

# DIY SHRUBS

These intensely flavorful drinking vinegars are great in cocktails—and that’s just for starters. *By Elaine Johnson*

MASTER CLASS

AS A FORMER fashion designer, cooking teacher Mary Karlin keeps an eye on trends. So when she saw shrubs—a sweet-tart infusion of vinegar and fruit—appearing on cocktail menus, she was intrigued. Soon, her counters were covered with jars of homemade shrubs, and eventually, her experiments blossomed into a topic for her latest cookbook, *Mastering Fermentation* (Ten Speed Press, 2013; \$30).

“I love shrubs’ vibrancy and versatility,” says Karlin, a founding staff member of Ramekins Culinary School in Sonoma, California. “They reflect all the seasonal brightness of the fruit, herbs, and vinegar in each combination.” And their applications go far beyond mixology. At her home kitchen in Petaluma, Karlin showed us her basic shrub-making method and then used the zingy results in a spritzer, seafood glaze, salad dressing—and a fine cocktail.



Mary Karlin in her kitchen in Petaluma, CA, with a cocktail made from her homemade shrub (page 86).

PINEAPPLE  
GINGER MINT  
SHRUB

## Building blocks of shrubs



“Once you’ve got the basics of making a shrub,” says Karlin, “look at cocktail menus to riff on the formula with different fruit-vinegar combos.”

**FRUIT** Start with any seasonal fruit—strawberries in spring, say. “You want something ripe that can give off juice,” Karlin says.

**RAW VINEGAR** An unpasteurized vinegar that still has its “mother,” or starter, is the key for fermenting. Karlin uses store-bought raw cider vinegar (for a zippy flavor)

or coconut vinegar (which is more subtle).

**FLAVORINGS** Add ginger, fresh mint or basil, or even savory herbs or hot chiles for complexity.

**SUGAR** This provides the sweet to go with the sour of the vinegar and creates a syrupy texture.

**CLEAN EQUIPMENT** To keep any undesirable bacteria from ruining your shrub, sanitize your workspace with 1 tbsp. bleach dissolved in 2 qts. water. Wash jars and cooking tools in hot soapy water, then rinse in bleach solution followed by tap water; air-dry on a cooling rack set over a baking sheet.

# PINEAPPLE GINGER MINT SHRUB

**MAKES 1 QT. / 20 MINUTES, PLUS 15 DAYS TO FERMENT AND MELLOW**

Once you create this tropical-flavored shrub, you will be able to use it for months in the recipes that follow. You'll need a widemouthed 1-qt. canning jar and a piece of cheesecloth.

- 1 cup thinly sliced fresh ginger with peel scraped off (use a spoon)
- 1 cup packed fresh mint leaves, plus a sprig
- 2 cups fresh pineapple chunks (½ by 1 in.)
- About 1¾ cups raw (unpasteurized), unfiltered apple cider vinegar\*, such as Bragg, or raw coconut vinegar, such as Coconut Secret
- 1 cup freshly squeezed lime juice (7 or 8 limes)
- 1 cup raw, unrefined cane sugar\*

1. Put ginger and mint leaves in a clean widemouthed 1-qt. canning jar. Bruise them with a wooden potato masher or pestle (if you have one; or use a wooden spoon) until very fragrant **(A)**. Add pineapple and enough vinegar to cover **(B)**. Close jar tightly and shake vigorously for 10 seconds. **"This gently macerates the fruit, releasing the flavors into the**

**vinegar,"** says Karlin. Push pineapple, mint, and ginger down so they're completely covered by vinegar and it can draw out their flavor. (It's also important to keep the fruit completely submerged to prevent undesirable bacteria or mold from growing on it.)

2. Replace lid with a piece of cheesecloth (so air can get in and help start fermentation) and securely attach with a rubber band or the jar ring. Leave at room temperature, 12 hours or overnight.
3. Discard cheesecloth. Replace lid and ring, secure tightly, and repeat the shaking daily for 3 days, keeping at room temperature. **"I usually stick a Post-it on the jar that allows me to keep track of where I am in the process,"** says Karlin.
4. Pour mixture into a wide strainer set over a bowl. Discard mint, then return solids and liquid to jar **(C)**. Shake well each day for 4 more days at room temperature. **"There's not much of a visual indicator, but it will be done after seven days total,"** Karlin assures.
5. Strain out solids over a bowl and set aside for salsa (recipe on opposite page), or another use. Return liquid to jar, using a funnel. Add lime juice and sugar **(D)**, cover, and shake until dissolved, about 2 minutes. Add the mint sprig.
6. Chill 7 days for flavors to meld, giving the bottle a good shake every day to be

sure sugar is dissolved. Discard mint. Use, or chill up to 4 months (shake before using). The shrub will get more syrupy with time.

\*Find raw, unfiltered cider vinegar at many grocery stores and natural-foods stores, and raw coconut vinegar at natural-foods stores (see a store locator at [coconutsecret.com](http://coconutsecret.com)).

Karlin likes Trader Joe's raw organic evaporated cane juice sugar.

**MAKE AHEAD** Up to 4 months, chilled.

## VARIATION

### Grapefruit Shrub

Follow directions for Pineapple Ginger Mint Shrub, but omit ginger and mint, and don't bruise fruit. Instead of pineapple, use supremes\* from 3 large red grapefruits.

Use coconut vinegar (about 1⅓ cups). In step 5, use 1 cup freshly squeezed red grapefruit juice instead of lime juice.

\*To make supremes, cut off outer peel and membrane of fruit, then cut between inner membranes to free segments.

## TIP

***"For a bright color in the shrub, use a raw sugar that's on the light side."***





“You can swap in rum for vodka, or leave out the alcohol for a mocktail.”

TIP

#### COCKTAIL

### Island Breeze

With a shrub as the foundation for this drink (shown above), “you’ve got the sweet and the tart covered,” says Karlin. “It doesn’t take much more to create a cocktail.”

**SERVES 1 / 5 MINUTES** In a cocktail shaker, shake 2 tbsp. **Pineapple Ginger Mint Shrub**, 3 tbsp. **vodka**, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. **grenadine** with ice. Strain into a chilled rocks glass, top with 6 tbsp. **tonic water** (Karlin likes Q tonic) and garnish with a **mint sprig**.

#### SPRITZER

### Shrub Fizzy

Five parts mixer to 1 part shrub is a good place to start for this spritely drink (inset above), but feel free to play with the ratio so it’s milder or more bracing.

**SERVES 1 / 5 MINUTES** Pour  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cold **Pineapple Ginger Mint Shrub** or **Grapefruit Shrub** into a tall glass. Top up with  $1\frac{1}{4}$  cups cold **sparkling water**, and stir. Taste and adjust proportions if you like. Garnish with a **pineapple spear** or red grapefruit wedge.



## More ways with shrubs

### PINEAPPLE SHRUB GLAZE

Karlin marinates shell-on shrimp with a generous splash of the shrub for 20 minutes. She drains and cooks them in a lightly oiled cast-iron skillet, brushing them with this glaze, and serves extra on the side.

**MAKES  $\frac{1}{2}$  CUP / 15 MINUTES** In a small frying pan, cook 1 cup **Pineapple Ginger Mint Shrub** (preferably made with coconut vinegar) and  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. **red chile flakes** at a low boil, swirling often, until reduced to  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup, 12 to 15 minutes. Sauce thickens as it cools.

### PINEAPPLE SHRUB VINAIGRETTE

The shrub’s flavors add complexity to this easy dressing. Karlin likes it over a salad of romaine, radicchio, red onion, avocado, feta, and toasted pumpkin seeds.

**MAKES 1 CUP / 10 MINUTES** In a small bowl, whisk together  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup **Pineapple Ginger Mint Shrub** and 3 tbsp. **lime juice**. Stir in 2 tbsp. minced **shallot**. Vigorously whisk in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup **fruity extra-virgin olive oil** in a stream. Whisk in  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. **kosher salt** and  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. **pepper**. Taste with a piece of lettuce; add more lime juice, salt, and pepper as needed. *Make ahead: Up to 1 week, chilled.*

### PINEAPPLE SALSA

Karlin turns the strained fruit into a tart salsa that’s especially good over seared pork chops.

**MAKES  $1\frac{1}{2}$  CUPS / 45 MINUTES** In a medium bowl, combine 2 tbsp. *each* **honey** and **lime juice**. Stir in 2 tbsp. diced, seeded **jalapeño chile**, 1 cup drained **pineapple chunks** (from step 5 of Pineapple Ginger Mint Shrub; discard ginger),  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup *each* diced **red onion** and **red bell pepper**, 1 tsp. grated **fresh ginger**,  $\frac{1}{8}$  tsp. **whole coriander seeds**, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. **fine sea salt**. Let sit 20 minutes. Adjust salt to taste. Just before serving, stir in 2 tbsp. roughly torn **fresh mint leaves**. 🍹