

Mindful Mixology

A Comprehensive Guide to
No- and Low-Alcohol Cocktails

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There's a Shandy, made with beer and lemonade, and there's a Pimm's Cup, made with Pimm's Cup No. 1 and lemon soda. Both very British drinks. With little regard for propriety or the crown, as an obnoxious American, I combined them.

But it's a great springtime drink that, despite my impropriety, may very well earn me knighthood.

Squash

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Makes 1 drink

Serve in a Pilsner glass

2% ABV

1 ounce Pimm's Cup No. 1

3 ounces fresh lemon juice

2 ounces lemon syrup (see page 45)

6 ounces crisp lager (or Heineken 0.0)

1 mint sprig and a lemon wheel for garnish

In a shaker, combine Pimm's, lemon juice, and lemon syrup with ice and shake vigorously. Strain liquid into pilsner glass, add fresh ice, and top with beer. Garnish with mint sprig and lemon wheel.

Verjus

Verjus is the juice from unripened grapes, red or white, literally “green juice” in French. (Picture biting into a sour green grape.) It’s helpful to think of this less like wine and more like tart, fresh juice or even vinegar.

Like wine, however, the quality varies depending on the producer. You can get wonderful floral and partially sweet verjus or grapey and mouthwall-tearing verjus. One works well with cocktails, the other is better fit for salad dressing. I absolutely love Navarro Vineyards gewurztraminer. Made from gewurztraminer grapes, it embodies many of the floral and tropical notes you get from their gewurztraminer wine. In fact, it makes a great wine-replacement with a little bit of water added.

Fruit Syrups

I tell bartenders I’m training that fruit doesn’t taste like fruit without adding extra sugar. Fruit syrups are just that: fruit and sugar. I know sugar isn’t healthy for you in vast quantities, and I know that non-alcoholic drinks have a reputation for being too sweet, but sugar is still important for balance, texture, and flavor. You can always reduce the sugar and play around with alternative sweeteners, but I’ve found that products like agave syrup and honey have their own unique flavor and low-caloric sweeteners like stevia leave an aftertaste.

Fruit syrups can, as advertised, be made from just about any fruit. But some should be done through a cold infusion and others through heat. Strawberries that are heated have a very different flavor than strawberries from a cold infusion. I tend to prefer the latter and often dump sugar over a bowl of fresh sliced strawberries and let it sit until a sweet, red syrup pools at the bottom. Call me lazy. However, with persimmons I’m going to add sugar and cook them until they extract a dark, sweet syrup that pairs wonderfully with spices. Oleo saccharum (sweet oil) is a kind of syrup that uses the fruit rinds, resulting in a greater depth of flavor. It’s especially used in punch recipes.

Here are recipes for a few common syrups used throughout the book:

Lemon Oleo Saccharum

Makes approximately 1 cup

4 lemons

1 cup sugar

Wash and peel lemons into strips, making sure to avoid as much pith as possible. Place lemon peels and sugar in a mason jar or Tupperware container and pulverize. Seal and leave overnight. The next day, stir and add a small amount of lemon juice to dissolve remaining crystals. Press and strain syrup through a fine mesh strainer. Discard the peels.

Lemon Syrup

Makes approximately 1 cup

½ cup sugar

½ cup water

Zest of 3 lemons (wash before zesting)

6 ounces lemon juice

Add sugar, water, and lemon zest to a small saucepan. Bring to a simmer and simmer until sugar crystals are dissolved. Stir, remove from heat, and combine lemon juice in the mixture.

(To make lime syrup, substitute lime zest and juice in the same proportions.)

Orange Oleo Saccharum

Makes approximately 1 cup

2 oranges

1 cup sugar