The Wormwood Society is a non-profit educational and consumer advocacy organization focused on providing current, historically and scientifically accurate information about absinthe, the most maligned and misunderstood drink in history.

**PREPARATION**

Some items that are specific to preparing and drinking absinthe are special glasses that are marked with lines or have reservoirs to mark a proper serving, which is about 1 oz or 30ml. However, any glass can be used. Absinthe spoons are flat, slotted spoons which rest atop the glass and hold a sugar lump.

The preparation of absinthe is fairly simple. A serving of absinthe is poured into a glass, then using a carafe or fountain, iced water is very slowly added to a ratio of between 3 to 5 parts water to 1 part absinthe. The absinthe will “louche,” turning an opalescent, milky white color. Sugar and water ratios are subject to individual tastes, but a properly made glass will be around the same strength as a glass of wine.

Absinthe is extremely flammable, however, the so-called "Bohemian fire ritual" is not recommended. This is a modern invention, and was never used historically with absinthe. The burnt sugar can ruin the flavor of the absinthe, and the risk of catastrophe is high.

**ABSINTHE FACTS**

**What is absinthe?**
Absinthe is a distilled herbal spirit made from wormwood, anise and other herbs. Its flavor is similar to licorice, and this varies in prominence by brand. Beware of imitations with no anise flavor. Absinthe is sold as an extract or concentrate, bottled at a high proof, and is intended to be tempered with iced water and taken as a cool, refreshing aperitif.

**What is wormwood?**
Wormwood is shrubby herb of the sagebrush family. There are over 125 species of Artemisia, with "wormwood" being the most common name for the genus. However only one species, *Artemisia absinthium*, makes authentic absinthe. Many imitation brands do not use Artemisia absinthium or wormwood of any kind.

**What is thujone?**
Thujone, a compound found in wormwood, has become a gimmick used by inferior brands to suggest they provide drug-like effects, despite the fact that thujone has no such properties. It is a neurotoxin at high levels, but not in the amounts found in any absinthe. Scientific analysis has shown that pre-ban absinthe contained only trace amounts of thujone, as do modern absinthes that are made to traditional standards. Thujone content is irrelevant when evaluating brands.

**How do I store it?**
Store upright, in a cool, dark place. Never refrigerate or freeze.

**Is it harmful?**
Neither absinthe nor the herbs from which it is made will make you hallucinate or go crazy. Millions of people drank absinthe daily for over 100 years with no adverse effects not attributable directly to the strong alcohol content. As with all spirits, however, it should be enjoyed in moderation.

**Why was absinthe banned?**
The ban was a political response to the temperance movement and lobbying by the wine industry, which was threatened by the popularity of absinthe. It was inspired by unsafe, inferior brands and was supported by poor science and deliberate misinformation.

**Is real absinthe legal in the US?**
Yes, and it technically has been for many years, although this was unknown until recently. Absinthe may be legally imported, and several domestic distillers are now producing fully historic authentic absinthe.

**Why is it green?**
A true "verte" absinthe is infused with herbs after distilling for the additional flavor and aromas they impart. It is naturally colored green by their chlorophyll, not from dyes or additives. Because of this, it can be expected to gradually change over time to an olive, amber, or dead leaf color. Artificially colored absinthe will lack the flavors and aromas imparted by the natural herbs and many argue that these are not truly absinthe at all.

**White or clear absinthe?**
Although not as common as the vertes, there were also “blanche” or clear absinthes made in both France and Switzerland. In these, the final maceration of herbs was omitted and often those same herbs were added instead to the primary distillation. After the bans in the early 20th century, and up until the present, many bootleggers continued to make the easily-disguised blanche absinthes. These illicit absinthes were commonly known as “la bleues.”