

# Cultural Daily

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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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