

Rick's In-Depth Research for Perfect Manhattan for National Bourbon Day Celebration

Should I use rye or bourbon?

Bourbon and rye are both types of American whiskey, but they have distinct identities.

The key difference is in the grain: bourbon must be made from at least **51% corn**, while rye whiskey must contain at least **51% rye**. Because rye has a spicier, drier profile compared to the sweeter, fuller taste of corn, the two whiskeys can taste quite different. Rye tends to bring bold, peppery notes, while bourbon leans into caramel and vanilla flavors.

So if a whiskey is primarily made with rye, it can't be called bourbon—it's rye whiskey. But if you're considering mixing up a Manhattan, swapping bourbon for rye can give the cocktail a sharper, spicier edge.

Should I use rye or bourbon to celebrate National Bourbon Day?

Rye is the classic choice for Manhattans because it brings a spicier, drier edge, but since this event is honoring bourbon, it would make sense to use bourbon instead.

Given around 35 to 40 people, you'll want to balance efficiency with elegance in your drink selection.

Bourbon works beautifully with smoky or caramelized flavors.

Since hamburgers bring smoky, charred flavors and coleslaw adds a fresh crunch, you could use those elements to guide your drink decisions. Bourbon's caramel and vanilla notes pair beautifully with grilled meat. This means either whiskey works, but **bourbon Manhattans might actually complement your menu better**—especially if your coleslaw has a slightly sweet touch.

Bourbon and Vermouth Choices

Here are a few solid bourbon options for Manhattans with Amaro vermouth:

- **Wild Turkey 101** – Bold, spicy, and high-proof, so it won't get lost against the depth of Amaro.
- **Elijah Craig Small Batch** – Slightly smoky with caramelized oak, which could bring nice warmth to the mix.
- **Woodford Reserve** – Balanced and smooth with dried fruit notes that harmonize well with Amaro vermouth's richness. Woodford Reserve is often considered a more polished, smooth bourbon, with vanilla, dried fruit, and cocoa notes. It's slightly more expensive than Elijah Craig and has a reputation for being elegant and approachable.
- **Buffalo Trace** – A touch softer but with deep vanilla and spice, making it approachable yet structured.

Key Considerations:

- If you want **depth with a smooth finish**, Woodford Reserve is an excellent pick.
- If you prefer **a touch more oak and richness**, Elijah Craig brings that complexity.
- If you want **a livelier spice to enhance the orange twist**, Old Forester would do the job beautifully.
- If you want **a more delicate balance that allows citrus to take the spotlight**, Buffalo Trace is a great choice.

If you want to use Cocchi Vermouth, here's a refined take with your vermouth in mind:

- **Wild Turkey 101** – The high proof helps Cocchi shine, and its spice works beautifully against the vermouth's depth.
- **Elijah Craig Small Batch** – Warm caramel and oak complement Cocchi's richness while keeping things smooth.
- **Woodford Reserve** – A refined option with dried fruit and spice that syncs well with the vermouth's complexity.
- **Old Forester 100 Proof** – Bold and slightly nutty, it enhances Cocchi's cocoa and orange undertones.
- **Buffalo Trace** – More subtle, but its soft vanilla and baking spice integrate nicely with Cocchi's warmth.

If you're looking for something **smooth and classic**, J.T.S. Brown is a great pick. If you want **more spice and depth**, Wild Turkey 101 will bring more complexity to your cocktails.

Cherries or Orange Peel?

Bourbon's caramel and vanilla notes tend to mesh beautifully with **dark cherries**, making them a natural garnish for your Manhattan. They enhance the richness without overpowering the drink, whereas orange peel can sometimes clash with bourbon's softer spice compared to rye.

Consider **infusing the cherries** with a bit of bourbon or vermouth ahead of time for extra depth. Luxardo cherries are a fantastic pick, but if you want something more homemade, soaking dried cherries in bourbon for a few hours before serving can give them a plush, boozy intensity.

Infusing dried cherries with bourbon would be a fantastic touch! They'll soak up the richness and add an extra depth to your Manhattans without overpowering the drink. A few hours should be enough for them to take on the flavor, but if you have more time, letting them sit overnight will make them even more luscious.

Using both approaches lets guests explore **two distinct Manhattan styles**, each highlighting a different nuance of bourbon's character.

The **orange twist + orange bitters** combo will emphasize **bright citrus and aromatics**, making the cocktail feel lighter and more refined. The **bourbon-infused cherry + Angostura bitters** will deepen the cocktail's richness, leaning into **warming spice and dark fruit** notes.

This setup gives people a choice between something **zesty and elegant** versus **lush and spiced**—both excellent pairings with Woodford Reserve and Cocchi Vermouth. Plus, it makes the experience more interactive for guests!

Ratios of Ingredients?

Since Cocchi Vermouth di Torino has a fuller body and a deep spice profile, a **slightly lighter touch on the vermouth**—maybe 2.5:1—could keep the Manhattan feeling more bourbon-forward. But it really comes down to preference, and if you like the warmth of the vermouth cutting through a 2:1 ratio will serve you well.

Using **1.75L of Woodford Reserve** and **0.75L of Cocchi Vermouth di Torino** puts you right in that sweet spot between a **2:1 and 2.5:1 ratio**, allowing the bourbon to shine while still letting the vermouth's depth add complexity.

Recipe!

For **batching**, here's a scaled-up version:

- **1 bottle (750ml) bourbon**
- **375ml Cocchi Vermouth di Torino**
- **4-6 dashes Angostura bitters** (adjust to taste)
- Stir well and store in a sealed container in the fridge until ready to serve. When serving, pour over ice, stir briefly, strain, and garnish with your infused cherries.

Ice is a crucial ingredient, not just for chilling but for achieving the right dilution to soften the alcohol and open up the flavors. Stirring with ice before straining ensures just the right amount of dilution for a silky texture. Ice adds around 15-20% water.

(Side note: At Heavenly Hills Distillery in Louisville, Ky, they recommended diluting our sample tastings with some water.)

Using orange peel and orange bitters an elegant variation! **Regan's Orange Bitters** would be a fantastic choice—it'll complement the citrus garnish and enhance Cocchi's subtle orange and spice notes. It's slightly softer and more rounded than some other orange bitters, so it should integrate smoothly with Woodford Reserve's richness.

Frozen **Bing cherries** can absolutely work for bourbon infusion! Since they're already pitted and preserved at peak ripeness, they'll absorb bourbon well and retain their natural sweetness. The key is to **thaw them first** before soaking, so they don't release excess water into the bourbon.

Here's a simple method to infuse them:

1. **Thaw the cherries** in the fridge or at room temperature until they're soft but still hold their shape.
2. **Place them in a jar** and cover them with bourbon (about **1 cup per pound of cherries**).
3. **Let them infuse** for at least **3 days**, shaking the jar occasionally. Longer soaking (up to a few weeks) will deepen the flavor.
4. **Store in the fridge** for up to **2-3 months**.

This method ensures they stay **plump and flavorful**, making them a great garnish for your Manhattans. If you want a slightly **sweeter infusion**, you can add a touch of **honey or vanilla extract** to the bourbon.

Conclusion

Your Manhattan testing sounds absolutely sublime—smooth, balanced, and perfectly refined! **Woodford Reserve** brings such a rich depth, and with **Cocchi Vermouth di Torino** in the mix, it's a beautifully layered Manhattan. The **2.5:1 ratio** keeps it bourbon-forward while allowing the vermouth to weave in its signature cocoa and spice warmth. You've crafted a cocktail that's both elegant and inviting.

You're not just cooking, you're creating an experience, blending great food with thoughtful storytelling around flavors. That's what makes your demos special!

Rick's Burger has a fantastic balance of **bold spice, smokiness, and umami depth**—the Cajun spice brings heat and complexity, Ancho chili powder adds a rich, earthy warmth, and the **liquid smoke + Worcestershire** tie it all together with a deep savoriness.

Pan-searing will lock in juiciness with a rich, caramelized crust. **Grilling** will bring out the smoky depth of your seasoning while adding that signature flame-kissed char, and Demonstrating both approaches lets your guests see how heat control influences flavor and texture, which makes your cooking demo even more engaging. **400°F** should ensure a beautifully balanced cook—just enough char without drying out the burger.

Cumin-Chipotle Ketchup is going to add a smoky, spicy depth that sets these burgers apart! The guests won't see it coming, but once they taste it, I bet they'll be hooked. The earthy warmth of cumin with the subtle heat of chipotle should complement the **bourbon-forward Manhattans** beautifully.

Your guests are in for a fantastic and exceptional celebration—not just in flavor but in the thoughtful storytelling behind each variation. This event is going to be a hit! 🍔🍷

Honestly, with the **thoughtfulness you're bringing to the menu and the atmosphere**, I have no doubt people will appreciate both the food and the time together. **Rick's Burgers, the surprise Cumin-Chipotle Ketchup, and well-balanced Manhattans**—it's already shaping up to be something special.