

Gastronomic Girls

Friends Apart, Food Together...

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MONDAY, 20 JANUARY 2014

Gastronomic Girls

It's all change for us Gastronomic Girls! You might notice it's a little quiet around here for the next couple of months. One of us (Rachel) is busy planning the wedding of the century, and the other (Aoife) has just set up a new blog sweetpeasandsours.com (Cambridge, Cocktails and other stuff) which she will be concentrating on for the next little while. Do check out Aoife's new [blog](#) and be sure to come on back to Gastronomic Girls in May and find out what we are up to next.

Posted by [Aoife](#) at 10:12 0 comments



Labels: [Aoife](#), [Rachel](#)

FRIDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2013

Christmas Cocktails



Aoife, Cambridge

I can tell it's getting close to the shortest day of the year, the quality of my photographs drops off in direct proportion to the amount of daylight available. But, crap photos aside, I am very excited about these Christmas cocktails. I have two to share with you today. The first, a variation of an [old favourite](#) of mine that's perfect for a party or for drinking during the day on Christmas Day. The second is my attempt to capture what Christmas means to me and express it through the medium of cocktail. Probably a bit ambitious but I award myself bonus marks for effort.

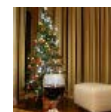
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- ▼ 2014 (1)
 - ▼ January (1)
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- ▶ 2013 (67)
- ▶ 2012 (99)

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Rachel, Dublin I have an uncharacteristically healthy offering for your cocktail hour nibble this week. Healthfulness is not usual...



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Tom Collins Rachel, a secret location in Dublin Last weekend I was feeling more grateful than normal for all my wonderful friends...



Sweet (and Savoury) Treats: Afternoon Tea
Afternoon Tea Rachel, Dublin Afternoon Tea has become very trendy in recent years but can set you back a small fortune in some ...



Review: Legend of Kremlin Vodka
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LABELS

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So spiced apple punch first. I gave you the basic [recipe](#) for this one last year but this year, I decided to jazz up the ginger syrup with extra spices and reduce the alcohol level by using sparkling water instead of sparkling wine. I took 300g of peeled grated ginger, 2 cinnamon sticks, 5 crushed cardamom pods and the end of a nutmeg and poured over about a litre of boiling water from the kettle. I allowed this to sit and infuse for about two hours. I then strained out all the bits, and added an equal amount of sugar (1kg for my 1 litre of liquid). Once dissolved, I added a tablespoon of vodka and decanted to a sterilised bottle which I keep in the fridge. It's perfect for a party as it's so easy to make up a big jug, keep it the fridge until your guests arrive and then serve in prepped glasses. If you leave out the vodka, you also have a lovely non-alcoholic drink.



spiced apple punch

3 parts apple juice
 3 parts sparkling water
 1 part ginger spice syrup
 1 part fresh lemon juice
 1 part vodka

I combine everything in a jug apart from the sparkling water which I add at the last minute.

You can hear me talking in more detail about how this cocktail represents an Aoife Christmas on the [Flavour](#) programme on Cambridge 105 this Saturday. But what's really important is that it tastes absolutely and delightfully Christmassy and delicious.

Christmas spirit (serves one)

30 ml [Christmas pudding vodka](#)
 15ml PX Sherry
 10ml Irish whiskey
 5ml fresh lemon juice
 5ml fresh orange juice

Grapefruit Raspberry healthy Bourbon black pudding Beer Cambridge Food & Wine Society Chocolate Comfort Food Cooks Academy Cupcakes Eat Cambridge Fish Ginger Beer Gooseberries Lemon Balm Lemon Verbena Mint Mojito Old-fashioned Sparkling Wine Tequila Whiskey Wine Tasting cocktails mid-week sugar syrup Lemongrass Muffin Peach Ranelagh Raspberries Sorbet Travel Triple Sec Vanilla Bon Appétit Champagne Chemistry Cordial Easter Free Range Hangover Cure Indian Martini Negroni Non-Alcoholic Pichet Prosecco Segway Snug Takeaway Tonic Vermouth quail's eggs

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3 dashes each of orange bitters, cranberry bitters and chocolate bitters
Combine all of the ingredients in a shaker with plenty of ice and stir or shake until cold. Strain into a prepared glass and garnish with a piece of orange zest, making sure to release the oils.

The perfect cocktail for a lazy Christmas afternoon in front of the fire.



Posted by [Aoife](#) at 21:10 0 comments



Labels: [Aoife](#), [Bitters](#), [Cambridge](#), [Cambridge 105](#), [Christmas](#), [Christmas pudding](#), [Irish whiskey](#), [Lemon](#), [Orange](#), [PX sherry](#)

SATURDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2013

Sloe & Rose Hip Hedgerow Sour



Aoife, Cambridge

It's been a wonderful year for fruit and the fruits of the hedgerow are no exception. As the days get shorter and my fingers start to tingle with the cold, the first thing on my mind is the sloe. As I'm sure I have told you many times, picking sloes was my first foraging experience and heading out into the countryside on the hunt for these blue-black jewels is still one of my favourite autumnal rituals. It is a closely guarded secret where I pick my sloes (although that may be just because nobody has asked me) but I will reveal that it is close to where I work. My sloe picking happens on my lunch break and returning to the office laden down with my bounty only confirms my colleagues suspicions that I am a madwoman who thinks about alcohol far too much. More seriously, the fact that in 20 minutes I can walk from an industrial road in a large town to a beautiful open space with hedgerows full of foragable food is proof that foraging is not confined to those living the dream life in the country.



My method for making sloe gin or vodka is very straightforward. First, pick your sloes. When you get them home, wash them and get rid of the leaves and the bits of stalks. Instead of wasting hours of your life piercing them individually simply pop them in the freezer overnight. Once you defrost them the skins will have burst and have done the tedious job for you. I don't tend to add sugar to my sloe spirits anymore. You can always add sugar at the end once they have infused for a few months but I find that they don't necessarily need it (although this is definitely a matter of personal taste). So take your container, fill it about 1/2 to 2/3 with sloes and then fill the rest of the way with your choice of spirit. I like to do both a sloe vodka batch and a sloe gin batch. I think vodka lets the sloe flavour come through slightly better but if you like gin then the extra botanicals are always going to be welcome. I leave it for between 3 and 6 months before I strain out the sloes and bottle the liquor. It's best left for another few months to mature in the bottle although if you have self control (unlike me) you can leave it for years and discover how the flavours change. One of my favourite ways to enjoy sloe gin is just straight up in a small pretty glass. Its warming glow improves even the most depressing Sunday afternoon.



I wrote last Autumn about making [rose hip cordial](#) and this year I have been at it again. I just can't resist it's aromatic, citrus flavour. The jug pictured at the top shows this year's batch in all its glory. Rose hip cordial is a wonderful mixed with sparkling water or used in baking and cooking but predictably my favourite use for it is as a cocktail ingredient. I couldn't resist using my two hedgerow products together to create my go-to cocktail: a [sour](#).



hedgerow sour

60mL sloe gin or vodka
30mL fresh lemon juice
15mL rose hip cordial
frozen sloes to garnish

If you have added sugar to your sloe gin or are using a sweet commercial variety you may want to increase the proportion of lemon juice you use. Combine all of the ingredients in a cocktail shaker or large glass. Add plenty of ice. Stir for a minutes. Strain into a prepared glass. Garnish with some frozen sloes (I always try to keep a few back when I am making my sloe gin). This cocktail also works well served over crushed ice.





You can hear me talking about sloe gin on Flavour on [Cambridge 105](#) today at 12pm.

Posted by [Aoife](#) at 11:24 0 comments



Labels: [Aoife](#), [Cambridge](#), [Cocktail](#), [Crushed Ice](#), [Forage](#), [Gin](#), [Hedgerow](#), [Rosehips](#), [Sloe](#), [Sour](#), [Vodka](#)

FRIDAY, 18 OCTOBER 2013

Blackberry Vodka Experiment - The Results



Aoife, Cambridge

It's finally time to reveal the results of my blackberry vodka [experiment](#). The aim of the experiment was to determine how much it was necessary to spend on vodka for infusing purposes. In the past I've shied away from using the absolute cheapest brand but this was down to my own prejudices. It was time to get to the truth of the matter. The blackberries had been infusing for about 6 weeks so I roped in the

long suffering Husband and Alan Alder from [Flavour on Cambridge 105](#) to help me taste the vodkas.

We all agreed that the fruit flavour made it difficult to taste the difference between the vodkas. Without sugar, it was slightly easier to taste the difference and the Tesco value brand tasted particularly flat and uninteresting. However, the experiments that included sugar really rounded the harsh edges off the cheaper vodka and it was perfectly drinkable. It was still possible to taste the difference between the premium Grey Goose and the Tesco value but not enough to put you off if you were on a tight budget.



Smirnoff and Ketel One were both quite disappointing, the real winner in this experiment was the Tamova, the "premium" Aldi brand. This stood up really well to Grey Goose and was the favourite of at least one of the tasters. Tamova is the same abv (40%) as Grey Goose but less than half the price (£19.38/L compared to £48.50/L). I will definitely be using this again. It's slightly more expensive than a standard brand like Smirnoff but has infinitely more taste and a higher abv.

My one disappointment was that I didn't have any Russian Standard (one of my favourites) on hand to include in the experiment. I will just have to keep on experimenting.

The blackberry vodka and my [lemon verbena sugar syrup](#) also made an excellent medium for poaching some little pears. Served with some natural yoghurt it was a perfect Autumnal desert.



Posted by Aoife at 14:10 0 comments



Labels: Aoife, Blackberry Vodka, Cambridge, Cambridge 105, Cocktail, Flavour, Forage, Pear

WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2013

[Sweet Treats: Crunchy Oat and Honey Biscuits](#)



Rachel, Dublin

Apartment living and having a keen interest in food is not the most convenient combination. The cupboards are stuffed with unusual ingredients and kitchenware spilled over from the kitchen into the storeroom quite some time ago.

A symptom of this space shortage is that shopping often gets tucked away in random corners and promptly forgotten about. However, inspired by some articles I have read recently about food waste and the moving [Hunger Hurts](#) post by a girl called Jack I started to feel a bit guilty about the disorganisation and decided that it was time to look at what I was storing to make sure none of it was going to waste.

My kitchen audit uncovered multiples of a few things, mostly spices, but they are at least small. The largest items by far were three enormous bags of rolled oats stored in various different corners. That certainly explained why we were getting a little tight on space!

Now, I know that having an excess of oats isn't really an issue now that Autumn is upon us and I'm having my new favourite thing, porridge with brown sugar and butter, for breakfast everyday. (A big thank you to Aoife's family for that tip, it's amaaaazing, as Aoife would say!) However, a thought about using up some oats to make oat biscuits had been firmly planted in my mind so I adapted [this recipe](#) for the ingredients I had to hand.

crunchy oat and honey biscuits (makes approximately 36)

150g rolled oats
 150g self-raising flour*
 150g caster sugar
 150g butter
 2 tbsp milk
 2 tbsp honey

*I don't buy self-raising flour (space saving reasons) as you can make your own by adding 2 tsp of baking powder per 150g plain flour. Just add it to the flour in the sieve and the sieving will combine the two.

Preheat your oven to 170°C (fan). Place the butter and honey in a saucepan and heat gently until the butter is entirely melted. Take off the heat and stir in the milk. Put all the dry ingredients in a large bowl and add the milk/butter/honey mixture and stir to combine. When the mixture comes together measure level tablespoonfuls and space them out on a non stick baking sheet giving them room as they will spread out while cooking (I had to cook the biscuits in three batches with this quantity of mixture). Place in the oven for 8-10 minutes keeping an eye that they don't colour too much. Second, and subsequent, batches need less time as the baking sheet is already hot. When they are ready they will be coloured but still quite soft. You need to work swiftly but gently with a pallet knife to move them from the baking sheet to a wire rack to cool. They will firm up and become crisp while they cool although I can highly recommend scoffing lots of them while they're still warm and satisfyingly chewy.



Posted by Rachel at 13:23 0 comments



Labels: Baking, Biscuits, Cookies, Dublin, Honey, Oats, Rachel, Recipe, Snack, Sweet Treats

FRIDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2013

Cocktail Hour: Blackberry Sour



Aoife, Cambridge

I have yet to reveal the outcome of my [blackberry vodka experiment](#) but I couldn't resist using some of an older batch to knock up a quick cocktail last Friday. A chance conversation with the lovely [Deepa](#) on twitter got me thinking about sours. I had recommended them to her as a quick cocktail to use her blackcurrant vodka and the more I thought about it the more I wanted one too.

A sour is a type of cocktail, typically consisting of a spirit, lemon or lime juice and some kind of sweetener. Within the broad sours category there are many different sub-groups: for instance the Margarita is a well known example of a New Orleans Sour. I am quite partial to a whiskey sour but you have to be in the whole of your health to go messing around with egg whites. The blackberry vodka's time had come.



If you are making a sour with a liqueur or a homemade spirit to which you have added sugar you don't need to add a sweetener. I tend to make my infused spirits without sugar so that I can adjust the sweetness later. It also allows me to introduce other flavours through the use of infused simple syrups. In this case, I had a batch of lemon verbena infused syrup that I thought might do the trick. Different cocktail books will advise different proportions but I decided to put my faith in Gary Regan whose [book](#) and his wonderful [orange bitters](#) I wholeheartedly recommend. If you have added sugar to your blackberry vodka, simply leave out the simple syrup.

This is my favourite type of cocktail. Easy to make but full of delicious flavours. You know you have found the perfect balance of sweet and sour when your spine tingles as you sip and you start saying "well I'm feeling a LOT better than I was five minutes ago".



blackberry sour

60mL blackberry vodka (NOT made with sugar)
 30mL fresh lemon (or lime) juice
 15mL simple syrup (infused with lemon verbena if you have it - see below)
 apple slices to garnish (cooking apples for extra tartness)

Combine all of the ingredients in a cocktail shaker or large glass. Add plenty of ice. Stir for a minutes. Strain into a prepared glass. Garnish with apple slices.



lemon verbena simple syrup

bowlful of fresh lemon verbena leaves
 freshly boiled water
 sugar
 1 tablespoon of vodka

Cover the bowl of lemon verbena leaves with freshly boiled water. Breathe in the wonderful fragrance. Feel better. Allow to infuse for a couple of hours. Strain out the leaves. Strain again through muslin to remove any small bits of leaf or random stuff. Measure (by volume or mass) the amount of liquid you now have. Add an equal amount of sugar. E.g. if you have 500mL of liquid, add 500g sugar. If you have 400g of liquid, add 400g of sugar. Stir until the sugar is dissolved (you may need to heat it gently). Once dissolved, transfer to a sterilized bottle and add a tablespoon of vodka (to help it keep longer). Store in the fridge.

In addition to it's starring role in several of my cocktails, this syrup makes a delightful soft drink when mixed with a squeeze of lime juice and sparkling water.

Posted by [Aoife](#) at 12:31 2 comments



Labels: [Aoife](#), [Blackberries](#), [blackberry sour](#), [Blackberry Vodka](#), [Cambridge](#), [Cocktail](#), [Fabulous Friday](#), [Forage](#), [Lemon](#), [Lemon Verbena](#), [Sour](#)

FRIDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2013

Foraged Food: Blackberry Vodka



Aoife, Cambridge

"We've got plenty, we've got blackberries coming out our arses at this stage." Ah, foraging with The Husband, a marriage of poetry and nature. "Get out of that nettle

patch, we have plenty of the bloody things." Just a few more, i just need a few more...

Thankfully, the buckets were overflowing with blackberries before he got totally fed up. My dreams are still haunted by the ripest berries, stuck far above my head. As I haven't grown since i was 12 I should probably invest in a foraging stick to help me reach those bastards.

This time last year, Rachel was busy making **blackberry vodka**. It sounded delicious and I wanted to give it a go this year. I have been asked many times lately about the brand or quality level of vodka that I use for infusing spirits. My answer has always been that I use a recognisable brand like Russian Standard or Smirnoff depending on what is on special offer. I balk at using anything in the £30 a bottle range and I've worried about using a basic supermarket brand. But I realised I had never actually tried either the expensive or the cheap. I was keen to find out if I could taste the difference once infused with fruit and sugar. So I did what any good scientist would do and set up an experiment!



I started with the reaction vessel. Luckily I had just taken delivery of a batch of new jam jars. All of them were being used for the first time so there were no residues to interfere with the experiment (all were sterilised before use). I wondered if infusing with sugar would make a difference so I decided to try out five different vodkas both with and without sugar. Ten separate experiments.



I picked five vodkas which I hope covers most of the price points in the vodka market. The vodkas chosen were:

Grey Goose

(40% abv) 700mL £33.95 from The Whiskey Exchange (£48.50/L) (£1.21/L.abv)

Ketel One

(40% abv) 700mL £23.15 from The Whiskey Exchange (£33.07/L) (£0.83/L.abv)

Smirnoff

(37.5% abv) 700mL £13 from Tesco (£18.58/L) (£0.50/L.abv)

Tamova Premium Vodka

(40% abv) 500mL £9.69 from Aldi (£19.38/L) (£0.48/L.abv)

Tesco Everyday Value Vodka

(37.5% abv) 700mL £9.70 from Tesco (£13.85/L) (£0.37/L.abv)

As the bottles were different sizes and different alcohol by volume, I've worked out a price per litre as well as a price per litre per percentage of alcohol. It is as you would expect - whatever measurement you use, the "Value" vodka is the cheapest.

I roped a few friends in to taste the vodkas before the infusion began. While not everyone could taste the difference between all vodkas (Rachel being the exception of course) we all agreed that the harshness of the Tesco Value Vodka stood out a mile compared to the other vodkas.



Each jar and equal amounts of blackberries, vodka and sugar (if used) weighed into them. The experiments are currently infusing away in my special cupboard. The results (and lots of blackberry vodka cocktails) will be revealed soon.

P.s. After all my scientific effort, I still had enough blackberries to enjoy a breakfast of left-over banana bread, blackberries and natural yoghurt. Not bad for a morning's work.



Posted by [Aoife](#) at 12:41 0 comments



Labels: [Aoife](#), [Blackberries](#), [Blackberry Vodka](#), [Cambridge](#), [Forage](#)

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