

MICHAEL DIETSCH

# SHRUBS

AN OLD-FASHIONED DRINK FOR MODERN TIMES

*Sweet and Savory Cocktails  
and Sophisticated Sodas*



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# PHOTO CREDITS

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# DEDICATION

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To Jennifer, Julian, and Mirabelle



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**Shrub is a colonial-day drink whose name is derived from the Arabic word sharab, to drink. It is a concentrated syrup made from fruit, vinegar, and sugar that is traditionally mixed with water to create a refreshing drink that is simultaneously tart and sweet. In the nineteenth-century, the drink was often spiked with brandy or rum.**

**—Entry in *The Ark of Taste*  
Slow Food Foundation**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The word *shrub* calls to mind a short, stemmy, woody plant, similar to a bush

but maybe even a bit bushier. It also refers to a delicious vinegar-based syrup that makes any drink—alcoholic or not—more refreshing. That’s the shrub I’m talking about.

I remember the first time I had a shrub. I was in New Orleans for Tales of the Cocktail, in July 2009. Tales of the Cocktail is a cocktail festival held in the French Quarter. It attracts bartenders, distillers, brand representatives, writers, and the general public for five days of seminars, dinners, competition tastings, and product launches.

Bartenders around the country were just beginning to rediscover the shrub, and that day I tasted a cocktail by a Chicago bartender named Bridget Albert. Albert is the author of *Market-Fresh Mixology* and she holds the position of director of mixology for Southern Wine & Spirits of Illinois. Her drink featured cachaça, a Brazilian liquor made from sugarcane juice that’s somewhat similar to rum. She also used raspberry shrub, lime juice, and ginger ale. The drink was balanced and refreshing, with no single ingredient taking over. I could taste the cachaça, the fruit, and the tang of the vinegar, but they were harmonious. And since I had just walked into the hotel from a blistering New Orleans summer day, the drink was also the most refreshing thing I had tasted all day. I kept going back for more.

It turns out that vinegar is incredibly good at quenching your thirst when it’s hot out. Research shows that sour-tasting beverages—such as vinegar and lemonade—are better at stimulating salivation than are other drinks. A wet mouth helps you feel hydrated even after you’re done drinking.

Salivation not only makes you feel hydrated, it stimulates the appetite. Salivation usually indicates to your stomach that food is forthcoming, and therefore it primes your digestive juices to get ready to work. Shrubs are a perfect cocktail to prepare you for a night of fine dining.

When I got home, I had to re-create the drink because I knew my wife would love it. Unfortunately, the raspberry season had ended in my area, and I couldn’t reproduce the raspberry shrub. However, I was able to find blueberries and gooseberries, so I cooked up my version using those ingredients.

I was right—my wife loved it, and we both fell in love with shrubs.

From that point on, I made them frequently. We drank them in cocktails, we drank them with vermouth or sherry, and we drank them without alcohol, just topped with soda or seltzer. During the summer of 2010, I went on a shrub-making frenzy. I made shrubs out of every type of berry I could find, plus peaches, apricots, nectarines, and cherries. I had so many shrubs in the fridge at any given time that it was hard to fit anything else in there.

My wife would open the door and a bottle of shrub would nearly tumble out onto the floor. She’d shoot dirty looks and sardonic comments my way. But I had the last laugh. In 2011, we found out we were expecting our first child, and those shrubs helped sustain her through her pregnancy when she couldn’t drink alcohol.

One of the joys of shrubs is that they’re both an adult beverage and a soft drink at the same time. The blend of fruit and tartness is challenging for a lot of children to appreciate, so shrubs tend to appeal more to adults than to kids (although if your kids enjoy shrubs, you’ve got the coolest kids in the neighborhood). But just because shrubs are “adult” doesn’t mean you need to serve them in a boozy way for them to be tasty. The balance of sweet and tart is sophisticated and complex enough that they’re wonderful with just soda.



We in the United States have a rich food heritage, and a history of creatively cultivating plants and animals for food purposes. But that culture is shrinking, and many of the foods our grandparents ate

their grandparents ate are disappearing, either through biological extinction or cultural neglect. Since 1996, the organization Slow Food has been working to develop an Ark of Taste, a catalogue of heritage foods that are in danger of extinction. The shrub is catalogued in this collection.

The Ark of Taste aims to save these foods and call attention to their plight. A food might appear on the Ark of Taste because it's an endangered species, as are certain plants and animals, or it may simply be at risk of being forgotten. Shrub falls into the latter category. The ingredients are plentiful, so there's no risk that shrub is in danger biologically. In fact, the rise of shrubs in popular culture has never been felt more keenly than it is today.

Eric Felten provided the spark in July 2006, writing about Independence Day barbecue beverages for the *Wall Street Journal*. He noted that one of the very few places you could find shrub on a menu was City Tavern in Philadelphia, where it's served with rum, brandy, or champagne. He discussed the thirst-quenching potential for shrubby drinks at Fourth of July cookouts, and provided a recipe. But then he concluded, "why bother when Pennsylvania's Tait Farm makes luscious Shrub syrups in a variety of flavors, using their own fresh fruit vinegars?" (More on Tait Farm to come.)

Felten's cocktail column was always intelligent, well informed, and witty. As the craft-cocktail movement gathered steam in the first decade of this millennium, his column was pored over by cocktail enthusiasts, writers, and bartenders. So when the idea of shrubs arose in his column, people who study cocktails jumped on it. In 2007 and 2008, shrubs started to gain some steam as ingredients for cocktails, appearing in blog posts, in beverage and bar-industry magazines, and on cocktail menus.



Vinegar drinks are more than just a cocktail trend, however. They're also common in Southeast Asian cuisine. Andy Ricker is the chef and owner of Pok Pok, a Thai-influenced restaurant with locations in Portland, Oregon, and New York City. Ricker put drinking vinegars on his menu when he opened his eatery. The vinegars were so popular that he now sells bottled versions of them, called Som. The Som line of drinking vinegars includes apple, ginger, honey, pineapple, pomegranate, raspberry, tamarind, and Thai basil flavors. Pok Pok's cocktail menu includes a variety of drinks that feature the Som vinegars.

Toby Cecchini then picked the topic up for the *New York Times* in 2008. Cecchini is a bartender and writer in New York City, and he helped develop the drink that we now know as the Cosmopolitan (see my shrubby take on the Cosmo [here](#)). He wrote a piece for the *Times* Style section about the surprising deliciousness of vinegar-based cocktails.

It's impossible to overestimate the speed with which the Internet spreads new or revived ideas in the cocktail/bartending community. When a new product or ingredient hits the market, it seems that within a week, people are already posting cocktail ideas using that product.

A San Francisco bartender named Neyah White started serving shrubs in low-alcohol cocktails, with dry sherry or vermouth. This turned out to be a smart idea. The fruitiness of shrubs pairs very well with dry wine-based aperitifs.

I've provided nearly fifty recipes here for shrubs, and if you follow them to the letter, I know you'll have good results. But I urge you to experiment. Shrub making isn't like baking, where you need to follow the recipe precisely to ensure perfect bread or cake. Shrub making is more intuitive. You can fly by the seat of your pants while making shrubs and still have something delicious to sip. Want more vinegar? Add it gradually until you're happy. More fruit? Go for it. Think it should be sweeter? It

your shrub, so that's your decision. I believe you can't really go wrong with these recipes. Add an herb if you want. Toss in a pepper if you think it's appropriate. (A hot pepper is probably more suitable with, say, a tomato shrub than it is with kiwifruit, but your tastes might vary.) You can even make your own vinegar, using wine (or cider, or even beer) and starter culture, but I've never made my own vinegar, so I have no advice to offer on that topic.







## **THE HISTORY OF SHRUBS**

Shrubs might be trendy right now, but the idea of drinking vinegar is ancient.

Vinegar, of course, is made from wine (and later in the book, I'll describe how it's made). Wine has been around for at least 8,000 years, and because wine naturally turns to vinegar as it ages, vinegar then must be nearly as old as wine. Archaeologists have found vinegar residues in urns and pots from ancient Egypt from about 4,000 years ago, and historians have written records of its use in China dating back at least 3,000 years.

Vinegar served a couple of important roles as a beverage in ancient times. First, people drank it simply so they wouldn't have to throw it away; when you work very hard for your food and beverage, you don't waste it. More importantly, however, vinegar was used to sterilize dirty water, to make it drinkable.

Take, for example, *posca*. Originally a medicinal tonic used in Greece, *posca* was a drink made of sour wine or vinegar, mixed with water and flavoring herbs. Roman soldiers and members of lower social classes drank it as an everyday beverage. (Members of higher social classes, of course, drank wine.)

Water of the time was often undrinkable, spoiled by dangerous bacteria. Spiking water with sour wine was a way to sterilize the water while reusing wine that would otherwise be wasted. *Posca* also provided calories and hydration, and thanks to the vitamin C in the vinegar, it was an antiscorbutic, meaning it prevented scurvy.

Vinegar appears throughout the Bible. The Old Testament's Book of Numbers speaks of the Nazirites, men and women set apart from the general population and consecrated to God. The Nazirites were forbidden to drink wine, other alcoholic beverages, and vinegar. In the New Testament, all four gospels tell the story of Roman soldiers twice offering sour wine or vinegar to Jesus during his crucifixion. The first offering was a blend of vinegar and gall, a narcotic herb that would have eased his suffering. He declined. Later, the soldiers offered him a drink from their own rations of vinegar. This was very likely *posca*, and he accepted.



The *shrub* you drink derives from the Arabic word *sharāb*, or beverage. Using *shrub* to denote a beverage may seem surprising to you, but you're probably familiar with a few other words that ultimately derive from *sharāb*—sherbet, sorbet, and syrup.

*Shrub*, as a word for a beverage, can itself mean two things: The type of *shrub* I'll be primarily discussing is a beverage made of acidulated fruit juice (fruit plus vinegar), sugar, water, and other ingredients. However, a blended drink made of fruit juice, sugar, and a spirit such as rum or brandy served cold and diluted with water is also known as a *shrub*.



How does the Arabic *sharāb* lead to *shrub*? A lexicographer named Eric Partridge supplied the answer in his 1958 book *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*. Partridge traces the history thusly: *Sirab* (or, as Partridge spells it, *sharāb*) derives from the Arabic *shariba*, to drink (verb). *Shariba* also gives rise to *sharba*, a drink (noun), which then gives rise to *sharbat*, the Persian fruit-juice drink, and finally to *sorbet* and *sherbet*. *Sharāb* also enters Middle Latin as *sirupus* and *syrupus*, giving rise to our modern word *syrup*.

Finally, *sharāb* yields another form that means a drink (noun), shurb which eventually became *shrub*.

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Shrubs came from Turkey and Persia, in the form of sherbets. These days, we usually take *sherbet* to mean a frozen dessert. Originally, though, sherbets were beverages enjoyed by teetotaling Muslims, made of sugar combined with citrus juice, violets or other flowers, herbs, or nuts. Sherbet has been called the world's first soft drink, arising in a pre-refrigeration era when the only way to preserve fruit juices was to douse them heavily with sugar, alcohol, or vinegar. Because Islam teaches forbearance from alcohol, sugar-based sherbets became popular throughout the Middle East.

Trading ships and travelers brought sherbet back to Western Europe starting in the middle of the seventeenth century. The word went through various permutations, and alternative spellings came and went. The spelling that survived was *shrub*, which came to denote a syrup of citrus and sugar, blended with either rum or brandy, and served aboard trading ships and naval vessels. This form of shrub reached colonial America, where it was popular with such notables as Martha Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson.



At the same time, another very old beverage was gaining steam in the colonies: a fruited, non-alcoholic vinegar beverage enjoyed as a thirst quencher on hot days. This beverage was known first as fruit vinegar. For example, recipes made of raspberries, vinegar, and sugar were called Raspberry Vinegar. By the mid-1800s, however, the word *shrub* was appropriated to describe them, and raspberry-vinegar syrups became known as both Raspberry Vinegar and Raspberry Shrub. Today, of course, we think of raspberry vinegar as a condiment made by taking raspberries, making wine from them, and then turning that wine into a true vinegar; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, though, a raspberry vinegar was simply a vinegar flavored with raspberries.

Vinegar-based shrubs evolved alongside the alcohol-laced versions; some early American cookbooks, for example, offer recipes for both Raspberry Shrub and Raspberry Vinegar. The former drink would be a rum- or brandy-based concoction, and the Raspberry Vinegar would be the vinegar drink we know today as shrub.





The earliest reference to a drinking shrub that I've found is from an itinerant pastor and scholar Franciscus Junius (1591–1677), a student of old Biblical texts and the evolution of the German family of languages.

At the time of his death, Junius had left many works unpublished, among them his magisterial *Etymologicum Anglicanum*, one of the earliest etymological dictionaries of the English language. As the title implies, the book was written in Latin, which was common for scholarly works of the time.

Junius's work influenced many later lexicographers, including Samuel Johnson, whose *A Dictionary of the English Language* became the primary source for English etymology when it was published in 1755. (Incidentally, Johnson himself described the beverage form of shrub as "A spirit, acid, and sugar mixed.")

The date of the *Etymologicum's* writing is uncertain, but Junius died in 1677. His *Etymologicum Anglicanum* was finally edited and published sixty-six years after his death, in 1743, by another lexicographer, Edward Lye. Lye took the liberty of inserting editorial comments into Junius's work, such as:

*SHRUB, a liquor, "most pleasant," says Junius, "The name arises from the East, whether from Syrian sareb; or from Arabian sirab."*

*"Junius rightly notes that sharab means to drink; and shorb, the thing itself that is drunk; hence our shrub, an intoxicating drink of dry wine, golden fruit, and sugar mixed together."—a very pleasant liquor, made generally with rum or brandy.*

As I mentioned in the introduction, shrub, as we know it today, arises from a Turkish beverage sherbet. The philosopher Francis Bacon provides one of the earliest known references in English to sherbet, in 1627:

*They have in Turkey and the East certain confections, which they call servets, which are like to candied conserves, and are made of sugar and lemons, or sugar and citrons, or sugar and violets, and some other flowers; and some mixture of amber [ambergris] for the more delicate persons: and those they dissolve in water, and thereof make their drink, because they are forbidden wine by their law.*

What Bacon encountered wasn't a drink, but instead a tablet of sugar, flavored with fruit juices, flowers, and ambergris (a form of whale cholesterol; yes, it's rather gross, and no, I don't have any recipes that call for it). These sherbet tablets were made by Turkish confectioners, who would take boiled sugar syrup, add flavorings such as fruit juices or essential oils, and then pour the syrup into molds or onto marble slabs, where it would cool and solidify.

When you wanted to drink a sherbet, you'd take a sherbet tablet and let it dissolve into water. In *Sherbet and Spice: The Complete Story of Turkish Sweets and Desserts*, Mary Isin tells of a German confectioner who visited Istanbul in the 1830s and found sherbet tablets flavored with "orange, cinnamon, rose, lemon, vanilla, salep (orchid root), pistachio, bitter almond, violet, jasmine, opium, barberry, strawberry, sour cherry, pomegranate, sour grape, apricot, peach, plum, date, pineapple and chocolate."



Sherbet entered Europe in the sixteenth century, by way of Venice, which for much of its history was a prosperous trade center between Western Europe and the Islamic world. Traders and merchants brought all manner of goods to Western Europe, including sherbet. From Venice it spread to the rest of Italy, France, and all of Europe. By the nineteenth century, sherbet was quite trendy in England. In 1813, Lord Byron wrote of it, "Give me a sun, I care not how hot, and sherbet, I care not how cool, and my Heaven is as easily made as your Persian's."

In 1655, an Anglo-Welsh historian named James Howell published a book recounting his travels. In one passage, he discusses the beverages of various countries—the ales and beers of England and Germany, the "usquebagh" [whiskey] of Scotland, and the mead of various European countries. Speaking of the "Turk," which here appears to be a general term for Muslims, and not a name suggesting residents of Turkey, he writes of their abstinence from wine and spirits, and then speaks of the beverages they drink instead, including a "Sherbet made of juice of Lemon, Sugar . . . , and other ingredients."

Sometime during the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries—no one's quite sure of the date—a drink called switchel arose in the Caribbean. In its original form, it was made of vinegar, ginger, molasses, and water. Landowners discovered that their slaves were drinking rum while working, and switchel became a cheaper substitute. The molasses trade carried it to colonial New England by the late 1600s, and eventually honey came to replace the molasses. Switchel was served to farmers, especially at hay harvesting time, which is why it's also known as haymaker's punch. The vinegar helped to cool the farmers during the heavy labor of harvesting hay, while also quenching their thirst.

In his 1787 *Letters on Egypt*, Claude-Étienne Savary writes of being served sherbet at a meal. Savary was a student of Middle Eastern culture and was fluent in Arabic. He wrote a life of Muhammad and a French translation of the Quran. "Sherbet," he says, "comes from the Arabic word

*shorba*, which signifies beverage. It is composed of lemon juice, sugar, and water, in which perfume paste is dissolved, made from the excellent fruits of Damascus; they usually mingle a little rose-water. It is a most agreeable beverage, the nectar of the orientals, and drank only by the great, or people of office. I was several times presented with it on my visits to the governor of Damietta, and drank with pleasure.”

Sherbet even made its way as an entry in the third edition (1797) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

*SHERBET, or Sherbit, a compound drink, first brought into England from Turkey and Persia, consisting of water, lemon juice, and sugar, in which are dissolved perfumed cakes made of excellent Damascus fruit, containing an infusion of some drops of rose water. Another kind of it is made of violets, honey, juice of raisins, &c.*

So what do sherbet and shrub have in common? And what distinguishes each from the other?

I think the answer, at least in eighteenth-century England, was pretty simple. Sherbet was a beverage made of lemon juice, water, and sugar. In some cases, perfumed cakes were added and allowed to dissolve, and in some cases, rose water was added.

Shrub was lemon or orange juice, water, sugar, and—here’s the salient difference—rum or brandy. The cocktail historian David Wondrich, in his 2010 book *Punch*, says, “The term of art for the mixture of sugar and citrus juice upon which [p]unch is constructed is variously given as as ‘sherbet’ or ‘shrub.’ . . . ‘Shrub’ is also used to refer to the same thing, but with some or all of the spirits added. As Wondrich alludes, the word shrub was slowly taking on the meaning of a sweetened fruit juice with added alcohol—sort of a spiked lemonade.

This raises the question, how did alcohol come to enter shrub in the first place? I can’t find a definitive answer to this. An amusing story describes smugglers in Southwest England bringing barrels of rum to the Cornish coast, encountering customs agents, and sinking the barrels to avoid discovery. This rum, so the story goes, took on so much seawater that the hooch was unpleasant to drink, and so innkeepers and saloon owners would mask the taste with sherbet.

I can’t find any verification for this story, or any primary sources to back it up. A company called Phillips of Bristol sells a bottled shrub cordial, and the Cornish-smuggler story is part of its marketing, so I take it with a large grain of Cornish sea salt. The story does, though, have some anecdotal evidence in its favor. First, Cornwall remains one of the few places where rum-based shrubs have never waned in popularity. Not only do Cornish taverns continue to offer the beverage, but a Cornish singing group, called the Rum and Shrub Shantymen, tours the countryside performing old sea shanties, sea songs, and traditional folk music.

The story does have one other thing going for it—seawater or no seawater, rum in the 1600s and 1700s was a rough-tasting product. This shouldn’t be surprising; it was still in its infancy. Although no one knows exactly when rum first appeared, historians think it arose no later than the early seventeenth century. In his book, *And a Bottle of Rum*, Wayne Curtis discusses several possible origins: Barbados in the early 1600s; Hispaniola or Cuba, at about the same time; Brazil; or even fifteenth-century Europe. Whatever evidence existed about rum’s birth, that evidence is gone.

What we do know is that by the mid-1600s, rum was all over the New World. We have records from Dutch, English, Spanish, and French sailors and colonists regarding their encounters with rum. Rum’s marriage with shrub, then, happened while both were still very young.

Why was this early rum so foul? Wayne Curtis has the answer. Whereas brandy is the distilled essence of wine, and whiskey is that of beer, rum is “the distilled essence of industrial waste,” he writes. Rum is distilled from molasses, which is left behind during the process of making sugar. Early distillation methods were crude and imprecise, and so the quality of rums varied from batch to batch.

and from distiller to distiller.

The story about using shrub to mask the taste of seawater-tainted rum might be simply an amusing fiction, but I do think there's an element of truth in it. I find it entirely reasonable to assume that drinkers first used shrub to mask the flavor of harsh rum, whether that rum was ever dumped into the sea or not.

Shrub reached colonial America by no later than 1716, when an expedition by the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe set out from Colonial Virginia to explore the west. The sixty-three-person group must have been thirsty; they carried "Virginia red wine and white, Irish usquebaugh [whiskey], brandy, shrub, two sorts of rum, champagne, canary, cherry, punch, water, cider, etc."



What was this early shrub? From the 1736 edition of the *Dictionary Britannicum*, we have an early definition: "[A] compound of brandy, the juice of Sevil oranges and lemons kept in a vessel for the ready making of punch at any time, by the addition of water and sugar."

The *Dictionary* was the work of Nathan Bailey, among the earliest English lexicographers, even earlier than Edward Lye. Bailey first published an English dictionary in 1721, his *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*. The third edition of that work, from 1726, contains only references to botanical shrubs: bushes, small trees, and whatnot. The *Universal Dictionary* was, as implied by the name, a holistic English dictionary, covering words from across the language. His *Dictionary*, by contrast, was a book of technical terms and less common words.

In 1737, the *Historical Register* takes note of a duty laid in New York on the importation, by ship, of rum, brandy, or other distilled liquor or shrub. So by 1737, shrub was common enough to be shipped into New York Harbor.

A 1752 book, published by the colony of New York, lists the laws of that colony dating back to 1691. Among the laws in the book are various duties and tariffs placed on items imported into the colony. Shrub is mentioned in several of the duties, but this is the first reference:

*An Act to let farm the Excise of Strong Liquors, retailed in this Colony, for the Time therein mentioned, and for declaring Shrub liable to the same Duties as distilled Liquors. Pass'd the 20th of September, 1728.*



Now, how do you make the stuff? In 1737, we see one of the earliest known recipes for shrub, from the second edition of *The Complete Family-Piece*, by an anonymous author. It calls for two quarts of brandy, the juice of five lemons (and the peels of two), nutmeg, white wine, and sugar. (I've included a modernization of the recipe [here](#).) A 1772 French work, *Dictionnaire Universel*, provides the



following definition for *sharāb*: *Mot Arabe qui signifie le vin et meme toutes les liqueurs fortes.* English, “Arabic word for wine and even all strong liquors.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* picks the tale up from there. It defines shrub as a “prepared drink made with the juice of orange or lemon (or other acid fruit), sugar, and rum (or other spirit).” Its first citation is from a 1743 work, *English Housewifry*, by Elizabeth Moxon, which gives instruction on making Orange Shrub. Her recipe calls for the juice and peels of Seville oranges and lemons, sugar, and brandy. (A modernization appears [here](#).)

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Scurvy was first identified as early as 1500 BCE. As Europeans began exploring the world by ship, stories arose of entire crews falling to scurvy. The disease even plagued the voyages of Vasco de Gama and Ferdinand Magellan, each of whom lost hundreds of men. Because the powers of Europe were looking at exploration to provide economic and political expansion, not just captains and ship owners but also governments and physicians were desperate to contain scurvy.

By 1593, the English admiral Richard Hawkins was recommending the use of citrus to prevent scurvy, but no one yet understood why, nor was citrus widely adopted after his recommendation. Through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the use of citrus to prevent scurvy began to pick up, but it wasn't until 1747 that citrus's scurvy-fighting properties were finally proven. The Scottish physician James Lind conducted what's now seen as one of the first clinical trials, judging citrus's efficacy versus that of sulfuric acid, vinegar, seawater, cider, and barley water. He published his results in the 1753 book *A Treatise on Scurvy*. The British Navy slowly started to adopt the practice of providing citrus, and by 1795 had virtually eliminated scurvy.

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The OED's next citation of shrub comes from *Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1747, in a long piece about methods for preserving the health of seamen on long naval voyages. We know now that scurvy is caused by the lack of vitamin C in the diet. Vitamin C is crucial to the diet because it helps us make collagen. Without collagen, tissues begin to break down, leading to such symptoms as muscle and joint pain, lethargy, anemia, swelling in the body, ulceration of the gums, and even the loss of teeth. Left untreated, scurvy can be fatal. Unlike most animals, humans are unable to synthesize vitamin C, and so we need to consume it in our diets in order to stay healthy.

To promote the health of sailors, an anonymous correspondent to a 1747 issue of *Gentleman's Magazine* suggests equipping ships with ample supplies of cider; vinegar; and fresh apples, lemons, and oranges. Should the long-term storage of fruit prove impractical, the writer suggests, “a mixture of lemon juice and rum (shrub as they call it) may be carried in any quantity, as it will keep a long time.”

Straying from the OED, we find other early references to shrub. From 1751, we find an entry from the department *The More Things Change*. *The Student, Or, The Oxford and Cambridge Monthly Miscellany* published a note on a friend of the publication's, one Ashley, who apparently established a punch house of which the young Oxbridgers were quite fond. They write:

*Nothing can be more agreeable, than to give encouragement to extraordinary merit. We are therefore very glad, that the notice taken in our last of the celebrated Ashley, and his Punch-House, has in any wise attracted the attention of the public. We acknowledge to have*

*received (accompanied with a cag [keg, presumably] of excellent shrub) a very polite letter from that eminent retailer of warm rum.*

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Elizabeth Cleland, writing in her 1755 book, *A New and Easy Method of Cookery*, provides the following recipe for shrub:

*To Make Shrub.*

*Take five English Gallons of Rum, three Chopins of Orange and Lemon-juice, and four Pounds of double-refined Sugar; mix all together, but first pare the Rind of some of the Lemons and Oranges, and let them infuse in the Rum for six Hours: Let all run through a Jelly-bag, then cask it till it is fine, and bottle it.*

A chopin, if you were wondering, is not a Polish composer of music, but a Scottish unit of liquid measurement, equivalent to eight gills. Oh, that probably doesn't clear things up either. A gill was five fluid ounces, and so one chopin equaled probably about forty ounces. The measure of a gallon, as eighteenth-century units of measurement weren't confusing enough, varied depending on whether you were in England, Scotland, the colonies, or, I suppose, the canals of Mars. An English gallon would have been about 160 fluid ounces. (A US gallon, by contrast, holds 128 ounces.)

Another shrub recipe comes from 1760, from a book titled *The House-keeper's Pocket-book, and Compleat Family Cook*, by Sarah Harrison. Hers calls for brandy, lemon juice and peels, and sugar.

As noted earlier, the use of shrubs on seagoing vessels arises in the middle of the eighteenth century, as a 1761 reference from *Dodsley's Annual Register* shows. An essay titled "Useful Hints for Sailors and Seafaring Men" concerns itself with providing tips to keep old salts healthy on long oceanic passages. Among its advice is to prescribe a little shrub after a day of hard labor, to guard "against putrefaction."

A 1762 advertisement in the *London Chronicle* offers several delicious choices available at the James Ashley Public House and Cellars, on Ludgate Hill, in London: Jamaica rum, cognac, Batavia arrack, and orange shrub.



A 1763 reference comes from *Dodsley's Annual Register*, from a harrowing account of a ship voyage. The *Phoenix*, captained by a fellow named McGacher, left London for Africa, where it picked up 332 slaves, and then headed to the "Potowmack" in Maryland. On Wednesday, October 20, 1763, the *Phoenix* encountered a storm, and the ship sustained heavy damage. Every cask in the hold was smashed to pieces, save a barrel of flour; 10 pounds of bread; 25 gallons of wine, beer, and shrub; and 25 gallons of spirits.

In keeping with the nautical theme, shrub appears in Patrick O'Brian's series of historical naval novels, featuring the nautical adventures of Captain Jack Aubrey and his ship's physician, Stephen Maturin, during the Napoleonic Wars of the early 1800s. *The Ionian Mission* (1981), for example, features a recipe for a hot lemon shrub, similar to hot toddy.

The recipe itself is simple; it appears in *Lobscouse & Spotted Dog*, a gastronomic companion to the O'Brian novels. It's much on the same order as the recipes of the early 1800s: lemon zest, lemon juice, sugar, and rum are combined and left to age for about a week. When it's time for service, you pour some into a mug and top with boiling water.

In 1764, Daniel Bellamy's *A New, Complete, and Universal English Dictionary* defines shrub as "spirit, acid, and sugar mixed."

More recipes for shrubs follow, including a 1769 recipe for almond shrub. This recipe differs from previous ones in that it calls for a pint of milk, which is mixed with brandy, orange juice, lemon peel, loaf sugar, and bitter almonds. The milk is allowed to curdle, and then the solids are strained off until the shrub runs clear. A currant shrub follows, using similar techniques. This business of allowing the milk to curdle may sound revolting, but it's common practice in making milk punches, and the almond shrub sounds a bit like an early version of the latter.

From 1777, two recipes for shrub come from *The Lady's Assistant for Regulating and Supplying Her Table*, by Charlotte Mason. The first is an orange shrub typical of the time, consisting of Seville orange juice and peels, rum, and sugar. The next is one of the earliest recipes for currant shrub, using currant juice, sugar, and either rum or brandy.

A 1791 recipe for double rum shrub comes to us from a Scottish writer, known only as Mrs. Frazer, who compiled a cookbook called *The Practice of Cookery, Pastry, Pickling, Preserving, Etc.* Mrs. Frazer calls for sugar, lemon and orange juices and peels, and rum. What makes it "double rum" is that you use some of the rum to steep the peels in and add the rest to the sugar and citrus juice.

## SHRUB IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The dawn of a new century, 1800, brings a double shot of shrub from a book called *The Compleat Confectioner*, by a Mrs. H. Glass. Mrs. Glass brings us first a citrus shrub, named for Sir John Cope, an eighteenth-century British general. This shrub calls for brandy, lemon juice and peels, white wine and sugar. As for Sir John, there's no evidence that he had much interest in shrubs, but history has given us a chance to play punnily with words. Among Cope's descendants are two recent American presidents, both named Bush. And this is the only joke I'll make in this book about shrubs and bushes.

Mrs. Glass, however, also has a recipe for currant shrub, calling for ripe white currants, rum, brandy, and sugar.

The first references to what we would now consider a vinegar-based shrub come to us not as shrub recipes, but as "quick" fruit vinegar recipes, just at the turn of the nineteenth century. I say "quick" because a true fruit vinegar is a time-consuming process: you press the fruit to make juice, ferment the juice to make wine, and then ferment the wine to make vinegar.

The "quick" fruit vinegar recipes you see in early cookbooks generally involve steeping fruit in vinegar for a time, and then straining it off. Early recipes for such things as gooseberry vinegar and raspberry vinegar are virtually identical to today's recipes for vinegar-based shrub—that is, they consist of fruit of some kind, vinegar, and sugar.

Take, for example, this recipe from 1804's *The New Practice of Cookery, Pastry, Baking, and Preserving*, published in Scotland by a Mrs. Hudson and a Mrs. Donat, which I'm quoting in full just so you can see how similar it is to a modern raspberry shrub:

### *Raspberry Vinegar*

*Fill your jar with raspberries, and cover them with vinegar; let it stand 24 hours, and drain it off and strain it; to every pint add one pound of sugar, put it in a jar, and set that in a pot on the fire till the vinegar has boiled some hours; take care to keep it close covered that no water from the pot gets in; the best way is to have hay about it; it must be covered with a bladder while in the warm bath; when cold, bottle it and cork it very close; when it begins to look tawny, it is done.*

*The New London Family Cook* (1808), by Duncan MacDonald, offers a similar recipe, along with advice toward its use:

### *Raspberry Vinegar Water.*

*Put a pound of fruit into a bowl, pour on it a quart of the best white wine vinegar, the next day strain the liquor on a pound of fresh raspberries, and the following one do the same, but do not squeeze the fruit; drain the liquor as dry as you can from it. The last time pass it through a canvas wetted with vinegar. Put it into a stone jar, with a pound of sugar to every pint of juice, broken into large lumps; stir it when melted, then put the jar into a saucepan of water, or on a hot hearth, simmer and skim it. When cold bottle it.*

*This is one of the most useful preparations that can be in a house, not only as it affords a refreshing beverage, but being of singular efficacy in complaints of the chest. A large spoonful or two in a tumbler of water. No glazed or metal vessel must be used for it.*

An 1808 book, *A New System of Domestic Cookery*, offers a very similar recipe.

Raspberry vinegars were often touted in old books for their medicinal uses, especially to slake the thirst of those fighting fevers or colds. In 1817, a physician named William Kitchiner published



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