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COOL SIPS FOR SUMMER

**NEW DRINK
MIXES OFFER
BOTH COCKTAILS
& NON-ALCOHOLIC
BEVERAGES PERFECT
FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY.**

BY LOPi MURRAY

The days are getting longer, and that's good news for outdoor entertainers and party planners. Warmer weather and sunshine are the ideal ingredients for a host of celebrations. Team them up with some of today's innovative cocktail mixes, and you've got the perfect recipe for party success. Margaritas, mojitos, daiquiris and lemonades — these refreshments are guaranteed hits at any event. Add the alcohol or leave it out because these drink mixes are designed to please the palates of every age group.

Fancy Food talked with several gourmet drink mix manufacturers to get a firsthand look at what's new for Summer 2007. Expect plenty of fruit and fresh flavors moving forward, and a hint of the exotic.

COCKTAIL MIXES

Make no mistake; these are not your mother's cocktail mixes. Dried cocktail mixes have been around for a while, but today's mixes are typically made from all-natural ingredients, boasting a premium product that mixes well with a premium brand of liquor.

Chicago-based Urban Accents (887/UA-SPICE) recently introduced 15 new mixes. Five of them are cocktail mixes, including the following unique flavor combinations: Mixed Fruit Sangria, Key Lime Margarita, Minty Lime Mojito, Triple Berry Cosmo and Spicy Bloody Mary. Each mix makes two quarts of finished product. Add to that five infused lemonade mixes, with adult flavor profiles like Cucumber, Ginger, Spiced, Lavender and Jalapeño, as well as five flavored lemonades,

boasting all-time favorites such as Tangerine and Black Cherry. The wide range of options ensures that there truly is something for every member of the family. "We wanted to introduce mixes that make celebrating even easier," says President Tom Knibbs. "Rather than stick to the standards, we wanted to offer unique flavor combinations for a new kind of party."

Perfect for summer cocktails, the infused lemonade packages are equipped with recipe ideas. The overwhelming favorite, Jalapeño Lemon-Lime Margarita, is as simple as adding 3 oz. of the prepared lemonade with 1.5 oz. tequila, .5 oz. triple sec and 1 oz. lime juice. Shake and serve in a salt-rimmed glass.

Staying in tune with the summer theme while capitalizing on what's currently popular, Fall

River, Massachusetts-based Stirrings (888/742-7837) introduced two new cocktail mixes at the Winter Fancy Food Show — Passion Fruit Mojito and Grapefruit Margarita. The already popular Mojito, a Cuban cocktail that blends muddled mint, lime and sugar with rum and a splash of club soda, can be difficult and time-consuming to make. The company solves that problem with its Mojito Mixer, which is now one of its best-selling products. The new Passion Fruit Mojito is an innovative twist on this already popular product, blending passion fruit juice, Key lime juice, mint extract and real cane sugar. “We feel strongly that innovation is important to Stirrings and the category in general,” says Marketing Director

Kristine Ford. “Mojito was popular all last summer, and Passion Fruit Mojito is expected to be big this summer.”

Always a favorite, the Margarita is getting a makeover as well. At Stirrings, the Grapefruit Margarita Mixer is a blend of tangy Rio Red grapefruit concentrate, Key lime juice and cane sugar. Consumers only need to add tequila and ice. Both the Passion Fruit Mojito and the Grapefruit Margarita can be paired with accompanying rimmer cocktail garnishes.

Again, the emphasis here is on better ingredients — real fruit juices, cane sugar and triple-filtered water. Stirrings has a wide range of cocktail mixers that follow this regimen, including the current favorite — Pomegranate — with actual crushed pomegranate seeds, sugar and other seasonings.

In Quebec, Gourmet du Village (800/668-2314) is introducing two new mixer flavors

Cobblestone Kitchens Inc.

(905/629-7570 or cobblekit@aol.com) has new packaging for its line of cocktail mixes. Previously sold in canisters, the drink mixes now come in stylish gable-top boxes.



Chicago-based **Urban Accents** (887/UA-SPICE or www.urbanaccents.com) recently introduced 15 new mixes that provide drinks for the whole family, including cocktail and lemonade mixes with specialty flair.

as well — Mango Margarita and Mai Tai. No doubt the success of the margarita continues to grow, and the Mango Margarita is a refreshing twist on the classic. The Mai Tai, a rum-based drink with orange, lemon and a hint of almond, is yet another all-time favorite. “(Cocktail mixers)

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COOL SIPS FOR SUMMER

are a big category for us," says Mame Norman, company spokesperson. "We have been adding to it for the past few years."

Gourmet du Village offers a wide range of cocktail mixes, from Apple Martini and Strawberry Daiquiri to everybody's island favorite — the Piña Colada. The mixes are sold in decorative boxes with a mylar foil package inside. Each box contains enough mix for an entire jug of cocktails, while a mini-sized box consists of two servings. A convenient Margarita cocktail shaker kit has a mini shaker and two packages (Margarita mini and Mango Margarita mini).

The big news at Toronto-based Cobblestone Kitchens Inc. (905/629-7570) is new packaging for its cocktail mixes. Previously sold in canisters, the drink mixes are now available in gable-top boxes with more stylish graphics. Each 8-oz. mix has a coordinating 4.5- oz. rimmer, and they are available in combination sets. Four flavors make the lineup: Lime Margarita, Strawberry Margarita, Lime Mint Mojito and Strawberry Daiquiri.

One of the newer innovations in the drink-mix category is a product called Wine Glacé. Made in Texarkana, Texas, by Wine-A-Rita (903/832-7309), the powdered drink mix is designed to pair

with wine. Just combine wine, ice and the mix in a blender to create a delicious frozen wine beverage. "The mix is all the same profile. Whatever flavor wine you have is what the taste is going to be," says Co-Owner Donna Griffin. "It can be mixed with any type of red or white wine." It can also be mixed with non-alcoholic wine or fruit juice. In 2005, Wine Glacé won Best New Drink at the National Gourmet Food Show, and in 2006, it was awarded Best Wine and Spirits at the Dessert Expo. Also a kosher product, it is packaged in a custom-printed fabric bag.

Another new player in the cocktail mix category is Mixerz by Creative Juices (978/762-MIXR), the brainchild of Mark Mahoney and Al Williams, two beverage industry veterans who got their start selling all-natural fruit smoothies and frozen cocktails. They went on to create a successful foodservice frozen cocktail brand, Maui Beverages. The duo decided to answer a need in the retail market creating bar chef-inspired cocktail mixers in seven of the most popular flavors they saw in their restaurant experience.

The Mixerz brand was launched at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco, just a few miles away from the company's bottling facility in the heart of Napa Valley. Each Mixerz flavor is all-



Stirrings (888/742-7837 or www.stirrings.com) introduces two, new cocktail mixes: Passion Fruit Mojito and Grapefruit Margarita. Each drink mix also can be paired with a complementary drink rimmer.

natural and hand-crafted in 200-gallon batches. The concept for the line follows many other gourmet drink mix manufacturers' philosophies, which is to design mixes that pair well with the premium liquors consumers are stocking in their home bars for everyday use and when entertaining friends and family.

"We created the Mixerz line to be the perfect complement to the finest liquors available," says Al Williams, vice president and co-founder, Creative Juices. "We spent months in Napa Valley perfecting each individual flavor ... We also created a proprietary bottle to showcase and capture the essence of this brand. The result is truly the most sophisticated and elegant cocktail mixer available."

Mixerz contain unique ingredients. The line includes: Bloody Mary (containing barrel-aged Worcestershire sauce); Cosmopolitan (with Pacific Northwest cranberries); Mango (with mangos from the Magdalena Valley of Colombia); Margarita (with fresh Key limes, Meyer lemons, and Florida orange juice); Mojito (with California mint leaves, fresh Key limes and Hawaiian cane sugar); and Pomegranate (pomegranates with a twist of Key lime); Sour Apple (with Washington Granny Smith apples).

Each Mixerz flavor was specifically created for consumers to use individually or have the option to mix the flavors together. Delicious Mixerz flavor combinations that they suggest include Mango and Mojito; Pomegranate and Margarita; Pomegranate and Cosmopolitan; and Margarita and Mango. Mixerz are available



Earth & Vine Provisions Inc. (888/723-8463 or www.earthvine.com) offers all-natural elixirs that can be used in alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, including Italian sodas, cocktails and milkshakes. This kit with shaker included is also available.

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DRINK RIMMERS

Rim trims, or rimmers, are a big part of the cocktail mix story. "The rimmers bring another element of dressing up a cocktail party," says Knibbs. "And they enhance the flavor of the cocktail."

Very simply, rimmers are sugar or salt-infused seasoning blends. Designed so that a glass can be dipped into the sugar or salt concoction, they are not only extremely decorative, but also tasty. Again, these are typically made with upscale, all-natural ingredients, such as sea salt and cane sugar.



Wine-A-Rita (903/832-7309 or www.wine-glance.com) offers Wine Glacé, a powdered drink mix designed to pair with wine and ice and that's blended into a delicious frozen wine beverage.

At Urban Accents, they've taken the rimmer concept a step further and created what they like to call Cocktail Dippers or "booze fondue." It's as simple as soaking grape tomatoes in vodka and then dipping them in the company's Bloody Mary rimmer for a Bloody Mary-on-a-Stick. Likewise, strawberries can be soaked in a coffee liqueur, followed by a dip in the chocolate rimmer. Additional Cocktail Dippers ideas are available on the Urban Accents website. The concept is great for in-store demos when you'd rather not pour a cocktail, as well as suggesting to consumers as a fun activity for parties.

Don't forget there's always the alternative to use the rimmers without alcohol to embellish mocktails or lemonades for those don't want to add liquor to the cocktail mixes.

NON-ALCOHOLIC OPTIONS

Non-alcoholic options are available with most of the drink mixes, and in most cases, the manufacturers provide non-alcoholic recipes on the packages and bottles. That means that everybody can enjoy the refreshing flavors and fresh ingredients that make these mixes special.

At Earth & Vine Provisions Inc. (888/723-8463) in Lincoln, California, the company's elixirs are used in alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. "This is a family-friendly drink mix, and we want to push the fact that we are an alcohol-free alternative," says President Tressa Cooper. "They are designed for Italian sodas, smoothies and milkshakes, but by the way, you can make a great martini or margarita as well."

Put some of the Mango Mambo Beverage Elixir in the blender with ice, hit the blend button, and the result is a fabulous smoothie. Or simply add the Black Currant Elixir to Champagne. At the same time, the Strawberry Banana Beverage Elixir is really thick, so it's geared more toward a smoothie, milkshake or daiquiri. The options are almost endless.

New on the list at Earth & Vine Provisions is Meyer Lemon Elixir, a refreshing lemon taste that can be used for classic lemonade. Add sparkling water for a quick but exhilarating drink, or make a lemon pineapple margarita. The company has also changed the packaging of its elixirs, using the same 17-oz. bottles, but with a new label.

The ingredients in the elixirs are 100-percent all-natural, with no corn syrup — just cane sugar. Cooper wants customers to know that her products are versatile. "We are more than a martini mix," she explains. "People are more focused on the family and want to include the family. Buy one bottle and you can have drinks for everyone."

To demonstrate the versatility of these elixirs, consider the following recipe ideas from Cooper. Using the Pomegranate elixir, mix a classic Shirley Temple in a tall glass with ice. Add a good dash of the elixir and pour in the ginger ale. Garnish with a cherry and your kids will thank you!

On the other hand, the same elixir makes a terrific Tequila Sunrise. Just fill a tall Collins

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glass with crushed ice. Pour in 2 oz. of tequila, 3 oz. of fresh orange juice and top with the elixir. Garnish with an orange slice and a cherry.

Kids love the Mango Mambo. It's easy to concoct a Mango Beach Shake by combining one ripe, medium banana, one cup vanilla bean ice cream, one cup Mango Mambo Beverage Elixir and a half cup of orange juice. Then blend until smooth.

At North Aire Market in Shakopee, Minnesota (800/662-3781), Co-Owner Maggie Mortensen is excited about the newest addition to the company's Freezie (smoothie) Mix line — English toffee. Simply add the dry mix to skim milk and ice cubes

set. Strawberries and bananas can be easily added for an appealing, healthy smoothie drink.

Mortensen likes to point out the product's convenience. "We are gourmet foods for real people. We have homes and lives," she says. "But everybody wants to have something kind of special once in awhile. For us, it's the smoothie mix. You don't have to do the measuring, and you don't need the fruit. You just need ice." Best of all, it's a shelf-stable product, so it is always ready. The entire line includes English Toffee, Pomegranate, Orange Mango and Key Lime.

At Stirrings, they've cleverly created some non-alcoholic recipes

customers of ours make gift baskets with a margarita theme," says Norman. They might

fresh limes," she says.

At North Aire Market, Mortensen agrees: "Store the (smoothie mixes) with fresh produce where you could put it on top of strawberries and banana bunches." When Mortensen shows the English Toffee Mix in



North Aire Market (800/662-3781 or www.northairemarket.com) offers a line of Freezie and Smoothie Mixes; English toffee is the latest addition. The mixes can be blended with milk and ice cubes.



Earth & Vine Provisions Inc. (888/723-8463 or www.earthvine.com) offers all-natural elixirs that can be used in alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, including Italian sodas, cocktails and milk-

in the blender for a wonderful treat with a rich, English toffee flavor. "If you want to zip it up, use part Kahlua instead of the milk. You can also use coffee for a blend of coffee and milk," says Mortensen.

North Aire Market introduced its smoothie line last year thinking it would be a summer line. They were surprised to discover how well it sold during the fourth quarter. "Lots of customers used them as cocktails or special drinks during the holidays," says Mortensen.

For instance, the Pomegranate Mix added a beautiful, red color to holiday drinks. "People really love pomegranate," says Mortensen. "It has natural antioxidants, and we fortified ours with some additional antioxidants. It isn't too sweet, and it appeals to adults." Likewise, the Orange Mango Mix grabs the attention of the younger

for their products. For instance, it's easy to concoct a Pink Grapefruit Sorbeto with Stirrings Pink Grapefruit Soda and 1 oz. Stirrings Grapefruit Margarita Mix. At the same time, a combination of 2 oz. Stirrings Passion Fruit Mojito, 1 oz. Stirrings Mango, 1 oz. Stirrings Apple and 3 oz. Stirrings Wild Blueberry makes a mouth-watering Brazilian Blueberry Punch.

SUMMER SALES Tie-INS

When it's time for poolside glassware to hit your store shelves, that may be the ideal cross-merchandising opportunity for these drink mixes and rimmers. Place them in pitchers or alongside patio ware or team them up with cocktail shakers, ice buckets and glasses.

"We have actually seen

use the company's Margarita Cocktail Shaker Kit and add some fun glassware to the basket. Don't forget other fun accessories such as cocktail napkins, drink stirrers, wine glass accents and coasters.

Ford suggests pairing the drink mixes with picnic baskets and outdoor entertaining accessories. "You could even merchandise the Mango Margarita in the produce aisle with

the company's trade show booth, she displays it with Kahlua, Godiva liqueur and Frangelica.

At Wine-A-Rita, Griffin suggests cross-merchandising the Wine Glacé with wine glasses. "Some wine stores sample it with their wines and end up selling two products," she adds.

You can also inspire consumers while doing demos in the store. Pull out all the stops and add flair to even sample-size drinks. Stirrings offers some creative garnishes to try or place them on a tip sheet for shoppers to take home and use. To create beautiful citrus garnishes for the rim of a glass, use a vegetable peeler to peel thin twists from oranges, lemons and limes; Use a zester to create short, thin "sprinkles" of citrus to float on the surface of the cocktail. This also works with a chocolate bar. A melon baller can create spheres of cantaloupe, watermelon or honeydew to float in a cocktail or skewer as a garnish.

While there are many approaches to merchandising these lively and creative products, letting your shoppers taste them is the best way to keep everyone excited about new flavors and recipes for trendy drinks. Whether it's poolside, picnic-style or for more formal entertaining, cocktail and non-alcoholic drink mixes make fun and memorable beverages that can be served to all ages. ©



Mixerz are a new line of bar chef-inspired cocktail mixers that are also all-natural. From Creative Juices, 978/762-MIXR or www.mixerz.com