

# The Greenest Beverage? Tap water. But What About Adult Beverages?



By Michael Chandler | August 30, 2008

A professional bio card for Michael Chandler. It features a larger portrait of him on the left and a list of his credentials on the right. The text is set against a light, textured background with a dark header.

**Michael Chandler**  
BUILDER AND PLUMBER

- President, Chandler Design-Build
- Helped create the new NAHB-ICC National Green Building Standard
- National Green Building Awards Finalist, 2006 & 2007 Custom Home of the Year
- Master plumber

"Life is too short to waste time building ugly homes."

## Bottles are greener than cans, but is beer the greenest choice?

*In a quest to discover the most environmentally benign beverage for backyard barbecues, one builder sifted through the options to help us drink greener.*

I have nothing against water: I make coffee with it, paddle a canoe in it, and I even drink it every day. But it's not always what my empty hand is looking for when I settle down in the backyard and fire up the Weber. Beer sort of hits the spot at these times. Listening to NPR on the way home from work one day, I heard that recycling 30 beer cans saved the equivalent of a gallon of gas. How many beer bottles, I wondered, would be equivalent to 30 beer cans? I asked [my local recycling coordinator](#) who wasted no time in answering me: from an environmental perspective, tap water is my best choice.

### **Tap water wasn't what I was after, so I refined my query**

He did some research and we ran the numbers. It turns out that 385 beer bottles have the equivalent embodied energy of 30 beer cans. He pointed out that there was some minimal adjustment needed to account for the transportation cost of imported beer so this calculation would be most accurate if applied to domestic beer in both bottles and cans. Ah-ha! I said, this gives me an environmental rationalization for buying that nice local microbrew!

### **Does this mean I get to invest in a kegerator?**

Actually he replied, the kegerator idea is a no-go due to the carbon footprint of the refrigerator (regardless of the impact of the increased beer consumption).

However, if you consider that there are 22 shots of bourbon in a bottle that likely has the embodied energy content of two beer bottles this gives you an environmental justification for drinking bourbon on the rocks (or mint juleps). If a single beer can equals 12.83 beer bottles it is roughly equivalent to 6 bottles of bourbon in terms of its carbon footprint.

I'll leave it to someone else to assess the relative carbon footprint and green house gas impact of marijuana. That's just not my cuppa tea.

—Michael Chandler is a builder near Chapel Hill, North Carolina. His website is [www.chandlerdesignbuild.com](http://www.chandlerdesignbuild.com)

[Ed's note: for some fun recycling facts go to <http://www.oberlin.edu/recycle/facts.html>]

## Comments



GBA Editor **Martin Holladay** | Feb 17, 2009 11:25am | #1

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### Whiskey distillers think green

A news article about the greening of whiskey stills: <http://planetark.org/wen/51314>

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1. **Michael Chandler** | Dec 12, 2011 05:08pm | #2

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### Makers Mark is at least making an effort here

<http://inhabitat.com/is-it-green-makers-mark> I want to see if there is a more triple bottom line and less corporate brand of bourbon that I can patronize.

My previous hesitance about the triple-bottom-line issue with Makers Mark was that I thought that they were a part of Seagrams which, like Diageo, is using distribution exclusivity to drive small brewers and distillers out of business in developing countries as it consolidates its distribution network.

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Actually Makers Mark has been spun off a number of times recently and is now part of Beam international which looks to be a pretty responsible company and is also home of Basil Hayden, Jim Beam, Knob Creek, Sauza, Teachers, Canadian Club, etc. Not a B-corp but looks to be better than Seagrams or Diageo at least.