

Seasons Change. Classic Drinks Do, Too.

The hot toddy and mulled wine get an update to meet cooling, but still not quite cold temperatures.



A modern hot toddy. Credit... Ryan Liebe for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Barrett Washburne.

By Rebekah Pepler

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Transitions are rarely linear — in life, love or seasons. As temperatures oscillate and the days get shorter, drinks that garner a sense of coziness, like toddies and mulled wine, can take you right from the cusp of fall to cuffing season.

Toddies and mulled wine have a long history, with mulled wine dating to Roman antiquity and the toddy to the mid-18th century. Both have stuck through to modern times and iterations, and both have simple, adaptable base formulas.

Start with the toddy.

“It is essentially spirit and sweetener, usually diluted with an option to serve either cold or hot,” said Al Culliton, a drinks historian and writer in Greenfield, Mass.

Modern versions often skew hot and whiskey-forward, and are generally thought of as an under-the-weather drink. But “there’s so much more to the toddy than you might think,” said Mx. Culliton, who uses the pronouns they and them.

They suggest using it to showcase aged spirits. Bourbon is readily tapped, but other spirits like rum, scotch, Cognac, amaro, port and sherry can help lift a toddy beyond sniffles remedy. While water is most commonly used to dilute toddy, you can swap in tea for an added layer of complexity. Mx. Culliton often reaches for an English breakfast tea, but there’s no need to stop there.

“Chamomile goes wonderfully in drinks, especially with Cognac, while green tea lends itself better to spirits that are more gentle,” they said. Oolongs in all forms from light and grassy to deep and smoky also shine in a modern toddy.

And, just as a cold drink is best served cold, a hot toddy should be, well, hot.

Even room-temperature spirits can alter the temperature of the drink, Mx. Culliton says, “so anything you can do to keep everything at the same temperature is great.”

To ensure everything is appropriately hot, they suggest warming everything up — serving glass or mug, and spirits. Then, fill the serving glass or mug with hot water. Set the bottom half of a shaker tin in hot water in a separate vessel, add the spirits and let it all heat through. Tip out the hot water into the now-preheated serving glass or mug and build the



This take on mulled wine is chilled, but still infused with warming spices. Credit... Ryan Liebe for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Barrett Washburne.

Mulled wine, another traditionally warming beverage, can also benefit from a contemporary overhaul.

The act of mulling refers to infusing the drink — generally red wine-based — with spices and a sweetener, and heating it. Sometimes brandy, aquavit or dried fruit are added. Whether you call it vin chaud, glogg, glühwein, or, indeed, mulled wine, the result is a hot, sweet, often over-spiced drink, ladled out during the holiday season or at outdoor winter markets and sipped more as a hand warmer than anything else.

But just as chilling a light red wine is a pro move, so, too, is serving a mulled wine chilled. Infusing a light red with classic mulling spices, by way of a simple syrup, creates a drink that is cozy in essence, rather than in temperature. The spiced drink is then fortified with Cognac, and shaken with ice to give it its renegade chill. (To keep the resulting drink nice and cold, tuck your cocktail glass in the freezer for at least 15 minutes before serving, or fill it with ice and water, and stir for 30 seconds. Pour out the ice and water, dry quickly, and add your drink.)

Whichever you choose — an updated toddy or chilled mulled wine — offer dependable flannel shirt-style comfort as the world (and the weather) shifts.

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