

mix masters

By Pameladevi Govinda



It takes a lot of lemons to make a bottle of sour mixes — and crates of tomatoes for house-made Bloody Marys. Since many bartenders don't have the time or means to chop, squeeze or muddle, the mixers on the market today often come to the rescue.

Commercial mixers have come a long way since the days of artificial flavors, when they were dominated by cloying corn syrup and undesirable preservatives. Today, several beverage companies offer busy bartenders and budding home mixologists an array of flavors to play with, all with an emphasis on much sought-after natural ingredients. Undoubtedly, a Bloody Mary made from scratch is ideal, but the great news is that a commercial mix can now come a close second.

It was a Bloody Mary mix in a small Colorado ski town that got the ball rolling for Freshies. Founded by a chef and a bartender aiming to create consistency for

the brunch-time favorite cocktail, Freshies started out making five-gallon batches of Bloody Mary mix to sell locally. The recipe was a hit and they eventually moved the operations to Denver and expanded their line.

“Not everyone is going to sit there and hand chop the onions, peel the horseradish, prepare the dill and everything else that goes into making our Bloody Mary mix,” says Steve Barton, chairman of the Freshies Executive Committee.

Freshies' biggest success started a few years ago when the trend for all things natural surfaced. “Around 2002 consumers started to learn about the importance of good ingredients and became aware that most mixers were made with high fructose corn syrup, artificial colors and preservatives. Because our mixers are made with natural, fresh ingredients and pure cane sugar, we've seen a lot of growth and our revenue has increased 300% over the last four years,” asserts Barton.

SAVING TIME

When restaurants are packed, and wildly popular, labor-intensive drinks like the aforementioned Bloody Mary or the Mojito are ordered, that's when a stressed-out bartender can truly be saved by a well-crafted mixer.

Maureen Dutra, the food and beverage manager at Not Your Average Joe's, a restaurant chain based in Massachusetts, relishes using mixers, and added **Stirrings** products to her beverage program last October. They currently use the brand's Simple Bloody Mary, Simple Pomegranate Martini and Simple Spiced Apple to create their cocktails. “The mixers are shelf stable, ready to use and you can fit the pourer right into the goose neck of the bottle, keep it in line and go. We were looking for minimal steps at the best quality possible,” she explains.

This month, Stirrings is diversifying their portfolio even further with the launch of Combi-Fit, five all-natural variants, including Margarita, Mojito, Bloody Mary, Cosmopolitan and Sour Mix. The preservative-free product and eco-friendly packaging both eliminates the need for refrigeration and allows for easy serving.





mixer recipes

pomegranate margarita (chilled)

2 parts Daily's Pomegranate Mix
3 parts Daily's Margarita Mix
1 1/2 parts Tequila

directions: in a shaker partially filled with ice, combine, shake and strain into a salt-rimmed margarita glass

garnish: garnish with a fresh slice of lime

salsa bloody mary

1 oz. vodka, gin or rum
4 oz. Daily's Salsa Bloody Mary Mix
ice cubes

directions: combine, stir well

garnish: celery stick or jalapeño pepper



pomegranate fizz

by Maureen Dutra

5 oz. Stirrings Pomegranate
1/2 oz. fresh squeezed orange juice
splash of Sierra Mist
splash of soda water
splash of grenadine

directions: combine, stir well

garnish: coat with Stirrings Pomegranate Rimmer and garnish with orange slice



citrus margarita

Two parts Modmix Citrus Margarita
1-2 parts tequila.

directions: shake over ice and strain into a martini glass or pour over ice into a margarita glass; salt the glass rim

garnish: lime wedge



grapes & pears

by Jonathan Pogash

1 oz. Welch's grape juice
1 oz. pear Cognac or pear liqueur
3 oz. premium brut Champagne

directions: stir ingredients into mixing glass with ice briefly and strain into a chilled Champagne flute

garnish: pear slice and sliced grape



Daily's is also looking toward an artificial preservative-free future with their lineup of mixers. Timothy Barr, marketing director, says there is a general demand for healthier products. "We recently launched five new all-natural mixers in popular flavors. One of those is pomegranate and açai. The former is a very hot superfruit and açai will soon be known as another better-for-you fruit," he points out. According to Barr, dessert dishes are often traded in for a dessert cocktails. To zero in on that trend, Daily's has launched a line of mixers called Daily's Divines. "We rolled out these very decadent mixers that are better suited for after dinner. The cheesecake flavor, when mixed with raspberry vodka, is just delicious. Getting consumers to indulge in a cocktail instead of dessert is also a great way to drive up profits," he says.



"MIX"-OLOGY

Kathy Casey, owner of Kathy Casey Food Studios and Liquid Kitchen in Seattle, specializing in food and beverage consulting, created a line of mixers and gourmet products called Dish D'Lish. Her mixers encompass four flavors: Lemon-Lime Sour, Classic Mojito, Classic Cosmo and Red Sangria, all perfect for cocktails. "Our Red Sangria is great when it is mixed with Pellegrino and a lemon twist. It also tastes good with Champagne. You can get really creative with them," notes Casey.

Another hot newcomer to retail stores is organic Modmix, decked out in spiffy packaging with distinctive flavors. "We are the only line that is dedicated entirely to organic ingredients," points out founder Gretchen Nix. "Our Lemon Drop has a hint of lavender water; it's definitely a twist on the classic."

"Bartenders were saying there was a surge in retro cocktails and they asked us if we could make a high quality mixer," recalls Al Williams, founder of Creative Juices Inc. and owner of Mixer

and Maui Beverages. "We hired bar chefs such as Tad Carducci to help us develop our products. There was a lot of back and forth until we were completely satisfied." The company caters to fans of Limoncello, the Italian *digestivo*, in particular. "A lot of restaurants make their own. With our Limoncello base restaurants can add vodka and create a great version that has a distinct lemon rind taste," William adds. "We want our products to complement the alcohol rather than mask it. So many companies make mixers without ever tasting them in cocktails."

Even mixologists, who are known for their from-scratch creations, are in support of commercial mixers lending creativity to cocktails. Jonathan Pogash, the New York-based cocktail developer and mixologist who also goes by the name "Cocktail Guru," was recently hired by Welch's grape juice to create a series of mixed drinks using the iconic juice. While Welch's is not strictly in the mixer category, per se, the company is latching onto the cocktail renaissance, proving that their store-bought juice varieties work just as well in mixed concoctions. Pogash created a series of recipes for the juice giant, five of which debuted at the World Bar in New York City last fall. "It ended up being a big bash for mixologists, bartenders and the industry in general," Pogash says. "Guests couldn't believe it; they had no idea that Welch's made good cocktail mixers." ■

