



Summer Drinks: Variety Builds Sales

With summer finally here, there are plenty of opportunities to increase cold beverage sales by offering exciting new drinks to stimulate diners' taste buds. Standbys like lemonade, iced tea, iced coffee, smoothies and shakes are sure bets, but going beyond the traditional to offer new twists on old favorites, or to introduce refreshing new signature drinks, can supercharge sales.

Gary Hemphill, managing director of Beverage Marketing Corp. in New York, believes that consumer attitudes toward non-alcoholic drinks are getting more sophisticated. "People have higher expectations of their beverages and want them to be healthier, or provide benefits such as energy, or something that makes them feel better," he says. Offering fruit- or vegetable-based drinks caters to these expectations.

Fruit and vegetable juices can be given an unusual spin with the addition of herbs and spices – either as a flavor or a garnish. Mint is commonly used with fruits, but other good choices include bergamot, borage, dill, lemon balm, lemon verbena, parsley, peppermint, rosemary, rose geranium, sage and thyme.

For vegetable juices, herbs like basil, chives, coriander and tarragon are great additions. Among the best combinations: basil, lovage or parsley with tomato juice, dill or chives with cucumber juice and tarragon or mint with carrot juice.

Introducing less-familiar ethnic beverages to the summer drink menu is another way to create interest and build sales. On such drink gaining fans outside of its original niche is lassi, a traditional Indian drink designed to calm the palate after spicy curries. With spicy foods heating up virtually every segment and interest in Indian cuisine growing, lassies have increasingly broad appeal. Made by blending yogurt with water, salt and spices until frothy, lassies are also sometimes flavored with cardamom or roasted cumin. And sweet versions, made with fresh or canned mango pulp, fruit juice or rosewater, are especially popular. For recipe suggestions, visit www.cuisinecuisine.com/Lassi.htm

Slushies are also a refreshing summer beverage option. Use any combination of fruit juices, adding one part sugar for every four parts juice, depending on how sweet the juice is. The easiest way to make this is by combining water, juice, ice and sometimes, fresh fruit, in a blender. Alternatively, the mixture can be frozen and stirred at regular intervals to keep it slushy. Pile this refreshing mixture into glasses with wide rims and serve with either fat straws or spoons. See below for recipe.

Italian soda is another on-trend summer drink selection. Available ready to serve, it's also easy to make by adding flavored syrup to carbonated water. There are so many flavors of syrup that customers will never be bored. Flavors range from cherry to passion fruit and chocolate-mint and you can add a splash of cream. Use fun glasses and garnish with fruit such as a cherry or a twist of lime, sugar and maybe a novelty straw to help sell the sizzle.

Iced Tea: The faithful standby

One summer beverage that is ever popular is iced tea. A proliferation of ready-to-drink branded products makes it easier than ever to serve. And new flavored versions, including tropical, berry and citrus, are jazzing up the category and boosting sales, says Gary Hemphill, managing director of Beverage Marketing Corp. in New York.

Iced tea has been a southern staple for more than 100 years, ever since ice became easily available. In the South, iced tea is usually served ready-sweetened. A mistake many operators make these days is expecting their customers to try and dissolve sugar — or even more difficult: artificial sweeteners — in cold liquid. It's better to make up two jugs of tea instead, one sweetened and one not.

Long revered for its refreshing flavor, tea has also made news recently for its health benefits. It contains antioxidants called polyphenols which are believed to protect the body from cancer, heart disease and stroke, according to Sue Licher, a contributor to online medical site Web MD.

RECIPES

Orange Apricot Slush

Source: U.S. Foodservice

Yield: 10 servings

16 oz. canned unpeeled apricot halves in light syrup, drained
3/4 cup frozen orange juice concentrate
3/4 cup apricot nectar
1/4 cup sugar
1 liter bottle club soda or ginger ale, chilled
peel from one orange to make up to 10 orange peel curls (optional)

1. Place apricots in a blender or food processor; cover and blend or process until pureed. Add concentrate, nectar and sugar. Cover and blend until combined.
2. Pour into a freezer container. Cover and freeze until firm.
3. To serve, let stand at room temperature for 10 minutes. Scrape spoon across the surface of mixture to form slush. Fill glasses full with slush. If desired, garnish with orange peel curls. (To make curls, peel an orange in long, thin strips, wrap the strips around a chopstick, pencil, or skewer and let them stand at room temperature about 30 minutes or until they hold a curled shape.)

Italian Cream Soda

Source: allrecipes.com

Yield: one serving

8 oz. carbonated water
3/4-oz. passion fruit flavored syrup
3/4-oz. watermelon flavored syrup
1 oz. ounce half-and-half

Fill a tall glass half full with ice. Fill to two-thirds with carbonated water. Pour in watermelon and passion fruit flavored syrups, and then float the half-and-half on top. Stir when ready to drink.

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