

The Fine Art of the Mocktail

Ad Hoc Retreat VI Ignite Talk and Recipes!

Elissa Frankle Olinsky, October 2018

The Narrative

In January 2015, my then-boyfriend Ben decided he wanted to set up his boss at the White House with one of his colleagues from the senate. The only way to get this competitive person to go to a party was to challenge him to a cocktail mix-off, which meant fancy cocktails would be the order of the day. My job was to sous-chef the party: juice the citrus, infuse the simple syrups, make the garnishes. And at the time, I wasn't drinking - which is how I discovered the fine art of the mocktail.

Non-drinkers have always had a special place in my heart when I host parties. My dad stopped drinking when my mom was pregnant with me, and never started again. A number of my close friends choose not to drink, for religious or personal reasons, and I've been on medications that don't play well with alcohol. Usually, this means when the wine or cocktail list comes out, at least one person at the table is stuck ordering a Coke - again - or raising a glass of Martinelli's. But there's no reason why choosing not to drink alcohol, for a night or a lifetime, should mean you're stuck drinking something boring.

The recipe for a good cocktail starts with a good lemonade: citrus plus sweetness. When you make a good alcoholic cocktail, this is your base into which you mix the alcohol. When you make a good mocktail, the recipe is the same: fruit plus sweet, plus fun.

This morning, I infused three simple syrups: one cup water to one cup sugar, brought to a boil until the sugar dissolves and the water is super-saturated. That's the sweet. While the syrup is still hot, I steep the fun in it: hibiscus flowers, fresh ginger and mulling spices, serrano peppers and mint.

I've paired these with fruit juices that complement the flavors: apple cider with the spiced simple, mint serrano with orange juice, and hibiscus with grapefruit juice, my favorite post-party leftover drink.

The last thing that makes a mocktail magical is bubbles. Ginger beer is a secret ingredient in cocktails and mocktails: a little bitter, a little sweet, a little sparkly, a little spicy. Here, I've topped the spiced cider and the hibiscus-lemon with a dash of it, and the mint-serrano, already spicy on its own, with seltzer.

Finally, I always serve mocktails in the same glasses as cocktails. I've spent so many parties being the only person with a highball glass with ice and a straw in it. If you're going to make a mocktail taste as awesome as a cocktail, why not make it look just as fancy?

This weekend, whether people choose to drink or not is up to them; there's no reason to ask them why. But in the future, let's make parties fun for the non-drinkers, and in the meantime, I'm going to set up a tasting station over here - enjoy!

The Recipes

Basic simple syrup

Ingredients

2 cups water

2 cups sugar

**Note: I always measure these in the same utensil, either a liquid OR a solid measure.*

Steps

1. Pour water into medium saucepan. Place on stove, turn heat to high.
2. As water starts to simmer, pour in sugar and stir.
3. Bring sugar/water mix to boil for 30 seconds. Stir.
4. Lower heat to simmer. Stir until all sugar is dissolved.

Hibiscus simple syrup

Ingredients

2 cups simple syrup, still hot

¼ - ½ cup hibiscus petals, dried

**Note: in a pinch, you can use loose hibiscus tea*

Steps

1. Add hibiscus petals to hot simple syrup. Stir.
2. Let steep for 2 hours.
3. Strain syrup into service vessel to remove hibiscus solids.
4. Let cool before using.

Autumn spice simple syrup

Ingredients

2 cups simple syrup, still hot

2 tbsp fresh ginger

¼ cup mulling spices (whole cloves, cinnamon stick pieces, allspice, nutmeg)

Steps

1. Peel ginger. Zest into simple syrup. Stir.
2. Add mulling spices. Stir.
3. Let steep for 3 hours.
4. Strain syrup into service vessel to remove solids.
5. Let cool before using.

Mint-Serrano Simple Syrup

Ingredients

2 cups simple syrup, still hot

1 bunch mint, chopped fine

2 serrano peppers, stems, seeds, and veins removed, diced

**Note: careful. Wash your hands before you rub your eyes. Don't learn the hard way.*

Steps

1. Pour simple syrup into blender.
2. Add mint and peppers.
3. Blend at medium speed until the mixture is green.
4. Let sit 30 minutes.
5. Blend on low to remix.
6. Strain from blender into bowl.
7. Restrain from bowl into service vessel; some small pieces of pepper and mint may still be present.
8. Let cool before using.

:Rad-Hoc:

**Thanks to Craig Butler for taste-testing this at the beginning of the evening and helping make a small, vital improvement!*

Ingredients for one mocktail

1 oz hibiscus simple syrup

1 ½ oz grapefruit juice

2 oz ginger beer

Shake with ice into fancy glass. Top with seltzer and a splash of autumn spice simple syrup.

:Decorative-Gourd-Hoc:

Ingredients for one mocktail

1 oz autumn spice simple syrup
2 oz apple cider
1 ½ oz seltzer water
Splash of ginger beer
Splash of orange juice

Shake with ice into fancy glass. Can also be served hot.

:Ad-Guac:

Ingredients for one mocktail

1 oz mint-serrano simple syrup
1 ½ oz grapefruit juice
1 ½ oz orange juice
1 ½ oz seltzer water

Shake with ice into fancy glass.

Bonus drink! (since I forgot to buy limes ahead of retreat - oops!)

Agua Frisky

Ingredients for one mocktail

1 oz hibiscus simple syrup
1 oz lime juice
1 oz ginger beer
Splash mint-serrano simple syrup

Shake with ice into fancy glass. Top with seltzer and lime peel twist.