

find your

Flavor



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of my favorite summertime memories is the sound of magical bells coming from the distant ice cream van, getting louder and louder as it approached our block. The summer air was sweet with the pungent fragrance of honeysuckle and my tongue, usually purple or orange from a recently consumed icy cold bottle of pop. Fun...fun...fun to coin a line from a favorite "Lost in Space" episode. Now that I am older and better informed, I might not choose the bomb pop with a grape Crush chaser as the place that I want to cash in my allotted calories for the afternoon, but back then, man...that was the only way to go.

With summer time upon us I thought it would be fun to suggest some ideas on flavors and give you the road map for two super easy summer indulgences. Either of these projects would be great for a 'girls night out', first date, parent/child project, or for you brave independent personalities out there.

Both sodas and sorbets are basically the same syrup recipe ultimately finished in different ways. Lollipops and hard candies are as well but let's not confuse the issue just yet. Broken down to the simplest idea, soda is just flavored syrup with bubbly water. Sodas were first conceived in the apothecary as a way to present medicines in a more appealing manner, as the song goes, "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." The ginger in ginger ale helps to settle an upset stomach, the once used coca leaves in Coca Cola helped to keep folks awake and alert. Today, we mostly enjoy a soda for the taste, or perhaps don't even think about the taste, it is just habit. The average American consumes an amazing fifty six gallons of soda pop per year. It is no secret that consuming that amount of soda is not healthy for us...at all! Hopefully you have already digested the idea that fifty six gallons of anything a year (with the exception of water) may not be the best option for your health. Ok, let's get past the "all things in moderation" message and back on track with the topic at hand, icy cold deliciously bubbly soda pop.

The easiest of homemade soda comes from simply taking club soda and flavoring it with something sweet. A little pure maple syrup or the remnant juice of the long gone maraschino cherries still taking up space in the door of your fridge both make readily available options. The next tier of soda making involves making from scratch your own

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Simple Syrup
 2 cups water
 2 cups sugar (granulated or raw)
Bring to a rapid boil and cool.

Sorbet
 2 cups simple syrup
 2 cups fresh fruit juice or puree
Mix together and freeze.

syrup creation. This simple syrup is a pastry kitchen standard. We use it daily to moisten cake layers, poach fruits, candy citrus peel and make beautiful sorbets. The flavor combinations are only limited by your sense of adventure. To make the syrup, simply place equal amounts of sugar (any) and water in a sauce pan, bring to a boil, cool and add flavored oil or extract of choice. You will find that depending on what you are trying to extract flavor from, you may need to simmer the ingredients in the syrup. For instance, cinnamon sticks, ginger, anise, citrus peel all need to simmer with the syrup to extract the flavor. Other flavorings simply need to 'steep' in the syrup. Herbal teas, basil or mint stems and even edible flowers such as rose blossoms or honeysuckle have delicate essential oils that will be lost or damaged when exposed to the excessive heat of boiling. Regardless of the infusion method, your syrup should be strong because you are going to dilute it with three parts carbonated water. How strong is strong enough? Taste it and see. You may also try adding a little salt and/or citric acid crystals to pop the flavor.

If you are really adventurous, you can carbonate your soda pop by forced carbonation. Forced carbonation forces CO₂ gas through your diluted syrup mixture just like the fountain drinks you get all over town. For the true craftswoman looking to bottle your creations you will need to use yeast to create the gas you need. Check out the internet for more info than you can shake a stick at.

Remember that champagne sparkles, so if you are an adult and want an "adult" soda pop, make your syrup and bubble it with champagne. Orange basil champagne pop...YUM!

Now let's talk sorbet.

Sorbet is a delicious way to enjoy icy flavors without the dairy and, subsequently, the calories associated with the dairy. You are going to want to make the same simple syrup as for a soda, only this time you are going to mix equal parts of the simple syrup with equal parts fruit juice of puree and freeze. If you have an ice cream machine simply use that, and if you do not just place the mixture in a shallow pan in the freezer and stir about every 15 minutes until frozen. I like to comb the super market for over ripe berries and melons for my sorbet, as the sugars are concentrated in the riper fruit which tends to give a truer flavor when frozen. Remember when flavors freeze they tend to "lock up," kind of like wine that gets too cold, so it is important to kick them up a bit to compensate for the flavor lost due to temperature.

As a Chef, I am constantly trying to find new flavors to spark my imagination. When I find one, I immediately run it through an obstacle course in my mind. This obstacle course attempts to pair the flavor with a dish, temperature, texture and possible complimentary flavor pairing. It does not end when I find what I think is the perfect match for said flavor. In fact, it immediately goes into a loop that questions: What about ALL the other possibilities? Why not that flavor fused into a pasta, soup, vinaigrette, ice cream or pastry? How would it (could it) be used with shellfish, beef, poultry or lamb? How would that flavor change if it were seared, smoked, grilled or poached? Then, how would it change if it were served hot, temped or frozen? Needless to say there are lots of voices banging around my head as I move through life. I offer this as a possible explanation for the furrowed brow that I tend to wear on my face, most of the time.

To this day, I truly enjoy the occasional, well crafted 'icy cold' soda pop... complete with purple tongue.

Cook with courage, passion and purpose...the rest will follow.

Love,
Chef John



SOME FUN FLAVOR IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

Soda Pops – Blueberry cinnamon, tart apple honey, lemon ginger pop ale, rhubarb, honeysuckle, chamomile, blackberry lime, watermelon...

Sorbets – Ruby red grapefruit w/ vermouth, strawberry orange vanilla, lavender lime, apple pie, coconut chai w/ rice milk, chocolate spearmint...

Get busy now and stock up so that you can enjoy beautiful summer flavors of fresh watermelon, peach or apple honey sorbet in the middle of winter. Again, champagne with a scoop of sorbet makes for a lovely fizzy fun summer beverage.

John Schopp is owner of Center Stage Catering and Edible Vibe. He and his beautiful family live (outside the box) in Rocky Mount, where rockstar catering is created, and the edible vibes are delectable! www.centerstagefood.com