

# DIY Bitters

with M. Quinn Sweeney from Libation Lab

## History

Bitters were originally medicinal herb infusions that were prescribed for everything from stomach ache to cancer, and of course patients reported excellent results, since everyone feels better after a stiff drink. In the 1800s, bitters evolved from sippable panacea to saloon staple, and during prohibition the popularity of bitters grew, as they could be added to low-quality moonshine to mask the taste.



## Uses

The original definition of a cocktail was “a stimulating liquor, composed of spirits of any kind, sugar, water, and bitters” and most classic cocktail recipes do call for a dash or two of bitters. A glass of sparkling wine is transformed into a “champagne cocktail” with the addition of a bitters-soaked sugar cube, and bitters can even be used in cooking, most often called for in soup and stew recipes.

Homemade bitters can be used to reinvigorate your favorite cocktail recipes that call for Angostura, orange or Peychaud’s Bitters, and they can introduce complexity or intense seasonal flavors to drinks. Mixing in a few drops of bitters will balance a cocktail that turned out too sweet, and a dash on top will add aromatic components to an otherwise bland beverage.



## Ingr.

### Bark

cassia  
cinchona  
cascarilla  
quassia

### Roots

gentian  
angelica  
ginger  
devil’s club

### Seeds

cardamom  
star anise  
coriander  
fennel

### Leaves

artichoke  
thistle  
wormwood  
walnut

### Fruit

citrus  
peach  
cherry  
plum

### Flowers

yarrow  
chamomile  
lavender  
cloves

### Alcohol

**Common**  
grain alcohol  
overproof rum  
vodka

**Uncommon**  
whiskey  
brandy  
rum

**Rare**  
gin  
tequila  
flavored



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## Tools

### Measure

spoons  
cups  
syringe

### Strain

funnel  
strainer  
coffee filter

### Store

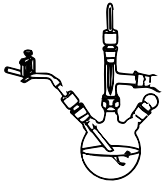
mason jar  
bottle  
dropper

### Display

lab glass  
dasher bottle  
vial



## Make



The easiest way to make your first batch of bitters is to follow a basic recipe. Putting all of your ingredients into one jar for a couple weeks, just shake daily, taste occasionally, and strain when ready. Recipes take less time, effort and raw material, and yield reliable results, but one mistake can ruin the entire batch.

Another approach is to create several tinctures, each a spirit infused with a single herb or spice, which you then blend to get the right balance. Blends require more space for dozens of tinctures, and blending is an involved process, but then you can whip up a batch any time from the ratios you create, or make a custom dash of bitters for any occasion.



## Test

Tasting bitters straight is generally offensive to the palate, and should be avoided. Utilize any or all of the methods below to test a couple drops of your bitters recipe every few days as it infuses, and keep tasting notes on the progress. Start by rubbing a dash vigorously between your palms to experience the aromatics without the alcohol.



palm +  
friction



still  
water



sparkling  
water



sparkling  
wine



Champagne  
cocktail



classic  
cocktail