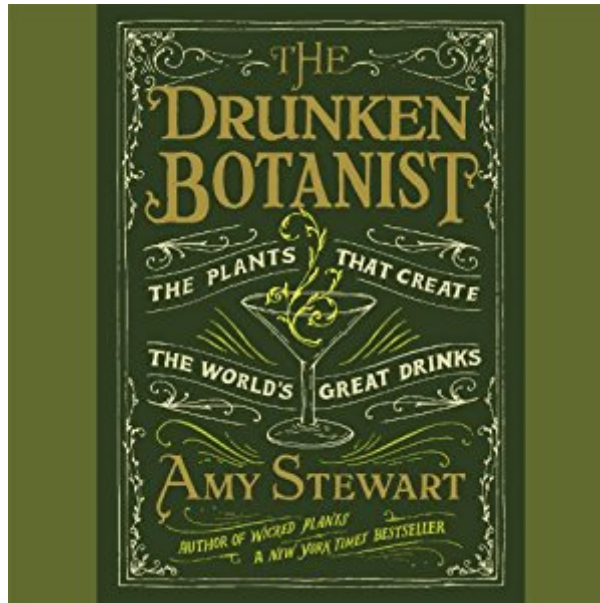


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The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create The World's Great Drinks



Synopsis

Every great drink starts with a plant. Sake began with a grain of rice. Scotch emerged from barley. Gin was born from a conifer shrub when medieval physicians boiled juniper berries with wine to treat stomach pain. The Drunken Botanist uncovers the surprising botanical history and fascinating science and chemistry of over 150 plants, flowers, trees, and fruits (and even a few fungi). Some of the most extraordinary and obscure plants have been fermented and distilled, and they each represent a unique cultural contribution to global drinking traditions and our history. Molasses was an essential ingredient of American independence when outrage over a mandate to buy British rather than French molasses for New World rum-making helped kindle the American Revolution. Captain James Cook harvested the young, green tips of spruce trees to make a vitamin C-rich beer that cured his crew of scurvy - a recipe that Jane Austen enjoyed so much that she used it as a plot point in Emma. With over 50 drink recipes, growing tips for gardeners, and advice that carries Stewart's trademark wit, this is the perfect listen for gardeners and cocktail aficionados alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Intriguing read. I dabble a bit in making bitters, limoncello, and various types of meads and honey wines, and this book provided a fascinating tour of the history of alcohol, while introducing other intriguing social facts, like how slave trade grew to harvest sugar for rum; there's also some wonderful recipes, a fantastic discussion on what defines a top shelf alcohol, and even a history of a number of plants discussed. If you geek out on science or history, or just like booze, you'll probably find something to love in this book.

Plants soak up CO₂ and sunlight and convert it to sugar and exhale oxygen. When sugar is combined with yeast, alcohol is born. So alcohol is very a very close cousin to the substances that make life possible. Yeast is plentiful in the air, which I didn't know, so many staple foods will turn to alcohol with time. I am not a drinker, but I am a gardener, and I am nosey. So I found this encyclopedic book to be delightful reading. Stewart does a thorough job of describing the various plants that form the basis of the alcoholic drinks in the world. She adds a few myth busters such as the fact that a worm in mescal actually just means a marketing tool for cheap mescal and is not remotely hallucinogenic. Good cider is made from apples so sour they are called spitters. Gin is actually flavored vodka. These are not spoilers, there are many such facts. In addition, she feeds my garden soul with the history of how these plants were found, mutated, grown, etc. And she points out which plants have very toxic relatives which look remarkably like the good cultivars so these you should not pick in the wild. She addresses the taste of each type of drink, how they taste, and how to make a cocktail with each type. And for us clueless types, she describes the "top shelf" specimens and what makes them premium. She also explicates the appropriate mixers and herb additives and how these came into popular use. The drink recipes seem intriguing as well. I especially enjoyed the nuggets of social history that accompany the text, for example the extreme creation of the slave trade to harvest the sugar so vital for rum. I enjoyed reading this book. It is more a collection of essays or entries than one narrative. As such, it makes perfect reading for those short breaks we all take. I personally got a bit weary with all the different permutations of alcohol and their precursors, but overall found the text to be full of information that I didn't know; much of it is fun to know. As a source book, I would find it excellent. Right now, different variations of familiar drinks and alcohols are particularly popular, so I would especially recommend this book to people who like to experiment with combinations. For the rest of us, we learn something new, always an excellent attribute in a book.

As an author, I wish I had written this book. I can not imagine a more enjoyable topic to research! The book ties together two of my favorite things-- botany and alcohol. Packed with interesting facts about things I've been putting in my stomach for years that I never knew before. Joking aside, it also provides a foundation to think more about why we like certain tastes, why drinks taste as they do, and the many ways that plant diversity enriches our lives.

Just last night, I went to a booksigning with Amy Stewart for "The Drunken Botanist", the first time I'd

heard Stewart speak. Her talk was as infectiously good-spirited (heh heh) as her writing. And, as in her book, there's tons of humor. I laughed when Amy said that when she was researching her previous book, "Wicked Bugs", she had no volunteers to help her. But when she started researching booze for "The Drunken Botanist", "everyone wanted to carry my suitcase". There are all kinds of books out now covering mixology and the new cocktails, etc. What sets Amy's book apart is that she is a horticulturist, and she tells you about the fabulous plants that make or go into all the different kinds of fermented beverages man has come up with. The book is divided into three parts: 1. Plants that are fermented to make the alcohol (wheat, potatoes, grapes, etc.) 2. Plants that are added to the alcohol (hops, gentian, aloe, etc.) 3. Plants that make up mixers and garnishes (spearmint, pomegranate, pepper, etc.) Throughout the book, in the appropriate chapters, are recipes for 50 cocktails, and 13 syrups, infusions and garnishes, such as limoncello and "Brine your own olives". This isn't a staid recitation of facts, but engaging, encompassing and trivia-filled reading. For example, the chapter on sugar cane (in part 1), tells you:- the first and current places sugarcane is cultivated and how it is cultivated- the botany of sugarcane- how to make rum- spirits made from sugar cane- how rum became linked to British sailors- drink recipes Did you know that the British navy had rum rations for its sailors until 1970! Do you know how to tell "real" tonic water from the cheap imitation? How about why a splash of water actually heightens the flavor of a spirit instead of diluting it? There's a member of the iris family called Orris (part 2) which is used in almost every gin made. Yet it is cultivated on only 173 acres worldwide. Stewart writes, "Its popularity in perfume is due to the fact that it not only holds the fragrance in place but clings to the skin as well. It also happens to be a very common allergen, which explains why allergy sufferers might be sensitive to cosmetics and other fragrances - as well as gin." I could write pages more about the great stories and tidbits of information contained in this book. I really had a fun time reading it. The illustrations in "The Drunken Botanist" are fine, but they're stock illustrations. I miss Briony Morrow-Cribbs' and Jonathan Rosen's incredible drawings and engravings that were such enchanting - and vigorous - enhancements to Stewart's previous books, *Wicked Bugs: The Louse That Conquered Napoleon's Army & Other Diabolical Insects* and *Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother and Other Botanical Atrocities*. Visit Stewart's website, drunkenbotanist.com for links to plant and liquor sources. There are some heritage plants that can only be found in a couple places. and check out Redventure, a type of very slender red celery that is perfect for use as a swizzle stick! Happy Reader

I purchased this book for my husband for Christmas and he was more excited about this than any of his other gifts. He said he was considering it for himself, but knows better during the holiday season.

He has not been able to put this book down. He is reading it every spare minute he has, and then telling me all the interesting details. It was a huge hit.

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