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Derby Day Drinks Beyond the Mint Julep

Our Friends · Wednesday, April 30th, 2025

Expanding the Derby Bar Cart

When people think “Kentucky Derby,” the **mint julep** is the first cocktail that comes to mind—and with good reason. It’s icy, refreshing, and full of Southern charm. But if you’re hosting a Derby party or planning to spend the day trackside, why not explore a wider range of race day refreshments?

This year, elevate your Derby experience with a full cocktail lineup that celebrates spring, Southern flavors, and festive flair. Whether you’re mixing for a crowd or sipping in the backyard, these drinks will have you toasting in style.

Why It’s Time to Diversify the Drinks

While the mint julep is iconic, its strong bourbon-forward profile and muddled mint might not be for everyone. Offering a few additional signature cocktails helps create a more inclusive and celebratory experience—especially if you’re hosting a Derby party.

Think of it as building a race day drink menu that feels as sophisticated as your seersucker and fascinators.

Derby Day Classics With a Twist

1. The Kentucky Mule

Swap out vodka for bourbon in this Southern version of the Moscow Mule. Serve it in a copper mug for maximum flair.

Ingredients:

- 2 oz bourbon
- 1/2 oz fresh lime juice
- Ginger beer to top
- Lime wedge & mint sprig for garnish

Why It Works: It’s bright, fizzy, and a great alternative to the heavier julep.

2. The Oaks Lily

This official drink of the Kentucky Oaks (the Derby's sister race) is a fruity, refreshing pink cocktail that's easy to sip all afternoon.

Ingredients:

- 1.5 oz vodka
- 1 oz cranberry juice
- 0.5 oz triple sec
- 0.5 oz lemon juice
- Lemon wheel and blackberry for garnish

Why It Works: It's light, elegant, and totally Instagram-worthy.

3. Southern Sweet Tea Smash

Think of it as a love letter to the South—sweet tea, fresh lemon, and a bourbon kick.

Ingredients:

- 2 oz bourbon
- 1 oz lemon juice
- 3 oz sweet tea
- Mint leaves
- Lemon slice for garnish

Why It Works: It's smooth, simple, and full of front-porch charm.

Easy Batches for the Backyard Party

Bourbon Peach Punch

Make it once, serve all day. Peach adds seasonal sweetness and balances the bourbon beautifully.

To serve 6–8:

- 2 cups bourbon
- 2 cups peach nectar
- 1 cup lemonade
- 1 cup club soda
- Sliced peaches and mint for garnish

Pro Tip: Chill all ingredients in advance and mix in a glass pitcher just before guests arrive.

Sparkling Mint Lemonade (Non-Alcoholic)

Keep it festive for guests skipping the booze—or kids who want in on the celebration.

To serve 6:

- 4 cups lemonade

- 1 cup soda water
- Handful of fresh mint
- Lemon wheels for garnish

Let it sit for 10 minutes so the mint infuses before pouring over ice.

Garnishes That Wow

Presentation matters. Dress up your drinks with seasonal garnishes that match your Derby vibe:

- Edible flowers: Pansies and violets look gorgeous in juleps and spritzers.
- Fresh mint: Always a staple—bonus points for a dramatic sprig.
- Fruit skewers: Lemon, strawberry, and blackberries add color and elegance.
- Crushed ice: It's not just for juleps—use it to chill cocktails faster and longer.

Glassware and Setup Tips

You don't need a bar cart full of crystal to do it right—just a few thoughtful details:

- Julep cups for authenticity (or highball glasses if you're improvising)
- Copper mugs for mules
- Mason jars for a rustic Southern touch
- Drink tags or chalkboard signs to label each cocktail

Create a self-serve station where guests can top up at their leisure. Include cocktail napkins, straws, and a big bucket of ice.

Final Toast: Make It Personal

The best Derby Day drink is one that's made with care and served with a smile. Whether you stick to tradition with a mint julep or expand your offerings with creative cocktails, remember: it's about the experience.

Raise your glass, tip your hat, and toast to the most stylish two minutes in sports. And before you bet, check out the official [Kentucky Derby Odds](#) at US Racing.

Photo: Magda Ehlers via Pexels

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