

Cocktails infused with summer flavor

By SHARYN JACKSON
Minneapolis Star Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS — Fruit, flowers, herbs — nothing says summer more than the bounty from farmers markets or our own gardens. Those fresh ingredients that fill our baskets are also the best places to start when crafting summer cocktails.

“We’re seasonal drinkers here in Minnesota,” said Christian Kyllonen, a bartender at Nolo’s Kitchen and its breezy Rooftop Bar in Minneapolis. “Obviously, in summer, you think fresh and fruity.”

That’s why Kyllonen jams his cocktails with the flavors of watermelon, blueberry and lavender, cucumber and berries.

He also leans toward clear spirits. “Wintertime comes around, I’m drinking stouts and Scotch and whiskey,” he said. “Summertime, I think tequila, I think vodka, gin, more of those lighter liquors.”

Bars across the Twin Cities are welcoming guests back with a slate of fun and refreshing concoctions that speak to the season.

With surfboards for tables and three churning slushie machines, the menu at the Rooftop Bar, perched on the top floor of the century-old Maytag building in the North Loop, is firmly rooted in summer.

The Raspberry 75 takes the classic gin cocktail and infuses it with bursts of berry flavors. The cucumber smash melds the salad staple with vodka, green tea, mango and lime. And the Tropical Tequila layers the spirit, a can of fruit-flavored Red Bull and a splash of orange juice — a drink that is easily re-engineered at home.

After all, Kyllonen says this summer might be tequila’s moment to shine. “One hundred percent,” he added.

It’s also the summer of travel, after a long dry spell. Playing up that theme is Travail’s Basement Bar in Robbinsdale, which, throughout July, is offering three vacation-themed cocktail flights — one is nonalcoholic — inspired by the beaches of the Caribbean, Hawaii and Polynesia. In more than a dozen fruit-forward drinks from bar director Nathaniel Smith, everything from the glassware (a glass puffer fish and a ceramic Great White shark) to the gar-



Cocktails from NOLO’s Kitchen & Bar. The two in front are the Cucumber Smash, and a Raspberry 75. In the back row are, from left, the La Chapa, an orange mocktail, Sangria, Tropical Tequila, the Hearts of Fire and a Pink Lemonade Slushie.

Jeff Wheeler-Minneapolis Star Tribune/TNS

nishes (a flamingo pool floatie) evokes summer fun in the tropics.

But summer drinks don’t have to be complicated, drink-makers say, and don’t be afraid to play with what you have on hand.

“I just love fresh herbs in cocktails,” said Britt Tracy, a Twin Cities bartender who’s also on staff at the north Minneapolis wine shop Henry & Son. “From a Minnesota perspective, we spend a lot of our time without local produce, and it’s all about preservation. Summer is the best time to use fresh ingredients.”

Home bartenders armed with fragrant, just-snipped herbs can enliven almost any classic cocktail.

“It feels good to be at the farmers market and buy every herb,” Tracy said. Infusing them into vinegars, oils, simple syrups and spirits is capturing the essence of summer in a glass.”

Simply rubbing an herb in your hands to crush it before dropping it into your cocktail glass can make a world of difference, like in Tracy’s basil-scented gimlet (see recipe).

Flowers, too, have a home in quenching drinks for the hottest days.

In the Middle East, nonalcoholic cold beverages are lightly sweetened with floral syrups derived from orange blossom or rose “to make them more celebra-

tory,” said Salma Hage, author of the upcoming “Middle Eastern Sweets.” One of Hage’s favorites is an iced tea from dried hibiscus flower petals, mixed with orange juice and mint, a cool and tart brew that’s an “ideal drink for a heatwave,” and complex enough to be an all-ages pleaser.

Garden aside, there’s one more unexpected ingredient that can elevate the freshest drinks.

Tracy likes to add a pinch of salt to her shaken cocktails, a tactic that “helps emphasize and embolden already existing players” in the glass, she said. Think of it as taking a margarita’s salt rim to the next level. “It’s so much better.”

TROPICAL TEQUILA

Serves 1.
Note: From Rooftop Bar in Minneapolis.
1 1/2 ounces (3 tablespoons) tequila
Tropical- or citrus- flavored soda, such as Red Bull Yellow Edition
Splash of orange juice
Ice, for serving
Fill a highball glass with ice. Add tequila. Add tropical soda almost to the top of the glass. Top with a splash of orange juice.

BASIL GIMLET

Serves 1.
Note: To make simple syrup, mix equal amounts of sugar and water and heat until sugar is dissolved. From Minneapolis bartender Britt Tracy.
2 ounces (4 tablespoons) gin
3/4 ounces (1 1/2 tablespoons) simple syrup
3/4 ounces (1 1/2 tablespoons) fresh lime juice
Pinch of salt
1 to 2 basil leaves or other fresh herbs
Ice, for shaking
Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Add gin, simple syrup, lime juice and a pinch of salt. Shake vigorously for 20 to 30 seconds. Strain into a coupe glass. Twist and rub the basil leaves in your hands to muddle before dropping them into the glass.

HIBISCUS AND ORANGE ICED TEA

Makes about 2 1/2 cups.
Note: Dried hibiscus flowers, which can be found in many grocery stores in tea bags or loose, lend a tart and tannic flavor to a brew that could be served hot or cold, says Salma Hage, author of the forthcoming “Middle Eastern Sweets” (Phaidon). Make this iced tea ahead of time and serve as an alternative to alcoholic beverages.
2 tablespoons dried hibiscus flowers
Strips of orange peel from 1/2 orange
Scant 1/4 cup orange juice
A few sprigs of mint, for garnish
Ice, for serving
Bring 2 1/2 cups of water to a boil, then turn off the heat and add the hibiscus flowers and the strips of orange peel. Cover and let steep for 20 minutes. Strain the tea and add the orange juice. Allow to cool in the fridge. Serve with fresh mint leaves and plenty of ice.

A simple, spicy sauce

Puttanesca can be served over pasta or on bread

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Feast of the Seven Fishes is a much-anticipated holiday tradition for Italian-Americans, traditionally served on Christmas Eve to celebrate La Vigilia, the period of waiting for the Christ child’s birth.

Menus range from simple to over the top, with everything from squid, smelts and shrimp sharing the table with cod, octopus and lobster. The only rule is there has to be at least seven courses, each with a different seafood.

Summer is prime time to source seasonal, responsibly caught seafood like branzino, shrimp and octopus. To whet your appetite, DiA-noia’s Eatery in Pittsburgh’s Strip District is sharing Chef Tyler England’s recipe for Puttanesca Crostini.

Puttanesca is a simple and spicy sauce made with anchovies, olives, tomatoes, capers and garlic. It’s usually served on top of pasta but can also be enjoyed on toasted crostini as a summer appetizer, as it is here, or on crusty sandwich bread for lunch. I know

there are rules about cheese and fish, but I think a dusting of grated Parmesan would add a lovely finish.

Puttanesca sauce is much loved because it usually comes together quickly, in less than 30 minutes. This version cooks a bit longer until it is thick and stew-like.

Don’t be afraid of the anchovies in the ingredient list. They melt as they cook and don’t really taste fishy, adding a rich umami that pairs perfectly with tomatoes.

The sauce can be refrigerated in a glass container for up to six days or frozen in a resealable container for up to three months; thaw overnight in the refrigerator and reheat in a large saucepan or frying pan until hot.

PUTTANESCA CROSTINI

- 8 ounces olive oil**
- 4 or 5 cloves garlic, minced**
- 12-ounce can anchovies fillets in oil, drained**
- 2 teaspoons red pepper flakes**
- 6 ounces pitted Kalamata olives, chopped**
- 2 ounces capers, rinsed**
- 28-ounce can chopped Italian tomatoes, or whole, crushed by hand**
- 1 bunch fresh parsley, chopped**
- 1 loaf crusty bread, thinly**



Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

In this easy appetizer, crostini are topped with puttanesca, a spicy sauce made with tomato, capers, olives, garlic and anchovy.

sliced and toasted

Heat olive oil over medium heat in a medium sauce pot. When oil is hot, add garlic, anchovies and red pepper flakes. Saute until fragrant, about 1-2 minutes. (Anchovies will melt as they cook).

Add chopped olives and capers and saute for another 2-3 minutes.

Add canned tomatoes with their juices, stir to combine and then stew the sauce for 90 minutes on low heat, stirring occasionally. Once stewed it should be pretty thick, and most of the

water should evaporate.

Add chopped parsley and check for seasoning; add salt if necessary.

Transfer sauce to a serving bowl and serve with toasted bread.

Makes about 3 cups of sauce.
— Cher Tyler England, DiA-noia’s Eatery, Strip District

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