

IMBIBE: Cooler & Warmer Holiday Bar Spreads

For a wickedly short moment in our state history, we let the world know Rhode Island was “Cooler & Warmer.” While that siren song did not resonate with we Rhode Islanders, we can, in fact, celebrate the demise of 2017’s tourism slogan and simultaneously bring Christmas cheer to all by hosting a holiday party with both cooler and warmer bar spreads.

I’m a big fan of putting out a spread of options, with notecards for what to do, and letting guests DIY their own drinks. In fact, you can even appoint each guest to bring a particular bottle or fixing for your shared holiday bar! By keeping to a warm bar or cold bar (or both on separate tables), it’s easy to interchange spirits and bases for happy holiday drinking. So let’s get a little cooler, and then warmer, shall we? <insert red nosed cheeky grin here>

Cool Bar

For your cool bar, you’ll need to think about what you can serve as a base (a punch or a wine or cider) that your guests can add to. I like bubbles, I like gin, I like cider. Check out the options below:

Go Get

Bubbly, lots of it (I like using prosecco, cava or Limoux for quality, but affordability. If you want to show off your earned dollars use a full-blown champagne.)

Gin (London Dry, preferably, or one with a high juniper profile)

Rum (dark)

Whiskey (your choice, but I prefer bourbon)

Vanilla Vodka (or just vodka for you vodka people)

Cranberry Liqueur (there are a few good local options! If you can’t find one, just use unsweetened cranberry juice.)

Fresh cranberries, lemon slices, and lime slices for garnishes

Cocktails you can make with this spread

Poinsetta: 1 oz of cranberry liqueur, top with bubbly and a cranberry or whatever berry you have on hand, serve in a flute or coupe.

Santa’s Chilled Cider: take 1 oz of your favorite spirit* and top with the Cider Blend**

Rudolph’s G&T: ½ oz Cranberry Liqueur, 1 oz Gin, top with bubbly for super booze or tonic for slightly moderate behavior

Warm Bar

Now it’s time to get warmer. The spread will have you rosy-cheeked and singing by the fire to your high school flame in no time. Be careful.

Go Get:

Hot water

Hot cider**

Hot coffee

Hot chocolate

Buttered rum batter (recipe below)

Lemon wedges, sliced, with cloves

Whipped cream (lots of it)

Chocolate sprinkles

Rum (preferably gold or dark)

Whiskey (preferably Irish or bourbon)

Brandy (don't be cheap - use something decent! I like Germain Robin)

Irish Cream

Liqueurs: raspberry (Framboise), mint (Menthe Pastille or Brancamenta), chocolate (Godiva or Meletti), orange (think Grand Marnier)

Cocktails you can make with this spread

Hot Toddy: Keep it simple. 1 oz whiskey (or rum), top with hot water and add the lemon wedge with cloves. You can get fancy with a cinnamon stick. Have a little sugar or honey nearby for sweetness to stir in as needed.

Spiked Hot Chocolate: Take your favorite way to make hot chocolate and have it warm and ready. Then stir in 1 oz of your favorite liqueur or spirit. Top with a lot of whipped cream and chocolate sprinkles.

Holiday Hot Buttered Rum: 1 Tbs of the Hot Buttered Rum Blend***, 1.5 oz rum, top with hot water. If you don't feel it's rich enough, top with whipped cream. Or better yet, a spoon of vanilla ice cream. Trust me.

Irish Coffee: 1 oz whiskey, 1 Tbs sugar (or 1 oz Bailey's), stir into coffee, then top with a load of whipped cream — guests can also just spike a coffee with whatever they like!

*I love a mix of ginger liqueur and mezcal, but rum, whiskey and vanilla vodka also work great.

****Cider Blend**

2 tsp dried orange peel

¼ tsp mace

1 tsp whole cloves

½ tsp whole allspice

¼ tsp ginger (optional)

¼ tsp nutmeg

2 Tbs cinnamon

1 cup brown sugar

This blend can be used for chilled and hot options! It's pretty easy if you infuse your cider ahead of time and let some of it cool for the cold bar. ALSO. You can make **Mulled Wine** with this spice blend. Just add ¾ cup water with the wine and warm up. You're welcome.

*****Hot Buttered Rum Blend**

4 sticks butter, softened to room temperature

2 ¼ cups sugar

4 Tbs molasses

1 Tbs ground cinnamon

¾ tsp ground clove

1 tsp ground nutmeg

1 tsp vanilla extract

Take all of the ingredients and pulse in a food processor or blender until smooth. Keep chilled in your fridge until the party.