

Tequila

Tequila is one of the rising stars of the liquor industry. Much of its success is due to the popularity of the margarita and the rising sales of the super-premium brands.

Tequila is not made from the cactus. It is made from a plant which has a cactus-like appearance called the agave plant. By Mexican government standards, tequila must be made using a minimum of 51% blue agave plant. Typically, an agave plant is aged 8-12 years before it is harvested. The core of the plant has the appearance of a large pineapple. It is called the "pina." This portion is removed and cut into pieces. These pieces are baked in large steam ovens and then compressed. The result is a sweet juice which is allowed to ferment and then distilled in copper pot stills at a low proof. The product is distilled a second time to reach an alcohol content of 55% or more. Some tequilas are distilled a third time. Water is added to reduce the proof. Tequilas to be sold in the U.S. are typically bottled at 80 to 86 proof.

Mezcal is the broad name for tequila. That is, tequila is actually the name of superior mexcal produced in or around the town of Tequila and the area of Tepatitlan in Mexico. Mezcal was invented by the Spanish conquistadors. They began to distill an Aztec drink called pulque, which is fermented agave juice.

Tequila is broken down into the following types:

- **White:** White tequila is clear in color and usually unaged.
- **Gold:** There are no Mexican government requirements on this product. Gold tequila obtains its color from the addition of caramel or aging six months or more in casks. Gold tequila does not have to be aged.
- **Reposado:** By Mexican government standards, reposado tequila must be aged in oak barrels from two months to a year.
- **Anejo:** By Mexican government standards, anejo tequila must be aged in oak barrels for one year or more. Tequilas aged from two to four years may be referred to as "muy anejo."
- **100% Blue Agave:** As the name implies, tequila made solely from the blue agave plant is called 100% blue agave.
- **Mixto:** This is a tequila which is distilled from a mixture of 51% agave juice and 49% other sugars.

Mezcals often contain a worm in the bottle. Tequilas will not contain a worm.

One of the most popular tequila drinks, the margarita, is made with tequila, triple sec (or premium orange liqueur), and lime juice (or margarita mix). Super-premium tequilas can be enjoyed in margaritas or alone in a snifter.