

Rose Cocktails

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Urban Grill and Wine Bar in Foothill Ranch serves a Mrs. Kennedy, created by bartender Kimberly Smith

COLIN BAUGH

If you've ever used rose water or brewed a cup of rose tea, you know that America's favorite flower has a beguiling taste: sweet, subtly perfumed, a bit loamy, wild, wine-like and acidic. In short, it's the perfect ingredient to add complexity to a cocktail. The recent rediscovery of gin has brought renewed attention to the rose as a cocktail ingredient; it nicely complements the flavor profile of modern gin, which often contains rosy notes.

There's no consensus on what kind of roses work best for food and beverages, although many bartenders and chefs prefer fragrant Damask roses, which smell markedly stronger than hybrids.

The Damask, named after Damascus, Syria, is an old rose (meaning it predated the beginning of the hybrid era beginning in the 1860s) whose journey to Europe from its Middle Eastern home is as colorful and twisted as its showy petals. One theory is that a returning crusader,

Robert de Brie, brought the rose to Europe in the 13th century. Others think it reached England much earlier, during the Roman era.

Some rose historians claim that the physician of Henry VIII gifted him with a Damask rose plant sometime around 1540.

Damasks are hardy and easy to grow, although they have notably sharp thorns. There are two main varieties: summer Damask roses flower intensely in the summer; autumn Damask roses bloom repeatedly during summer and early fall.

There are only a few simple rules to follow to make sure your roses are safe to add to food or drinks:

- Plant the rose bush as far from the street as possible to avoid pollution from vehicle exhaust.
- Dig a hole about 2 feet deep. Fill the bottom with about 3 inches of good-quality manure, rather than commercial fertilizer, to encourage deep rooting.
- Avoid commercial plant food. Feed your rose with compost around its base.
- Don't use pesticides. Remove pests such as aphids by hand or by shaking the stems; a short blast from the hose also works. Antibacterial soap can be used sparingly.
- Harvest your edible roses before they're fully open. Clip the bottom of each petal (the white part) to avoid bitterness. Wash the petals and dry them on a paper towel. Be careful not to bruise the petals.

Some of Orange County's best bartenders were asked by local gin distiller Nolet Spirits U.S.A. to explore the intriguing taste profile of roses in cocktails. Here are the results.

The Molly Ringwald

Yield: 1 cocktail

- 2 ounces dry gin
- 3/4 ounce lemon juice
- 2 drops rose water
- 1/2 ounce brut rosé Champagne

Mixologist's notes: To make rose water, boil 2 liters of water with the petals from a dozen roses. Rose water can also be purchased at most Middle Eastern food markets and better liquor stores. Fee Brothers and Nielsen-Massey are two excellent brands.

Procedure:

1. Combine first three ingredients in a mixing glass, add ice, and shake. Add brut rosé.
2. With a Hawthorne strainer, strain cocktail into an Old Fashioned glass with ice.

Garnish with a grapefruit twist and an edible pansy flower.

Source: Brad Fry, Babette's Newport Beach

Mrs. Kennedy

Yield: 1 cocktail

- 1 1/2 ounces dry gin
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup
- 1/2 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 1 dash of rose water
- diced peaches
- 1/4 cup raspberries
- 3 ounces soda water

Procedure:

1. Muddle first six ingredients in a mixing glass, add ice and shake. Top off with soda water.
2. Garnish with rose petal and peach slice.

Source: Kimberly Smith, Urban Grill and Wine Bar, Foothill Ranch

Flying Rose

Yield: 1 cocktail

- 2 ounces dry gin**
- 1 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 3/4 ounce simple syrup
- 1/4 ounce rose water
- 1/4 cup raspberries

Procedure:

1. Muddle raspberries in a mixing glass. Add remaining ingredients with ice.
2. Shake and strain into a martini glass. Garnish with a Luxardo Maraschino cherry if desired.

Source: Amin Benny, Fig & Olive, Newport Beach

Nolet Vie Rose 75

Yield: 1 cocktail

- 1 1/2 ounces Nolet's Silver dry gin
- 1/2 ounce fresh lime juice
- 1/2 ounce rose water cardamom simple syrup
- 2 drops Peychaud's bitters
- 1 pinch of muddled dried rose petals

Rosé Champagne

Mixologist's notes: To make rose water cardamom simple syrup, combine 1/2 cup of super-fine sugar and 1 cup of rosewater in a small saucepan, simmering and stirring until sugar is dissolved. Add 1/4 cup cardamom and continue to simmer on low heat for five minutes. Remove pan from heat until completely cool, then refrigerate. Allow mixture to steep for approximately three days, then pour through a fine-mesh strainer to remove solids.

To make candied rose petal sugar rim, rinse and pat dry rose petals. Paint both sides of petals with simple syrup, egg whites or prepared meringue powder and sprinkle with granulated sugar. Dry on parchment or wax paper overnight. After completely dry, crumble into small pieces.

Procedure: Combine first four ingredients in a mixing glass, stir and strain. Top with rosé Champagne in coupe rimmed with candied rose petals.

Source: Allison Isambert, Montage Resort, Laguna Beach