



Sloe gin

The traditional way of making sloe gin is to infuse gin with the berries. Sugar is required to ensure that the sloe juices are extracted from the fruit.

To make sloe gin, the sloe berries must be ripe. In the Northern Hemisphere, they were traditionally picked in late October or early November after the first frost of winter. A wide-necked jar that can be sealed is needed. Each berry is pricked, and the wide-necked jar is filled half way with the pricked berries. Folklore has it that when making sloe gin, you should not prick the berries with a metal fork, unless it is made of silver. The established traditional method is to prick the berries with a thorn taken from the blackthorn bush on which they grow.

For each 1 imperial pint (570 ml) of sloes, 4 ounces (110 g) of sugar is used, then the jar is filled with gin, adding a few cloves and a small stick of cinnamon. The jar is sealed and turned several times to mix, then stored in a cool, dark place. It is turned every day for the first two weeks, then each week, until at least three months have passed.

The gin will now be a deep ruby red. The liqueur is poured off. It can be filtered, but it is best decanted back into clean containers and left to stand for another week. Careful decanting can then ensure that almost all sediment is eliminated, leaving a clear liqueur. The leftover berries can be infused in cider, made into jam, used as a basis for chutney or a filling for liqueur chocolates.

Made in this way, the alcohol extracts an almond-like essence from the sloes, avoiding the need to add almond essence. Homemade sloe gin is a much more complex and subtle drink than that produced commercially, and, obviously, recipes will vary depending on the maker's taste. The sweetness can be adjusted to taste at the end, but sufficient sugar is required at the start of the process to ensure full extraction of flavour from the sloes.