

6 GREAT BOURBONS THAT MIGHT SURPRISE YOU

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The mash bill for **bourbon** is pretty straightforward: It must be distilled from at least 51 percent corn, although it's often much higher than that at around 60 to 80 percent. The remaining percentage is a mixture of grains. According to **Heaven Hill** American whiskey brand ambassador Bernie Lubbers, barley usually only comprises 5 to 10 percent of the mash bill, as it's mostly used to help with the fermentation process. This leaves flavoring grains, which are commonly wheat or rye. In wheated bourbon, like **Maker's Mark**, **W.L. Weller** and **Larceny**, the percentage of wheat goes up to around 20 percent.

Then there's high-rye bourbon, in which the percentage of rye is also about 20 percent, with some variation. This gives the bourbon a nice spicy kick that complements the sweetness of the corn, without the full-on peppery zing of a true **rye whiskey**. These are six of the best high-rye bourbon available today.

1. REDEMPTION HIGH RYE



Redemption Rye, a nondistiller producer purchased by Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits in 2015, is known, obviously, for its rye whiskey. But the brand also has a high-rye bourbon (\$30), with a mash bill of 60 percent corn, 36 percent rye and 4 percent barley—a very high-rye bourbon indeed. It’s incredibly floral and almost fruity, with the classic rye baking spice flavors really standing out against the corn sweetness. This bourbon would make a good substitute in any classic rye cocktail. It’s most likely on the younger side, as the brand states the whiskey is “aged for no less than one year in new charred oak barrels,” but it tastes like something that’s been sitting in casks for long enough.

2. BASIL HAYDEN'S



There are several [Jim Beam](#)-affiliated high-rye bourbons on this list, and Basil Hayden's (\$42) is one of the standouts. This is a relatively easy-sipping bourbon at only 80 proof, and the high rye content (presumed to be about 30 percent, although the brand does not say specifically how much) does shine through. Once listed as being eight years old, Basil Hayden's switched to no age statement a few years ago. It's not the deepest or most complex of the high-rye bourbons, but it's an enjoyable sipping whiskey that works well as a cocktail component.

3. BULLEIT BARREL STRENGTH



Bulleit is another nondistiller producer, at least until the brand's new distillery starts releasing whiskey. The entire Bulleit line of bourbon is considered to be high rye. The brand lists the mash bill for the Barrel Strength (\$50) as being about two-thirds corn and one-third rye, the same formula as its regular bourbon. This expression is only available in Kentucky and is bottled uncut and non-chill-filtered, usually running about 120 proof. It's a rich, deep-sipping whiskey, best cut with an ice cube to lower the proof (or not), and the rye does get a little lost given that it's barrel-strength. Still, this particular release, if you can find it outside of Kentucky, is a quality catch.

4. OLD GRAND-DAD



Old Grand-Dad is another Jim Beam offering and another fine high-rye bourbon. It's bottled in bond, so you get the assurance that it's at least four years old and clocks in at 100 proof. And it's cheap too, often retailing for around \$25. How does it taste? It's definitely recognizable as a Jim Beam product, with the nutty, oaky palate that so many of the brand's whiskeys have. But the higher-than-usual rye content is also noticeable here, with a soft spice that clings to your tongue as you finish a sip. This one might be bottom shelf (although it's gaining in popularity among bourbon drinkers), but it's definitely not bottom of the barrel.

5. FOUR ROSES 2016 LIMITED EDITION SMALL BATCH



Four Roses is unique in that its whiskey is a blend of recipes, combining two mash bills with five yeast strains. It's known as being an affordable high-quality bourbon and for good reason. The two mash bills used are either 20 percent rye or 35 percent rye, putting Four Roses firmly in the high-rye category. For this release (\$100), master distiller Brent Elliott chose two 12-year-old bourbons and a 16-year-old and bottled the mixture at barrel strength (111.2 proof). It's no surprise this is an excellent bourbon, with orange, spice and cherry on the palate and a sweet and spicy finish. With Four Roses, it's not immediately apparent that it's high-rye bourbon, but it's evident that it's of a very high quality.

6. JIM BEAM SIGNATURE CRAFT HIGH RYE



The final entry in the high-rye category makes its intention very clear in the name. Jim Beam Signature Craft High Rye (\$40) is part of the brand's Harvest Bourbon Collection, where it takes the tried and true Jim Beam formula and experiments with different grains in the mash bills. The total amount of rye isn't disclosed here, but it's clearly a high-rye bourbon with an immediate spicy flash that overrides the familiar Jim Beam oak and nut flavor. This 11-year-old bourbon is only sold in 375 milliliter bottles, but that's probably all you'll need—it's a good bourbon but at the bottom of this list for a reason.