



Owner's Guide to Small Barrels

Copperworks handmade oak barrels enable you to age your favorite liquids to suit your own individual taste. These barrels work particularly well to age spirits like Copperworks New Make Whiskey and Copperworks Gin. You can also age other spirits, beer, wine, cider and even cocktails. The premium-quality American White Oak of these barrels will give rich notes of vanilla, caramel and spice to the liquid you let age inside.

Barrel-Aging Magic

Barrel aging seems like a fairly simple process—put a product in a barrel and wait until it tastes good. And that's pretty much it.

But inside that barrel, many complex things are happening to change and develop the flavors of a barrel-aged product. Aging your own liquors (or non-alcoholic products) gives you a fun opportunity to taste the effects as they occur.

For example, the char layer of the barrel staves filters out some flavors of the aging liquid while the wood adds sweetness and other flavors, plus the amber color. Alcohol and water evaporate from the barrel (that's called the "angel's share") and air enters the barrel, interacting with the product to transform it in many different ways.

Many factors contribute to the individual flavors your aged product will have: length of time in the barrel, temperature and humidity of where the barrel is stored during aging, the number of times the barrel has been used, and, of course, the product itself that's being aged.

Barrel aging is both discovery and magic. We hope you enjoy learning an age-old craft through personal experience, the way it's been done for generations.

About our Barrels

Copperworks barrels are handmade, so they vary slightly in size. The barrels hold roughly two liters, so they can hold the contents of at least two 750ml bottles (plus some additional water if you prefer to age your spirit at a lower proof).

The American oak staves have been air-dried for two years, making the flavors of the wood mellow than kiln-dried wood. And the drying time ensures the staves are free of sap.

The wood was charred over direct fire in the manufacturing process. The heavy char of the barrel creates a clean, sanitary surface and a natural filter for your aging liquid. If you age a clear spirit, the char turns the spirits to an amber or golden color.

No nails or glue are used to make the barrel. It's held together and made liquid-tight by the force of the oak staves swelling against the metal hoops.

The barrel can be used multiple times. With each use, a diminishing amount of wood flavor and color are imparted to your aging liquid. But this allows more delicate liquids to be aged with each subsequent use.

Prepare the Barrel for Use

Before filling your barrel with the product you wish to age, you must hydrate the barrel so it doesn't leak. Follow these steps and ensure there's no leakage before filling it with spirits or other products.

Fill the barrel with water.

- If any of the metal hoops on the barrel are loose, press them evenly toward the center of the barrel until they are snug.
- Firmly push in and close the spigot, then fill the barrel through the bung hole (the hole on top) with cool water. Filtered water is best.
- Place the bung back into the barrel and leave the barrel to hydrate for 24 hours. This soaking swells the barrel's staves so they press tightly against the hoops to ensure the barrel doesn't leak.
- Check the water level periodically and top off as needed. If the barrel is still leaking after 24 hours, you can repeat this hydration method until the barrel stops leaking.

If leaking continues, submerge the barrel.

If your barrel is quite dry to begin with, the process above might not be sufficient. So you will have to fill and submerge the barrel in water; following these steps.

- With the barrel in a sink, bucket, or other suitable food-grade vessel, fill the barrel and the vessel with cool water. Make sure the barrel is completely submerged. Keep the spigot and bung out.
- Soak the barrel for 24 hours. Then remove the barrel from the vessel and drain.
- Refill the barrel with water to ensure there are no leaks. If it's still leaking, you should fill, submerge and soak the barrel again.
- When the barrel is no longer leaking and has been drained, it's ready to be filled with the liquid to be aged. If there's a little bit of water left in the barrel, that's fine.

Hoops may stain the barrel: One side-effect of this submersion method is that the hoops may stain the barrel when they get wet. Some consider that an attractive patina, but if you don't want this look, pat dry the hoops and outside of the barrel as soon as you remove it from the water.

Age Your Product

What can you age in this barrel? That's up to you! We think Copperworks New Make Whiskey or Copperworks Gin are good products to begin with. You might also consider aging beer, cider, bitters, vermouths, cocktails, or your other favorite liquids.

Fill the barrel.

When the barrel is hydrated and liquid-tight, you're ready to go. Insert the spigot, making sure it's tight, and fill the barrel with the liquid to be aged. Then insert the bung, making sure it's tight too. If you're filling the barrel with Copperworks spirits, we suggest you save the empty bottles to fill again with your aged product.

Age and test.

The first time you use a barrel, taste the liquid within a few days after filling it. Then, continue to taste frequently and notice the changes that are occurring.

How long you age your product in the barrel depends on the product you're aging and your personal preference. You might find that with the first usage of the barrel, the liquid is aged to your liking within as little as two weeks, but it also might also take two or three times that, depending upon your preferences.

With each filling, expect the aging process to take a bit longer for the barrel to contribute flavor and color.

Sample early and often.

When aging spirits in a small barrel, longer is not necessarily better!

Aging your spirit for too long will result in an over-oaked flavor and aroma and you'll lose a larger amount of the spirit to evaporation.

The key to successful aging? Sample often. (It's a tough job, but someone has to do it...)

Empty the barrel.

When you're happy with the flavor of the product in your barrel, carefully pour it out of the barrel, through either the bung hole or the spigot. Pour it through a strainer (to catch any large pieces of char) into a large container. You may want to filter through cheesecloth when you pour the aged liquid into glass bottles for long-term storage. Now you're ready to pour yourself a celebratory sip and enjoy!

Using the barrel again.

With proper care, you can use your barrel multiple times. In second and subsequent uses of the barrel, slightly longer aging is recommended, since much of the flavor, color, and aroma components of the barrel were taken by the previous products that were aged in the barrel.

Whenever possible, fill the barrel immediately with a new liquid right after you've emptied it of your aged liquid. That way, the next product benefits from a sanitary barrel and gets the maximum influence from the product previously in the barrel. And you won't need to rehydrate the barrel, since it should still be liquid tight.

To get more wood flavors out of your barrel once it has been used, contact Copperworks about obtaining wood inserts you can add to the barrel to impart more wood flavor.

Tell us about your results!

We would love hear about your results with your barrel. What products did you age? How did they turn out? What did you learn? What products do you plan to age next? Please share your thoughts, ideas and questions with us at info@CopperworksDistilling.com.

Cheers!