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## Welcome the Margarita - America's favourite cocktail

14 September 2000 | Source: Robert Plotkin

**Robert Plotkin, investigates the lure of the margarita in the US and how it can increase the success of your on-trade business.**

Ask your friends and associates what they drink socially and chances are the answer will be "beer, wine and margaritas." The margarita has quietly, steadily become an international phenomenon, and according to the readers of Gourmet magazine, it is the now most popular cocktail in the United States.

The margarita is a cocktail that has defied the odds. It has become an American success story despite not being from around these parts. Born and raised in Mexico, the margarita's personality reflects the flavour of its native land. Its fate has also been inextricably bound with [Tequila](#), a spirit that until recently was perceived as raw, raspy and suitable only for a shot glass with salt. Not exactly the profile of a mainstream contender.

One reason for the margarita's rise in popularity is that it is an exceptionally versatile recipe. The cocktail lends itself to several methods of preparation, and variations in fruit-flavourings. It blends easily with liqueurs, and marries well with the taste of different types of ingredients. For these reasons, on-premise operators have taken advantage of the margarita's versatility by creating scores of creative variations. It has become popular to promote variations of the margarita as specialties of the house.

### CREATING GOURMET MARGARITAS

Gourmet margaritas best illustrate why leaving well enough alone is not always sound advice. Unravelling the secrets of how these signature margaritas are created is the next step. At the risk of stripping the creative process of its mystery and inspirational genius, there is a formula to engineering a high performance margarita. It involves tweaking one or more of a number of variables. Learning how these elements affect the dynamics of the finished margarita is at the heart of the creative process.

It goes without saying that Tequila is the featured performer in the margarita. While there are different types of Tequilas that can be used in a margarita, silver is most frequently selected, not because of its lower cost, but for its robust and vibrant character. Silver Tequilas are exuberant and add vitality to the margarita that the more

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reserved, aged Tequilas don't quite manage.

Don't hesitate, however, to use premium Tequilas in your margaritas - committing expensive Tequila to a margarita is not sacrilege, it's creative genius. When looking to use a top-shelf Tequila choose a recipe that adequately showcases the Tequila. The recipe should have few other ingredients that may tend to obscure the enhanced quality of the Tequila.

Consider also the technique of splitting the Tequila portion in a margarita. The objective is to pair two or more complementary styles of Tequila. For example, one of the specialties of the house at El Charro Café in Tucson is the ELEGANTE MARGARITA. It's made with equal parts of Sauza's Commemorativo and Hornitos. The Hornitos Reposado adds complexity and a fresh agave flavour, while the Commemorativo Añejo contributes a spicy, well-rounded vitality to the margarita. The result is magnificent.

Mac Gregory, beverage director at the Hyatt Regency Scottsdale, Arizona, promotes two signature margaritas that combine Tequila with unusual bed partners. The MARGARITA FRAMBOISE marries Porfidio Single [Barrel](#) Tequila with Bonny Doon Framboise, a sensationally flavourful, fortified raspberry wine. Another of his creations, the OERITA LA REYNA DEL PLAYA, pairs Cuervo Reserva de la Familia Añejo with Lillet Blonde, a superb French aperitif wine.

You can turn any Tequila into something extraordinary by infusing it with everything from kiwis to sun-dried tomatoes. Steeping is straightforward and uncomplicated. The process involves marinating Tequila with fresh fruit, among other things, in large, airtight containers. Several days to a week later, the fruit will infuse the spirit with flavour, colour, aroma and loads of appealing character.

The PEPPER-TEQUILA INFUSION (a.k.a. the SONORAN SPITTOON INFUSION) features Tequila steeped with jalapeño peppers, a serrano chili and an assortment of green, red, and yellow bell peppers for colour. After two to three days you'll have pepper-infused Tequila, which in turn provides the heating element for several intriguing margaritas, including the CAJUN MARGARITA and MARGARITA PICOSITA.

Ready to graduate to the next level? Try making the SUMMER SHADES MARGARITA INFUSION. This dreamy concoction is prepared by steeping gold Tequila, Midori and blue Curaçao with cantaloupe, pineapples, strawberries and peaches. Taste test the infusion after several days, at which time it should have a light, fruit bouquet, a pale turquoise hue and a delightfully fresh

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flavour. Mix the infusion with an equivalent amount of sweet 'n' sour and shake in an iced shaker set. This specialty margarita may be served either straight-up or on-the-rocks.

When preparing a premium margarita, [Cointreau](#) is the consensus choice as the modifier. The French liqueur is unsurpassed in the role. Cointreau is crystal clear, highly aromatic and imbued with a vibrant orange flavour. The advantage of using Cointreau in a premium margarita is that the liqueur will augment the cocktail's bouquet and taste profile, but won't alter its natural colour. When the pressure is on, reach for the Cointreau.

Other modifier options are Grand Marnier, Gran Gala and Extase. Each is a premium orange liqueur formulated on a brandy-base. Their fresh pronounced orange flavours make them ideal modifiers. Modifying a margarita with these liqueurs will alter the cocktail's colour and introduce the flavour of brandy. In some recipes these alterations may be welcome, in others they will only serve to mask the flavour of the Tequila.

For margarita aficionados, several other liqueurs have risen above and beyond the call to duty. Proven margarita performers include the French black raspberry liqueur, Chambord; the Japanese honeydew liqueur, Midori; the Italian almond liqueur, Di Saronno Amaretto; and Damiana, a Mexican liqueur made from the damiana plant. Another often relied upon cordial is blue Curaçao, an orange-flavoured liqueur slightly sweeter than triple sec and beloved for its luminous blue colour.

Armed with an electric blender, you can puree any fresh fruit to enhance the flavour of your specialty margaritas. The partial shopping list includes jellied cranberry sauce, prickly pear marmalade, canned Bartlett pears, applesauce, and blueberries. You'll also need to pick up some prickly pear juice, mangoes, pineapples, strawberries, raspberries, bananas, and a pomegranate or two.

### **PUTTING ON A GAME FACE**

For those aching to try out their blender, consider the MIDNIGHT MADNESS MARGARITA, a novel swirled-drink made in two parts, one requiring blue Curaçao and the other Chambord. The resulting drink is both delicious and visually striking. Another gourmet margarita worth being seen with is the RASPBERRY TORTE MARGARITA, a blended concoction separated in the middle by a layer of luscious raspberry puree.

The TWO-TONED MARGARITA is a delicious and remarkably clever concoction. Begin by making a Hornitos margarita and pouring half of the drink in a half-filled glass

of ice. Pour the remainder of the cocktail into the blender with an added shot of Midori. Blend the drink, and then layer the Midori-laced margarita on top of the lighter coloured, iced Hornitos margarita. The drink has two distinctly different coloured and flavoured personalities. The effect is simply fantastic.

The MELTDOWN MARGARITA is made with Sauza Silver Tequila, Grand Marnier, Chambord, sweet 'n' sour, and raspberries. However, instead of blending the Chambord into the margarita, it's served separately in a shot glass for the guest to pour on top of the drink. The Chambord will slowly wind its way down through the margarita adding the marvellous flavour of raspberries and creating a striking presentation.

After spending countless hours devising a fabulous signature margarita, do not undermine your efforts by sending it out in public underdressed with an ordinary rim of coarse salt. Embellish your specialties in the style they deserve with designer salts.

High fashion has indeed hit the world of margarita salt. Now there are margarita salts marketed in different colours. Franco's of Pompano Beach, Florida, makers of a line of cocktail mixes, has introduced a number of brightly coloured margarita salts, including the festive hues of blue, green and yellow. The colouring used to make Franco's Coloured Margarita Salt are permanently adhered to the salt so they won't run or bleed, and the taste of the salt is completely unaffected by the colouring.

The Blendex Company of Louisville, Kentucky, also recently introduced a line of designer margarita salts in five different shades - Sunset Red, Tropical Green, Mediterranean Blue, Sunburst Yellow and Fresh Orange. You can mix the various salts together to create scores of colourful possibilities.

Sumptuous Selections of Rocky Hill, Connecticut wondered why margarita salt has to taste like, well, salt? Receiving no answer, they proceeded to create two devilishly delicious flavoured roasted sea salts - mesquite smoked with lime and caramelised orange and lemon. The Twang Company of San Antonio has introduced Twangarita Margarita Salts. These delectable salts come in three flavours - lemon/lime, pickle, and the tart and spicy chilli con limon. They can be used by themselves, blended together, or mixed with your regular margarita salt. For that matter, try mixing some flavoured salt with the coloured salt.

Make every margarita you serve a work of art. Involve your staff and clientele in the process of devising a signature margarita or two. Make a night of it, promote it

as a special event. Once the winners have been selected, don't keep their recipes a secret. Great margaritas are meant to be shared.

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