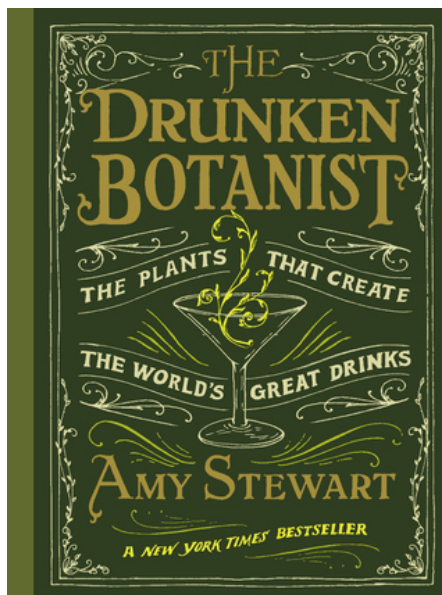




The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create the World's Great Drinks

Amy Stewart

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Every great drink starts with a plant. Sake began with a grain of rice. Scotch emerged from barley. Gin was born from a conifer shrub when a Dutch physician added oil of juniper to a clear spirit, believing that juniper berries would cure kidney disorders. "The Drunken Botanist" uncovers the enlightening botanical history and the fascinating science and chemistry of over 150 plants, flowers, trees, and fruits (and even one fungus).

Some of the most extraordinary and obscure plants have been fermented and distilled, and they each represent a unique cultural contribution to our global drinking traditions and our history. Molasses was an essential ingredient in American independence: when the British forced the colonies to buy British (not French) molasses for their New World rum-making, the settlers outrage kindled the American Revolution. Rye, which turns up in countless spirits, is vulnerable to ergot, which contains a precursor to LSD, and some historians have speculated that the Salem witch trials occurred because girls poisoned by ergot had seizures that made townspeople think they'd been bewitched. Then there's the tale of the thirty-year court battle that took place over the trademarking of Angostura bitters, which may or may not actually contain bark from the Angostura tree.

With a delightful two-color vintage-style interior, over fifty drink recipes, growing tips for gardeners, and advice that carries Stewart's trademark wit, this is the perfect gift for gardeners and cocktail aficionados alike.

The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create the World's Great Drinks Details

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Debra says

Who knew plants were the life of the party!?

Carmen says

This is a great book, very interesting. It all started when Stewart went to a liquor store with her friend.

We had arrived at a liquor store by then, and I was gesturing wildly at the shelves around us. "This is horticulture! In all of these bottles!" ... Suddenly we weren't in a liquor store anymore. We were in a fantastical greenhouse, the world's most exotic botanical garden, the sort of strange and overgrown conservatory we only encounter in our dreams. ...

Around the world, it seems, there is not a tree or shrub or delicate wildflower that has not been harvested, brewed, and bottled. Every advance in botanical exploration or horticultural science brought with it a corresponding uptick in the quality of our spirituous liquors. Drunken botanists? Give the role they play in creating the world's great drinks, it's a wonder there are any sober botanists at all.

The only reason this didn't get five stars from me is that although I drink, I don't DRINK. This is heavy with various cocktail and drink recipes that I have no use for and will never make. It also frequently takes a page here and there to explain how to grow certain plants yourself. Again, I'm never going to do this, I have no interest in gardening.

However, Stewart is fascinating; she tackles every variety of plant you can think of and then goes through them species by species, telling us how they became involved in becoming an alcoholic drink. She includes great, fascinating stories about history and historical figures that had me grinning from ear to ear. I especially loved the stories about Nixon going to China and drinking mao-tai - so hilarious!

On February 21, 1972, President Nixon... attended a banquet in Peking to mark the beginning of Nixon's historic trip to China. The ceremonial drink that night was mao-tai, a sorghum spirit with an alcohol content over 50%. Alexander Haig had sampled the drink on an advance visit and cabled a warning that "Under no repeat no circumstances should the President actually drink from his glass..." Nixon ignored the advice and matched his host drink for drink, shuddering but saying nothing each time he took a sip. Dan Rather said it tasted like "liquid razor blades."

A dozen or so pages later, Stewart expands this story:

The mao-tai served to President Nixon was surely the best China had to offer. Prime Minister Chou En-lai held a match to his glass to show the president that the spirit could be lit on fire, a fact that Nixon filed away for future use. In 1974, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger told another Chinese official that the president tried to repeat the trick for his daughter when he returned home. "So he took out a bottle and poured it into a saucer and lit it," Kissinger said, "but the glass bowl broke and the mao-tai ran over the table and the table began to burn! So you nearly burned down the White House!"

LOL This is just a taste - Stewart has plenty of entertaining stories about alcohol and its successes and

pitfalls throughout history.

The book is colorful, fully illustrated, and has a fun, whimsical feel to it.

Tl;dr - Tons of botany, and a great exploration of liquors, infusions, and cocktails that you will be longing to try after reading this book. I loved learning more about plants, and alcohol, and history. Although the book had a lot of "extra" material that didn't apply to my life or interest me, it was a strong and worthwhile read.

Sean Gibson says

Waaaayyyy back in my undergrad days, I fulfilled my science requirement in part by taking classes like Practical Botany and Environmental Plant Biology. So, I know a thing or two about those things that grow in dirt.

Consequently, I found discussions about the necessary starch levels in potatoes needed to make good vodka at least semi-interesting. And now I finally know what "proof" means, which is good (therein lies a delightfully entertaining story that I shan't spoil).

Mostly, though, this book just made me want a cocktail. Or seven.

Who's in?

Peter Tillman says

A good book to read a bit at a time, and a painless way to learn some botany. Stewart writes well, and her botanical vignettes are (mostly) entertaining. There are drink recipes and liquor lore, mostly lost on me -- though I did learn some interesting stuff about brewing beer. 3.5 stars, rounded up.

This would make a fine gift book -- the hardcover is attractive, sturdy, and well-designed. I gave away a copy this past Christmas.

The go-to review is Margitte's,
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Erica says

Preamble

June, 2017:

I'm buddy-reading this with the victim of my attention, Todd, although he doesn't know it, yet. He doesn't even know I bought this book, though he did know I was going to because when it came to our attention in the museum's gift shop and we both put it on our to-read lists right then and there, I promised I'd get us a copy. There was another book in the same display in which we were also interested, DIY Bitters: Reviving the Forgotten Flavor - A Guide to Making Your Own Bitters for Bartenders, Cocktail Enthusiasts, Herbalists, and More, and I've purchased that, as well. So my plan is to give that one to him while I read this one during my lunch breaks. Todd reads sporadically so it will take him years to get through that which is perfect

because my lunch break reading only happens in summer and fall and I get distracted a lot and it often takes me more than a year to get a book read so we'll both have ample time to finish our fascinating tomes. When we're done, we'll swap! Together, we will learn all the things about making refreshing adult beverages out of plants. It's going to be a great time for us. It will not be a great time for Gabe because he thinks our projects are stupid but what does he know? He spends his time doing dumb nerd stuff, not science nerd stuff and science nerd stuff is the best stuff to do.

One year later...

This isn't a buddy read anymore. My victim and I broke up and we're just cordial acquaintances now (that's a pun because this book is about liquor)

I have both books, I will read them by myself and wish I had someone with whom I could discuss the contents.

C'est la vie.

But!

I finished this one and it is the perfect lunchtime reading book. It's arranged in quick essay format starting with major botanical-to-alchemical plants, such as wheat, barley, rice, etc. and moving on to lesser known plants that have been alcoholized, like angelica, chamomile, coffee, and pepper.

Every plant gets between 1 and 6 pages of description, history, fermentation process, and anecdotes.

There are recipes throughout.

I enjoyed this a great deal both because it came in bite-sized pieces and because I am a plant enthusiast as well as a amateur mixologist (lies. I just like making drinks, I don't know anything about it, though) so everything in here was super fascinating to me.

Margitte says

Horticulture in bottles. Booze and botany. The elixir of life—the aqua vitae—that the plant world has given us.

"Every great drink starts with a plant".

So, depending on the mission, one person will be more interested in the content of the bottle, and another might be thrilled by the botanical magic leading up to it. I'm one of the latter. A teetotaler since forever, most boring nerd at a party. Coffee and water - the only substance abuses I am guilty of. Ah, it just happily float my boat.

"How can anyone with even a passing interest in botany not be fascinated by this stuff?" I said. "Look at the ingredients. Juniper! That's a conifer. Coriander, which is, of course, the fruit of a cilantro plant. All gins have citrus peel in them. This one has lavender buds, too. Gin is nothing but an alcohol extraction of all these crazy plants from around the world—tree bark and leaves and seeds and flowers and fruit." We had arrived at the liquor store by then, and I was gesturing wildly at the shelves around us. "This is horticulture! In all of these bottles!"

One hundred and sixty plant species are covered in the book. But there's thousands more, of course.

And then there's proper tonic water:

"proper tonic water, made with actual cinchona bark and real *Saccharum officinarum*, not that artificial junk...

...Scott browsed the selection of bottled *Agave tequilana*. He was in the habit of trekking into Mexico in search of rare agave and cactus, and he'd encountered many of his prized specimens coming out of the working end of a handmade Oaxacan still."

...There wasn't a bottle in the store that we couldn't assign a genus and species to. Bourbon? *Zea mays*, an overgrown grass(sweet corn). Absinthe? *Artemisia absinthium*, a much-misunderstood Mediterranean herb. Polish vodka? *Solanum tuberosum*—a nightshade, which is a weird family of plants if there ever was one. Beer? *Humulus lupulus*(common hop or hop), a sticky climbing vine that happens to be a close cousin to cannabis.

...In China, they make their wine from barley; in the northern parts thereof, from rice and apples. In Japan, also they prepare a strong wine from rice. We in England, likewise, have great variety of wines from cherries, apples, pears, &c. little inferior to those of foreign growth. In Brazil, and elsewhere, they make strong wine of water and sugarcane: and in Barbadoes they have many liquors unknown to us. Among the Turks, where wine of the grape is forbid by their law, the Jews and Christians keep, in their taverns, a liquor made of fermented raisins. The Sura in the East-Indies is made of the juice that flows from the cocoa-tree; and sailors have often been inebriated, in that country, with the liquors made of the fermented juices obtain'd by the incision of vegetables.

...Drunken botanists? Given the role they play in creating the world's great drinks, it's a wonder there are any sober botanists at all."

...A great gin or a fine French liqueur is flavored with innumerable herbs, seeds, and fruit, some of them added during distillation and some just before bottling. And once a bottle gets to the bar, a third round of plants are called into service: mixers like mint, lemon, and—if the party's at my house—fresh jalapeño. I structured the book around this journey from mash tub and still, to bottle, to glass.

...Marc Wucher, an Alsatian eau-de-vie maker, once told a reporter, "We distill everything except our mothers-in-law," and if you've ever been to Alsace, you know he wasn't exaggerating.

"You can proceed in orderly fashion through the book," says the author. The plants are alphabetically indexed and include all the well-known beverages first, and then proceed to the uncommon ones. History, cultural uses, distillery, product names. It's all there.

I just had an arresting moment when feces, two thousand years old, were discovered in the 1950s and analyzed. It did not go off well.

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. .

Ahhh.... it's in the book!!

MARULAS!

Let's skip the skimpy info in the book here and rather share my own memories with you:

Marulas(*Sclerocarya birrea spp caffra*), a delicious African fruit, is not only a highly sought after ingredient for various liqueurs, beers, moonshine (*witblits* in Afrikaans, also called *Tôt-Tôt*, one of the most potent moonshines on the planet). A very popular liqueur, called Marula Cream, is made from this fruit.

The fruit is also popular with the animals, with hilarious consequences. Just watch this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50tIF...>

Do yourself a favor and watch it! Even the worms have a happy moment! Believe me, those hangovers are REAL!

The author, from Oregon in the USA, rejects this kind of evidence. I don't.

I've grown up in the northern parts of South Africa and we witnessed these animals constantly. Not only eating the fruit, but stumbling away in a drunken stupor. In fact, when the word was out that elephants were at the trees, we all went *en masse* to witness it. When the elephants shook the trees, the monkeys within had to cling for dear life until the tree-quake was over. It lasted only a few minutes at a time.

The fruit is safe for human consumption when it's dropped from the tree and picked up immediately (especially after the elephants shook the trees). Stored in fridges, and eaten within a day, it is one of the most delicious fruits on the planet. But left out on the ground in the hot African sun, it totally changes the ball game! Nobody in their right mind touches those sun-baked fruits!

The Marula fruit contains a delicious nut which is used by African tribes for making bread. The tree forms part of the ANACARDIACEAE (cashew nut) family of plants. The nuts can be stored for months in clay pots before it is used. As children we helped the African mammas collect the fruit and harvest the nuts. Huge heaps. For our assistance we were awarded with the bread.

The bread is not only delicious, but also extremely healthy. As children, we had our fill of both bread, nuts and non-fermented fruit. We knew which fruits to avoid and which were safe. I miss it every day! Humans and animals rejoice together in Marula season :-)

Back to the book: It is so well researched, and really fascinating to read. Not a book to rush through within a day. I would rather add it to a coffee table collection to be scrolled through and absorbed slowly. The author has a wonderful, witty and casual way of sharing the information.

The author's website: www.drunkenbotanist.com

Book says

The Drunken Botanist: The Plants that Create the World's Great Drinks by Amy Stewart

"The Drunken Botanist" is a wonderful reference on plants associated with the world's favorite drinks. It's a well-balanced mixture of history, horticulture, and even some agricultural advice and some recipes to boot. It's an ambitious and well laid out book that like a great drink is better served in small measured amounts than as a whole. This instructive 400-page book is broken out into the following three parts: 1. We explore the twin alchemical processes of fermentation and distillation, from which wine, beer, and spirits issue forth, 2. We then suffuse our creations with a wondrous assortment of nature's bounty, and 3. At last we venture into the garden, where we encounter a seasonal array of botanical mixers and garnishes to be introduced to the cocktail in its final stage.

Positives:

1. A well researched, and well-written book.
2. An eye-catching title and an interesting topic for the masses.

3. Excellent format. Easy to follow. This is a book of essays that is best read in short time increments thus the well-laid format is conducive to jumping around to topics of interest.
4. A well-balanced book..some history, some horticulture, and recipes too. The book is structured around the journey from the desired plant to still, to bottle, to glass.
5. A very informative book from beginning to end. " Serving size: A cocktail is not supposed to be an enormous drink. The modern martini glass is a monstrosity; filled to the rim, it holds eight ounces of liquid. That's four to five drinks, more than anyone should choke down in a single sitting."
6. The bottom line: "the botanical world produces alcohol in abundance". If there is one thing you are going to get out of this book is that fact.
7. I like how the book jumps into the classics; that is those plants most commonly associated with alcohol.
8. Stewart does a wonderful job of clarifying misunderstandings and debunking popular myths throughout the book. " Mezcal is sometimes confused with mescaline, the psychoactive component of the peyote cactus *Lophophora williamsii*. In fact, the two are entirely unrelated, although peyote was sold in the nineteenth century as "muscale buttons," leading to a linguistic misunderstanding that persists today."
9. Plenty of fun anecdotes, "Some historians have speculated that the Salem witch trials came about because girls poisoned by ergot had seizures that led townspeople to conclude that they'd been bewitched. Fortunately, it's easy to treat rye for ergot infestation: a rinse in a salt solution kills the fungus." Ok maybe not so much fun.
10. Some fun science facts, "The DNA of apples is more complex than ours; a recent sequencing of the Golden Delicious genome uncovered fifty-seven thousand genes, more than twice as many as the twenty thousand to twenty-five thousand that humans possess."
11. The book provides some agricultural advice called "Grow Your Own". Value added.
12. Plenty of recipes too. Make your own cider.
13. Another bonus of the book is lists of terminology. As an example, Apple Spirits.
14. Interesting facts throughout the book, "The oldest domesticated living organism is not a horse or a chicken, nor is it corn or wheat. It is a wild single-celled, asexual creature capable of preserving food, making bread rise, and fermenting drinks."
15. You will get a good handle on the process of fermentation. "The science of fermentation is wonderfully simple. Yeast eat sugar. They leave behind two waste products, ethyl alcohol and carbon dioxide. If we were being honest, we would admit that what a liquor store sells is, chemically speaking, little more than the litter boxes of millions of domesticated yeast organisms, wrapped up in pretty bottles with fancy price tags." Bonus, "But what about the other waste product, ethyl alcohol? That is what we call pure alcohol, or ethanol. After some tinkering, it makes for a great drink—but not for the yeast. As they excrete this alcohol, yeast make their own grave. They can't survive in high concentrations of their own waste product, so as the alcohol content rises above about 15 percent, the yeast die off. That explains why, until distillation was invented, no human had ever enjoyed a stronger drink than beer or wine."
16. Another fun section of the book is "Bugs in Booze".
17. One of the best attributes about this book is that it covers all the main spirits and you can easily jump to your favorite sections.
18. Some great historical stories, "At the state dinner, Prime Minister Chou En-lai held a match to his glass to show the president that the spirit could be lit on fire, a fact Nixon filed away for future use. In 1974, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger told another Chinese official that the president tried to repeat the trick for his daughter when he returned home. "So he took out a bottle and poured it into a saucer and lit it," Kissinger said, "but the glass bowl broke and the mao-tai ran over the table and the table began to burn! So you nearly burned down the White House!"
19. An excellent reference to have.
20. Includes a recommended reading list.

Negatives:

1. My only gripe about this book is that it is best read in small increments. It reads like a collection of essays instead of one neat comprehensive narrative. It's an excellent reference and as such it is best read by topics of interest.

2. I really thought I was going to enjoy this book more than I did. It's well-researched, it has some funny anecdotes and it's a great book to have but it's not necessarily what I consider a must read. A must have, but not a must read.
3. The parts are so much better than the whole.

In summary, this is a great book to add to your book collection. It's not what I consider to be a must read but it will serve you well as an excellent reference piece. The book is well researched and well arranged for easy access of topics. The one thing clear I got out of this book is never underestimate human's ingenuity in producing great drinks from practically every plant on this one globe we live on. If you are a biologist, gardener or a bartender, this is a must read, for everyone else this is a must have. I recommend it!

Further suggestions: "Wicked Plants" and "Wicked Bugs" by the same author, "Boozehound" by Jason Wilson, "The Complete Book of Spirits" and "The Complete Book of Mixed Drinks" by Anthony Dias Blue, "Craft Cocktails at Home" by Kevin Lu, "100 Years of Cocktails" by H.L. Holbrough, and "The Ultimate Bar Book" by Mittie Hellmich.

Doris says

As the subtitle says, this is about the plants behind (alcoholic) beverages. Besides the obvious candidates, such as barley, grapes, rice, agave, etc. that form the backbone of drinks, the author also covers various flavoring agents, so that we hear about vanilla and cocoa and allspice and cinchona... The author is at pains to tell us that her coverage is by no means exhaustive, but it is comprehensive. She delves into the botany of the plants and how different species can contribute different flavors (or must be eschewed entirely due to toxicity or simply unpleasant tastes), the history of the plants and their mutations over the centuries, archeological findings supporting speculations about the origins of some favorite beverages, recipes for DIY, and growing tips for would-be gardeners.

Through all this, her writing is approachable and entertaining. Another reviewer compared her to Mary Roach, and I agree that's a fair comparison.

The book is also replete with fascinating trivia, e.g.:

'When Coca-Cola made its ill-fated switch to New Coke, the Wall Street Journal reported that the economy of Madagascar nearly collapsed because of the sudden drop in demand for vanilla. The company refused, as always, to comment on its secret formula, but the inference was that the original Coke recipe called for vanilla and the new version did not.'

It was perhaps more than I ever needed, or even wanted, to know, but I'm glad that I read it.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Helmut says

Es werde Schnaps

Eines meiner Hasswörter in der Welt der Spirituosen ist das von Gin-Hipstern immer gern verwendete Wort "botanicals" geworden, das zusammen mit der Ächtung der im deutschsprachigen Raum bis vor wenigen Jahren üblichen Wortkombination "Gin Tonic" – wer nur ansatzweise etwas auf sich hält, bestellt heutzutage einen britisch-korrekten "Gin **and** Tonic" – in die Bars Einzug gehalten hat. Was an dem kantig-klobigen Wort "Pflanzenextrakt" die hippe Szene stört, ist klar, es ist nicht cool genug. Nun lasse ich sie das englische Wort im deutschen Satz gern gebrauchen – unter der Voraussetzung, dass sie wenigstens wissen, wovon sie reden. Mit dem Buch von Amy Stewart lässt sich ein gewisser Bildungsbedarf schnell, unterhaltsam und umfassend nachholen.

"The Drunken Botanist: The Plants that Create the World's Great Drinks" ist eine Reiseerzählung, nicht durch die Länder der Welt, obwohl man in diesem Buch auch viel herumkommt, sondern durch die Welt der Pflanzen, die uns Freunden des hochgeistigen Genusses so viel Freude bereiten.

Wir verwenden Pflanzenextrakte in unseren Spirituosen und Cocktails in drei unterschiedlichen Varianten, die Stewart in den drei Teilen ihres Buchs auch so aufgreift: Die Pflanzen, die schon seit alters her fermentiert und destilliert werden, wie Zuckerrohr, Weizen, Roggen, Mais und Agave. Eine andere Art, Pflanzengeschmäcker in die Drinks zu bekommen, ist die Mazeration und Infusion – Nelken, Wacholderbeeren, Holunder oder Aprikosen können durch handwerkliche Prozesse dazu genötigt werden, ihre Aromen in eine bereits vorhandene Schnapsbasis abzugeben. Und zu guter letzt sehen wir als Cocktailfreunde auch gern das eine oder andere Pflanzenteil in natura in unserem Glas; Pfefferminzblätter, Kirschen oder Zitronenzesten lockern den Drink auf und geben den letzten, hocharomatisch-frischen Twist.

Von Pflanze zu Pflanze, und damit auch von aus dieser Pflanze typisch hergestellter Spirituose, handelt sich Stewart so durch die Botanik, und lässt bei all den hochinteressanten Informationen die Unterhaltung nicht außen vor. Anekdoten, wie zum Beispiel zur wirklich spannenden Geschichte des Angostura-Bitters, und eine mit einem sehr wirksamen, aber zurückhaltenden Humor durchzogene Schreibe, machen das Buch zu einem unerwarteten Pageturner.

Spannend sind auch die eingestreuten Wissensbröckchen, wie der kleine Ausflug über Essigherstellung (ein echtes Bakterien-vs-Hefe-Deatchmatch), oder wie der Vodka und die Kartoffel zusammenkamen. Und schließlich hat Stewart auch den einen oder anderen, äußerst klugen Ratschlag zum Konsum der beschriebenen pflanzenbasierten Spirituosen auf Lager.

Now carry your julep to the porch and remain there until bedtime; there will be nothing else to your day but the slow draining of the glass and the pleasant drone of the cicadas.

Genau das werde ich wahrscheinlich am Wochenende tun. Ein schöner Mint Julep, lange auf Eis gerührt, und mit viel hausgezogener Minze darin, auf dem Balkon im Liegestuhl. Das Leben kann so schön sein, wenn man die richtigen Lebensratgeber liest.

jennifer says

This book goes into meticulous detail in listing all the plants, trees, herbs, nuts, flowers, spices and pretty much anything else that has ever been fermented and distilled to make alcohol. Stewart tells how agaves are harvested, what that flavor in Amaretto di Saronno is (nope, not almonds), what kind of bugs find their way into what liquour and gives comparison charts for the multiples of say, violet liqueurs. This isn't just a gathering of dry facts though; when something is badly made Stewart tells you.

Stewart is the other of several botany and gardening books, is the a founder of a gardening blog and has a bookstore. I'd read about this book here on LT, so when she appeared nearby a couple of weeks ago I went to grab this for the signing and listen to her talk about all the research (parties) that went into the two years she spent on this book. It's so complete that I know I'll be taking it with me to find things I never would have tried before. Who hasn't looked at a bottle of something and wondered what to do with it? You'll get the answer here.

Laurie says

Nature seems to love making alcohol; take any plant with sugars present in it (any fruit and a lot of grains) and let it sit out where wild yeasts can land in it, give it a little time, and alcohol will appear. Humans have been taking advantage of this for thousands of years and show no signs of losing their enchantment with alcohol. It seems that no matter what area humans lived in, there was **something** that could be turned into alcohol. And if it couldn't be turned into alcohol, it could be used to flavor alcohol.

Stewart has written a book that, while small, is encyclopedic in style. First she takes us through the plants-grains, potatoes, cacti, grasses - that are fermented and distilled to make hard liquors; then she goes through categories like fruit, sap (sugar maple), and roots that are fermented and the herbs, seeds, nuts, and barks that are used to flavor the brews. For each plant she tells us how and where it was/is used, what it adds to the brew, which brands of the brew are best, and for many, how to grow the plant. This is where the book ties into gardening: while the average gardener won't be growing grain and setting up a still, most gardeners are able to grow some mint for mojitos, jalapenos for some special margaritas, cherry tomatoes for a Blushing Mary, or a fruit tree. Face it; nearly everything in an alcoholic drink comes from plants except for bacon vodka and Irish cream. And a lot of those things are easy to grow. The author includes over 50 drink recipes for the home mixologist.

The book accomplished two things for me: I have a lot better understanding of alcohols and the history of drinks, and I want to try a lot of things I can't afford but really want to taste, like violet liqueur and fancy vodka. And I'm looking at my garden with a new eye: what can I grab out of it to make a drink?

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

I was so relieved to learn that I wouldn't have to root around in emu droppings in order to enjoy a quandong cocktail.

Amy Stewart is sort of the Mary Roach of the plant world, but not quite as funny. I'm more of a botanist than a boozier, so I was most interested in the history and folklore of the plants. It's quite a revelation, though, to see the variety of plants that are used in alcoholic beverages. If you like to make exotic cocktails from pricey liqueurs and liquors, you could throw one hell of a party with the recipes in this book. She even gives some gardening advice so you can grow the plants you'll use in your boozy concoctions.

BellaGBear says

Despite my love-hate relationship with potted plants (they keep dying), the title of this book immediately caught my attention. Maybe that's because I have a love-love relationship with liquors and most kinds of alcohol, who knows. While writing this review, I was sipping a good red port and musing over all the great anecdotes in this book. The book is best described as an encyclopaedia of the botanical origins of drinks, and how people came to make alcohol out of every plant they could find, such as the banana. Sometimes I really do admire the inventiveness of humans. So grab a nice drink of your choosing and let me tell you a bit more about this book.

(...)

This book is a combination of a serious botanical account, with growing tips that all seemed very sensible to me as a non-gardener. Also, there are funny stories and advice how to make the best cocktails and where to find the highest-quality ingredients. The book ends with a list of recommended readings for the reader who wants to know more. This combination of informative and entertaining works very well, especially because the topic of alcohol lends itself well for humorous accounts. It is a tricky balance though, because sometimes authors try to be too funny, losing credibility during the more serious parts of a book. Amy Stewart doesn't do that: there is a clear division between the serious and funny parts. It might not be the kind of book you will read from cover to cover in one go: that will probably make you forget all the names of the plants and drinks, even when you're reading it completely sober. It is the kind of book you pick up once in a while and read a few chapters from to have something new to tell next time you're enjoying a drink in a bar or pub.

This is part of the review. Read the full story, with lots of funny anecdotes and a great picture of alcohol and the socks my mother knitted me, at Bookworms United

Cissa says

Brilliant!

I loved this book. While the format is something like an encyclopedia, I read it cover-to-cover, and was sad when i reached the end; the entries were that informative and well-written that it was more engaging than some novels I've read recently.

I knew some of the background info, but a lot was new to me. And fascinating! As a species, we are clearly keen on fermenting anything that might be fermentable!

The suggestions of ways to explore more- like with tequilas and liqueurs- were really interesting, and our bar storage is going to be increasing. The drink recipes included worked really well based on those I tried.

Now- I got this as an ARC from LibraryThing, so the indices weren't functional, and the printing was gray-scale rather than the 2-color promised in the "real" version. Based on this, though, I've ordered the "real" version, because I think it'll be worth it; I've also ordered a couple of the author's other books.

It really is that good.

If you are interested in the history of booze, or in cocktails, or spirits in general- I HIGHLY recommend this book. It is not only really informative, it's a great read.
