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Cocktails Get Royal Treatment In Gin Garden Pop-Up Bar

by: JENNIFER HATTAM

in: DRINKING



8.28.14 - With the world's largest collection of living plants, and its scientists working around the globe to preserve biodiversity, the Kew Royal Botanic Gardens in London is internationally renowned for its conservation work. Less well known, perhaps, is the fact that its 300-acre grounds harbor the ingredients for some darn good cocktails.

"Sweet cicely, or garden myrrh, is very fragrant, but it also has a natural sweetness so it's good to pair with rhubarb," says Jo Farish, founder of the **Gin Garden**, as she hands over a Strawberry Cup. The beguiling early summer concoction of strawberry-infused gin, homemade rhubarb-and-sweet-cicely cordial, and lemon juice is garnished with fresh strawberries, cucumber and edible flowers.

Summertime gin garden

The Gin Garden's summer residence at Kew Gardens, where Farish and her team have turned a small greenhouse into a jungle-like bar serving up gin cocktails and tonics on weekends (Friday through Sunday) and British bank holidays, offers plenty of inspiration for **mixologists**.

"We're taste-testing new ingredients as they come into season — we've been infusing cherry gin, with more fruits and berries coming up, and the lavender and Roman chamomile growing over there will be used in drinks when they're ready," Farish says.

The cocktail menu, which changes weekly, "uses bits and pieces from the Kew Gardens, but we can't use too much," she says. "The ingredients are all things that are grown here, but these plants have to be preserved."

Serving drinks based on what's growing nearby is the focus of the Gin Garden, which Farish started in fall 2012 after a successful trial run making apple martinis for an event at a historic house and garden run by the U.K.'s **National Trust** from the apples, lavender and honey on the property's grounds.

Her company, which has taken its traveling botanical bar to museums, flower shows, design fairs and other locations in and around London, melds Farish's background in event planning and garden design — and, she says, some very British sensibilities.

Do-it-yourself gin

"British people are real gardeners and lots of people **make their own gin**. The two go hand in hand," Farish says. "People are used to preserving (food) and having something to get through the winter." She assures urban dwellers with more limited space that plenty of cocktail ingredients are easy to cultivate in a window box.

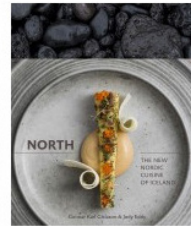
In addition to its pop-up bars, the Gin Garden also offers workshops on growing botanical ingredients at home and making infusions and syrups.

To make the infused gin that forms the base of its refreshing Kew-cumber cocktail, for example, Farish recommends slicing up cucumbers like you would for a sandwich, filling up a Mason jar halfway with the vegetables and topping it off with gin.

"Sip it the next morning and see how it tastes," Farish says. "If the flavor isn't strong enough, just close the jar up and try it again the next morning."

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*Cocktail ingredients at the ready in the Gin & Tonics Garden, including fresh strawberries and gooseberries and The Herball's aromatic waters.
Credit: Jennifer Hattam*

A Gooseberry & Fennel cocktail is made from gin infused with the fennel that grows wild along the coast of Norfolk, in the east of England. The drink has a subtly acidic bite — and plenty of health benefits. “Gooseberries have vitamins A, B, C and antioxidants; they were actually used to ward off scurvy before citrus fruit was available in the U.K.,” Farish says.

The temporary **Gin & Tonics Garden** at Kew is part of the botanic garden's summertime “Plantasia” festival, which includes a variety of activities, from a healing plants tour to a barefoot walk. The activities are aimed at introducing visitors to plants' benefits “for body, mind, and soul.”

Benefit of plants

The passiflora tincture in the Rose Garden cocktail, for example, is said to be good for anxiety, while the namesake ingredient in the **Elderflower** Fizz is said to improve resistance to allergens. Angelica root, one of the six botanicals in the No. 3 London Dry Gin used to make the Kew cocktails, has long been employed in traditional medicine as a treatment for digestive issues.

“Nearly all plants have some kind of health benefit,” says Farish, who prefers to use a masticating or cold-press juicer for serious cocktail-making because it preserves more of the nutrients in fruits, vegetables and herbs.

Some of the Gin Garden's drinks get an extra boost from a spritz of aromatic water before serving. The water is applied over the top of the glass with an old-fashioned perfume atomizer. Made by the London-based company **The Herball**, these aromatic waters are distilled using the same method as gin itself, retaining the complete essence of herbs and flowers like the chamomile spritzed over the Strawberry Cup or the geranium, rose and lavender that add a floral twist to the otherwise classic G&T.

“There are so many botanicals you can use with gin. It's pretty limitless,” Farish says, mentioning her recent discovery of a small distillery in Cornwall that makes a violet leaf gin. “You really have free reign with ingredients compared to other drinks.”

Though gin is often thought of as a summertime tippie, Farish is already thinking ahead to the chillier seasons to come after the Kew pop-up bar closes its doors Sept. 7. “I'd like to do a winter gin garden,” she says. “Gin makes a great hot **toddy** with warming winter herbs and spices like ginger, sage and thyme.”

The Kew-cumber

Ingredients

7 parts (35 milliliters) cucumber-infused No. 3 London Dry Gin (infuse your gin with sliced cucumbers for 48 hours)

1 part (5 milliliters) lime juice

1 part (5 milliliters) basil and mint syrup (simmer water and sugar to form a simple syrup then add herbs, keep on heat for 5 minutes, strain and bottle)

Top with freshly pressed (juiced) cucumber juice that has been diluted with sparkling water -- 1 part cucumber juice to 10 parts sparkling water

Directions

1. Fill a highball glass with ice and add the ingredients above, stir, garnish with a slice of cucumber and a sprig of mint.

* Recipe courtesy Jo Farish. Find more recipes at **The Gin Garden**.

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Main photo: *The pop-up Gin & Tonics Garden at the Kew Royal Botanic Gardens in London.* Credit: Jennifer Hattam

Zester Daily contributor **Jennifer Hattam** is an independent journalist based in Istanbul. Her work has appeared in *The Atlantic Cities*, *BBC Wildlife*, *California*, *IPS*, *Istanbul Eats*, *The National*, **Salon.com**, *Time Out Istanbul*, *Wired* and *Women's eNews*. She also leads culinary tours in her adopted city and blogs about her experience at **The Turkish Life**.

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