

# American original

## Meet Johnny Appleseed's cocktail of choice

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One of the most tortuous aspects of Washington's summers is the speed with which the baking, blinding sun cedes its jurisdiction to the steamy, stifling rain — and then back again. When Mother Nature plays such tricks, it becomes necessary to find some method of refreshing one's spirit. Perhaps some magic elixir that delivers the ying of a sweet dose of sugar balanced by the yang of something sour, with the whole brought to life by a zesty, tangy bite. What is needed, clearly, is a Jack Rose cocktail.

### Missing ingredients

A simple, fruity potion of Applejack (American apple brandy), grenadine (pomegranate juice with sugar), and citrus (lemon or lime), the Jack Rose is one of those classic, elevating, magical cocktails that, like the well-made martini, becomes something far more than the sum of its parts. Unlike the martini, however, the Jack Rose is fairly hard to come by in your average bar. For not only will 9 out of 10 bartenders display total incomprehension at your request (unless they have been at it a very long time), most bars don't even stock all the necessary ingredients.

The primary ingredient that is hard to come by in most bars is not the grenadine, which every bar has but most every bartender hates to use (principally because most commercial mixes lack real pomegranate flavor and are too sweet). Nor is it the citrus, which no cocktail bar could really survive without. No, the hardest Jack Rose ingredient to find in bars today is the Applejack — the original American distilled spirit.

Although it isn't too difficult to find in a well-stocked liquor store, and it isn't at all expensive, applejack fell from many a bar roster as national tastes shifted and simplified to clear spirits like vodka. This is tragic not only because it is a fine product and the base spirit of the Jack Rose, but also because Applejack is as American as, well, apple pie.

English apple seeds were first introduced to America around 1630. Fairly early in the American colonial experience, hard apple cider became one of the standard beverages of choice. It was imbibed at every meal and often throughout the day, including mornings — John Adams was said to knock back a tankard every day with breakfast. Whenever apples grew, cider's popularity spread. Throughout the Colonial experience, hard cider was second only to rum.

The initial evolution from cider to applejack was simple: The cider was kept outdoors and allowed to freeze during winter, and then the ice was scraped off, leaving it far more concentrated and potent. The next step was obvious, and so by the 1670s virtually every farm with an apple orchard began distilling their hard cider into apple brandy, or applejack, for family and friends.

It was around this time, in 1689, that William Laird, a Scotsman from County Fyfe, who had crossed the Atlantic and settled in Monmouth County, N.J., began distilling applejack.

The first existing record of the commercial distillation and sale of applejack in America dates from the 1780 ledger entry of William Laird's grandson, Robert Laird, at the Colts Neck Inn, which he operated. Thus, Laird & Company dates itself from that ledger entry, 225 years ago. Entirely family owned and operated, Laird & Company is now the only company in the United States that still distills applejack. Their only product until the 1970s, the Laird's now produce just 50,000 cases of applejack a year, amounting to less than 4 percent of their total profits.

### Lightning in a bottle

Applejack, or "Jersey lightning" as it has been affectionately known, is today an apple brandy (about 65 percent) blended with neutral grain spirit (roughly 33 percent) and a little bit of apple wine (just 2 percent). Unlike the French Calvados of Normandy, however, this stuff is more like a young whiskey than a brandy — it is rough, unrefined and assertive. Add grenadine and citrus in the right proportions, however, and you get something exceptional and delicious. You get a Jack Rose.

There are several competing theories in wide circulation that attempt to explain the naming of this drink. The first is simply that "Jack Rose" is a contraction based on its obvious com-

ponents: It is made with applejack, hence the "jack," and the drink has a distinctly pinkish hue, giving us the "rose." Another theory asserts that "Jack Rose" is merely a corruption of its original name, the "Jacque Rose," so named because the drink's color is the exact shade of the thornless, long-stemmed rose known as the "General Jacqueminot Rose."

Another version of this same theory suggests, even more improbably, that the "Jack Rose" was actually named for the man for whom the flower was named: Jean-Francois Jacqueminot, a French general and Napoleonic war veteran.

Yet another theory credits the Laird family with the drink's invention and propagation. The idea being that a John or a Jack Laird invented this rose-colored drink at the Colts Neck Inn and spread it around from there.

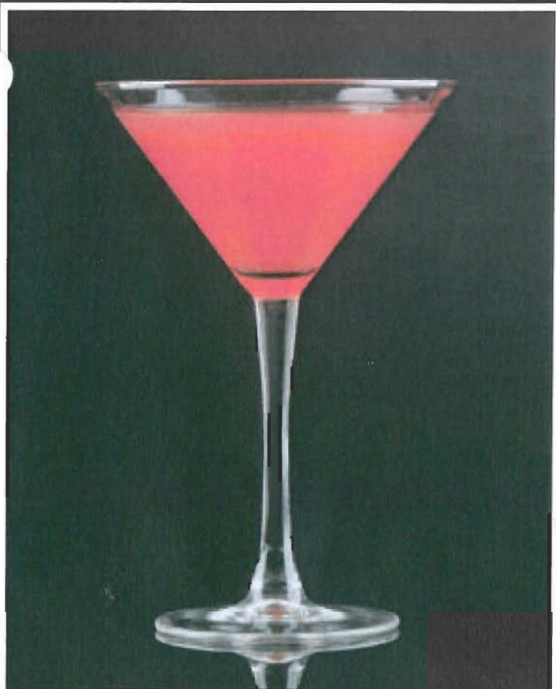
The Laird's actually endorse the most exotic and best-known theory of them all: The drink was named for a gangster named Jack Rose who was the star witness in a notorious 1912 murder trial in New York, in which a policeman was tried and convicted for murdering a gambling house operator named Herman Rosenthal.

Regardless of which of these theories is nearest the mark, the Jack Rose remains a wonderful and beguiling cocktail that is silky, sweet and refreshing. The key here, as it is in most worthwhile endeavors in life, is balance — that harmonious interplay of ingredients that ensures that everything is coherently perceived, but nothing overpowers.

### Jack Rose

Pour 1 1/5 ounces of applejack, the freshly squeezed juice of half a lime (about 1 ounce), and no more than a 1/2 ounce of grenadine (please only use a grenadine that contains real 100 percent pomegranate juice) into a cocktail shaker with cracked ice. Shake well, then strain into a pre-chilled cocktail glass and garnish with a lime wedge.

Recipes differ on whether to use lemon or lime as the citrus component. Most early recipes call for lime, more contemporary directions call for lemon (including the back of the Laird's Applejack bottle). Both are excellent in a Jack Rose, but they make for very different drink sensations. Some prefer lime juice, while others decry lime as overpowering, insisting that only lemon will do the trick. Try them both.



Courtesy photos

