

## HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN CUSTOM, KICKASS PUNCH

There's no better drink for sending off summer—and entertaining a large party.



BY BRIAN GOOD



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If your last interaction with punch was spiking a bowl of it in high school, or brewing a vat of jungle juice with your roomies in college, you'd be right to assume punch isn't the right drink for your next shindig. But you'd be wrong. With its recent surge in popularity, this classic concoction—considered by many the world's first cocktail—really is the perfect party drink.

## First, Get a Bowl

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“Every culture has its own take on punch, but the message is always the same: bonding over a cup together,” says Mariena Mercer, chef mixologist at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. “I love it at parties because it enables me to step away from the bar and mingle with my guests. I’ve ended many a party feeling like I just pulled a shift. I much prefer having a couple of punch bowls and enjoying the party alongside friends and family.”

## Next, Create Your Own Custom Punch

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The word *punch* has nothing to do with the drink’s kick. The term actually comes from the Sanskrit word for *five*—the number of ingredients a traditional punch includes (alcohol, sugar, lemon, water, and spices). Although it’s hard to go wrong with a basic ratio of 1:1 or 1:2 alcohol to mixer, most experts agree on a slightly elevated formula: one of sour, two of sweet, three of strong, four of weak. “For example, mixing together one part lime juice, two parts sweetener, three parts rum, and four parts water,” says Mercer.

## Decide On Your Booze

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Vodka is most versatile, says Derrick Turner, head bartender at Harding’s NYC. “Whatever ingredients you pair with it come through very strong.” Gin and rum pack some flavor but are still easy to work with. “Tequila requires a bit of finesse, and if you use whiskey or bourbon, just aim to complement the flavor—you can’t change it or cover it up,” he says.

## Select a Sour

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Your mixer options are endless: Vodka and gin work best with fruit juices, according to Mercer. “With whiskeys, I favor autumnal flavors like apple, cinnamon, and ginger,” she says. Rum is ideal with sweeter citrus juices like pineapple and sweetened grapefruit. “Bourbon goes nicely with orange or lemon but fights with lime, and tequila is happiest with grapefruit and lime,” says Anjoleena Griffin-Holst, beverage director for South Carolina’s Table 301 restaurant group.

## Pick Your Sweetener

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The easiest options for punches are diluted agave nectar or a quick simple syrup that you can either buy or make yourself. Or, go old school and make something called Oleo-Saccharum—the original sweetener used in most Prohibition-era punches. To prepare it, use a vegetable peeler to strip the peel off some citrus fruit. Coat the chunks of peel with a tablespoon or two of sugar (white for vodka or gin punches; brown for rum or whiskey drinks) and let the mixture sit for a couple of hours so the sugar can absorb flavor from the peel. To use the mixture, just add water as needed to dilute the sugar/peel to a thin syrup, strain out the peel, and pour the liquid into the punch.

## Finish It Up

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For the four parts punch dilutor, you can use water or something a bit more flavorful like green or black tea, flavored water, sparkling water, white wine, champagne, or even soda. Combine all your ingredients together. Add an optional handful of fresh fruit, cucumber slices, or diced hot peppers or herbs, and then top your punch off with a bit of spice—a few dashes of bitters are ideal.

## Finally, Serve It Up Cool and Classy

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If you don't have a punch bowl, Mercer recommends checking out your local thrift store or an antique shop for a retro option that will cost practically nothing. Or, pick a vessel that's uniquely you. Anything that can hold liquid will work: a metal bucket, flower pots, a fish bowl, stock pots, cookie jars...even a hollowed out watermelon or pumpkin, suggests Griffin-Holst. Then add some ice—you want the biggest cube possible, so it melts slowly. Last, and most important: Make more punch than you think you'll need. "Treat it like firewood," says Turner. "When you think you have enough, double it!"

## Try This: Blood Orange Thai Chili Punch

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### INGREDIENTS

- 1 750 ml bottle silver tequila
- 1 375 ml bottle orange liqueur
- 2 cups blood orange juice (Can't find it? Use OJ and pomegranate juice instead.)
- 1/2 cup lime juice
- 1 cup sparkling water
- 1/3 cup Thai chili simple syrup
- 1-2 oranges, washed and thinly sliced 1 lime, washed and thinly sliced
- Ice (to serve)
- Smoked sea salt (optional for glass rim)

### TO MAKE:

- 1) Add tequila, orange liqueur, blood orange juice, lime juice, sparkling water, Thai chili simple syrup, and orange and lime slices to a punch bowl and stir until mixed well. Serve punch in a glass filled with ice. Optionally, rim glass with smoked sea salt and garnish with a slice of orange or lime.
- 2) For the simple syrup: Combine equal parts water and agave nectar in a small saucepan and stir to dissolve. Add three Thai chilis, quartered, and bring to a simmer for 5-10 minutes. Let cool before using in cocktail.