

Setting the bar

Party pros offer advice on stocking your home bar without breaking the bank

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If you've ever offered a guest a gin and tonic only to find the gin bottle is empty and the tonic water has gone flat, then you know how difficult it is to maintain a well-stocked home bar.

Susan English, 52, entertains friends in her Richardson condominium several times a month. She's learned some tricks to staying well-stocked.

"Once you get it stocked and have all your basics, it's much easier," she says. "Getting it started and knowing what you need is a slow process because different friends drink different

things.

"I had to find a way to keep mixers on hand, like ginger ale and tonic, because they would always go flat. Finally I resorted to buying the 12-ounce cans and just keeping them in the bar all the time," she says.

Maile Mayer, 28, who says she entertains at least a couple of times a month in her Dallas apartment, relies on a little help from her friends.

"A lot of times, when I invite people over, I ask them to bring stuff," she



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says. “I used to think that was a burden, but people really respond well to that. They feel like they’re needed, and they feel like they’re part of the party by doing that.”

As these women have learned, with some careful shopping, you can put together the ingredients to make most of the drinks your guests will ask for without breaking the bank.

We’ll show you the drinks, mixers and accoutrements you need to entertain like a pro.

Cost-cutting

If you’re starting from scratch, the basics listed here, excluding glassware and nonessentials, will run about \$380, estimates Randy Eubanks, manager of Centennial Fine Wine and Spirits on North Stemmons Freeway.

Fortunately, there are some ways to cut corners. A bartender for 20 years, Greg Roberts owns the beverage-catering service Dallas Bartenders in Highland Park. You don’t want to buy the cheapest liquors, he says, but you also don’t have to pay top dollar.

“You get what you pay for until you get to the extreme premiums, which I think are way overpriced; \$15 to \$20 for 750 ml, that’s going to be sufficient quality without overdoing it,” he says. In bar terminology, 750 ml is what’s known as a fifth. The Dallas Bartenders Web site has a list of bar measurements and their equivalents (dallasbartenders.tripod.com/bar_measurements.htm).

When it comes to wines, “there are some nice bottles you can get here in the metroplex for around \$10,” Mr. Roberts says. If you’re looking for bargains, *Wine Spectator* magazine offers recommendations within a certain price range, he says.

Newspaper ads are also a good place to look for bargains, says Mr. Eubanks, and liquor stores regularly run specials.

“Summertime is a good time for specials because it’s a slow time for liquor stores,” he says. “Also, sometimes companies will give discounts when they introduce a new product.”

Centennial and other liquor stores offer a case discount if you buy as few as 12 bottles of assorted drinks, Mr. Eubanks says. And if you’re planning a big party or wedding, you can return any unopened bottles for a refund.



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Did you know?

If you’re planning a cocktail party, expect guests to drink two drinks the first hour and one drink every hour thereafter.

People tend to drink more at night than if the party is during the day.

A home bar should have locking cabinets if children are in the home or will be visiting.

Offer your guests some appetizers — but nothing too salty — with their cocktails. It will slow down absorption of the alcohol.

Start with the basics

Eight basic liquors are the fundamentals of a well-stocked bar, says Randy Eubanks, manager of Centennial Fine Wine and Spirits on North Stemmons Freeway. They are:

Vodka, rum, bourbon, gin, tequila, brandy, scotch and Canadian whisky

Hint: Always store liquors with the original cap on, not a pour spout, to minimize evaporation.

Add some liqueurs

Three basic flavors will give you a good base for a variety of cocktails, Mr. Eubanks suggests:

Almond, such as Amaretto

Coffee, such as Kahlúa

Orange, such as Cointreau

And for the rest ...

Vermouth: Both the dry and sweet varieties are essential for many drinks, including the classic martini.

White wine: For a good, basic white, Mr. Eubanks suggests a California chardonnay.

Red wine: a merlot or pinot noir or maybe a burgundy

Champagne: \$20 will buy a decent bottle of champagne, he says. It’s also a good mixer for drinks, such as the mimosa.

Beer: An imported dark beer and one of the popular light beers are good to keep on hand.

Hint: Vermouths and wines do not keep as long as liquors, so you might want to choose smaller bottles. Store wine bottles on their sides so the corks don’t dry out.

Nice, but not necessary

Bailey’s Irish Cream, a mixture of Irish whiskey and dairy cream often used in coffee drinks

Grand Marnier, a liqueur made from cognac (a distilled wine named after the Cognac region in France) and orange essence

B & B, a blend of Benedictine (a liqueur flavored with various plants and spices) and brandy (a distilled wine)

Framboise, a raspberry liqueur

Port, a fortified wine, often drunk alone

Melon liqueur, often known by the brand name Midori, which is made from honeydew melon

Schnapps, a distilled beverage that comes in many flavors, from peppermint to peach, and is most often used as a mixer in cocktails

Tabasco and **Worcestershire** sauces, used for bloody marys

Mix it up

Club soda

Tonic water

Cola

Orange juice

Cranberry juice

Grapefruit juice

Pineapple juice

Bitters (Angostura bitters can be found in the grocery store. Other popular brands include Campari and Peychaud.)

Tomato juice

Sweet & sour mix

Hint: Instead of opening a large bottle, keep small bottles or cans of juices on hand for mixers.

Garnishes

Lemons

Limes

Cherries

Salt

Olives

Hint: Some drink recipes call for simple syrup. It's easy to make; just mix equal parts of sugar and warm water. Cook over low heat until clear, and then boil for 1 minute.

Equipment

Corkscrew

Bottle opener

Cocktail shaker

Can opener

Jigger

Bar spoon

Measuring cup

Knife

Blender (It's optional, but a must for frozen drinks.)

Glasses

There are dozens of types of glassware for all kinds of drinks, so keep it simple, says Randy Eubanks, manager of Centennial Fine Wine and Spirits on North Stemmons Freeway.

"If you think about the shapes, there's a wine glass, tall and short glasses for tall and short drinks, a champagne flute and cordial glasses or a brandy snifter. It's nice to have a couple of frozen mugs, and you could add a margarita or martini glass," he says.

"Get the basic shapes covered and a nice rack to hold them upside down." In addition to keeping the glasses clean, a rack of wine or cordial glasses can add a nice look to your bar, Mr. Eubanks says.



Red wine, old-fashioned, martini, cordial and highball glasses.

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Resources

<http://dallasbartenders.tripod.com>:

Greg Roberts' Dallas Bartenders site has recipes, bar measurements, drink calculators and party planning tips.

www.centennialwines.com:

information on specials and an online party planner

www.sigels.com: locations, specials and staff picks

www.webtender.com: recipes, a bartender's handbook and statistics on most-popular drinks

www.idrink.com: tons of recipes, drink ratings, plus a feature where you can enter all the ingredients you have on hand and generate a list of drinks you can make with those ingredients

www.cocktailtimes.com: more recipes and party ideas, plus some interesting history on drinks and the people behind them, such as Jack Daniel and the Jim Beam family

SUGGESTED READING



The Bartender's Black Book by Stephen Kittredge Cunningham (The Bartender's Black Book Co., \$12.95) Note: Some of the drink names are decidedly adult.



The Joy of Mixology: The Consummate Guide to the Bartender's Craft by Gary Regan (Clarkson Potter, \$30)

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