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Finding a More Sustainable Tipple



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When we think about our environmental [foodprint](#), we're usually only thinking about meals. But the size of our [beverage footprint](#) can be surprising. From [coffee](#) and [tea](#) to [orange juice](#), and even [bottled water](#), beverages have global life cycles with complex impacts. While we might agonize over the [packaging](#) options for our soda, we tend to overlook alcohol. Hopefully, you drink more water than whiskey. But shot for shot, liquor can pack an environmental punch. Fortunately, some brewers and distillers are working to make it easier for responsible drinkers to drink more sustainably.

Alcohol and the Environment

From small [cideries salvaging](#) urban apples to industry titans [saving water](#), alcohol manufacturers are working to improve their environmental performance. Across industries, alcohol presents many of the same environmental challenges:

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agricultural impacts from ingredients; the energy use^{CLOSE} and the waste generated in the production process; and packaging and shipping choices. For refrigerated beverages, home storage makes a difference to the footprint, too.

The relative importance of each factor will vary depending on the product. For [beer](#), growing barley is the largest component of the footprint. For [wine](#), it's the glass bottle. Choosing organic certification is a good way to ensure your beer – or [vodka](#), or other alcoholic beverage – uses more sustainable ingredients. Besides organic certification, alcohol makers are saving water and energy, reducing waste, and getting creative with packaging. Here are some examples.

Bainbridge Distillers

[Bainbridge Organic Distillers](#) is an artisan distillery in Washington State's Puget Sound. They use wheat, barley, triticale, and corn to make whiskey, vodka, and gin. All of their grains are grown in-state and many of them are heirloom varieties from the mid-20th century that were bred to thrive in the region. All ingredients are certified USDA Organic. Bainbridge ages some of their five kinds of whiskey in virgin casks. For others, they use barrels recycled from scotch, rum, or their own whiskey production. Their gin combines imported spices and locally sourced botanicals, including Douglas Fir needles.

Mijenta Tequila

Founded in 2008 by the first woman certified as a maestra tequilera, [Mijenta Tequila](#) is also the first tequila company to be [B-Corp certified](#). They use a steam extraction process that produces more tequila from fewer plants, thus producing less plant waste and requiring less land for cultivation. Producing añejo, reposado, and blanco varieties, Mijenta does not use pesticides or herbicides and works to maintain genetic diversity in its agaves. They are certified carbon neutral and use mostly recycled packaging, creating labels locally from agave waste, bottles from recycled glass, and boxes from 100% post-consumer recycled or Forest Stewardship Council-certified paper.

Gray Whale Gin

A 1% for the Planet company, every Gray Whale purchase benefits the nonprofit Oceana. Made by the California-based distillery Golden State, [Gray Whale Gin](#) is a corn-based liquor flavored with local, organically farmed or foraged herbs. The paint on their glass bottles is organic and they use a biodegradable [cork stopper](#). The brand also collects as many empty bottles of Gray Whale Gin as possible and up-cycles them as [candle jars](#), with 100% of candle profits going to [Oceana](#).

Montanya Distillers

Colorado's [Montanya Distillers](#) makes high mountain rum from sugarcane grown by a sustainable farmers cooperative in Louisiana. The woman-owned B-corporation works towards employment diversity in its hiring practices and in the larger spirits industry. Using no added sugar, sweeteners, or artificial colors and flavors, their operations are 100% wind powered. A biodigester processes organic waste into greywater and they've reduced landfill waste by 75% in the last decade. They are certified Plastic Neutral through [rePurpose Global](#) and use Cradle to Cradle certified packaging.

Copper & Kings

Aged in Kentucky bourbon barrels and matured on rock'n'roll ([literally](#)) American brandy maker [Copper & Kings](#) does things differently. A rooftop solar system contributes power to the basement subwoofer system. Both the chiller for the condensers and the boiler for the stills operate on closed-loop water recycling systems and they forgo climate control in the maturation cellar. Their retail space is built in a recycled shipping container with recycled furniture, and the grounds are landscaped with a [butterfly-friendly](#) rain garden to [handle runoff](#). Anyone who bikes there gets 50% off a facility tour.

Tomatin

[Tomatin](#) was named Sustainable Distillery of the Year at Whisky Magazine's [Icons of Whisky Awards](#) in 2023. The Scotch whisky distiller powers 80% of its operations with a wood pellet boiler. They source their wood pellets from an afforestation program that plants two trees for each one harvested. Draff from the mash is used to produce biogas. Since 2021, they have reduced water consumption in their cooling system by half and all wastewater from the whisky making process is biologically treated in a reed bed system.

Miami Cocktail Co

Cocktails in a can may not scream classy, but they do have a smaller environmental footprint, and you can always pour them into a glass. [Miami Cocktail Co.](#) uses only [CCOF certified organic](#), non-GMO ingredients, so the contents of the can are sustainable, too.

Soju

[Soju](#) may be the last part of the Hallyu wave to make a splash in the United States, but the [top-selling liquor brand](#) in the world makes soju. If you're interested in drinking the Korean spirit, skip the classic green bottle and try a somewhat greener brand. [Yobo Soju](#) is America's first craft soju distiller. They use Northern California grapes for a grape spirit base. The base is blended with organic wheat spirit and a proprietary short-grain Calrose rice spirit. Yobo contains no sulfites, preservatives, additives, or sugars.

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