



# FOOD & WINE

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## MAKE A BETTER MARGARITA WITH THESE 5 TEQUILAS

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These editor-approved tequilas are sure to upgrade everyone's favorite summertime cocktail.

At its core, the margarita is a remarkably straightforward cocktail. The classic version consists of just three ingredients — tequila, orange liqueur, and lime juice, though a bit of agave syrup is a common addition, as is a salted rim. Given the simplicity of the recipe, each component is crucial to the final character and quality of the drink.

Unfortunately, this deceptive simplicity has also made the margarita ripe for over-manipulation and occasional outright bastardization. Creativity is important behind the bar and at your kitchen counter drinks setup, and the margarita is particularly receptive to the addition of fresh fruit purees or juices, spices, and herbs. But when the drink starts to resemble dessert or a salad more than a cocktail, things have likely gone too far.

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Then there's the issue of margarita mixes, an increasing number of which are excellent, yet too many are still loaded with chemicals and artificial sweeteners. One well-known brand (it will remain nameless here) boasts high-fructose corn syrup as its second ingredient, as well as Sodium Hexametaphosphate and three different gums, including cellulose, acacia, and ester. Things are improving in this realm, and there are also some well-made RTD margaritas, but for too long a time, one of the most refreshing and sneakily complex cocktails in the canon had its reputation damaged by these less-than-ideal imitations.

Here's the good news: Crafting your own thoughtful, delicious margarita is incredibly easy. Just make sure you either squeeze your own lime juice or, if you're making a batch, use a high-quality jarred lime juice not from concentrate, which often comes off as unbalanced and overly tart. Be sure to employ the best triple sec or orange liqueur that fits your budget; Cointreau and Grand Marnier are always fantastic options, as is Combier, but these bottles can add up quickly if you're batching your margaritas for a crowd.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, choose a great tequila. Just like a Martini made with a poor-quality vodka or gin will result in a disappointing cocktail, mediocre tequila will ruin an otherwise well-made margarita. The five under-\$50 tequilas below — all blanco tequila, though reposados also make excellent margaritas — produce decidedly different cocktails from one another, but they're all delicious and offer the experience of what a great margarita can be.

#### **Pasote Blanco**

In this tequila, caramelized agave notes mingle with honey-coated almonds and corn nuts. This almost earthy spirit makes for a balanced sipper on its own, and works well both on the rocks and neat. When mixed into a margarita, it takes on a totally different character, and gains liveliness from freshly squeezed lime juice.

#### **PASOTE / BLANCO TEQUILA**