

HOST A TEQUILA TASTING



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it's *not* just for margaritas...

Perhaps more than any other liquor, tequila has been stuck with a bad boy reputation: a fiery venom that can only be slammed or camouflaged to be enjoyed.

A far cry from salted shots chased by lime, today's artisan tequilas are meant to be savored. **Cruz Tequila's** Todd Ellinwood dispels some myths about the misunderstood spirit with a little tasting how-to, and shows us that - far from frat party fare, tequila is actually a spirit full of taste and refinement.

Tequila 101

There are two main types of tequila: 100% agave tequila and mixto tequila. Commonly labeled 'gold', mixto tequila is made with 51% agave and 49% sugar syrup for flavor and color. "This is the type of tequila that usually brings hangovers, awful taste, and buyer's remorse," Ellinwood explains. When selecting spirits for your tasting, this is one case where you don't want to go for the gold.



Of the superior 100% agave tequilas, they basically come in three different styles.

Silver/Plata/Platinum/Blanco/White: Typically, this tequila has not been aged in any type of barrel. This is what makes the tequila crystal clear in color. Silvers can be aged, but it must be less than two months.

Reposado (rested): This tequila must be aged from two months up to 364 days in some type of barrel. The natural aging in barrels creates a light brown color and brings additional flavor profiles to the tequila like chocolate, cinnamon, and almond.

Anejo (aged or old): This tequila must be barrel-aged from one year up to three years. The added aging produces a dark brown color and enhances flavors of dark chocolate, oak, cinnamon, and sometimes whiskey.

Extra Anejo: This tequila must be barrel-aged a minimum of three years, which produces a tequila that is more similar to a cognac, with heavy oak flavors and a hint of agave taste.

Tasting Tequila

“Most people can enjoy 3-7 different tequilas before their palate is tired,” says Ellinwood, who suggests that hosts provide a variety of tequila styles and arrange the tasting from light to dark. “At **Cruz Tequila**, we recommend that consumers drink tequila however they



enjoy it, whether that is on the rocks, shaken with ice, or with your favorite sangrita. When tasting, it is best to sip them at room temperature to experience the florals and complexities. In order to enjoy the full experience of a tasting, we recommend using tequila stemware, which resembles a champagne glass and delivers the aromas perfectly to the palate.” **Reidel** crafts a beautiful glass called the Overture just for that purpose.

“People enjoy different flavors and aromas and tequilas will appeal to different people in different ways,” Ellinwood says. “When tasting, you should first smell the aromas. This can be done by placing your nose a few inches from the top of the glass and swirling the tequila. As you progress from silver towards reposado and anejo, you will smell and taste less agave flavors and more oak and whiskey flavors. Although taste is subjective, good tequila will present flavor complexities of the agave and aging process while still being smooth and soft.”

Food and Beverages

Your best bet is to save the prepared food and mixed drinks until after the tasting. “Most foods will change your palate and therefore change your tequila tasting experience,” Ellinwood says. Instead, lay out a variety of palate cleansers for your guests to enjoy with their tequila. “Food items like crackers or jicama are great for the tongue, and smelling coffee beans works well for the nose. These will cleanse the palate and allow you to experience each tequila individually.”

Post tasting, elevate traditional chips and salsa to a new level with a gourmet guacamole bar. Offer plain guacamole (remember to add some citrus to keep the avocado from coloring), and give your guests a variety of mix-in options like pico de gallo, diced mango, or a sweet pepper relish. Skewers of grilled meat and seafood spiced with lime and cilantro are also easy to prepare and are no-mess snacks for guests.



Looking for a post-tasting activity? Put your guests’ mixology skills to the test with a margarita challenge. “The rules can vary, but typically you must use the same tequila and all fresh ingredients,” Ellinwood says. “Supply a variety of ingredients, or have each guest bring their own, and make a margarita on-site. You then line up all the margaritas and judge each one individually.”