

What is gin?

Gin can be described as a flavored vodka. Gin distillers take neutral spirit, a mash of fermented grain to re-distill with numbers of botanicals. The primary source is juniper berries. The word 'gin' comes from genever, French word for juniper.

Gin was first produced in Holland for medicinal purposes around 1650 by a Dutch doctor, Franciscus de la Boe. In the early days, gins that were sweetened with sugar for more palatable taste were called Old Tom. Terms like Dry or London Dry Gin were used to distinguish unsweetened gins from Old Tom.

After the Thirty Years' War British troops returned home with 'Dutch Courage.' Soon gin distillation took place in England. King William III, better known as William of Orange (1650 - 1702) actively encouraged gin production and gin was sometimes given to workers as a part of their wages.

The flavouring ingredients are all natural and are referred to as 'botanicals'. The type and quantity of each producer's botanicals vary according to their own closely guarded recipes; all are carefully selected and tested for purity and quality. All gins include juniper as an ingredient: other botanicals used are coriander, angelica, orange peel, lemon peel, cardomom, cinnamon, grains of paradise, cubeb berries and nutmeg. Typically a fine gin contains six to ten botanicals. Like all gins, London gin should have a predominant juniper flavour.

The detailed processes for the distillation do vary between producers. In most cases the spirit is diluted by adding pure water to reach the required strength of about 45% ABV. This is pumped into a still normally made of copper and the flavouring ingredients are added to it and it is then left to steep. Some producers place the botanicals in a tray over the spirit.

The still is heated, using a steam coil or jacket, to remove from the botanicals the essential oils (less than 5% of the weight) which give the flavouring to the spirit. The first distillate 'runnings' are re-circulated until an appropriate standard and strength (over 90% ABV) is reached. The lower quality early part of the run ('foreshots') and end of the run ('feints') as judged by the skill and experience of the 'Stillman' are run off to be redistilled. Only the 'middle run' is used to produce high quality gin; this is run off at about 80-85% ABV. The product then goes through a quality control 'Tasting Panel' and may also be analysed by gas chromatography to ensure that it meets the required specification. This ensures product consistency. Only further neutral alcohol, water and minute amount of sugar can be added after distillation.

Distilled gin is made in a similar way to London gin. Production differs from London in that it is permitted to add further flavourings, both natural and artificial.

The gin is then brought to the required EU legal minimum alcohol level - at least 37.5% ABV to meet EC regulations, although some gins have a higher level - by the addition of pure demineralised water. It is now ready for bottling as it does not require any period of maturation.

Although several different styles of gin have evolved, it is legally differentiated into four categories in the European Union, which are described as follows.

Juniper-flavoured spirit drinks

This includes the earliest class of gin, which is produced by pot distilling a fermented grain mash to moderate strength (e.g. 68% ABV), and then redistilling it with botanicals to extract the aromatic compounds. It must be bottled at a minimum of 30% ABV. Juniper-flavoured spirit drinks may also be sold under the names Wacholder or Genebra.

Gin

This is a juniper-flavoured spirit made not via the redistillation of botanicals, but by simply adding approved natural flavouring substances to a neutral spirit of agricultural origin. The predominant flavour must be juniper.

Distilled gin

Distilled gin is produced exclusively by redistilling ethanol of agricultural origin with an initial strength of 96% ABV (the azeotrope of water and ethanol) in stills traditionally used for gin, in the presence of juniper berries and of other natural botanicals, provided that the juniper taste is predominant. Gin obtained simply by adding essences or flavourings to ethanol of agricultural origin is not distilled gin.

London gin

London gin is obtained exclusively from ethanol of agricultural origin with a maximum methanol content of 5 grams per hectolitre of 100% ABV equivalent, whose flavour is introduced exclusively through the re-distillation in traditional stills of ethanol in the presence of all the natural plant materials used, the resultant distillate of which is at least 70% ABV. London gin may not contain added sweetening exceeding 0.1 grams of sugars per litre of the final product, nor colorants, nor any added ingredients other than water. The term *London gin* may be supplemented by the term "dry".

10 gin facts:

1. Gin is just flavoured Vodka, 'predominate flavour of Juniper'
2. Gin was used in the British Navy to cure Scurvy with Lime, hence the term 'limeys'
3. Gin was used in India to cure Malaria, Hence Gin & **Tonic**
4. The Philippines is the largest consumer of Gin
5. Gin Was invented in Holland, hence 'Dutch Courage' (dutch independence war 17C)
6. Gin does not make you depressed, Mothers Ruin is a Myth
7. London Dry Gin is not from London
8. A Martini is made with Gin NOT Vodka
9. 'Plymouth Gin' is the only Gin that can be labelled as Plymouth (AOC)
10. Gin 'Balloons' are actually burgundy wine glasses