

# Beverage Trends of 2021: Non-Alcoholic Drinks

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Now that 2021 is finally here, it's out with the old and in with the new. And in the business side of beverages, no topic is more trendy right now than "functional beverages." Functional drinks are just what it sounds like. They're beverages that serve a "function," or basically, products that claim to benefit health, wellness or performance (1).

And according to The Hartman Group's Functional Food & Beverage and Supplements 2020 report, 29 percent of consumers have been consuming more functional foods and beverages since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (2).

The growing concern of the pandemic and awareness for health is shifting consumer preferences towards healthier beverages, and less-sugared, natural products with minimal artificial ingredients are being favored over the sugared juices or carbonated soft drinks (3). Clean, plant-based and healthy ingredients are also reflecting the consumers' desire to boost immunity.

“Consumers will aim to improve physical health by paying closer attention to macronutrients, maintaining a healthy weight, and choosing products suggested to boost immunity,” wrote Holly McHugh, Marketing Consultant at Imbibe, a Chicago-based beverage development company (4). “Ingredients that promote gut health, improve hydration and have anti-inflammatory properties will be in the spotlight. Superfoods that are naturally rich in immune-boosting ingredients like elderberry, acerola cherry, apple cider vinegar, ginger and turmeric will be popular. Brands will also fortify products with ingredients like zinc, vitamin C, probiotics and prebiotics” (4).

This trend has also spurred the growth of the non-alcoholic drink market. According to Donna Berry, writer for Food Business News, consumers, particularly millennials and Gen Z'ers, are “reaching for no- and low-alcohol options that provide the experience of imbibing but without the possible negative effects...in their quest for balance and health” (5).

More interesting is the changing behavior of the drinking majority. One NRN article reported that more people are now “more mindful about how much and when they drink” (1). “They are comfortable deciding not to drink on occasion. It is not a foregone conclusion that drinkers drink every time they visit a restaurant or bar.”

That's why we think non-alcoholic drinks will help restaurant operators tap into that potential market.

### **Alcohol-free Cocktails**

Alcohol-free cocktails are nothing new, but what will be different in 2021 is how they'll be prepared. According to Julieta Campos, Beverage Consultant and Bar Manager at Chicago's Whistler, these spiritless cocktails will be more focused on fresh ingredients, as well as “nuanced flavors and stylish presentations of leading craft cocktails” (1).

That opens the door to endless possibilities. “There are very interesting cocktails that you can make without the use of alcohol,” says Perbellini, head mixologist at newly opened Nella Kitchen & Bar in Los Olivos, California (6). “You have to explore the flavors and use what you have in the house and improve the selection... It's (also) a very good sales strategy because instead of offering sugary sparkling sodas for a low price, you can actually charge \$7, \$8, \$10.”

Here's some examples of cocktails from a Chicago Restaurant, Table at Crate, that showcase the trend perfectly: a Pretty in Pink (created by Julieta Campos), featuring a medley of green tea, sumac-pomegranate syrup and lime juice, shaken and strained over ice with a fresh

tarragon sprig; a Cucumber Crush, a sports fresh grapefruit and lime juice and demerara sugar syrup, shaken and strained over ice with a cucumber wheel garnish (1).

The first drink emphasizes the antioxidant and inflammatory properties of the pomegranate juice to appeal to today's consumers, and the second uses citrus fruits that help boost immunity. "These are thoughtfully made drinks," says Campos (1). "You're not stuck with a lemonade or an iced tea or some other afterthought."

## **Zero Proof Spirits**

Zero-proof spirits are still a novelty in the U.S., but they have started gaining a strong consumer base as a result of the health and wellness trend. It used to be that "Many of the leading non-alcoholic spirits that have emerged in the past decade hail from abroad," said Nicole Duncan, Editor of FSR Magazine, "Seedlip, Three Spirit, and Borrego from the U.K.; Lyre's from Australia; Ceder's from Sweden; Abstinence from South Africa; and more" (6). Now, American brands are starting to enter this market, with brands like Ritual Zero Proof, Kin Euphorics, and Proteau.

According to the founders of Kentucky 74, a non-alcoholic bourbon, zero-proof spirits provide consumers a way to drink a "cleaner cocktail without the unwanted side effects of imbibing" (6). And these drinks can be as complex as their alcoholic counterparts. The distilled non-alcoholic spirit Seedlip, for example, takes six weeks to make and is a blend of complex herbs, spices, and barks selected to create a delicate flavor (7). And despite the earlier skepticism, the non-alcoholic movement seems to be gaining traction as more consumers look beyond alcohol and seek alternatives that offer a new kind of sophistication.

Zero-proof spirits and cocktails address this gap in the market, said Duncan (6). But it's also important to recognize that the power of this trend has "less to do with proof and more to do with how it redefines the dining and drinking out experience.

Here are some examples of elevated zero-proof cocktails that you can try: Seedlip's Praying Mantis-Style, a spin on the gin sour that features English pea syrup and celery bitters (7). The Ritual Zero Proof Whiskey's Hot Toddy uses their zero alcohol whiskey and brings out the citrus notes from the orange and lemon meld perfectly with the spice of the cinnamon and clove (8).

## **Low Cal, Low Carb Drinks**

Drinks that are focused on weight loss, such as those made with sugar-free sweeteners, are also expected to trend this year as many try "to lose the extra pounds gained during the quarantine," said McHugh (4). "Consumers will also be focused on getting in shape and to improve overall health. Launches of sports nutrition products like protein drinks, electrolyte replenishers, performance enhancers, energy boosters and weight-loss elixirs will increase."

It's the Millennials and Gen Z who will be driving this trend forward. "Health and wellness are cited as important purchase drivers for Millennials," said Scott Helstad, technical services adviser, Cargill, a global food corporation situated in Minneapolis (5). In fact, his company's trend report says 60% of millennials often opt for a lower-calorie drink.

One way non-alcoholic beverages could appeal to these generations is to offer cocktails that are low in calories and carbs. "This will include reducing sugar or swapping it out for natural low-calorie sweeteners like stevia, monk fruit and allulose, improving nutrient density and incorporating plant-based, functional and clean label ingredients," said McHugh (4). Zero-proof alcohols are also great in that some brands (such as Ritual Zero Proof) advertise their products as having little to no calories (8).

Here are some examples of low calorie/ low carb cocktails that we like: Chef Diane Hendricks's Watermelon Moscow mule, using freshly grated ginger, club soda and stevia muddled with watermelon and lime juice—only 110-calories per concoction with the added alcohol (9). A margarita sweetened with stevia would rack up just 110-125 calories, compared to the 200-300 calorie average.

*Are you looking to maximize sales and efficiency in your beverage program? Is your restaurant considering a bar reorganization for the new year? Goliath Consulting Group offers a full suite of bar and beverage programs, from inventory, costing, and custom cocktail menus to staff training and safe alcohol practices. Contact [GetResults@GoliathConsulting.com](mailto:GetResults@GoliathConsulting.com) to learn how Goliath Consulting can help your restaurant today.*

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