

Restaurant Business

STREET SMARTS FOR THE ENTREPRENEUR

FOODSERVICE BUYER SYRUPS

BY TH STRENN

Maple syrup: tap the sap

MIXOLOGISTS ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH NATURAL SYRUPS, LIKE MAPLE, HONEY AND AGAVE, to differentiate their drinks. Maple syrup has been sugaring cocktails and other drinks here in America since Colonial times. The tree-sap syrup is a key component in a number of classic cocktails, including the bourbon-based Maple Leaf, Maple Sour and Hot Toddy, and is currently enjoying a modest revival among trendy bar chefs.



MAPLE-BOURBON COLLINS FROM RAINES LAW ROOM

"Compared to using simple syrup, you're kind of getting two for one because maple syrup is a sweetener but it has that extra flavor that cane sugar doesn't have," says Meaghan Dorman, head bartender at the Raines Law Room in New York's Flatiron District. Currently on the drinks list at the recently opened cocktail bar (named after an 1896 tax and regulations package aimed at decreasing alcohol consumption) is the Fourth Route, made with Hennessy VS Cognac, lime juice, maple syrup and ginger (\$13). A Maple Leaf Sour cocktail, which mixes the syrup with Scotch and lemon juice, was also on the specials list last winter. Another specialty is a maple-flavored variation on the Collins, made with Buffalo Trace Bourbon, maple syrup and lemon, topped with club soda.

"Maple syrup is great for comforting drinks," notes Dorman, who finds it mixes best with brown spirits such as whiskey or brandy. "And maple goes really well with rum agricole."

Acid-wise, maple syrup marries with both lemon and lime juices, according to the mixologist. Another Raines Law bartender pairs it with grapefruit juice as well. The lounge uses grade A amber maple syrup for cocktails because the lower grades are too bitter, says Dorman, and the higher grade is too light in flavor to stand up in a mixed drink. "It's important to only use pure, 100 percent maple syrup," advises Dorman. Although interest is largely seasonal, use of maple syrup in cocktails seems to be on the upswing. "I think next season, you'll see more bartenders working maple syrup into their menus, especially in this area where we have access to good-quality maple syrup," predicts Dorman.

The syrup scores on the health front, too. A new research study conducted by the University of Rhode Island discovered more than 20 antioxidant compounds in Canadian maple syrup (Canada produces 80 percent of the world's supply). In a presentation on the findings at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Chemical Society, Dr. Navindra Seeram noted that several of these antioxidant compounds are also reported to have anti-cancer, anti-bacterial and anti-diabetic properties. In addition, maple syrup's high levels of zinc and manganese can assist in heart health and boosting the immune system. "Maple syrup is unique in that it is the only product in our diet that comes from a plant's sap," Seeram pointed out.

Sweet variations

COCKTAILS OFTEN CONTAIN A SWEET element to offset the sourness of citrus juices. Mixologists tend to use simple syrup; here are some alternatives:

- **Agave syrup** (also called agave nectar) is made from the same agave plant as Tequila and mescal. Thinner than simple syrup, agave syrup dissolves readily in cold liquids. The nectar is available in light and dark amber; the latter has a fuller flavor. Initially used to sweeten margaritas, many bartenders have made agave their go-to syrup for all mixed drinks.

- **Bacon** is the latest "it" cocktail flavor. Because of its high fat content, some bar chefs "wash" the bacon in alcohol infusions, then remove the fat. An easier solution is Torani's Bacon Flavored Syrup, ready to use right out of the bottle.

- Syrups are usually mixed into beverages for a jolt of flavor. But Smucker's has an interesting variation for use with its Platescapers line. In a recipe for Raspberry Cream Lemonade, the **raspberry syrup** is viscous enough to be painted in a decorative pattern inside the glass for a striking presentation.

- The Aztecs, who discovered chocolate, like to lace their drinks with **spicy chilies**. In a tribute to those ancients, Monin's new Spicy Chocolate Syrup has a warm peppery kick to it. The syrup is made with pure cane sugar, to boot.

- The **tiki bar concept** is experiencing a renaissance as the cocktail crowd rediscovers classics like the Zombie and Planter's Punch. With its pineapple and almond flavors, Tiki Syrup from The Simple Syrup Company is a natural to sweeten those fruity tropical drinks. The company produces half a dozen syrups, including Burnt Orange & Vanilla Bean and Pomegranate & Tahitian Lime.

Distribution to bars and restaurants is through Vanguard Luxury Brands.



RASPBERRY LEMONADE SWIRLED WITH PLATESCAPERS