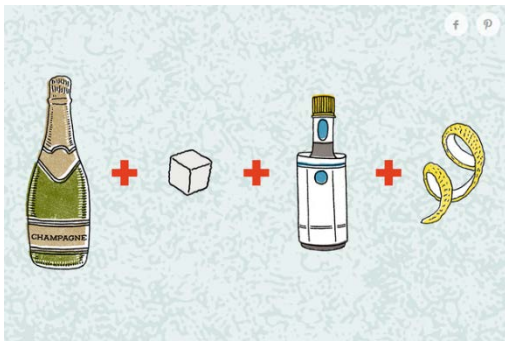


Easy One-Ingredient Upgrades to the Champagne Cocktail

Brad Nugent, beverage director at [Center Bar](#) in New York, seriously loves [Champagne Cocktails](#)—so much so he’s featured a bevy of riffs on the classic bubbly cocktail on the bar menu.



“If you take a base of [Champagne](#), citrus, bitters and sweetener, you can create thousands of cocktails,” he explains. “It’s like the Mr. Potato Head method. You just plug in different ingredients in the same proportions for a different flavor profile.” With the simple addition of a single ingredient, you can open a world of boozy possibilities. Here, easy one-ingredient upgrades for next-level Champagne Cocktails.

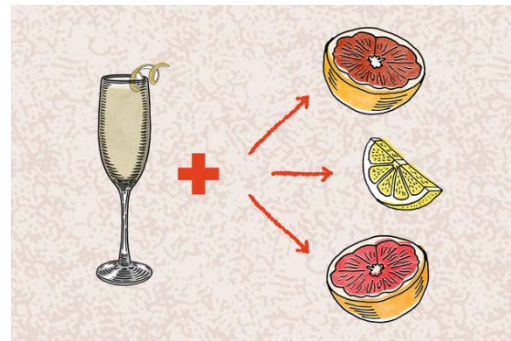
Citrus

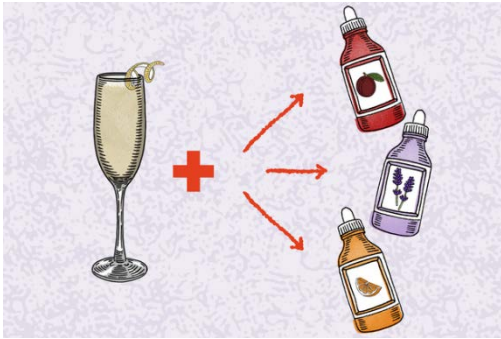
Adding citrus juice to a Champagne Cocktail not only gives it a delightful punch of acid, but Nugent points out that it balances the sugar in the drink. Together, citrus and sugar work like seasoning on steak, he says, brightening and magnifying the base flavors.

Lemon Juice: The [lemon twist](#) that garnishes a classic Champagne Cocktail already adds a whisper of citrus, but fresh lemon juice imparts more intense acidic zing.

Grapefruit Juice: The sour tang of [grapefruit](#) is even more pleasing when spread out over Champagne bubbles, while Angostura deepens the tartness of the ruby red juice. Consider swapping out the lemon twist for a twist of grapefruit peel as well.

Blood Orange Juice: More potent than standard orange juice with a hint of tart raspberry, blood orange juice won’t crush your taste buds with aggressive acid, but will instead provide mellower acidic warmth along with fruity depth. As above, consider swapping the lemon twist out for an orange twist to keep your citrus coordinated





Bitters

They may be called [bitters](#), but dashing these dropper bottles into your cocktail won't make your drink bitter—it will offer structure, Nugent explains. “Bitters can add some texture, and another layer of flavor as well,” he says. With an insane variety of bitters on the market—like savory herbal bottlings, lemon, plum, orange, Peychaud's, [tiki](#) and grapefruit, just to name a few—you don't have to stick to the standard

Angostura. Try using one of these varietals instead, or try layering them on top of the traditional Ango.

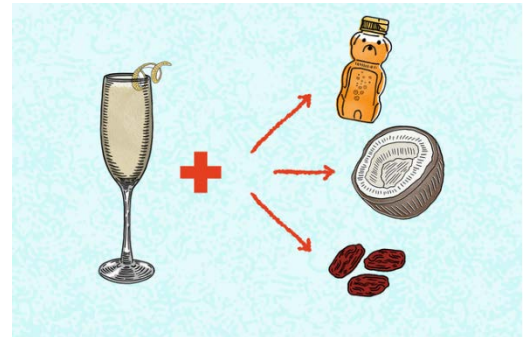
Orange Bitters: If you want sweet orange flavor, you're better off using juice. Orange bitters impart more of the tannic, tart notes of the fruit's peel. The overall effect on the cocktail is subtle yet enticing.

Lavender Bitters: Floral [lavender](#) isn't just good for candles. These bitters add a grassy sweetness with notes of mint, lemon and spice.

Plum Bitters: One of Nugent's favorite drinks at Center Bar is The Red Queen, which calls for both lemon and plum bitters to perk up heavy Chambord and fruity rose cider. On their own, plum bitters recall plum pudding, which combines the sweet-tart stone fruit with winter spices like clove, mace and nutmeg.

Sweeteners

It's hard to top the humble sugar cube in terms of sheer utility—plopping one into your flute and topping it with Angostura bitters and Champagne requires no measuring or thought—but alternative sweeteners from all over the globe open a world of flavor opportunities. Start with a half ounce of each of these in place of the sugar cube and adjust to taste.



Honey Syrup: If white sugar gives drinks neutral sweetness, think of honey as one step into deeper sweet notes. Cutting the thick honey with water to create [honey syrup](#) makes mixing easier and stabilizes the earthy, caramel-y syrup.

Coconut Sugar: Give the Champagne Cocktail a tropical twist by using this healthy-ish sugar substitute, made not from [raw coconut](#) but from the sap of the coconut palm tree. The dry, slightly nutty sweetener adds caramel notes akin to light brown sugar.

Date Syrup: If you've ever enjoyed the rush of biting into a raw date, imagine that same nutty, mature, caramelized sweetness in liquid form, and you've got date syrup. The molasses-like sweetener can be thick, so use sparingly to avoid weighing down the airy cocktail.



Liquors

A Champagne Cocktail is light and refreshing, but it doesn't always satisfy deeper boozy cravings. For something with a little more oomph, add an ounce (or less or more, to taste) of hard liquor to the mix, which creates a great foundation for the wispy flavors floating above in the bubbly.

Gin: Like a pared down [French 75](#), a gin-spiked Champagne Cocktail is punctuated with botanical, floral notes of whatever brand you choose, whether that's a juniper-heavy London Dry or something cleaner in the American style.

Absinthe: Combining absinthe and Champagne creates a [Death in the Afternoon](#), Ernest Hemingway's favored way of consuming bubbly, but adding absinthe to the more complex Champagne Cocktail rounds out the harsh edges of the green fairy spirit even more than toasty Champagne can alone.

Cognac: Combine two AOC-protected boozes in one glass of French luxury. Cognac and Champagne go together like peanut butter and jelly, if that PB&J were fancy AF.

Liqueurs

For those looking to change up their sweet ingredients without cramming their cupboards full of various syrups, liqueurs can add an array of sweet flavors, or you can use bitter aperitivos to add a complex twinge.

Chambord: The aforementioned Red Queen is a perfect example of how liqueurs can bring both sweet and bitter fruit to the forefront of a Champagne Cocktail riff. An ounce of the French raspberry liqueur melds with the drink's aesthetic perfectly, turning the drink a sultry shade of purplish red.

Aperol: Campari is too heavy for the delicate Champagne-based cocktail, but adding 1.5 ounces of Aperol makes for a hybrid between the Champagne Cocktail and the [Aperol Spritz](#), shaking up the standard dry bubbly with a light dusting of bitter pucker and showcasing the Italian aperitif's perfect match with sparkling wine

St-Germain: This cult liqueur makes everything better, even the seemingly impossible-to-improve upon Champagne Cocktail. With a two-ounce pour of St-Germain, this floral riff will taste like shining elderflowers are blooming right from your flute.

