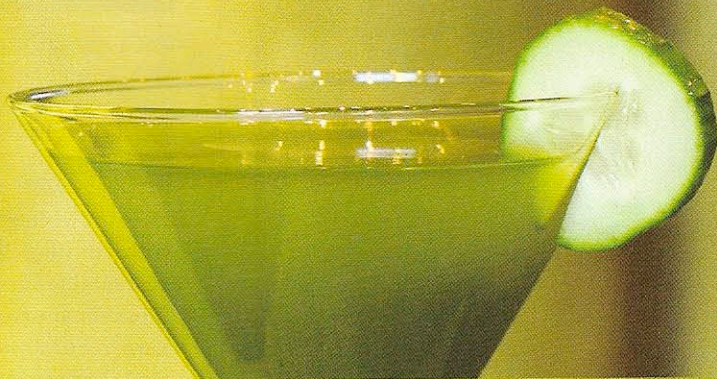


thought for food

Martini Go Greenie

Chilled, shaken or stirred, it's easy to get in the organic spirit with organic spirits



BY JESSICA RIDENOUR

Does your idea of a refreshing summer cocktail involve artificial flavors, blue dye and little paper umbrellas? That doesn't sound good to us either. There's no reason to settle for bottom shelf booze and no-expiration-date mixers when you can sip freshly harvested fruits and vegetables from the farmers' market, organic herbs and sustainably-produced, chemical-free liquor. You wouldn't binge on Doritos and triple Whoppers and call it a meal (okay, there have been a few moments of weakness), so why drink the liquid equivalent?

Following in the lucrative footsteps of organic beer and wine, organic spirits are the latest libations to hit the natural foods scene. More restaurants across the country are starting to offer organic cocktails, concocting healthful creations with fresh produce and unadulterated alcohol, and organic distilleries are popping up all over the country.

One such distillery is Square One Organic Spirits. "Consumers are really starting to understand the impact of everything we put into our mouths and our bodies," says Square One founder and CEO Allison Evanow. The folks at Square One currently offer a 100 percent organically grown and fermented rye vodka, and as their name suggests, have left the door open to eventually produce other organic spirits as well. Evanow combined an MBA with extensive behind-the-bar experience to create a product that, unlike traditional vodkas, is chemical-free and uses only natural enzymes and supplements in the fermentation process, so it needs little distillation. "We don't have to clean our vodka up as much as everybody else because we didn't add anything to

it that needs to be stripped out later," the eco-entrepreneur adds.

While there are only a handful of organic alcohol brands on the market today, demand for salutary spirits will certainly increase in the coming years, judging from the examples set by organic beer and wine. Vodka, being the number one choice of spirit in the US, offers the most organic choices, including Illinois-based Rain Vodka, London's UK 5 and Colorado-based Vodka 14. Papagayo Rum (plain or spiced) hails from remote Paraguayan organic sugarcane, and for the martini purists, there's Juniper Green, the world's first organic dry London gin.

It would be such a shame to taint these finely crafted alcohols with a corn syrup-, dye- and preservative-laden mixer. Fresh squeezed organic fruit and vegetable juices are an ideal companion for a refreshing summertime beverage. If juicing oranges seems a little labor intensive for a lazy summer afternoon, just pour in an all-organic mixer. Modmix is one of the first certified organic mixers on the market, coming in luscious summery flavors such as Citrus Margarita, Pomegranate Cosmopolitan and Lavender Lemon Drop, all made from filtered water, organic fruits and herbs and unrefined cane sugar.

Restaurants and bars are starting to catch on to the organic cocktail buzz as well. Hollywood's BlackSteel features uniquely delicious organic cocktails to complement its healthy French/Japanese fusion menu. Specialty cocktails, such as the Ginger Cucumber Green Tea-Ni (pictured) and the Black Passiontini, have such a fulfilling, wholesome quality to them that one may be inclined to forget the generous four-ounce pour of vodka betwixt the fresh

berries and cucumber puree. BlackSteel offers six different vodka infusions, and pairs them with fresh fruits and vegetables that are juiced only an hour before serving. Infusions are made in futuristic looking glass and metal tanks above the bar, in an apparatus they call a "vodka aquarium" (the brainchild of proprietor Chef JJ), and are served at five degrees below zero for consistently crisp cocktails. Chef JJ's experience as a personal chef for Hollywood players like Aaron Spelling and John Travolta adds a splash of glamour to his salubrious brews.

At San Francisco's vegetarian temple, Millennium Restaurant, everything is seasonal, local and sustainable, including the cocktails. "We have access to all these great farms in the Bay Area, so being organic is not as hard as you may think—it just takes a little effort," says new bar manager Paul Jacob. Since his arrival a few months ago, he's done away with the apple drinks (at least for this season), opting instead for in-season infusions like strawberry gin, fennel vodka and mint rum. Bar classics like a screwdriver will be made from organic vodka and fresh squeezed orange juice. "It's just taking things to the next level so they're a little healthier," says Jacob, whose bar boasts the largest organic spirit menu in San Francisco. No standard lemon wedge garnishes here either; Jacob uses edible flowers, apricots and toasted cashews to dress up his drinks.

So forget the Red Bulltini; ask your local organic eatery to get its cocktail menu up to par or mix up your own libations at home with the following recipes.

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