

Tips for making cocktails for a dinner party

Any good host knows the joy in hosting a party and showing off their entertaining skills. Only the best hosts know the joy in being a part of that party. The key to enjoying the party as much as your guests do lies in proper preparation. The more you get done ahead of time, the less there is to do when the guests arrive. Pre-batching your cocktails is an easy way to save yourself any effort in prepping drinks for your guests. Here are some of my tips for doing so:

Water or Ice?

Pre-batched cocktails come in 2 styles, those with water included in the recipe, and those without. For a little explanation, most cocktails involve ice at some point. Ice provides two things for a cocktail, chill and dilution. If you choose to add water to your batch, it accomplishes the dilution, and all you must do now is keep it cold. If you DO NOT add the water, it is still recommended to keep the batch cold, just not refrigerator cold; otherwise, once your guests add fresh ice to their drink it will be too cold to melt said ice, meaning there will be no dilution and the drink will taste too strong.

How do you keep it cold?

The recipes below illustrate 2 methods of chilling your cocktail batch. Whichever method you choose should depend on whether water was already added to the batch or not. If you did choose a recipe with water added, keep it as cold as possible either in the refrigerator, freezer, or in a bucket of ice. I prefer putting those batched cocktails back in the same liquor bottles used to make them. But if you want to get extra fancy, you can buy nice bottles specifically for this purpose. There are all variety of ways to label those bottles, but I am a fan of Avery waterproof labels. And if you are handy with graphic design, you can personalize those labels quite a bit for a special touch.

The second method of keeping your batch cold is for those recipes that do not include water, such as the margarita recipe below. I recommend following the advice given in that recipe, by adding ice to sealed Ziploc

bags that can be dropped in the serving vessel. It keeps the batch cold without melting into the drink and making it weak within a few hours of the party starting. Keep in mind, this method does not make the drink TOO cold, so once the guest pours themselves a drink over some fresh ice, it has some melt right away to make the drink just right. Now, if you did not have those bags of ice in the serving vessel, it would melt the ice in the guests' glass too quickly, and they would have a watery drink soon.

Margaritas by the gallon

6 cups tequila (you will need to buy two fifths for this)

2½ cups triple sec (just buy one fifth, please)

2½ cups fresh lime juice

2½ cups fresh lemon juice

2 cups simple syrup

1. Mix ingredients together in a large, insulated serving vessel
2. Fill container with gallon Ziploc bags full of ice to chill
3. When ready to serve, pour mixture into an 8-ounce glass filled with ice.
4. Salted rim is optional.
5. Makes around 20 margaritas per gallon.

Recipe courtesy of jeffreymorgenthaler.com

Negroni Bianco

150mL Barr Hill gin

150mL Suze Liqueur

150mL Cocchi Americano Bianco

80mL water

Mix all gently, rebottle, label, and keep in the refrigerator. Serve with in a rocks glass over ice with a fresh squeeze of orange twist, and a sprig of rosemary, ideally torched lightly to open the aroma.

The chosen gin here comes from Vermont, distilled from fermented honey that gives it bold, rich texture and taste. Very different from classic London gin, and amenable to most American palettes that shy away from the classic London style. I highly recommend seeking it out over any other brand. Keep in mind Barr Hill has a barrel-aged Old Tom Cat version as well, which I do not recommend using for this recipe.

Suze is a gentian liqueur from France. It possesses a unique bright earthy flavor. The only descriptor I find myself reaching for when describing the flavor is 'yellow'. Really, if you have not tasted it, you have no way to know what it tastes there. The only other commercial substitute is Salers, which would likely be more difficult to find than Suze.

Cocchi Americano Bianco is a sweet white vermouth from Italy. I always keep it on hand for this drink, and for a Vesper Martini when I am feeling like James Bond. If you cannot find it, look for Dolin Blanc vermouth, which is also a sweet white vermouth. Dolin Dry vermouth will not cut it.

Vieux Carré

200 mL Sazerac Rye

200 mL Martell VS Cognac

200 mL ATXA Red Sweet Vermouth

45 mL Benedictine

15 dashes Peychaud's bitters

15 dashes Bogart's bitters

116mL water

Mix all gently, bottle and label the bottle. Serve in a rocks glass with fresh ice, a twist of lemon, and a preserved cherry.

Vieux Carré is an old-school New Orleans cocktail, originating from the Carousel bar in the Hotel Monteleone. I have written my recommended brands here, but you can substitute with similar brands if you cannot find these exact bottles. The Benedictine cannot really be substituted, but if you don't want to buy a whole bottle of Benedictine for some reason, you can experiment with another amaro such as Yellow Chartreuse, Amaro Averna, Amaro Nonino, Cynar, etc.

The 2 bitters called for can also be substituted. Bitter Truth makes a New Orleans bitters which can be substituted for the Peychaud's. They also make an aromatic bitters which can replace the Bogart's. There are other brands that make an equivalent aromatic bitters.

Old-Fashioned

1L Elijah Craig 94-proof Bourbon

80 mL Rich Demerara Syrup

56 mL Fabbri Cherry Syrup

44 mL cacao bitters

185 mL filtered water

-Mix all and rebottle. Label and refrigerate. Serve in a rocks glass over fresh ice with an orange twist and a Fabbri cherry.

What is rich demerara syrup? Demerara refers to raw sugar. You may know the name brand "Sugar in the raw", but there are much cheaper versions of equal quality. In a sauce pot, melt 2 parts demerara sugar with 1 part water. Measure out how much you need for the batch while still hot, so it doesn't stick to the measuring cup.

Fabbri is a brand of preserved cherry, similar to the famous luxardo cherries. Fabbri comes in an ornate opaline and white vase. I strain out the syrup and use that in my old-fashioned. The syrup is more tart and less sweet

than the Luxardo brand and adds a nice dimension to the cocktail with that tanginess. You can use Luxardo brand if you prefer though.

Cacao bitters is my preferred choice here. There are lots of brands that make a cacao/chocolate flavor, such as fee's, bittermens, bitter truth, and many more. If all you have is the classic angostura bitters though, just use that. I recommend starting with less than the recipe calls for and tasting as you go. I wrote this recipe with a homemade cacao bitters which was less bitter than the commercial versions.