

Basic Ingredients

What you buy will depend on:

1. How much you want to spend
2. How many different types of drinks you want to make
3. How much room you have to dedicate to your bar

There are three ways to approach starting out, no matter what the answer to the above questions. The first is to drop \$1,000 and buy multiple brands of every base liquor and every liqueur you can find. I don't recommend this, even if you have the money. You'll end up with a bunch of bottles you will never use. The second way is to select 1 to 3 drinks that you really like and expect to make often. Buy just the ingredients for those drinks. Then, after those are perfected, you can venture out and add to your repertoire. Lastly, you can spend a little more and purchase all of the popular base liquors. There is a new book out, The 12 Bottle Bar: A Dozen Bottles. Hundreds of Cocktails. A New Way to Drink by David Solmonson and Lesley Jacobs Solmonson. I have only read reviews and some excerpts, but it appears to be really good. The idea is that with a modest selection of ingredients, you can make virtually every popular cocktail. I'll come back to this.

The single most important thing that will determine the quality of your cocktails will be the ingredients. The difference between crap and premium is \$10 – \$15 per bottle. If you want to start with 3 base liquors but do not wish to spend the additional \$30 – \$45 to buy 3 premium brands, settle for 1 or 2 bottles. This includes vermouth's and liqueurs. Plan on spending \$2 – \$3 per drink when using premium liquors.

Another consideration when determining cost is the shelf life of vermouth and other fortified wines. Once opened, these deteriorate rapidly. You would not expect wine to be good

after it was opened and left in the cabinet for a week. Fortified wines last longer, but only a little. Dry vermouth will last about a week refrigerated, while sweet vermouth will last considerably longer. You can try buying small bottles, but they tend to be poorer quality. Bottom line, if you like martinis, you better figure \$10-\$15/week for dry vermouth, or \$6-\$7 for poorer quality, small bottles.

Now, back to how many bottles to buy. I like the 12 bottles idea, but more as a goal rather than a start up. I suggest you start by answering the question: "Self! What do I want to make?" Then go out and buy the required ingredients. Let's say you choose old fashioned's and martinis. Pick out premium brands of gin, bourbon, bitters and vermouth. After you use up most of a bottle, replace it with a different brand. Summer coming up? Add white rum, silver tequila and a curacao and you now can make mojitos and margaritas. You get the idea.

The price of a bottle may not indicate it's quality. If you're not sure which brands to try, do a little research. Go to web sites like <http://smallscreennetwork.com>, Liquor.com or abarabove.com. See which brands they are using in which drinks. While sometimes they are sponsored, these guys seem to only offer the best.

So, there it is. I'm not telling you what brands to buy or even what liquors to start with. It's all up to you!