

Bourbon

According to law, bourbon is made from at least 51% corn, (typically about 70%) with the remainder being rye and/or wheat, and malted barley. It is distilled to no more than 160 proof, and aged in new charred oak barrels for at least two years. The two years maturation process is not a legal requirement for a whiskey to be called "bourbon" but it is a legal requirement for "straight bourbon." However, in practice, most bourbon whiskeys are aged for at least four years.

Bourbon must be put into the barrels at no more than 125 proof. Generally, it is then adjusted to 80-100 proof and bottled. However, some distillers produce "cask strength" bottlings.

Bourbon can legally be made anywhere in the United States. Legitimate production is not restricted to Kentucky, although currently all but a few brands are made there and Kentucky is the only state allowed to put its name on the bottle. Bourbon is not Bourbon unless the label says so.

Small Batch bourbons are bottlings from a "batch" of barrels that have been mixed prior to the bottling. Single Barrel bourbons are the bottling of an olde 'single' barrel of bourbon.

Tennessee Whiskey

Jack Daniel's and George Dickel are not considered bourbons because they are charcoal-mellowed-slowly, drop by drop, filtered through sugar-maple charcoal-prior to aging. The process, called Lincoln County Process, infuses a sweet and sooty character into the distillate as it removes impurities. But up to and after the charcoal filtering, Tennessee Whiskey production is much the same as any other Bourbon.

Rye Whiskey

American rye whiskey is, by law, made from a mash of at least 51 percent rye. The other ingredients of the mash are usually corn and malted barley. It is distilled to no more than 160 (U.S.) Proof, and aged in oak barrels. The whiskey must be put into the barrels at no more than 125 proof. Rye Whiskey was the prevalent whiskey of the northeastern states, especially Pennsylvania and Maryland, but largely disappeared after Prohibition.

Corn Whiskey

Corn whiskey is an American whiskey made from a mash of at least 80 percent corn. The whiskey is distilled to no more than 80 percent alcohol by volume, and stored in used or untreated oak barrels for a short time.

Sour Mash

Today, all straight bourbons are produced by the sour-mash method. In the sour-mash method, backset (liquid from a previous distillation) is added to the mash in addition to the yeast. The backset helps to make the next batch of the bourbon similar to the previous ones by passing on some of the characteristics of the previous batches. This is similar to using a "starter" when making sourdough bread.

Bottled-in-Bond

To be labeled as "Bottled-In-Bond" or "Bonded" the whiskey must be straight whiskey that is the product of one distillation season from one distiller at one distillery. It must have been stored (aged) in a federally bonded warehouse under U.S. government supervision for at least four years and bottled at 100 proof (50% alcohol by volume). The bottled product's label must identify the distillery and, if different, where it is bottled.

Canadian Whiskey

By Law, this Whiskey must be aged at least three years in a wooden barrel of no greater than 700 Liters. Most Canadian whiskies are blended multi-grain whiskies and are usually lighter and smoother than other whiskey styles. These are also called "rye whiskey" though American law prevents them to be labeled as such. Although rye is often a primary component in Canadian whiskies, the use of rye is not dictated by law.

