

MARCH 2010

Root Beer Grows Up

With all due respect to the floats of our youth, ours is strictly for the 21-and-over crowd *by* LORA ZARUBIN



Nigel Cox

Who doesn't have a childhood memory of root beer? Mine is vacationing in Napa Valley when I was a kid and always stopping at the local A&W in St. Helena for a hamburger and a frosty mug. Unlike most youngsters, I was not a fan of soda pop in general, but even then I was taken with root beer's complexity of flavors, which were more unusual and provocative than any other soft drink.

As a grown-up, I've retained my passion for root beer, in fact if anything it has reignited with so many artisanal choices that are bringing the beverage's quality and uniqueness to a whole new level. Oh, and there's the recent introduction of an all-new aromatic American liqueur, Root, inspired by—yep, root beer.

Because I've always been fond of classic desserts with a twist, I've enjoyed mixing up an adult version of the root-beer float using Root. (For more about Root, created by Steven Grasse, the distilling genius behind such spirit icons as Hendrick's Gin and Sailor Jerry Rum, check out [Cocktail Confidential](#).)

Root-Beer-Granita Float made with Root Liqueur

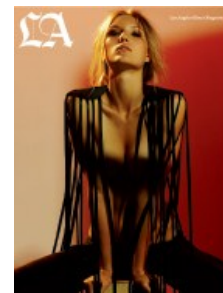
Makes 4

Prep time: 12 hours

2 cups root-beer granita* (recipe below)

4 large scoops vanilla ice cream

2 bottles of Virgil's Special Edition Bavarian Nutmeg Rootbeer, chilled



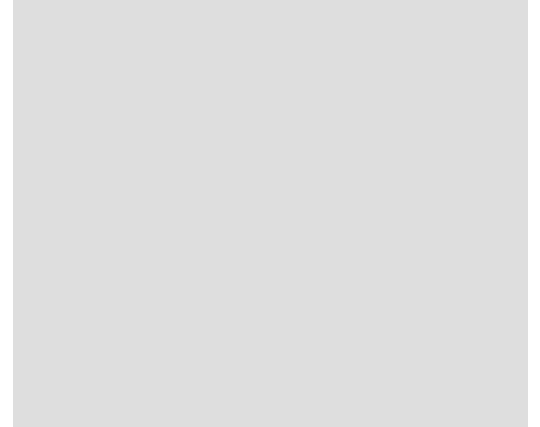
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8 ounces Root liqueur

The secret to this recipe is making sure you freeze your dessert glasses, scoop out the ice cream ahead of time and refreeze the ice cream balls until you're ready to assemble the floats.

To assemble floats, pour 2 ounces Root liqueur into each of the frozen glasses. Place several tablespoons of the root-beer-granita mixture over the liqueur. Top with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Pour chilled root beer over the layers of granita and ice cream almost to the top. Top with the remaining granita. Serve immediately.

*Root-Beer Granita

Pour 16.8-ounce bottle of root beer into shallow bowl and place in freezer. Every two hours, scrape down the sides of the bowl with a fork and stir the frozen bits into the center. Repeat until all of the mixture is frozen and flaky.



Brain Leatart

TASTING NOTES

After a panel and I tasted dozens of contenders, I realized there are not only brilliant root beers, but there are also quite a few different styles. Root beer, I learned, is incredibly complex and can have any number of spice and aromatic notes, as well as different textures, heads and effervescence. And that made it even harder to narrow down the selection. These are our favorites, and they represent a good range of style and diversity for the casual root-beer drinker and connoisseur alike. Freeze a mug—and enjoy the latest and greatest frosty American beverage.

Sparky's Fresh Draft Root Beer

Loaded with major complexity and notes of spices, cinnamon and a bite of licorice with the most elegant finish, almost a velvety effervescence. A benchmark root beer with enough going on to keep you coming back for more.

Virgil's Special Edition Bavarian Nutmeg Rootbeer

Virgil's microbrewed root beer is synonymous with quality and integrity and is leading the pack. Made in Germany with water from the Bohemian Forest, it's outrageously delicious. Made with all natural ingredients, it's a brew for the true root-beer connoisseur.

Gale's Root Beer

Created by a pastry chef who, while living abroad, wasn't able to get root beer and took matters into her own hands. This root beer screams cinnamon, ginger and vanilla all coming together in perfect balance with excellent effervescence.

Americana Root Beer

Evokes something very American, with smooth caramel, amaretto and wintergreen notes and a nice kick in the finish.

Iron Horse Root Beer

A very elegant root beer. On first tasting, I had notes of crème brûlée and cotton candy. The spices come at you a little later and are totally satisfying.

Capt'n Eli's Root Beer

Really complex, with great effervescence while staying completely balanced.

Death Valley Root Beer

All natural, no preservatives and flash pasteurized, this brew reminds me of an old-school root beer. Amazingly rich with pronounced characteristics—it is amazingly

pleasing.


Frostie Diet Root Beer

I'm not a fan of diet sodas, but if you are watching calories and still want to enjoy a delicious root beer, Frostie is it. Not overly sweet and free of a chemical after taste, it will quench your root-beer appetite.

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sounds delish :)

Posted by: [Kristan](#) | [03/15/2010 at 11:29 PM](#)

What about Abita's and Waiialua? I much preferred those (and others) over Gale's, as much as I love all things Chicago. Root liqueur sounds, but surely there are other alcoholic base? Galliano? vanilla vodka?

Posted by: [SinoSoul](#) | [03/18/2010 at 12:42 PM](#)

YUM that looks amazing

Posted by: [sarah](#) | [04/03/2010 at 03:32 AM](#)

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