

Beverage infusions: market overview

Zenith Global's Roberto Donati and Christina Avison share their research and insights on some of the summer-inspired beverage infusion product launches of 2021.

As we are all excited for a bright summer of increased freedoms after a gloomy year passed, beverage flavour trends are reflective of nostalgia for foreign climes, beach cocktails and exotic fruits. Product launches in the last 18 months across a variety of soft drinks categories have reflected this, from fruit juice blends to sodas and seltzers, with a surge in NPDs ready for summer 2021.

Summer infusions

PepsiCo's Tropicana launched tropical premium juice drinks based on classic cocktails for the US market, including: Piña Colada, Caribbean Sunset and Strawberry Kiwi Sunrise.

In the UK flavoured waters category, Refresco's MacB brand announced a sugar-free watermelon flavour, while Radnor Hills released Radnor Splash with flavours such as watermelon and orange-passionfruit.

Danone Waters launched Volvic Touch of Fruit variants, including a mango-passionfruit flavour, and pineapple-orange with added Vitamin B6 in an attempt to infuse one of its most popular flavour combinations with added health benefits.

In the US, passionfruit and pineapple also feature in Ocean Spray's latest innovation, Ocean Spray Wave, which includes mango-passionfruit, cranberry-pineapple and mandarin-blackberry flavours.

Genki Forest's new range of canned flavoured waters include plum, grape and lychee, among others. Following its launch in the Chinese market, the company – one of the fastest growing beverage companies in China – plans to expand into the US and Singapore, with other new markets in Europe, Asia and North America proposed for later in 2021.

Canadian Truss Beverages also launched new flavour infusions for summer 2021 with its Little Victory CBD range, including watermelon, dry grapefruit, blood orange and dark cherry.

Red berries

Cherry, pomegranate and strawberry are all popular flavours leading this year's trend for red fruit infusions – for example, French craft soda brand Mona's strawberry-raspberry variant. PepsiCo's new Gatorlyte sports drink range features cherry-lime and strawberry-kiwi flavours,

while Coca-Cola's AHA sparkling water brand added raspberry and acai, and mango and black tea varieties to its existing line launched in 2020, which features strawberry-cucumber, peach-honey and blueberry-pomegranate.

Herb garden

Inspired by craft cocktail and spirits trends, craft soft drinks are pairing herbs, florals and botanicals with fruit flavours for a refreshing, flavourful experience. The booming seltzers category spreading across North America and Europe has offered the opportunity for companies to branch out with more experimental flavours.

Consumers are looking for more audacious sensory experiences, so brands are introducing unfamiliar flavours paired with the familiar to enliven consumers' palettes.

Craft sparkling water brand Aura Bora was launched in 2020 with unique herbal flavours including lemongrass-coconut, peppermint-watermelon, lavender-cucumber and cactus-rose, while Suntory Beverage & Food France launched new Schweppes mixer flavours: raspberry-verbena and grapefruit-rosemary.

This trend is truly global, reaching Saudi Arabia where Nai's RTD teas include hibiscus-pomegranate-rose and peach-mango-jasmine. Cherry blossom season in Japan is not only a top tourist attraction, but a popular seasonal flavour with Sakura flavoured beverages capitalising on this each year. Starbucks and Coca-Cola release annual cherry blossom products in Japan, whilst Danone Waters Volvic Touch of Fruit brought a raspberry-cherry blossom variant to the British market.

Rising health consciousness will continue to be a topical driver in light of an increased desire to build up immunity and maintain general wellness. Low sugar, healthy hydration, vitamin boost and natural ingredients will continue to appeal to consumers, without compromising on taste, with increasing consumer preference for zero preservatives, colours, additives or artificial flavours.

While the pandemic continues to shape our experiences, with restrictions lifting further and hope on the horizon, a sunnier palette for non-alcoholic beverages is certainly forecast for summer 2021. ●

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A taste of summer

There are plenty of tried and tested flavours hitting the beverage market this summer, but what about some of the lesser-known tropical tastes? FoodBev speaks to some of the flavour innovators taking a leap of faith with fruits such as dragon fruit, guava and pomelo.

Tropical and exotic flavour infusions have long been popular in the beverage industry, particularly for manufacturers looking to push out their summer-inspired NPDs.

But the Covid-19 pandemic has also accelerated certain trends in this category, as consumers experiment with new flavours at home, or aim to recreate the feeling of going on holiday to faraway lands.

"Multiple lockdowns saw people experimenting with food and drink more at home and many created their own at-home drinking experiences, including tiki bars, to deliver a taste of the tropics despite travel restrictions," Vicky Berry, European business development manager at Synergy Flavours, told FoodBev.

Adam Cohen, marketing manager at ITS agreed, commenting that: "Exotic and fruity flavours are big every summer, but this year especially we'll be crying out for escapism and something to get the taste buds bubbling. Everyone knows this year has been tough and there is still so much uncertainty surrounding people's summer holidays and breaks away."

Synergy's Berry also recognises an intrinsic link between fashion trends and food/beverage products: "In 2019 and 2020, we saw a wave of tropical fruits in fashion. So far in 2021, we are already starting to see more pink fruits in fashion with lychee, pomegranate and dragon fruit prints – this again may influence the types of flavours we see in food and drink."

Flavour fusions

Caribbean and tropical flavours are considerably popular at the moment, with fruits such as mango and passionfruit becoming core profiles in the beverage sector. These join common profiles such as coconut and pineapple at staple favourites.

Additionally, these tropical, fruity flavours translate well into alcoholic beverages such as cocktails, hard seltzers, flavoured beers and ciders, and spirits and liqueurs. That said, the alcohol industry also provides a hotbed for innovation and experimentation with lesser-known exotic flavours.

"The pornstar martini is still one of the most popular cocktails in the UK with its refreshing blend of passionfruit, lime and vanilla but we have seen rising interest in the lesser-known fruits – like guava, lychee and dragon fruit," said Berry.

Berry claims that dragon fruit is a popular choice due to its colourful and vibrant aesthetic, among other factors: "Dragon fruit is 'instagrammable' and therefore appeals to Millennials and Gen Z. It is an established profile in Asia but we are seeing more European launches with bright pink/fuchsia beverages. The fruit also has multiple nutritional benefits that manufacturers are latching on to – it is rich in antioxidants and a good source of fibre. However, it seems to be the visual and nutritional benefits ▶



Dragon fruit is 'instagrammable' and therefore appeals to Millennials and Gen Z





that attract consumers, as it is not the tastiest fruit. Manufacturers are therefore incorporating more fantasy dragon profiles with certain notes augmented or flavourings paired with more dominant fruit."

Berry also highlights exotic citrus as a rising star in the beverage flavours category, with fruits such as yuzu, pink grapefruit and mandarin taking centre stage. "These flavours are particularly interesting to consumers as the fruits may be less readily available to purchase in supermarkets. They are also harder to prepare – having the profile in a beverage allows them to taste something new and exciting without the hassle of preparing the fruit."

Cohen at ITS adds that beverage flavours featuring 'exotic' and 'summer' claims must innovate to compete in a crowded and busy market, as many of the big core flavour profiles have been replicated too many times.

To stand out this year and in 2022, Cohen says manufacturers should focus on how well these flavours work together. "It's all about hybrids here – how can you add another fruity flavour note to an already big selling flavour to make it more exciting and premium?"

He continued: "This works well for more obscure or unknown fruity flavours. Brands struggle to incorporate such flavours into big lines as many consumers simply haven't heard of them, so it's a risk. A perfect way to counter this is to lead with a big popular exotic flavour like pineapple, passionfruit or mango and pair it with something up and coming like yuzu, guava or pomelo."

"You could also be really brave by mixing tried and tested pineapple, grapefruit and mango with something a little different. We've seen great results with grapefruit and dark chocolate, for example, which delivers a surprisingly refreshing but bitter flavour that knocks everyone's socks off. But our top flavour tip for a refreshing summer flavour is kiwi and cucumber – it may sound slightly odd, but trust us, it's the most refreshing thing you'll ever try. Also works great in milk drinks (we're not joking)."



Exotic innovations

At Synergy, one main focus for 2021 will be to explore the nuances of different types of citrus through the company's educational 'Citrusology' programme. The programme includes a webinar series that focuses on different citrus fruits.

"We started with lemon and are launching our orange webinar soon, which will show how exciting the flavour is. We will illustrate how a chinotto variety is different to a mandarin, which fruit is the juiciest and which orange has more floral characteristics."

ITS, on the other hand, is focusing on healthier formulations that are packed with less sugar typically found in summer drinks. Over the past year, the company has been perfecting its SweetLITE Body natural sweetener solution that reduces sugar content by up to 50%, but also factors in the much-needed mouthfeel.

"As I'm sure anyone that has tried to remove sugar from a drink knows, sugar doesn't just help

with sweetness but also adds much-needed depth to the mouthfeel," Cohen added.

This summer, consumers can expect to see a wealth of well-known flavours, including pineapple, coconut, mango and passionfruit, as well as the introduction of lesser-known beverage flavours such as guava, dragon fruit, kiwi and pomelo.

To pique the interest of consumers, beverage manufacturers must be bold with their flavour choices, as Cohen concluded: "Don't stand still, always make sure your products stand out and hold their own in the market. Don't be afraid to be brave and go for something slightly different – consumers are ready to try new things, rather than the same products they have been seeing for years. Believe in a braver flavour." ●



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