

Martini Madness

TECHNIQUES FOR HOSTING THE COOLEST MARTINI PARTY

By Nicole Aloni

The martini was invented in the late 1800s and has gone wildly in and out of fashion ever since. For the last 15 years or so, they have been enjoying a vogue in flavored, colored and bejeweled variations that would have astonished early martini connoisseurs. But this new range of flavors has given the cocktail a far broader appeal; martinis are a very cool theme for a casual holiday bash.

To throw a successful martini party, set up a self-serve *Martini Buffet* with recipes and ingredients for three or four contrasting martinis. Guests will try their hand at preparing their own cocktail while you serve well-matched hors d'oeuvres. Garnishes (like lemon twists) and any special ingredient (like simple syrup) should be prepared beforehand.

The Set Up

1. Decorate one large buffet table (or two small) for your martini setup.
2. For each martini, provide a shaker, printed recipe, ingredients, garnishes and glasses.
3. Put the liquor for each martini on ice, with a separate bowl of ice to use in the shaker.
4. Offer three or four hors d'oeuvres that complement the flavors of the martinis selected.
5. Rent or borrow enough martini glasses so you don't have to wash up between tastings. Look for glasses on the small side; people will be sampling, not gulping.
6. Scatter bowls of the *Spiced Nuts* (see recipe on page 21), around the room; bring out the warm hors d'oeuvres one at a time.

HOW TO MAKE A GREAT MARTINI

The Essential Equipment

18 oz. shaker (It can be metal or glass with a metal cap. There should be a strainer in the cap.)

Martini glasses

Ice bucket

Plenty of ice (about 1 lb. for 4 cocktails)

Premium gin, like Bombay®

Premium vodka, like Grey Goose®

Dry vermouth

Flavored liqueurs

Fun Extras

Small vermouth atomizer for a really "dry" martini

Variety of unusual stuffed olives, like blue cheese, anchovy or jalapeño

Unusual picks for olives and other garnishes

Procedure

All steps are meant to create the two essential conditions of a perfect martini: the drink must be as cold as possible and there should be as little melted ice (water) as possible.

1. Chill glasses.
2. Fill the shaker half-full with ice and shake for 10 seconds; the shaker should feel icy. Drain any melted ice.
3. Add the liquid ingredients and shake to chill for 15 seconds.
4. Immediately strain into chilled (and garnished) glasses.



MARTINI RECIPES

(all make one cocktail)

Lemon Drop Martini

The lemon drop became popular in California in the '70s. It has remained one of the most popular of the "new martinis." For those of us who like sour candy and lemon tarts – this is the best.

3 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
2 tsp. of simple syrup*
3 oz. (1/3 cup) lemon-flavored vodka
2 tbsp. triple sec

Superfine sugar for dipping
Lemon wheels

1. Follow basic martini instructions.
2. Strain mixture into a chilled, sugar-rimmed martini glass. Garnish with a lemon wheel.

*Simple syrup: Cook slurry of 2 parts water and 1 part sugar over low heat until clear. Boil one minute, then cool and store for up to one month.

Red Apple Martini

A lovely, rosy-red hue and the tang of a crisp winter apple – yum!

2 oz. (1/4 cup) Grey Goose vodka
2 oz. (1/4 cup) sour apple liqueur
2 oz. (1/4 cup) cranberry juice
Apple slices
Cinnamon sugar*

1. Follow basic martini instructions.
2. Rim glass with cinnamon sugar and garnish with a thin slice of apple.

* 3 tbsp. sugar and 1/2 tsp. cinnamon, well blended.

Espresso Martini with a Twist

This fantastic drink was inspired by a woman who said, "I love espresso and I love martinis. Couldn't they be in the same glass?"

1.5 oz. (3 tbsp.) Grey Goose vodka
1.5 oz. (3 tbsp.) Kahlúa®
1 oz. (2 tbsp.) white Crème de Cacao
1 oz. (2 tbsp.) double-strength espresso – chilled

3 chocolate covered coffee beans
1 long lemon twist

1. Follow basic martini instructions.
2. Put three coffee beans in each chilled martini glass. Pour into glass and garnish with lemon twist.

MARTINI LINGO

Bruising

Describes the effect that shaking has on gin; small shards of ice are created and the gin becomes cloudy. Some say it releases the flavor of the gin. If you dislike this, you prefer a stirred martini.

Dirty

A dirty martini has a little bit of olive brine drizzled in.

Dry

A dry martini is one with very little vermouth. As more vermouth is added, the martini becomes "wetter."

Martini Glass

A stemmed glass with angled straight sides on the bowl (like an inverted cone). If it's not served in this glass – it's not a martini.

Rimmed Glass

To create a rimmed glass, moisten the lip of the glass with a lemon wedge. Press the edge of the glass into a saucer of coating (like cinnamon sugar).

Rinse

Many recipes call for a glass to be "rinsed" with a liquid (often vermouth). This means you add the liquid to the first chilled glass, swirl to coat the inside, and then pour that into the second glass, and so on. After you have coated all glasses in this way, discard any remaining liquid.

Shaker

Stainless steel or glass container in which you combine the liquor and ice. With the lid firmly in place, shake the shaker up and down to mix and chill the liquors.

Stirred Martini

For those of you who dislike shaking your martinis, you can stir. Basically, add ingredients to an ice-filled pitcher, stir to chill and serve.

Straight Up

Any drink that is served chilled, but without ice cubes, is called "straight up" or "straight."

Twist

A twist is a garnish made by cutting a very thin ribbon from the rind of a lemon or lime (usually a lemon). There are special tools to cut these.



Classic Dry Martini with “Firecrackers”

This is the martini for the person who can never get it “dry” enough. If you have a vermouth atomizer, use that to introduce a mere mist of vermouth to each cocktail before adding the chilled gin.

3-4 oz. premium gin, such as Bombay®
1/4 tsp. dry vermouth
2 large green “firecracker” olives (stuffed with jalapeno chile)

1. If using an atomizer, mist the inside of each glass with vermouth. Otherwise, *rinse* with vermouth, and drop olives in the bottom of each glass.
2. Follow the rest of the basic martini instructions.

With a 20-year catering career, Nicole Aloni is a recognized expert on every element of entertaining, and the author of *Secrets from a Caterer's Kitchen* and *Cooking for Company*. She currently teaches cooking and entertaining across the country at schools like Sur La Table, Draeger's and Viking, where her Martini Madness classes are a sold-out smash. To find out more about Nicole, and martinis, visit her Web site at www.secretsfromacaterer.com.

MARTINI-FRIENDLY HORS D'OEUVRES

Barber Foods® Four-Cheese Stuffed Chicken Chunks with Mustard Dipping Sauce†

This bold, cheesy flavor and tangy dipping sauce are the perfect complement for the Classic Martini. Plan on preparing four to five of these for each guest.

Moroccan Spiced Nuts

Flavorful homemade, spiced nuts are a classic pairing for any cocktail. These stay crisp for up to 1 week if sealed in an airtight container with a piece of parchment or waxed paper in the bottom. Prepare about 1/4 cup of these for each guest.

Makes about 2-1/2 cups

1 egg white
2-1/2 cups roasted, unsalted almonds, cashews or pecans
2 tsp. kosher salt
3 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. chili powder
1/2 tsp. ground ginger
1/2 tsp. cayenne
2 tsp. sugar

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Line a sheet pan with foil and spray with vegetable oil.
2. Whip egg white with a few drops of water until frothy. Add nuts to whipped egg white and toss to mix. Use a slotted spoon or strainer to transfer the nuts to a second bowl. Mix all spices, sugar and salt in a bowl and sprinkle on the nuts. Toss to coat.
3. Spread the nut mixture out, in one layer, on the sheet pan. Bake in the preheated oven, shaking or stirring once to make sure they roast evenly, about 25 to 35 minutes until they are crisp and browned. Transfer the nuts to another cool, flat surface to cool and crisp.

Asian Temptations® Tempura Shrimp†

Tempura Shrimp is always popular and a superb match for the Lemon Drop Martini. Prepare two or three of these for each guest.

Brie and Pear Tartlets

A surprisingly simple hors d'oeuvre that gets raves every time. This is a great flavor combo with the Red Apple Martini. Make three to four of these for each guest.

To make 16 tartlets

1 sheet frozen piecrust, defrost in the refrigerator
2 tbsp. honey
1 tbsp. minced thyme
1/4 cup ripe pear, peeled and minced
3 oz. Brie, minced

For the crust

1. Roll out the crust to flatten and cut into 1-1/2" to 2" squares.
2. Spray the cups of a mini muffin pan with vegetable oil. Put one square into each muffin cup, pressing flat to the bottom of the cup – so it will sit flat after baking. Prick the bottom of each cup and chill for 10 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Bake chilled tart shells 10 minutes until light gold. Remove and let cool before use.
4. Combine the Brie, honey, pear and thyme. Toss to mix.
5. Increase oven temperature to 375°F. Fill each cup with about 1 teaspoon of the Brie mixture – bake 5-6 minutes until cheese is bubbling. Serve with a sprig of thyme, garnishing each cup.

† Available in the Frozen Food Department.