

# An Artisan's *Eye for Ice*



Today's mixologists concoct fragrant syrups from locally grown herbs, handcraft their own bitters and revere artisanal top-shelf liquors and small-batch mixers. To ensure these carefully selected, lovingly handled ingredients meet their delectable potential, one seemingly simple ingredient must not be taken for granted: ice. The right ice for a drink is crucial: size, shape and quality all impact the imbibing experience.

While water is seldom an ingredient in a cocktail, the water that melts from the ice plays an essential role in the balance of the beverage. A spirit-intensive cocktail — think Sazerac or Manhattan — demands ice with less surface area. A single large cube or sphere is perfect to minimize dilution and maximize flavor over the life of the libation.

On the other end of the spectrum are drinks like the Mint Julep, whose drinkability depends on incorporating a generous dose of frigid runoff from chipped ice. Martini-style drinks can become thin and weak when shaken or stirred with too many small cubes, but do require more ice surface area than one or two large chunks provide in order to chill sufficiently during the brief mixing process.

Freshness and quality of water are pivotal: don't ruin a top-shelf cocktail with stale freezer-scented ice, and use filtered water for a clear, neutral flavor. A dramatic shape delights the eye, achieved with silicone trays that make large, cubical ice or with molds for striking two-inch globes. —AK