

# Cocktail time with Emily: Infusions

BY EMILY O'CONNOR

You are only limited by your own imagination (and ingredients) — so why not experiment a little? Every region has its own seasonal variety of tasty potential — but Astoria is a cornucopia of opportunity for your home bar.

I was recently inspired by Fort George Brewery's Spruce Budd Ale. The brewery's employees went out and hand-harvested spruce tips from the area to substitute for the ale's hops. I wanted to utilize fresh spruce tips by infusing gin with them, eventually using them in a martini. I steeped a cup of fresh spruce in gin (using a mesh bag for easier filtration) for 24 hours in the refrigerator, adding two large lemon peels after 12 hours. Then, I double-strained the gin and poured it back into the original bottle — storing it in the refrigerator.

Depending on the ingredients and the desired cocktail, using fresh or dry ingredients can be equally successful. Dried flowers and herbs offer the flexibility of a stable shelf life. However, freshly-harvested local ingredients add another layer of complexity to the flavor.

When picking dry ingredients to infuse a spirit, think of anything that would steep well for tea, like chamomile or hibiscus flowers. Dry ingredients are more flexible, however. When left in the spirit for a prolonged period of time, they bring out rich and complex flavors when steeped for at least 24 hours — but they should be consumed within a month.

Even though I chose gin to infuse with the spruce buds, vodka is also a great spirit base because it has more of a neutral canvas of flavor. Fresh ginger or any citrus peel work well in vodka but if you want a more savory or heat-forward route, try pink peppercorns or fresh chili peppers



ABOVE: A lilac lemon drop and a spruce tip-infused martini. RIGHT: Spruce tips. BOTTOM LEFT: Lilac used for the lilac lemon drop.

like jalapenos or habaneros. This is great in a spicy bloody mary alongside a homemade brunch. Hotter flavors also work well in silver tequila to add a kick to your house margaritas this summer.

In some contexts, it is better to infuse ingredients instead of the spirit. For example, I have always loved lilac flowers and wanted to make a seasonal lemon-drop cocktail using the fresh blossoms. The best way to make use of the flavor and color of these delicate flowers is infusing them in simple syrup, simmering it with the freshly washed and sorted blossoms. The best lilac varietal for infusion has extra dark purple blossoms, which offer botanical richness in flavor and a natural magenta hue. When sorting fresh blossoms,

it is best to include as few stem and leaf particles as possible. Achieving the best consistency and flavor of any floral simple syrup requires a cooking process, allowing the flowers to steep and the syrup to reduce. Check the flavor often, potentially adding more blossoms and stirring regularly. I added fresh lemon juice at the end to help extract color and balance the syrup.

Practice makes perfect and if an experiment ends with a tasty cocktail, all the better. Trust your taste buds as you go because the possibilities are infinite. Infusion offers yet another space to get creative with your home bar. As always, please drink responsibly — never waste a drop. Cheers!



## Lilac lemon drop

### Ingredients

- 2 ounces vodka
- ¾ ounce lemon juice
- ¾ ounce lilac simple syrup
- ½ ounce Combier orange liqueur

### Preparation

Shake and double strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with a lemon wedge and/or sugared rim.

## Spruce tip-infused martini

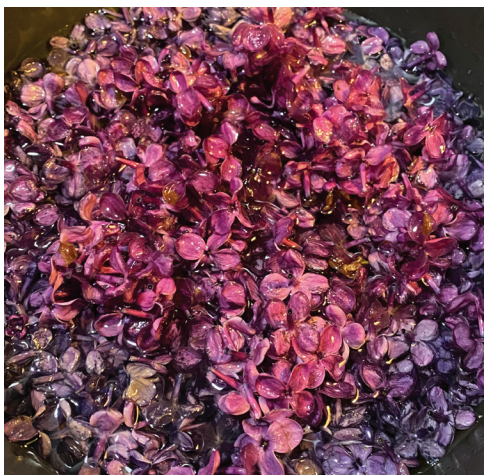
### Ingredients

- 2 ounces spruce tip-infused gin
- ¼ ounce Lillet or Dolin Blanc vermouth
- 1 dash black lemon or orange bitters

### Preparation

Stir and strain into a chilled coupe or martini glass. Garnish with a lemon twist.

*Emily O'Connor is the bar manager at the Bowline Hotel.*



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