



More Healthful Beverages Replace Sugary Sodas

With the sales of sugary, carbonated beverages continuing to decline in the U.S., nutrition-conscious consumers are making the shift toward drinks they perceive as being better for them.

Clearly, the nonalcoholic beverage landscape is changing, as demonstrated by the growing popularity of the following beverages:

Iced Tea. Recognized for its health benefits, natural ingredients and thirst-quenching qualities, iced tea is being consumed by consumers with greater frequency. Arlene Spiegel of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, a restaurant consulting company in New York, notes that there are hundreds of teas which can be brewed with botanical and spice infusions and which often give the operator a chance to create something unique.

Mocktails. Mocktails, which came of age in the '80s, are in full swing again in the form of drinks like Mojitos, made by muddling lime and mint; and Margaritas, flavored with fruit purees and served

frozen, says Spiegel. "These drinks are given the same beautiful garnishes as their boozy versions and appeal to kids of all ages."

Artisanal Soft Drinks. Interesting house-made sodas with unique flavor profiles are filling some of the gap left by slumping sales of traditional carbonated soft drinks. "Some restaurants are creating soft drinks with watermelon juice, berry juice, cucumber juice and natural syrups, which are delicious, refreshing, and yield a higher price than the typical [sodas]," says Spiegel. They can be sugary, though, so restaurants may want to reduce the sugar content in their homemade versions to appeal to calorie-conscious guests.

Over the past decade, sugary beverages have fallen steadily out of favor with many nutrition-minded consumers, only to be replaced by a new generation of favorites. "With so many choices of natural, healthier, functional beverages available in mainstream markets, the dining-out public want these options at their favorite restaurants, too," Spiegel says. ●