheat, rye, and corn. But distillers don’t seem at all hindered by tradition; in Turkey, they use beets! Vodkas are distilled at a very high proof (190 or higher), and most are filtered through activated charcoal. (Flip to Chapter 5 for an explanation of proof.) Certain charcoals are so important to the making of vodka that distillers patent them. High-end vodkas are triple- and even quadruple-distilled, and some are filtered through fine quartz sand.

Popular Brands

Vodka is now produced in almost every country in the world, and each location tends to put its spin on the classic. You may want to sample some of the following brands to see whether you can find differences:

- ✔ **42Below:** An award-winning, 84-proof vodka from New Zealand.
- ✔ **360 Vodka:** An eco-friendly, green-packaged vodka that's quadruple-distilled.
- ✔ **Absolut:** From Sweden.
- ✔ **Artic:** Wheat vodka from Italy.
- ✔ **Belvedere:** From Poland.
- ✔ **Blavod:** 80-proof black vodka distilled in the United Kingdom.
- ✔ **Boru:** Made in Ireland from grain and pure Irish water.
- ✔ **Chopin:** From Poland; made with potatoes.
- ✔ **Cîroc:** Made from snap-frost grapes in southwestern France and distilled five times.
- ✔ **Crystal Head:** Made with water from a deep aquifer in Newfoundland and sold in a cool skull-shaped bottle.
- ✔ **Danzka:** Made with wheat from Denmark.
- ✔ **Devotion Vodka:** An ultra-premium, sugar-free, gluten-free vodka.
- ✔ **Double Cross:** An award-winning, seven-time distilled vodka produced in the Slovak Republic.
- ✔ **Ed Hardy:** Made with wheat from France.
- ✔ **EFFEN:** A Dutch vodka. In a bar, if you order a cocktail made with EFFEN, you're supposed to say, "Give me an EFFEN Screwdriver," or, "I'd like an EFFEN Cape Cod." Get it?
- ✔ **Finlandia:** Classic Finlandia is imported from Finland. It's made from spring water and barley.
- ✔ **Fris:** Produced in Scandinavia.
- ✔ **Gilbey's:** An American vodka.
- ✔ **Glacier:** Distilled in Rigby, Idaho, using Idaho potatoes and water from the Rocky Mountains.
- ✔ **Gordon's:** Has been distilled in the United States since 1957.
- ✔ **Grey Goose:** From France, made from fine grain and mineral water that's naturally filtered with champagne limestone.

- ✔ **Hamptons:** From the Hamptons in New York.
- ✔ **Hangar One:** An 80-proof vodka made with American wheat and Viognier grapes (a white wine grape).
- ✔ **Iceberg Vodka:** Made from the waters of icebergs from the coast of Greenland.
- ✔ **Jewel of Russia:** Made with only natural ingredients from an ancient recipe.
- ✔ **Ketel One:** From Holland, Ketel One is handmade in small batches according to the techniques and secret family recipe developed by the Nolet family more than 300 years ago.
- ✔ **Kremlyovskaya:** “Kremly” is made in the Vladimir region of Russia.
- ✔ **Level Vodka:** An ultra-premium vodka from the makers of Absolut.
- ✔ **Luksusowa:** An original potato vodka (unlike most vodkas, which are grain-based), made in Poland.
- ✔ **McCormick Vodka:** Quadruple-distilled vodka made from American grain.
- ✔ **Nikoli:** A very inexpensive vodka made in the United States.
- ✔ **Pearl:** Made from Canadian Rocky Mountain spring water and distilled from Canadian winter wheat.
- ✔ **Pink:** Made with wheat from the Netherlands.
- ✔ **Rain Organics:** 80-proof organic vodka distilled seven times, made with organic white corn.
- ✔ **Reyka:** From Iceland.
- ✔ **Russian Standard:** The number-one premium brand in Russia. Employing a unique blend of century-old tradition and a passionate attention to detail, it’s made using only the finest Russian ingredients.
- ✔ **Seagram’s Vodka:** A very popular vodka from Canada.
- ✔ **SKYY:** An American vodka made with 100-percent pure mountain water.
- ✔ **Smirnoff:** From the United States, the largest-selling vodka in the world.



How a Russian drink became popular in the United States

American John Martin of Heublein, Inc., is credited with encouraging Americans to drink vodka. In the summer of 1946, he and his friend Jack Morgan, the owner of the Cock'n' Bull Restaurant in Los Angeles, were discussing his Smirnoff Vodka when Jack remembered that he had an overstock of

ginger beer. Jack and John mixed the two, added a dash of lime juice, and thus created the Moscow Mule. It spread rapidly, promoted by Heublein ("It leaves you breathless!"), who had it served in a copper mug. Smirnoff Vodka was in high demand and is still the best-selling vodka in the United States.

- ✔ **Snow Leopard:** Made from spelt grain from Poland.
- ✔ **Snow Queen:** Made with organic wheat from Kazakhstan.
- ✔ **Sobieski:** The number-one premium vodka in Poland. Made with Dankowski rye.
- ✔ **Square One:** A certified organic, 80-proof vodka made with organically grown America rye.
- ✔ **Stolichnaya:** A Russian vodka also known as "Stoli."
- ✔ **Svedka:** Imported from Sweden.
- ✔ **Tanqueray Sterling:** An English vodka from the makers of Tanqueray gin.
- ✔ **Three Olives Vodka:** Imported from England.
- ✔ **Tito's Handmade Vodka:** Produced in Texas's first and oldest legal distillery, Tito's Handmade Vodka is distilled six times.
- ✔ **Ultimat:** A rich, smooth-tasting, ultra-premium vodka made from wheat, rye, and potatoes.
- ✔ **UV Vodka:** A four-time distilled corn vodka made in the United States.
- ✔ **Vermont Vodka:** Available in a Gold variety distilled from the sugar of maple sap and a White variety distilled from pure milk sugar.

- ✔ **Vincent Van Gogh Vodka:** From Holland, handcrafted using small batches of the finest grains.
- ✔ **VOX:** Distilled five times in the Netherlands from 100-percent wheat.
- ✔ **Wyborowa:** From Poland.
- ✔ **Xellent:** A Swiss vodka.

Flavored Vodkas

Flavored vodkas, which have become quite popular, are made with the addition of natural flavoring ingredients. Scores of flavored vodkas are available, from apple to Zubrowka. (Once sold with a single blade of grass in each bottle, Zubrowka is no longer available with grass in the United States because some believed the grass contained a toxic compound, but you can still get it *sans flora*.) New flavors of vodka come out seemingly every day. The following is a list of just some of the most popular flavored vodkas:

- ✔ **360 Vodka** offers a wide variety of flavors including Buttered Popcorn, Glazed Donut, Red Raspberry, Huckleberry, Double Chocolate, Cola, Grape, Mandarin Orange, Madagascar Vanilla, Georgia Peach, Sorrento Lemon, and Bing Cherry.
- ✔ **4 Orange Premium Vodka** is the world's first and only super-premium vodka distilled from pure Florida oranges.
- ✔ **Absolut** offers many flavors, including Apeach, Berri Açai, Citron, Kurant, Mandrin, Mango, Pears, Peppar, Raspberri, Ruby Red, and Vanilia.
- ✔ **Bakon Vodka** is a bacon-flavored vodka made from potatoes and the essence of bacon.
- ✔ **Cîroc** offers Red Berry, Coconut, and Peach.
- ✔ **EFFEN Black Cherry** combines natural black cherry and vanilla flavors.
- ✔ **Finlandia** offers Cranberry, Lime, and Tangerine.
- ✔ **Firefly** offers Lemon Tea, Mint Tea, Peach Tea, Raspberry Tea, and Sweet Tea Vodka.

- ✔ **Gordon's** offers Citrus and Wildberry.
- ✔ **Grey Goose** offers Le Citron, L'Orange, and La Poire.
- ✔ **Ketel One** offers Citroen and Oranje.
- ✔ **Seagram's** offers Peach Tea and Sweet Tea.
- ✔ **SKYY** offers Cherry, Citrus, Ginger, Grape, Passion Fruit, Pineapple, and Raspberry flavors.
- ✔ **Smirnoff** offers an extensive list of fruit flavors, including Blueberry, Cranberry, Green Apple, Raspberry, Strawberry, Vanilla, and Watermelon, plus many other non-fruit flavors.
- ✔ **Sobieski** offers Karamel, Cytron, Vanilia, Raspberry, Espresso, Bison Grass, Cynamon, and Orange.
- ✔ **Square One** offers Cucumber and Botanical vodkas.
- ✔ **Stoli** offers Blueberi, Citros, Cranberi, Gala Aplik, Ohranj, Peachik, Razberi, Strasberi, and Vanil.
- ✔ **Three Olives** is offered in Berry, Cherry, Chocolate, Citrus, Grape, Green Apple, Orange, Raspberry, and more.
- ✔ **UV Vodka** offers Apple, Blue, Cake, Candy Bar, Chocolate Cake, Citrus, Cherry, Lemonade, Grape, Orange, Vanilla, and Whipped.
- ✔ **Vincent Van Gogh** offers Acai-Blueberry, Banana, Black Cherry, Double Espresso, Dutch Chocolate, Espresso, Grape, Mango, Mojito Mint, Pineapple, Pomegranate, and more.
- ✔ **VOX Raspberry** has the flavor of fresh raspberries.

Storing and Serving Vodka

Store at least one bottle in the freezer or refrigerator. It won't freeze because of the high alcohol content. Serve vodka *neat* (straight up) in a small cordial glass, especially paired with caviar, smoked fish, salmon, sardines, steak tartare, and spicy foods.

When an opened bottle is refrigerated or stored in a cool, dry place, it should last up to three years.