

Raising the Bar

Who Says "It's Not Easy Being Green?"

From the classic long island iced tea to start off your evening, to a warm and comforting blueberry tea after a good meal, tea flavoured cocktails have been around for forever. The recent surge in popularity of green tea, coupled with the fact that teas are included on more and more cocktail menus, is a great indication that we're all about to get a healthy dose of antioxidants. In North America, high quality tea products are now accessible than ever. With its highly publicized health benefits, wholesale tea sales have grown more than 600 per cent in the last 15 years. Trailblazing restauranteurs are noticing the trends from the Far East and incorporating what was once considered a very ceremonial ingredient into today's cocktail revolution. Matcha is one of the latest types of tea to hit the Canadian marketplace. Don't feel bad if you've never heard of it, few people have. With both Starbucks and Booster Juice recently adding matcha to their menus, it won't be long before it's a household name. Just know that matcha is the new chai, and it's a buzzword that may just turn the industry on its ear.

Most will agree that few things are more refined than relaxing after a meal with a digestif or specialty coffee warmer. While Spanish coffees and monte cristos have long been staples on the after dinner coffee list, the one and only after dinner tea cocktail on the vast majority of our menus is the quintessential blueberry tea. The classic recipe calls for a curious mix of the orange flavoured Grand Marnier, and almond flavoured amaretto (the jury's still out on where the blueberry reference comes from). Sadly, that seems to be the end of our creativity when it comes to tea cocktails.

The recent rise in popularity of green tea martinis or "greenteanis" has opened a floodgate of opportunity in Asian inspired cocktails. While Central and Eastern Canada seem to be a bit behind the times, British Columbia has had a long love affair with a myriad of green tinted Japanese culinary delights. From the almost fluorescent coloured wasabi, (try a little mixed into your next caesar) to the light green textured aloe vera juice, to the deep green nori (seaweed) to the brightly coloured edamame (soybean), it seems like it's easier than ever to be green. The latest addition to the family of popular green ingredients is matcha. Although there are some subtle differences between matcha and green tea, (types of leaves used and the method of harvest) quite simply, matcha is powdered green tea in a concentrated form.

Restauranteurs have been using this brilliant green ingredient in culinary applications for quite some time. Matcha ice cream, matcha cream cheese, matcha chocolate and energy bars, parfaits and cheesecakes... the list goes on. Chefs like Toronto's John Lee of OMI Sushi suggests matcha's slightly bitter flavour balances well with sweet or chocolaty desserts, which is why it works so well in sweeter cocktails. He adds that it's not only matcha's unique taste, but its many health benefits that are making it an increasingly popular ingredient to work with. With as many as eight times the antioxidant properties of regular green tea, a little dose of matcha can go a long way.

Powdered Matcha is available in a few different varieties. For cocktail applications look for sweetened matcha, which often comes in the form of a matcha latté mix. The unsweetened powder is fine, but I find it too bitter to be used without the addition of simple syrup. Mixology Canada Inc. offers powdered matcha in both varieties along with an extensive line of Tea Fuzions concentrates created specifically for cocktails.

This month, I'm offering up two suggestions, one for before the meal and one for after. First, the emerald matcha martini, made with premium Vodka, lychee liqueur, aloe vera juice (another unique ingredient available in most Asian grocery stores) and matcha tea. You'll find it best to dissolve your matcha in hot water before adding it to your beverages. Try 1 tsp. of matcha powder to 1oz. of hot water. The second is the lychee matcha latté. With both soothing and digestive qualities; it's made just like it sounds, with lychee liqueur, a shot of matcha and steamed milk, and it's the perfect way to end a meal.

One thing is certain, Asian inspired cocktails including tea-based creations are here to stay. With a curious consumer base thirsty for a healthy excuse to have a cocktail, these drinks could just be the way to raise your bar!



Emerald Matcha Martini

1 oz. premium vodka
3/4 oz. lychee liqueur
1 tsp. Tea Fuzions matcha latté powder
(dissolved in 1 oz. hot water)
2 oz. aloe vera juice

Lychee Matcha Latté

1 oz. lychee liqueur
1 tsp. Tea Fuzions matcha latté powder
(dissolved in 1 oz. hot water)
6 oz. steamed milk



Gavin MacMillan is currently Canada's Top Ranked Flair Bartender. He trains, competes and performs all over the world and operates Canada's Premier Hospitality Training Facility, BartenderOne. You can reach him at gavin@bartenderone.com.