

# Luscious holiday libations

by Lydia Lovell



Entertaining at holiday time is common to every culture, and the more important the holiday, the more festive and gala the social gatherings. Throughout the Christmas season, Aunt Olivia and Uncle Henry welcomed lots of company. They were as glad to see those who dropped in without advance notice as they were happy to receive their invited guests. It often seemed the Lovells truly cherished surprise visitors and they were always well-prepared.

Uncle Henry prided himself on his stock of homemade liqueurs. You may, of course, purchase or you can mix your own as he did. A tiny glass, sipped slowly, warms the heart on a frosty evening and makes an excellent after-dinner treat. **Coffee Liqueur** is also known as **Kahlua**.

1 2-oz. jar instant espresso coffee powder	2 C. vodka
2 C. boiling water	7 t. vanilla extract
4 C. sugar	3/4 C. brandy

In a large pitcher, pour boiling water over coffee powder. Gradually add sugar, stirring constantly until dissolved. Add vodka, vanilla, and brandy. Pour mixture into a 2-quart glass jar with a tight-fitting cap. Place container on its side and allow to mellow for 30 days at room temperature. Once a week or so, turn container. This liqueur may be served sooner, but reaches peak of flavor if allowed to age. Yield: 1-1/2 quart.

If **Crème de Menthe** is your choice among after-dinner drinks, you can follow Uncle Henry's recipe although it does require patience. Or you can speed up the process using more modern techniques. Here's how he made it.

1/2 C. tightly-packed fresh mint leaves	zest of 1 lemon
1 6" stick of cinnamon	1-1/2 C. vodka
1 whole allspice	1 C. sugar
	1/2 C. water

Crush mint leaves in a mortar and pestle (or in a plastic bag with a rolling pin). Place crushed leaves in a glass jar with tight-fitting cover, together with cinnamon, allspice, lemon zest and vodka. (Lemon zest: Cut peel from lemon and pinch oils from peel into mixture.) Close jar tightly and allow mixture to steep for one week. Taste to see if mint flavor is strong enough; if not, add more mint leaves and steep another week. When flavor is right, pour mix through coffee filter paper. In a small saucepan, combine sugar and water and boil until sugar dissolves. Cool syrup, add to filtered mint mixture, and set aside to mellow another week or two.

If you're in a hurry, you can make **crème de menthe** in a couple of days. Use 1 tablespoon of peppermint extract instead of mint leaves. Blend extract into the vodka, add the spices, and steep overnight. Filter to remove spices, add cooled sugar syrup and let stand another 24 hours.

Green food coloring may be added or the liqueur may be left clear. Green **crème de menthe** is pretty (and delicious) served over vanilla ice cream. Clear **crème de menthe** gives unexpected zip to whipped cream topping on a chocolate brownie.

Another aromatic spirit enjoyed by many of Uncle Henry's guests is **Banana Liqueur**, which he made as follows:

2 medium bananas, peeled, mashed	1 C. sugar
1 t. vanilla extract	1/2 C. water
	3 C. vodka

In a half-gallon glass jar with a tight cover, mix bananas and syrup made by boiling sugar and water together until sugar dissolves. Cool mixture, add vanilla and vodka, and stir. Cap tightly and let stand in a dark place at room temperature for a week. Stir again. Strain through a fine sieve and press liquid from solids. Pour into two pint bottles and cork tightly. Mixture will improve in flavor if allowed to mellow several months, but is drinkable immediately.

Liqueurs were but one potable the Lovells offered their guests. For another traditional beverage, Aunt Olivia kept on hand a quantity of her basic mix. We children loved to watch while she made mugs of **Christmas Hot Chocolate** for us.

From her refrigerator Aunt Olivia took a bowl of chocolate concentrate and into each mug she measured a tablespoon of concentrate, then poured over it a cup of scalded milk. For garnish she popped a marshmallow on top, but I prefer a dollop of whipped cream flavored with **crème de menthe**.

1 6-oz pkg. semi-sweet chocolate bits	1 t. vanilla extract
1/2 C. sugar	1 C. whipping cream
1/2 C. water	Hot milk

Combine chocolate bits, sugar and water in a small saucepan. Heat over low fire, stirring, until chocolate melts. Cool, add vanilla. Whip cream and fold chocolate mixture into cream gradually. Store in refrigerator for up to one week. Pour hot milk over a tablespoonful of concentrate and top with **Whipped Cream Dollops**.

1 C. whipping cream	2 T. confectioners sugar
1T. <b>crème de menthe</b>	

Combine in a chilled bowl; whip until stiff. Spoon dollops onto wax paper and freeze. Store in freezer up to two weeks.

Another non-alcoholic holiday drink, popular with some of Aunt Olivia's friends and relatives, was **Eggnog Wassail**. It, too, can be mixed in advance and served either hot or cold. Makes six cups.

1 qt. dairy eggnog	1/8 t. each: nutmeg and cinnamon
2 C. apple cider	2 whole cloves
1/2 t. grated lemon peel	Whipping cream

In a 2-quart saucepan, stir cider into eggnog. Add lemon and spices. Heat over low fire, stirring occasionally, until simmering. Strain into an automatic coffee pot and keep hot. Serve with whipped cream.

Special occasions such as Christmas Eve call for **Hot Buttered Rum**.

1 C. softened butter	2 pints vanilla ice cream, softened
1 C. packed brown sugar	
1 1/2 t. each: cinnamon and nutmeg	Boiling water
1/2 t. ground allspice	Rum extract (or rum)

Cream butter, sugar and spices until fluffy. Beat in ice cream. Freeze. (I keep this mixture frozen in a covered one-quart plastic freezer container until ready to use. Mixture remains slushy.)

At Aunt Olivia's, when the time came to serve these drinks, she put the teakettle on to boil, Uncle Henry placed 3 T. of ice cream mixture in each mug, and poured in 2/3 C. boiling water. Then he stirred into each mug 1/4 t. rum extract or 3 T. rum. Super.

Rich, thick, and filling, Aunt Olivia's **Holiday Eggnog** was sinfully calorie-laden, but whenever she set out a big punch-bowlful, few resisted taking a cup.

1 doz. eggs, separated	1 t. vanilla
1-2/3 C. sugar	1 qt. heavy cream
1 liter dark rum	Nutmeg
1 qt. milk	

In a large bowl, beat egg yolks, adding sugar gradually, and beating until thick. Add rum, milk and vanilla and stir well. Cover bowl with plastic film and refrigerate overnight. Before serving, beat egg whites until stiff and whip the cream. Fold egg whites and whipped cream together, then fold into egg mixture. Pour into punchbowl and sprinkle with nutmeg. Makes 36 servings.

To keep a punchbowlful of eggnog cold without diluting it with ice, I usually prepare a separate frozen eggnog ring; Aunt Olivia would have approved and would have thought of doing this herself, I feel certain, if freezers had been available in her day. This is my method.

2 C. dairy eggnog	2 small jars maraschino cherries (one red, one green) chopped coarsely
2 C. milk	

In a medium bowl, combine eggnog and milk. In the bottom of a 4-cup ring mold scatter chopped cherries. Gently pour a small quantity of the eggnog mixture into the mold. Freeze solid. Pour in the rest of the eggnog and place in freezer overnight. At serving time, dip the mold in hot water, unmold, and float ring in eggnog in punchbowl, cherry side up.

May your Christmas be filled with joy, may you be surrounded with loving family and friends, and may peace flourish in the hearts of all mankind. (I'd give anything to have the recipe for THAT!)