

Cocktails 101: From Zero to Cocktail

Inexpensive Spirits to Start your Home Bar:

When starting with your home bar, you don't need to stock up on the highest quality spirits. Especially if they will be primarily made for cocktails, a mid to low priced spirit is usually more than good enough. If you find out you're a big fan of that particular spirit – great! Feel free to migrate up the price range as your tastes evolve. But in the beginning, I'd recommend starting on the lower priced spirits.

Here are some brands that are a good combination of inexpensive and decent quality.

Spirit	Recommendations	Comments
Vodka	Gordon's Tito's Nikolai	Vodka is relatively inexpensive. These low to mid-priced vodkas are a decent quality for the price.
Gin	Gordon's Seagram's Extra Dry New Amsterdam Straight	Gordon's and Seagram's are the more traditional, Juniper-flavored gins. For folks new to Gin, I recommend New Amsterdam.
Tequila	El Jimador Espolon Olmeca Altos	Most of these are available in Blanco or Reposado at a reasonable price point. I'd recommend starting with Blanco.
Brandy	St. Remy French Brandy VSOP Christian Brothers Brandy VSOP E&J Brandy XO	Brandy is one ingredient that you can get fairly good quality for low cost. These are a great place to start.
Rum	Angostura 5 Year Flor de Caña 4 Yr. White Rum El Dorado 3 Yr. White Rum	Angostura has been aged, but the other two are white. If you like sweeter drinks, consider the Angostura.
Whiskey	Four Roses Yellow Label Bourbon Jim Beam Black Label Old Crow Reserve	All three of these are "Bourbon" whiskeys, which is what I recommend folks start with. If you enjoy whiskey cocktails, consider branching out into other types of whiskey.

Non-Spirits:	Recommendations	Comments
Cocktail Bitters	Angostura Bitters	This is pretty much the standard.
Orange Liqueur <i>(also known as "Triple Sec")</i>	Bols Triple Sec Marie Brizard Triple Sec Luxardo Triplum Triple Sec	Start with these lower priced options and consider Cointreau / Grand Marnier if you enjoy using them in cocktails.
Sweet Vermouth	Martini & Rosso Sweet Vermouth Noilly Prat Sweet Vermouth	If you can buy these in the 375 ml size, I'd recommend it! Vermouth will last up to 2-3 months in the fridge.
Dry Vermouth	Martini & Rossi Extra Dry Vermouth Noilly Prat Dry Vermouth	Buy Dry Vermouth if you're a fan of a particular cocktail that uses it (like a dry martini). Otherwise, I'd skip it.

"What Can I Make with What I Have?"

As you start to grow your bar, it can be hard to know what cocktail recipes you can make with the ingredients you have. Here are a couple of websites where you can input the ingredients you have, and they'll let you know what you can make!

- <http://www.drinkstudio.com/>
- <http://www.makemeacocktail.com/mybar/>
- <http://www.cocktailbuilder.com/>