

Chile Pepper

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Tequila Sunrise

DISCOVER TEQUILA'S TRUE COLORS

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Welcome to the tequila re-education center. You're not in college anymore, so drop the lime wedge and step away from the salt. There's more to tequila than body shots and margaritas.

Okay, we'll admit a fondness for a good margarita, but exploring the wide world of tequila yields delicious dividends, from clever, boldly flavored cocktails to aged artisanal gems. Although the right balance of juices and liqueurs softens tequila's edge, that distinctive bite still shines through.

Cocktail experts agree that the first step to mixing the perfect tequila cocktail is understanding the different varieties available. Ryan Magarian, master mixologist and president of Portland, Oregon, spirit and cocktail consulting agency Liquid Relations, gave us a quick lesson.

First, the basics: Tequila is distilled from the fermented sap of the weber blue agave plant. While some tequilas, called "mixto," are made with 51% agave mixed with other ingredients, such as fermented cane juice, Magarian always looks for those made from 100% blue agave.

Secondly, tequila is classified by age. While younger tequilas tend to have a sharp, fresh agave taste, older tequilas are mellower. Many aged tequilas may have notes of oak, as they're often aged in oak barrels. Here are the main varieties of tequila you'll encounter:

Silver or *blanco* tequila is not aged at all. "Silver has the purest expression of the agave," Magarian says. "It has peppery, true flavors." When it comes to mixed drinks, the acidity of silver tequila is perfect with light apple or citrus juices, or bright flavors like fresh ginger.

Reposado (Spanish for rested) is aged for two to 11 months, usually in an oak

barrel. While it retains agave flavor, *reposado* is heavier than silver tequila. Pair it with fruit flavors like peach, apricot, cranberry and grape juices.

Añejo (aged) tequila has been aged for one to three years, developing a richer, more intense flavor. "Añejo has incredible nuances from the oak," Magarian says. "In cocktails, *añejo* makes a great substitute for whiskey or bourbon in a drink like a Manhattan or an Old Fashioned." We've included a recipe for Magarian's tequila riff on the Manhattan.

Muy añejo (very aged) is a relatively new category, referring to tequila that has been aged for three years or longer. "More age means more oak flavor," Magarian explains. *Muy añejo* can be sipped neat or with a cube of ice, like cognac.

Jacques Bezuidenhout, whose tequila credentials include developing the bar program at San Francisco-based tequila bar Tres Agaves, says that tequila cocktails pair perfectly with many classic Mexican dishes.

In particular, Bezuidenhout suggests a well-made sangrita to sip alongside tequila with a Mexican meal. Not to be confused with sangria, sangrita is similar to a nonalcoholic Bloody Mary, made with tomato, citrus and chiles.

"Everywhere you go in Mexico, they have a different recipe for sangrita," Bezuidenhout explains, reminiscing about a particular favorite he tried on a recent trip. "It's Bloody Mary style, but lighter, with more citrus coming through."

Typically, sangrita is made ahead of time and chilled in the fridge. It's served in a shot glass alongside a separate glass of tequila. The tequila: 100% agave. The technique: sip from one glass and then the other, alternating throughout the meal. The result: *muy delicioso*. And no exposed navels are required.



Añejo Manhattan

Yield: 1 cocktail • Zest Factor: Mild

Adapted from Ryan Magarian. The richness of aged tequila offsets orange and vanilla flavors in the bitters and liqueur. Magarian garnishes this drink with a tequila-soaked dried cherry wrapped in mole salami (see page 66 for more on this). You can find Licor 43, a Spanish liqueur, at licor43usa.com.

- 1/4 cup añejo tequila, such as El Tesoro Añejo
- 1 tablespoon sweet vermouth
- 1/2 tablespoon Licor 43
- 1 dash Angostura bitters
- 1 dash Regan's No. 6 orange bitters

In a pint glass, combine all ingredients. Fill the glass about 1/4 of the way full with ice. Stir swiftly for 30 seconds, and strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish as you wish, and serve.



One Hot Minute

Yield: 1 cocktail • Zest Factor: Medium

Adapted from Jacques Bezuidenhout. This spicy tequila concoction took first place in a 2006 cocktail competition sponsored by Tabasco Hot Sauce. Lillet Blanc is a French fortified wine, often drunk as an aperitif. You can find it at lillet.com.

- 1 (1-ounce) piece cucumber, peeled and puréed
- 2 tablespoons unfiltered apple juice
- 3 1/2 tablespoons silver tequila, such as Partida Silver
- 1 tablespoon Lillet Blanc
- 1/2 tablespoon agave nectar or simple syrup
- 1 teaspoon jalapeño hot sauce, such as Tabasco Green Jalapeño Pepper Sauce

In a cocktail shaker, combine all ingredients, and fill with ice. Shake vigorously, and strain into a highball glass. Serve.



Sangrita

Yield: One pitcher, or about 25 two-ounce servings

Zest Factor: Medium

Adapted from Jacques Bezuidenhout. While on its own sangrita is nonalcoholic—and full of zesty flavors—it's traditionally accompanied by a shot of good tequila. Sip from the chilled sangrita, and then the tequila. Prepare a pitcher ahead of time for your next summer party.

- 1/2 cup Mexican hot sauce, such as Cholula
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 1 3/4 cups orange juice
- 1/2 cup grapefruit juice
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground pepper
- 3 3/4 cups (30 ounces) tomato juice
- 1 jalapeño, stemmed and halved

In a plastic or glass pitcher, combine all ingredients. Stir until the salt is dissolved.

Allow the mixture to sit for 15 to 30 minutes, and then taste for flavor. Add additional salt or pepper if desired. Remove and discard the jalapeño pieces when the desired level of heat is achieved. Chill the mixture until cold, then pour into 2-ounce shot glasses, and serve each glass alongside a small tumbler of añejo tequila.