

It's Summertime.

So what's on the menu?

One should always consider and utilize the fresh fruits of the season such as watermelon, honeydew, cantaloupe, or any of the wonderful melons that are at their peak at this time of year. These fruits can be either juiced, as in the case of watermelon, or made into a handy puree for simple mixing.

Watermelons, Strawberries, and More

Take a look through a selection of cocktail books and see how many drinks feature fresh watermelon. Aside from the rare umbrella-bedecked blender drink, there are amazingly few. With its bright, clean flavor and naturally sweet juice, watermelon has definitely been underemployed as a cocktail feature. Aside from having a flavor that telegraphs summer fun, *Citrullus lanatus* is more than 90 percent water and is a great source of vitamins, potassium, and fiber. (Okay, perhaps that's not so important within the context of cocktail ingredients, but it impressive nonetheless.) Watermelon seeds are fabulous for spitting contests, but the seedless variety works best for drink preparation.

You can get strawberries all year, be they the hothouse variety or those that are picked early so that they can travel far distances without spoiling. But have you ever tasted a Michigan strawberry picked at the peak of ripeness? This is as close to strawberry nirvana as one can experience—fresh, ripe, succulent, and full of natural flavor and sweetness! Take full advantage of the short season, and when it's over, move on to another

fruit. Savor the experience until summer comes again and brings with it those incredibly flavorful strawberries.

Fresh, seasonal summer fruits and juices lend themselves to a wide variety of creations, from cocktails to long drinks, fizzes, and blended frozen drinks. They also work to complement a plethora of spirits but

particularly the white categories such as vodka, rum, gin, and Tequila. Half the fun comes from mixing things up and experimenting with various combinations of ingredients. As always, showcase the wonderful flavors of summer that Mother Nature has provided for us; don't cover them up with inexpensive, artificial products.



► 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*.

Zig Zag

I have always been a huge fan of watermelon, from my childhood days sitting on the back porch with a big wedge of ice-cold melon, spitting seeds at my kid brother, to the present. This recipe takes a little more preparation than most, but it is well worth the effort.

1½ oz Belvedere Citrus Vodka
½ oz Cointreau
3 oz fresh-pressed watermelon juice*
2 oz fresh homemade lemonade**
Watermelon spear and mint sprig for garnishes

Combine the vodka, Cointreau, watermelon juice, and fresh lemonade in an ice-filled mixing glass. Shake until well blended and strain into an ice-filled tumbler. Garnish with a watermelon spear and mint sprig.

*Press your watermelon just before the mixing to assure the freshest-quality juice.

**Make a simple syrup by dissolving 1 cup of granulated sugar in 1 cup of boiling water; allow to cool. Mix the simple syrup with 1 cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice (remove the seeds but not the pulp) and 4 cups cold water. Refrigerate until ready to use.

For a fun party, cut the top (approximately 4 inches) off a watermelon and reserve as the base of what will become a watermelon punch bowl. Carefully scoop all the meat out of the watermelon and use to make the juice, leaving the body intact. Batch-mix the drinks and pour into the watermelon punch bowl. Garnish with slices of lemon and serve in ice-filled glasses.