

Let's muddle it OVER

It wasn't that long

ago that the only time bartenders reached for their trusty muddler was to make the occasional old-fashioned or to whack an unruly patron across the knuckles. But today, with *mucho* libations with strong Latin American influences getting mixed up in the cocktail shaker and the mojito quickly becoming the hottest drink sensation since the margarita first crossed the border, muddled cocktails seem to be everywhere. And I could not be more excited!

Stick Skill

The practice of infusing a libation with fresh fruit, herbs, vegetables, and spices through the process of muddling is far from new and is an art all bartenders should strive to master. Many popular drinks are muddled—mojitos, smashes, old-fashioned, juleps, caipirinhas, and caipiroskas, to name a few. In deference to bar terminology of old, I affectionately refer to these cocktails as “stick drinks,” the muddler at one time having been referred to as the “muddling stick.”

The muddling stick, or simply the muddler, is invaluable for unlocking innovative flavor combinations, and as a mixologist basking in the bar-chef era, I have been more and more inclined to promote its use. Unlike the rum-based mojito or the cachaça-based caipirinha, a stick drink can utilize any spirit you fancy and feature any fresh fruit you desire.

Stick Adventure

If there ever was a perfect opportunity to stretch your mixology wings, it is now, and the muddler is the instrument to help you take flight. Any pleasing

combinations of fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs (e.g., berries, pineapples, grapes, peaches, melon, apricots, cherries, cranberries, lemons, limes, kumquats, blood oranges, tangerines, clementines, ruby red grapefruits, rosemary, lavender, hibiscus, pepper, and ginger—to start with) can be muddled with a host of different sweetening agents such as simple or gomme syrup; ginger, mint, vanilla, or cinnamon syrups; maple syrup; agave nectar; cane syrup; or honey. Or how about substituting a liqueur such as blackberry or apricot for the sugar syrup? And what about the base spirit? Choose from any spirit that tickles your fancy, from flavored vodkas to complex rums, rich bourbons, and rye whiskeys. The options are limited merely by produce availability and your sense of adventure for combining flavors.

Stick Care

Before you begin your sensory journey, I have a few words about the muddling stick. Consider the muddler as one of your most important bar tools. Invest in a good solid hardwood muddler that has not been stained or lacquered. (Have you ever noticed the muddlers at most bars with pieces of varnish missing, and do you wonder where these bits end up?)

I became so frustrated with the inferior quality of muddlers on the market that I decided to design my own—big, made of dense cherry wood,

and perfect for the job. You can purchase excellent hardwood muddlers from Dave Nepove at mistermojito.com. Treat your muddler with respect: oil it regularly with food-grade mineral oil, keep it dry, and never put it in the glass washer. Take care of your muddler, and it will take care of you—and any unruly customers who might sneak into your bar.



► Tony Abou-Ganim is the proprietor of the Modern Mixologist, a beverage consulting firm that specializes in bar-staff training, product education, and cocktail development. He and his recipes have been featured in a variety of magazines and books and on television and radio shows. He is presently at work on his first book, *The Modern Mixologist*.

Cucumber-Ginger Crush

4 thick slices English cucumber,
peeled
4 pieces, 1/4-inch slices
gingerroot, peeled
1/2 lime, quartered
1 ounce simple syrup
1 1/2 ounce 10 Cane Rum
Chilled ginger ale or ginger beer
Cucumber slice for garnish

Muddle cucumber, ginger root, lime, and simple syrup in a mixing glass. Add ice and rum. Shake the ingredients until well blended and strain into an ice-filled 14-ounce goblet. Spritz with chilled ginger ale or ginger beer and garnish with a slice of cucumber. Yummy!