

FOOD & DRINK PAIRING

Sure is hot

By Sean Murphy
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

There is Hot, there is Florida Hot, and worst of all of there is Florida September Summer Hot. Florida September Summer Hot is all the other hots added together minus any patience you ever had.

Florida September Fun is standing in a deadly silent line at the hardware store on an oppressively September Hot afternoon and saying in a clear voice,

"Sure is hot."

Some people jump or just grind their teeth, others will moan and hold their heads, and occasionally someone will drop to their knees and begin to weep openly.

Fun.

By the time we all get to September and it has been too hot for too long, our patience, our appetites and our sense of humor have been diminished.

Mom told us that cocktails are not the cure for anything, but it is amazing how they can ease the pain of the summer hot blues. We have been crafting some Asian-styled cocktails for the summer hot blues at my favorite bar.

Family travels in Asia in the

wake of our path-finding daughter revealed a bag of tricks to make hot weather beverages truly amazing and refreshing. The Thais and Vietnamese generally begin with chilled sparkling fresh fruit juices such as watermelon, mango and peach. They blend in moderate background flavors – ginger, basil or lime. They then finish the drinks with a startling flash of bright, clean heat from jalapeno or Thai peppers.

You get a cool and sweet beginning, then a pleasant surprise from the ginger and then a "Wow" from the peppers – and we are off to the races.

Inevitably the peppers in these concoctions prompt the question, "Why are hot peppers so popular in hot climate cultures?"

First – pepper and spices tend to kill bacteria.

Second – they mask the flavors of spoiled food. Never order the Chef's Special if it is curried shrimp. He has some old shrimp he has to dump – and he is covering it with curry and cream.

Third – the capsaicin, the "hot," in hot peppers acts to increase metabolic rate. Increasing metabolism

means increased perspiration, which, of course, cools the body. Increasing metabolism also means increasing activity and appetites, including sexual appetites. Yet another reason to indulge in summer cocktails.

For a refreshing and stimulating Summer Hot Cocktail try adding fresh ginger and sliced Thai peppers to your favorite gin or vodka. The Vietnamese peppers have a much cleaner and crisper heat flavor than Tabasco, but Tabasco is handy and will do in a pinch. Finish the glass with a kosher salt that has been kicked up with a little cayenne pepper. Rim only part of the glass so you can alternate crisp ginger-peppery sips with

the salty ones.

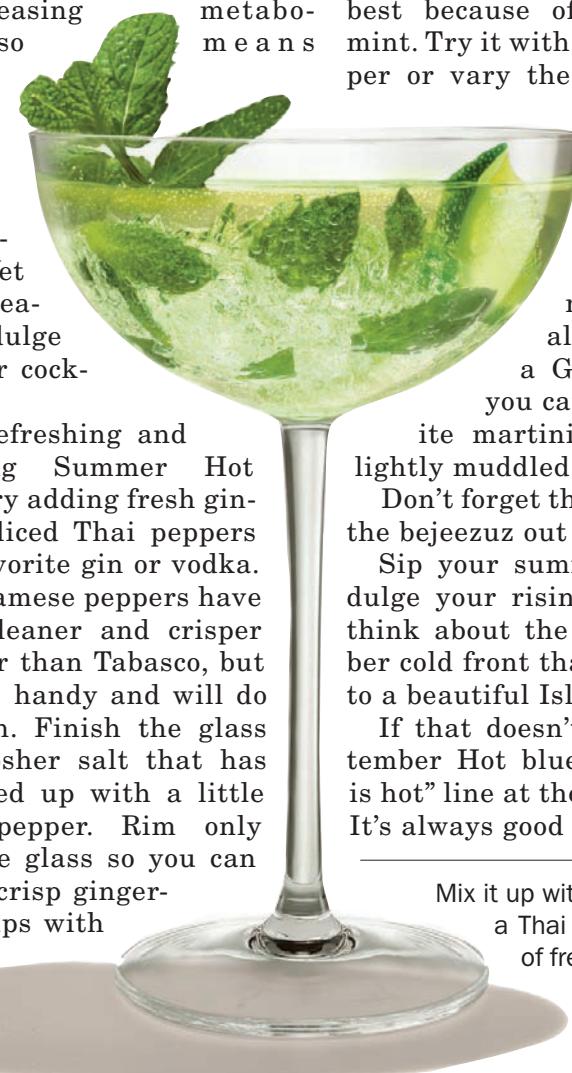
The mojito is always a summer best because of the refreshing mint. Try it with a little Thai pepper or vary the concoction with a splash of fresh mango or peach juice. Another classic is the "cool as a cucumber" martini – generally prepared with a Geneva gin – but you can take any favorite martini blend and add lightly muddled cucumber slices.

Don't forget the ice – and shake the bejeezuz out of it.

Sip your summer cocktail, indulge your rising appetites, and think about the inevitable October cold front that is coming soon to a beautiful Island near you.

If that doesn't cure your September Hot blues, try the "Sure is hot" line at the hardware store. It's always good for a smile.

Mix it up with mojitos by adding a Thai pepper or a splash of fresh mango or peach juice.



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