

## Title:

Grain Distillation

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## Summary:

Aquavit

Aquavit, genever, gin, and whiskey (or whisky as the Canadians and Scots spell it), as well as vodka and the unflavored German schnapps called korn

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## Article Body:

Aquavit

Aquavit, genever, gin, and whiskey (or whisky as the Canadians and Scots spell it), as well as vodka and the unflavored German schnapps called korn, are all part of the extended family of grain-based spirits. Except for whiskey and korn, whose compositions are strictly controlled by legislation, these potent drinks can also contain so-called agricultural alcohol made from molasses, potatoes, and other ingredients.

The name of this strong Scandinavian spirit is derived from the Latin *aqua vitae* (water of life), and was once the designation for all liquor. The basis of the pale or golden-yellow aquavit is very pure, almost nil-less alcohol distilled from grain or potatoes with 96 percent alcohol by volume, or almost 200 proof.

It is distilled with water and a variety of flavorings, such as caraway (the most traditional), cinnamon, cloves, coriander, dill, fennel, lemon peel, and star anise, along with a number of "secret" ingredients. The heart of the distillate is then mixed with neutral alcohol and softened water and left to mature in the producer's cellars or warehouse. The alcohol content of Danish aquavit is 80 to 84 proof; German aquavit is 76 to 80 proof.

Serve aquavit very cold in a short glass, similar to a shot glass; this is how its full, round, and distinctive taste develops. It acts as a stimulant on the stomach wall and is very easily digestible, so it is ideal to offer guests after a meal as a digestive.

## Genever

Genever is the Dutch national drink, and what is considered to be first gin. The word genever developed from the French word genievre (juniper), which is not surprising because genever, like some varieties of gin, has a juniper aroma. First-class genever is matured for several years in oak casks and is golden yellow. The alcohol content is 76 to 86 proof. The Dutch drink their genever neat and very cold in small, tulip-shaped glasses as an aperitif. Fruit-flavored genevers are also available.

## Gin

Clear spirit is one of the drinks without which a bar would be lost. The alcohol is based on barley and rye, to which a mixture of herbs and spices, called botanicals, is added, such as i, aniseed, cardamom, coriander, juniper, and lemon and orange zests. After distillation, the gin is diluted to the customary strength of 76 to 90 proof. "Dry gin," for example, is 80 proof.

Gins, produced in England, Holland, and the United States, have different taste qualities. The most requested gins are those as "dry gin" and "London dry gin." The dry designations developed to discriminate the contents from that which was labeled Old Tom gin" and "Plymouth Gin," both of which used to be sweeter than they are today. Sloe gin is, in fact, a liqueur, not made by macerating crushed sloes in gin.

Klarer This colorless, weak, and often flavorless spirit is made from potatoes, corn, and millet. The minimum alcohol content is 32 percent

## Korn schnapps

When a German orders a "schnapps," the chances are that it is this clear, grain-based spirit that is required, not the flavored, often creamy drinks called "schnapps" in the United States. Korn is the most popular drink in Germany, where it is traditionally drunk neat or as a chaser to beer. Produced from wheat, rye, barley, oats, or buckwheat, it has an alcoholic content of between 32 and 38 percent by volume, or 64 to 76 proof.

If the designation Alt or Alter is on the label, the product has been matured for at least six months. Pure korn just tastes of grain, nothing else. If it is distilled from wheat, it is very mild; but if it is based on rye, it is powerful and spicy. Some varieties, called Kornbrand, contain a minimal addition of flavorings such as aniseed, cinnamon, cloves, or coriander. Apfel Korn has been made with apples.

## Vodka

In Russian, the meaning of the word vodka is "little stream." Vodka is a colorless, clear, smooth, and pure spirit with a neutral taste. It is distilled from mixtures of grains or potatoes. The top brands, however, consist only of grain (primarily barley and wheat, and occasionally rye). Its strength is usually at least 80 proof, with some brands being far more potent. Flavored vodkas have become popular and the range is constantly expanding.

Widely available flavors include lemon, lime, pepper, and other fruits. In the United States, vodka is perhaps best known as the main alcoholic ingredient in Blood Marys and Screwdrivers, but in many countries it is drunk neat as a straight shot. When you serve neat vodka, make sure it is as near ice cold as possible. If you store your bottle in the freezer, the high alcohol content prevents the liquid turning to ice and it will always be ready to enjoy.

### Whiskey

"Whiskey" may be the generic term for the most widely drunk liquor in the world, but you will find great variety, not least of all determined by where it is produced. Canada, Ireland, Scotland, and the United States are the great whiskey producers.

Each country produces different product, and within each country there is great diversity. Even the spelling of the word is not the same: the americans and the Irish spell it "whiskey"; the Scots and the canadians spell it "whisky." Scottish whisky, or scotch as it is commonly known, is produced from malted barley or a mixture of grains, which can include malted and unmalted barley and the whole grains of cereals, such as corn or wheat, It is aged for at least three years in oak casks (traditionally second hand sherry casks) before bottling.

You will also see on the label the scotch is blended or a single malt. Blended scotch, as the term implies, contains scotch from several distilleries and will contain malt and grain whiskies married together. Single malts, on the other hand, are produced from only malted barley. If the label on a blended whiskey also contains an age, that is how long the youngest whiskey in the blend was aged in the cask.

One other characteristic of some scotch, especially some single malts is a smoky aroma. This occurs if the barley malt grains are dried over burning peat taken from the moorlands. Irish whiskey, produced from barley, wheat, rye, or oats, is blended, with only one significant single malt produced.

(The Irish use the term -vatting not "blending.") After distillation, clear water is added to give the whiskey its final alcoholic content of about 80 proof'. Irish whiskey is matured in wooden casks (for at least three years that

previously stored sherry, rum, or bourbon. As a general rule irish whiskey has a mellower flavor than scotch, and you will never find any with the smoky, peaty aroma of some scotches because the grains are not dried over peat-fueled fires. In the United lush whiskey is best known as a component in Irish coffee or after-dinner drinks.

#### Bourbon

Good bourbon is aged for four to six years, but some is left much longer in the cask. Like scotch, bourbon is also available either blended or straight, the latter meaning that it has been distilled from a single grain and all the whiskey comes from a single distiller.

Rye whiskey, also popular with Americans and often simply referred to as rye, is distilled from a mash with at least 51 percent rye and matured for about four years. The taste is generally spicier than that of bourbon, and it also comes in blended and straight varieties.

Tennessee whiskey, which must be produced in the state to be labeled as such, is filtered through wood charcoal and is therefore very mild. Some of the best-known brands also have a distinct flavor, easily recognizable as different from bourbon because they are produced from a sour mash containing some previously fermented yeast (similar to the starter used to make sourdough bread; fresh yeast produces a sweet mash). This is the whiskey someone wants if they ask for a "sour mash whiskey."

American blended whiskey is a mixture of bourbon, rye whiskey, and corn whiskeys. Canadian whisky is blended from straight grain whiskies and practically flavorless neutral alcohol, resulting in drink that is paler and lighter in flavor than most American whiskeys. This is why Canadian whisky is often used in drinks with soft-drink mixers, such as ginger ale.