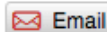


FOOD & DRINK

The Rules of the Moscow Mule



Credit: Evan McGinnis / Getty Images

The Moscow Mule is one of the most straightforward cocktails, but also most easily lends itself to modifications. At the bar I manage, **Nose Dive**, in Greenville, South Carolina, we offer guests the chance to "Ride Your Own Mule" and recreate the cocktail using flavored vodka, infused gin, bourbon, and more. Here are some of the rules for the foundation of a cocktail that's meant to be embellished.

1. Stick to the Essentials

All mules should include vodka*, crushed ice, lime juice, ginger beer, and copper mugs.

*2. First, Tinker with the Vodka

The classic mule features unflavored vodka, but this is a department that you can definitely mix up. Swap out the vodka for a cognac or a high quality brandy for a warming holiday mule. Consider flavored spirits as well — St George makes a great domestic apple brandy and Cathead

Honeysuckle Vodka from Mississippi makes for a delicious mule. You can also infuse the vodka with coconut, vanilla, chocolate, peach and pineapple.

3. But Don't Mess with the Crushed Ice

If you don't have access to a crushed ice machine, an inexpensive bar staple is a Lewis bag and mallet. A Lewis bag (**less than \$10**) is a heavy duty canvas bag that you put ice in, close tight, and smash with the mallet to crush your own ice as needed.

4. Always Get Fresh Lime Juice

You can pre-squeeze to make execution faster, but the pre-packaged stuff is sweetened, artificially flavored, and loaded with preservatives and artificial-coloring. The flavor of fresh is always better.

5. Choose Your Ginger Beer Wisely (or Make It Yourself)

There have been an explosion of ginger beers in recent years and there are now lots of great ones available on the market — Goslings, Barrit's, Blenheim. But whenever I'm planning a party at home, I make ginger beer myself — all you need is a couple hours and an overnight fermentation. For a gallon's worth, you'll need about a pound of fresh ginger, a cup and a half of sugar, a pinch of a clean fermenting yeast such as a champagne, burgundy, or lager yeast. You basically juice the ginger, heat up the water enough to dilute the sugar and ginger juice in it, cool it down, pitch a literal pinch of yeast and let it ferment in a sanitized, tight sealed container overnight at room temperature. The overnight fermentation will produce less than 1% alcohol content, about as much as your average fruit juice has, but enough carbonation to give the spicy ginger beer some fizz.

6. Invest in Some Copper Mugs

Presentation is everything when it comes to food and beverages, and the **copper mug** is a good reason the Moscow Mule is so popular. You see one and instantly crave one.

7. Play Around with Garnishes

Garnish sets up the drink to be delicious before the first sip is even taken. Depending on the spirit or flavor of choice, the garnish should follow suit: from fresh berries to cucumbers, to spices or a mint sprig, or a classic lime wedge- garnishes can add another flavor dimension or compliment the already existing flavors in the vodka or spirit. For the holiday season, offer fresh cranberries or cranberry bitters to give the mule a more mature, subtle dimension. Or serve the mule with a cinnamon stick to add extra spice that compliments the ginger. A whole star anise will add a spice characteristic that's strong on the nose, and subtle on the palate.

—Edgar Flores, Bar Manager of *Nose Dive*