

VITAL SUMMER ACCESSORY:

Tapioca "Pearls"

Bubble tea's sphere of influence expands in Eugene.

BY VANESSA SALVIA

Boba tea. No, it's not Boba Fett's long lost cousin from the Star Wars saga, it's a drink craze that's gripping Eugene in its sweet, fruity grasp. Also known as bubble tea or pearl tea, the drink originated at a tea stand in Taiwan 20 years ago. Vendors sold children chilled, refreshing tea drinks after school. One vendor added powdered fruit flavors to the tea drinks, which the children shook vigorously to blend, making the drink bubbly. Another enterprising vendor expanded the concept, adding tapioca "pearls" which sunk to the bottom of a clear plastic cup, making "bubbles" that lasted.

Bubble tea is huge in Asia and has been slowly making inroads here in the States. Now, a bubble tea drink shop is taking hold at 841 E. 13th Street in Eugene. Boba Bubble Tea Shop is the enterprise of two sets of twins (from the same parents!), 18-year-olds Maiah and Sarah Albi and 15-year-olds Keegan and Colin Albi. The siblings sold bubble tea from a food cart last summer and at the February 2005 Asian Festival. The campus store is already a hit and keeps the focus on drinks, with 65 flavors of boba available along with specialty coffees and Asian popsicles.

Maiah Albi said the siblings discovered the drink because their father travels frequently to Asia, where boba teashops sprout faster than mushrooms in a wet field.

"He knows [the drinks] are really popular in bigger cities like Seattle and San Francisco so basically he just decided to see if we could get it started here," said Maiah. "Last summer we had a little cart, really small, just testing it out, and we got a lot of positive feedback." Blended "fruit" bobas contain green tea, are slushy and have lighter flavors than the "milk" bobas, which are thicker and smoothie-like. Boba Bubble sells 16 oz. of both varieties for \$2.75.

For the uninitiated, the drink can seem a little intimidating, but deciding on a flavor is really the hardest part. Bimb Kampanat at Aiyara Thai Café says they sell up to 30 bobas a day, and their most popular flavors are mango, purple yam, coconut and sour raspberry. For my dollar, traditional strawberry is hard to beat. Once you've got your



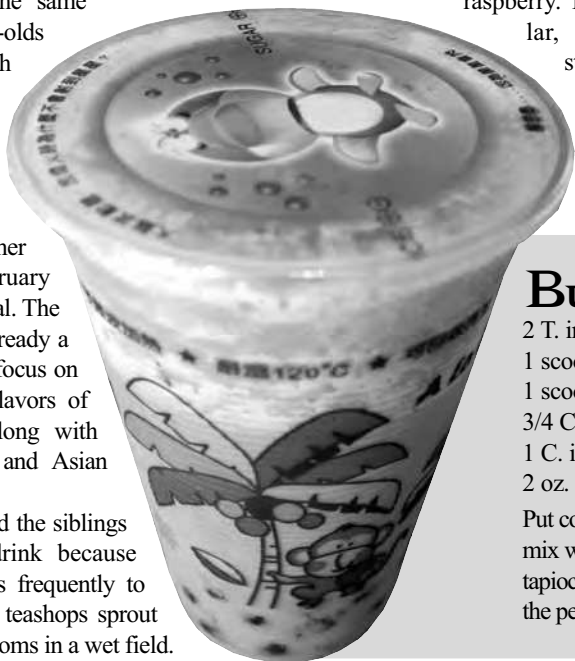
(Left to right)
Colin, Sarah,
Maiah, & Keegan

TODD COOPER

boba in hand, pierce the drink's plastic covering with an oversized straw and start sucking! When the marble-sized tapioca pearls come through the straw, chew them up — the texture is like a soft gummy bear in a fruity fluid. Most tapioca balls are black and look like blueberries in the cup, but they can also be white or transparent. Rest assured, the fruit bobas are completely vegan. The drinks are low on sugar, but still sweetly satisfying and definitely healthier than a soda.

Maiah said the bobas are addictive. "When I first had them I didn't like them at all but they grow on you. Now I have like four a day!" she said. *

Bubble Tea Supply has a website (www.bubbleteasupply.com) with lots of information and history of bubble tea. They also post numerous recipes and sell boba "kits" including the tapioca pearls and flavor powders for those who want to make authentic boba teas at home. The tapioca pearls must be boiled and steeped for an hour to make them chewy, so it's much easier to visit the boba tea shop!



Bubble Tea Iced Coffee

2 T. instant coffee
1 scoop non-dairy powder creamer
1 scoop bubble tea sugar syrup
3/4 C. water
1 C. ice
2 oz. cooked bubble tea tapioca pearls
Put coffee, creamer and sugar syrup in a shaker and mix well. Add ice, cover and shake until frothy. Put tapioca pearls into a cup and pour blended mixture over the pearls. Add your fat bubble tea straw and enjoy!

Bubble Tea Sugar Syrup

1 C. white sugar
1 C. brown sugar
2 C. water
Mix sugar and water in large pot. Cook on medium to high, removing from heat as soon as mixture boils. Cool and refrigerate any excess. Makes approximately 32-35 16 oz. bobas.

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