A Spirited Discussion

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By: Jerry Edwards

Sober up when it comes to cooking with spirits

To make the perfect drink, there has to be a perfect balance of sweet and sour or salty and sweet or even creamy and bitter. And cooking with spirits makes accomplishing these flavor profiles even more of a challenge.

Most dishes that I have been served that carry names like Jack Daniels Ribs or Tequila Lime Shrimp have been quite delicious. But the truth is they taste nothing at all like the spirit they are named after. There is no bourbon or sour mash taste in those ribs, just a sticky sweet glaze that can be only identified as a mixture of salt and sugar and other unidentifiable ingredients.

If you want to really cook with spirits and have the true intended flavors of the spirit come through, follow these guidelines:

1) To avoid the bitterness that alcohol will add to your dish, simmer the spirit for 30 minutes by itself in a non-reactive (copper is best) pot.

2) Keep in mind that you may flambé until the flame is extinguished for drama, but when the flame is extinguished, 75 percent of the alcohol is still present. After 30 minutes, only about 35 percent of the alcohol is remaining. By using this method, most of the alcohol will be removed, the spirit will be concentrated and bitterness will not be an issue for any recipe.

3) Create marinades from these concentrated spirits with complementary flavors (such as lime and salt to tequila, toasted nuts or spices to bourbon and citrus or herbs to vodka and gin).

4) Use the marinades judiciously on your center of the plate items so as to not over marinate. This will cause the meat or seafood to become mushy.

5) Create sauces from these marinades to reveal the true flavors of the alcohol.

6) When possible, use the spirits directly on the dish as a complementary flavor.

All “spirited” station party:

Around the Bar in 80 Minutes

The Lemon Vodka Oyster and Crab Bar
Lemon Vodka Marinated Lump Crab with Lemon Vodka Crema on Spoons
Orange Vodka Infused Oyster and Fennel Shooters
Pepper Vodka Drunken Oyster Cream Pasta

Bourbon Barrel Bar
Panko Crusted Southern Catfish with Bourbon Spice Glaze
Shirley Courier’s Corn Bread
Eggplant Fritters

Tequila Cantina
Smoked Margarita Shrimp Tacos
Lime and Chili Scented Shoestring Fries
Avocado Salsa
Rum DESSERTED Island
Rum over Trinidadian Vanilla Ice Cream
Rum Cakes with Hot Buttered Raisins
Absinthe De-mystified
Absinthe Lollipops

Hopefully you will be able to take some of these ideas and sell them to your clients that are looking for a different twist and would welcome an edible bar. All I can say at this point is “cheers.” Here’s to thrilling your customers with new ideas.

By Jerry Edwards
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