

Living food fiesta



RISE AND SHINE!
Tequila sunrise was popularised by The Rolling Stones on their 1972 US tour. After having the drink at a party, the band kept ordering it at every bar.

Plant your cocktails

BOTTOMS UP!
Bid the artificially sweet & syrupy cocktails adieu and try out some botanical pours that use fresh ingredients to keep you in high spirits. Phorum Dalal takes a sip

One are the days when mixologists and bar chefs relied on commercial concentrates of artificial flavourings and syrups. Just like a food recipe, your cocktails too have ingredients that have been meticulously prepared through fermenting, pickling and foraging.

Last month, at Solander Bar, in my hotel The West on Sussex Street in Sydney, I ordered Purple Reign, a cocktail inspired by lights, music and ideas festival, Vivid Sydney. After a tiring day, the first sip refreshed me. Topped with fresh mint and berries, it was spiked with Havana rum, a blackcurrant cordial, soda water, a foam of homemade blackcurrant and thyme syrup, egg white and lemon.

The bar — named after first fleet naturalist Daniel Solander, who was integral to the early documentation and collection of Australian plants — specialised in botanical cocktails. The head mixologist, explained, “The cocktail selection takes inspiration from the world of botany and plant science, using kitchen-oriented infusion techniques including sous-vide and a Rotavapor to create delectable cocktails,” our server explains.

Interestingly, the use of botanicals in cocktails is as old as the history of cocktails themselves. Some of the earliest of botanical works that date back to around 250BC are by Theophrastus, titled *Enquiry into Plants* or *Historia Plantarum and Causes of Plants*. Together these books constitute the most important contribution to Botanical Science during antiquity and into the Middle Ages. The Roman medical writer, Dioscorides, provides important evidence on Greek and Roman knowledge of medicinal plants.

Tinctures & syrups
Closer home, at Bo Tai, Zorawar Kalra’s latest offering in Delhi, the bar serves a Full Moon Festival, a gin-based cocktail with a



homemade strawberry rose syrup, fresh grapefruit juice, homemade orange spice syrup, 15 ml homemade spiced vermouth and a dash of *pandan* tincture garnished with edible flowers. “All our cocktails have fresh and tincture botanical ingredients. Each homemade syrup takes at least six hours of rigorous preparation as we don’t use any artificial syrup or method of preparing them,” says Kalra.

Today, we look at cocktails as we do our food, Nikhil Merchant of Nonchalant Gourmand blog says, explaining the trend. “We eat with our eyes first. It’s the same with cocktails. While food has a more pronounced appeal for tempting one with its aroma, cocktails (especially in India) relied more on the contents and its taste. Simply put, botanical cocktails rely on all sensory nodes starting with the ‘nose’ as its first and final appeal.” Using the freshest of herbs, garden fresh flowers and ingredients in their rawest form to upgrade the cocktail drinking experience. They also are heavy on the trend words used today such as ‘forage’, ‘harvested’, ‘garden grows’, ‘sustaina-

“MOSTLY GIN AND VODKA ARE USED IN BOTANICAL COCKTAILS – MANY GINS HAVE A BOTANICAL FLAVOUR TO THEM, WHICH WILL AMPLIFY THE FRESHNESS OF IT ALL

Jam’nartini
INGREDIENTS

- Gin: 60 ml (infused with jamuns)
- Dry vermouth: 20 ml
- Rose water or floral tincture
- Orchid garnish
- Ice

METHOD

- Cut up some jamuns and deseed. Pop them in a 750-ml gin bottle and let sit for anywhere from five to eight days. Strain without pressing and re-fill bottle to use.
- In a mixing glass place two spheres of ice and pour the gin followed by the dry vermouth. Stir well for 30 seconds tops.
- Strain into a chilled coupe and spritz natural rose water on the surface of the cocktail.

RECIPE

- Garnish with an orchid and serve immediately.

(Courtesy: Nikhil Merchant)

ble produce’ etc. as they depend on what is available to the user immediately or grown right there.

Merchant makes most of his home garden, infusing dried button roses into a small vial of vodka. “Within a few days, I strained the petals out and poured the infused liquid into a spray container. Now when I make my special Hendricks dry martini, I squirt a few of this rose tincture into the glass before serving, perfuming the surface of the cocktail with the smell of my mom’s garden — its pure passion,” he says.

Bartender Ashish Kumar at Juniper, Andaz Delhi, has stocked his bar with a list of botanicals, including thyme, rosemary, juniper berries, timur, pink peppercorn and elderflower. “About in every form, we have tinctures of peppercorns, syrup of elderflower, cordials for peppermint, and 40 homemade gin infusions,” he says.

While we all know sake came from rice, scotch from barley, tequila from agave, rum from sugarcane, bourbon from corn. Kumar mentions bestselling author Amy Stewart’s *The Drunken Botanist*, which explores the dizzying array of herbs, flowers, trees, fruits, and fungi that humans have, through ingenuity, inspiration, and sheer desperation, contrived to transform into alcohol.

No syrups, please!
Chef Farrokh Khambata, restaurateur and owner of Umame & Joss in Mumbai, says he prefers using botanical ingredients fresh or as syrups. “Muddling these ingredients can give a pulpy consistency and can also re-

lease bitter flavours to the drinks so we prefer to give these fresh ingredients a good smack or lightly rub them between our hands before infusing them,” he explains.

When it comes to cocktail preparations, it can’t get better than Mother Nature-inspired mixology with botanical cocktails, but getting the balance right can be rather tricky, he adds. “Knowing what herb goes with what spirit ensures that you’ll end up with wonderful flavour profiles. As for the spirit itself, mostly gin and vodka are used in botanical cocktails — many gins have a botanical flavour to them, which will amplify the freshness of it all. For instance, gin pairs well with herbs that complement its flavour not mask it such as coriander and sage,” he says, turning his attention to vodka. “It is quite light and one dimensional so it can be paired with almost anything. We recommend infusing vodka with stronger herbs such as basil, rosemary and mint for a winning combination,” he says.

Lastly, tequila has an earthy flavour that serves as the perfect base for more fragrant and floral ingredients such as lavender. “The infusions work well with zesty fruits too. Rum-based cocktails will go well with fresher, cooling herbs due to its naturally sweet taste. Herbs like mint & oregano go well together with rum. A classic example would be a mojito,” he signs off.

Merchant leaves us with a few tips: “Stick close to your roots, look at the unusual ingredients at your local markets, invest in a herb garden tray to stick outside your window and grown herbs such as basil, rosemary, thyme, lemon, curry leaf, etc.”



Oh so corny!

I thought I knew all about making perfect popcorn. I would pop the kernels in oil, slather them in butter and salt, and gobble them while watching old slapstick comedies on the couch. Then I tasted Jessica Koslow’s recipe, and my popcorn world exploded.

Her snow-white kernels were impeccably crunchy, glistening with fat and seasoned with just enough salt to stick to my fingers. Their initial crackle melted into a corn-flavoured fluff on the tongue before completely disappearing.

Koslow, the chef and owner of Sqirl in Los Angeles, has a knack for taking something that people think they know how to make, and making it even better. Here are some of her recommendations:

- Use a half-cup oil to one-third cup popcorn kernels. That’s more oil than corn. Sunflower, safflower, vegetable, canola and corn oils work, as does ghee if you have it on hand.
- For a buttery flavour without using ghee or adding melted butter at the end (which can make the kernels soggy), you can pop your corn in half butter and half oil.
- Similarly, you can use a quarter-cup grapeseed oil mixed with a quarter-cup of another flavourful fat with a lower smoke point — coconut oil, olive oil, bacon grease, duck fat.
- No matter which fat you use, these shiny kernels hold their seasonings well. Stick to dry toppings like ground spices, seeds, chillies, nutritional yeast, vegetable powders, seasoned salts and dehydrated herbs. Anything with a high moisture content (grated Parmesan, lemon zest, fresh herbs) will wilt your crunchy corn.
- Koslow mixes her sweet caramel corn with coconut sugar and turmeric. And her homemade seasoning mixes often include spices, dehydrated herbs, sugar for sweetness and a pinch of citric acid for acidity without moisture. But, then again, when the popcorn itself is this crisp, even plain sea salt tastes amazing.

“Great popcorn is surprising to people; they’re not used to it,” Koslow said.

Until, like me, they get hooked. Then there’s no going back. **Melissa Clark**
The New York Times



With a dollop of chutney

Sweet, sour & spicy. Who doesn’t like chutneys? Everyday greens like mint, coriander, curry leaves, *brahmi* etc., abound in medicinal properties and are perfect for chutneys. They are rich sources of vitamins, minerals and other therapeutic compounds.

A proper blend of these herbs with spices can be a tasty addition to your meals, says **Rama Gokul**.



Minty mango chutney

Ingredients: Two cups of mint leaves; ½ cup of coriander leaves; 1 tbsp of mango gratings; 1 tsp of roasted Bengal gram dal; 1 cup of coconut gratings; 1 green chilli; a pinch of asafoetida; salt to taste; 1 tsp of sugar. For seasoning, 1 tsp of oil; ½ tsp of mustard seeds and 2 red chillies.

Method: Grind all the ingredients together into a coarse paste. Adjust consistency using sufficient water. Add a tempering of ingredients mentioned for seasoning the chutney. You can serve this with rice, *roti*, *dosa*, *idli* or use it as a filling for sandwiches.



Curry leaves chutney

Ingredients: Two cups of curry leaves; a small piece of tamarind; 1 tbsp of *urad dal*; 1 tsp of pepper; a pinch of asafoetida; a cup of coconut gratings; 1 tsp of jagger powder; salt to taste and 2 tsps of oil; ½ tsp of mustard seeds; ½ tsp of *urad dal* and two red chillies.

Method: Heat 2 tsps of oil and fry the first five ingredients till light brown and crisp (leaves). Allow them to cool and grind coarsely along with the rest of the ingredients. Temper with the ingredients for seasoning. This goes well with rice, *roti*, *idli* or *dosas*.

Doddapatre chutney

Ingredients: A cup of fresh Indian borage leaves (finely chopped); ½ tsp each of *jeera* and pepper; 1 tsp of *amla* gratings; a cup of coconut gratings; salt to taste and 2 tsps of ghee. For seasoning, 2 tsp of oil; ½ tsp of mustard seeds and a few curry leaves.

Method: Heat ghee in a pan and fry the *jeera* and pepper. Add the chopped leaves and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes. Allow the mixture to cool. Grind to a paste along with coconut gratings and salt. Season with the mentioned ingredients. Serve with rice and *rotis*.

Brahmi chutney

Ingredients: A cup of *brahmi* leaves (chopped); ½ tsp each of *jeera* and pepper; ¼ tsp of *ajwain*; a cup of coconut gratings; salt, sugar and lime to taste and 2 tsps of ghee. For seasoning, 2 tsps of oil; ½ tsp of *jeera* and a pinch of asafoetida.

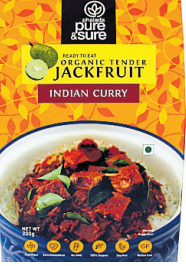
Method: Heat ghee in a pan and fry *jeera*, pepper and *ajwain*. Add the chopped leaves and sauté for 3-4 minutes. Allow this to cool. Grind with salt, sugar, lime juice and coconut gratings. Temper the chutney and serve with rice or *rotis*.

Note: Some of these chutneys (except curry leaves one) can be made into dips by mixing them with beaten curds.

ON THE SHELF

Fruit power

➤ This season, indulge in, the all-new range of ready-to-eat organic jackfruit cubes. Made from the finest available fruit sourced from certified organic farms across India, Phalada Pure & Sure organic tender jackfruit is a perfect blend of tasty and healthy. The cubes are mixed with other spices and will help you prepare your favourite recipes instantly. The product comes in three flavours — *choley masala*, Indian curry, and just jackfruit. The product can be purchased online on, www.pureandsure.in.



Goodness of protein

➤ Godrej Nature’s Basket has introduced ready-to-eat egg white cubes across its stores in Bengaluru. “Best Egg White Cube” is a ready to cook and eat, natural egg protein product under the SKM Best brand launched in India. It is available with limited online and offline retailers. The zero fat, no cholesterol and no preservatives product, made from chicken egg white can be used in various dishes. A serving of 100 gm egg white cube provides 14 gm of natural egg white protein. It makes for a good addition to your snacks and pre-workout meals.



Warm tokens

➤ This wedding season, gift your loved ones timeless presents of quality from the popular cookware brand Le Creuset. Blend tradition and efficiency with Le Creuset, for it, offers quality with fine beauty. This collection of cookware and accessories are understated, modern and sophisticated. Gift from the exclusive assortment of cast iron, stainless steel and toughened non-stick collection, which will last in their kitchens forever. The quintessential wine & cheese, stoneware and bakeware & accessories are some of the products that are high quality, durable, energy efficient and add an aesthetic appeal to your present.

KNOW YOUR INGREDIENT



Transform water with traditional flavours

As a connoisseur of authentic South Indian vegetarian food, the banana leaf of traditional items spread out before me at a hotel in Kerala looked inviting! More fascinating, perhaps, was the reddish yellow water infused with spices like *jeera*, dry ginger etc called *chukku vellum*, a digestive for the meal. It was a lesson in how simple drinking water could be made attractive and healthy.

Roots, leaves, spices and grass have always been used to add that special touch to simple drinking water. *Nannari* (sarsaparilla plant), *bel* or beal (wood apple), and *vetiver* roots are popular additives to drinking water. Some of them are said to be good for skin and kidney related problems as well. Sweet basil seeds or *sabja* are used for their cooling properties, aroma and aesthetics. Spices like cardamom, saffron if one could afford it, *ajwain*, *saunf*, etc could be added to water without upsetting its balance and lightness.

Every cell in our body needs water for proper functioning. Even a 20% decrease in it leading to serious consequences. But the crux of the problem is the bodily need for water outlives thirst.

Refrigerated water, although refreshing on a summer day, is not recommended as the energy meant to digest food gets diverted to neutralise it. Freezing vegetable juices, mint leaves, or berries as ice cubes and dropping them in your glass of water is a good idea to maintain pleasing temperature. **Snehitha Baliga**