

The Four-Bottle Cocktail Matrix

20 measured drinks from gin, vodka, white rum and blanco tequila - plus a shopping list, substitution rules and a party-scaling worksheet.

GIN	VODKA	WHITE RUM	BLANCO TEQUILA
5 drinks	5 drinks	5 drinks	5 drinks

Use this as a controlled starting point, not a commandment. Measure the first drink, taste it, then change one variable at a time.

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The small pantry that unlocks the matrix

The four spirits are only the base. These inexpensive supporting ingredients produce the biggest range without filling a cupboard with single-use bottles.

Fresh	Long-life	Optional extras
Lemons, limes, mint, oranges, grapefruit	Caster sugar, soda water, tonic, ginger beer, cola, coffee	Triple sec, sweet vermouth, Campari, coffee liqueur, cream of coconut

The four rules

- 1. Measure.** A 25/50ml jigger removes more uncertainty than a new bottle.
- 2. Use enough ice.** More ice usually controls dilution better because the drink chills quickly.
- 3. Keep carbonation cold.** Open small cans late and pour gently.
- 4. Change one thing.** If a drink is too sweet, remove syrup before changing the spirit, citrus and mixer together.

Simple syrup

Mix equal weights of caster sugar and hot water until clear, cool, refrigerate and label with the date. For a small batch, 100g sugar plus 100g water is enough for several drinks.

UK alcohol units

Units = millilitres x ABV / 1,000. A 50ml pour of 40% spirit is 2 units before other alcoholic ingredients. Drink responsibly and keep water available.

Five drinks from London Dry gin

Start with a juniper-led London Dry. Use soda to diagnose the gin, tonic for bitterness, citrus for structure and vermouth/Campari only when you want a spirit-forward drink.

01 Gin and Tonic

Measure: 25ml gin, 75ml tonic, lemon peel

Method: Build over plenty of ice and stir once.

Adjust: Add mixer in 15ml steps if the gin is still too strong.

02 Gin Rickey

Measure: 50ml gin, 25ml lime, 75-100ml soda

Method: Build over ice, top with cold soda.

Adjust: Add 5ml syrup only if your lime is severe.

03 Tom Collins

Measure: 50ml gin, 25ml lemon, 15ml syrup, 75ml soda

Method: Shake first three with ice, strain over fresh ice, top.

Adjust: Reduce syrup to 10ml for a drier drink.

04 Gimlet

Measure: 50ml gin, 25ml fresh lime, 15ml syrup

Method: Shake with ice and fine-strain.

Adjust: For cordial, omit syrup and start with 20ml cordial.

05 Negroni

Measure: 30ml gin, 30ml Campari, 30ml sweet vermouth

Method: Stir with ice, strain over a large cube, orange peel.

Adjust: Try 45/30/30 for a drier, gin-led version.

Mixer test: compare 15ml gin plus 45ml each of soda, tonic and ginger ale in identical glasses before committing to a full serve.

Five drinks from unflavoured vodka

Vodka is the flexible bottle. Choose a standard-strength unflavoured spirit; then control coffee, citrus, sugar and carbonation rather than paying for branding alone.

06 Moscow Mule

Measure: 45ml vodka, 120ml ginger beer, 10ml lime

Method: Build over ice and stir gently.

Adjust: Split sweet ginger beer with soda.

07 Espresso Martini

Measure: 50ml vodka, 30ml coffee liqueur, 1 espresso, 0-10ml syrup

Method: Shake hard with plenty of ice, fine-strain.

Adjust: Taste before adding syrup; liqueur sweetness varies.

08 Cosmopolitan

Measure: 40ml vodka, 20ml triple sec, 20ml cranberry, 15ml lime

Method: Shake with ice and fine-strain.

Adjust: Add cranberry in 5ml steps if too sharp.

09 Vodka Collins

Measure: 50ml vodka, 25ml lemon, 15ml syrup, 75ml soda

Method: Shake first three, strain over ice, top.

Adjust: Use lime instead of lemon for a sharper version.

10 Black Russian

Measure: 50ml vodka, 20ml coffee liqueur

Method: Stir over ice in a rocks glass.

Adjust: Add 25ml cream for a White Russian.

Espresso tip: fresh coffee can be shaken promptly with enough ice. For several drinks, cool a measured batch covered and make two cocktails per shaker.

Five drinks from light white rum

A light, dry white rum keeps lime, mint and soda clear. Dark and spiced rum can make good variations, but they are not neutral substitutes.

11 Daiquiri

Measure: 50ml white rum, 25ml lime, 15ml syrup

Method: Shake hard with ice and fine-strain.

Adjust: Move syrup by 5ml after tasting.

12 Mojito

Measure: 45ml rum, 20ml lime, 2 tsp sugar, mint, soda

Method: Press mint gently, churn with ice, top with soda.

Adjust: Reduce sugar if using sweetened or spiced rum.

13 Cuba Libre

Measure: 50ml rum, 10ml lime, 100ml cola

Method: Build over ice and stir gently.

Adjust: Lime separates it from a plain rum and cola.

14 Rum Mule

Measure: 45ml rum, 10ml lime, 120ml ginger beer

Method: Build over ice; garnish with lime.

Adjust: Split the mixer with soda if too sweet.

15 Pina Colada

Measure: 50ml rum, 50ml pineapple, 30ml cream of coconut

Method: Shake with ice or blend with a measured ice portion.

Adjust: Cream of coconut is sweetened; coconut milk is not equivalent.

Mint rule: clap the leaves once and press them lightly in the liquid. Grinding stems produces fragments and can add harsh vegetal flavour.

Five drinks from 100% agave blanco

For the cleanest reference, use blanco labelled 100% agave. The statement is a production fact, not a guarantee of taste, health or craftsmanship.

16 Margarita

Measure: 50ml tequila, 20ml triple sec, 15ml lime

Method: Shake with ice, strain, optional half salt rim.

Adjust: Add 5ml syrup only after tasting.

17 Tommy's Margarita

Measure: 50ml tequila, 25ml lime, 15ml agave syrup

Method: Shake with ice and strain over fresh ice.

Adjust: Reduce syrup to 10ml for a drier serve.

18 Paloma

Measure: 50ml tequila, 15ml lime, pinch salt, grapefruit soda

Method: Build over ice and top gently.

Adjust: Split sweet soda with plain soda.

19 Ranch Water

Measure: 50ml tequila, 20ml lime, 100ml sparkling water

Method: Build over ice in a tall glass.

Adjust: Add a pinch of salt before adding sweetener.

20 Tequila Sunrise

Measure: 50ml tequila, 100ml orange, 10ml grenadine

Method: Build tequila and orange over ice; sink grenadine slowly.

Adjust: Use less grenadine if the juice is already sweet.

Bottle check: compare 70cl-equivalent price, ABV, promotion conditions and delivery. Gold colour is not a quality grade.

Substitution and rescue matrix

Problem	First change	Do not change yet
Too sweet	Remove syrup or split a sweet mixer with soda	The base spirit
Too sour	Add 5ml syrup or reduce citrus next round	Every other ingredient
Watery	Use more cold ice, colder glassware and a shorter controlled shake	Buy a stronger bottle immediately
Spirit disappears	Reduce sweetener, liqueur or mixer volume	Assume the cheapest bottle is faulty
Flat long drink	Use a newly opened cold mixer and add it last	Add more alcohol
Harsh finish	Check dilution and balance; add 10-15ml mixer	Mask it with a large syrup pour

Scaling for a group

Multiply still ingredients, but add fresh citrus on the day and carbonated mixers in the glass or just before serving. Do not batch soda overnight. For shaken drinks, pre-batch the measured liquid and shake two servings at a time with fresh ice.

A simple worksheet

Drink	Serves	Spirit ml	Citrus ml	Sweet/liqueur ml	Mixer ml

Where the reference ratios come from

The International Bartenders Association recipe pages were checked on 24 August 2026 for the Margarita, Mojito and Espresso Martini reference structures. The Moscow Mule structure also follows its current listing. Other serves are clearly presented as practical home-bar starting ratios.

iba-world.com/iba-cocktail/margarita/

iba-world.com/iba-cocktail/mojito/

iba-world.com/iba-cocktail/espresso-martini/

iba-world.com/iba-cocktail/moscow-mule/

Editorial promise

This guide does not claim a blind bottle tasting. It is a recipe and decision tool. Product prices are intentionally omitted because they change faster than the methods. Visit the site for dated UK bottle comparisons and the full editorial policy.

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Responsible drinking

Measurements are provided for consistency, not to encourage consumption. Track the total alcohol in every serve, include water and food, and do not drive after drinking. In the UK, alcohol units are calculated as millilitres multiplied by ABV, divided by 1,000.

FREE TO DOWNLOAD. USE IT, MARK IT UP, AND MAKE THE SECOND DRINK BETTER THAN THE FIRST.