

## LIQUIDS

# Berry, Berry Good

The elusive elderflower blooms in creative cocktails.

By Brandy Rand

**ELDERFLOWER LIQUEUR HAS** captivated cocktail enthusiasts with its unique taste and magical mixability; it gets along with everything from champagne to tequila. Adam Weng, bar manager at G Bar and Kitchen in Swampscott explains elderflower's appeal: "The aroma is floral, but not the flavor. As an ingredient it provides just enough sweetness for a balanced cocktail."

Known as *Sambucus nigra*, these edible flowers are tiny, white, and star-shaped. They grow widely across mountainous regions in Europe and only bloom for a few short weeks from late May to early June. The flower heads are very fragrant but lose their bloom—and flavor—quickly. That hasn't stopped many cultures from using elderflower as a homemade cordial mixed with sparkling water, soda, tea, and wine.

The most popular brand of elderflower liqueur is St. Germain, which debuted in 2007 in what looks like a Parisian apothecary bottle. Produced in France, St. Germain created quite a stir in the bartending world because no one had successfully been able to bottle the essence of fresh elderflower in a shelf-stable liqueur. It took the company a few years to get it right—previous attempts rendered a bitter liquid.

At G Bar and Kitchen, St. Germain plays a supporting role to a variety of cocktails: Sofie's Mom is a garden-fresh mix of Farmer's Organic Gin, muddled cucumber and lemon, while the French Intervention



**Garden in a Glass**  
Sophie's Mom features organic gin, muddled cucumber, and lemon.

is a citrusy combination of silver tequila and grapefruit juice. Both cocktails use elderflower liqueur to bring the flavors seamlessly together.

Weng says elderflower is a bartender's best friend because it goes with so many things. "It mixes particularly well with gin because the floral notes play off the evergreen." He features a cocktail called the Portland Flower made with Maine-brewed Allagash beer, gin, lemon, and of course, elderflower.

At-home bartenders can add a little "ooh la la" to cocktails made with elderflower liqueur using brands like newcomer St. Elder (produced in Somerville, Massachusetts). Add a few tablespoons to champagne or white wine with a twist, and shake with vodka, gin, or tequila.

## Uncommon Uses for Elderflower

**As Medicine:** Packed with antioxidants, elderberry has been used to treat ailments like flu symptoms and allergies for hundreds of years.

**As Decoration:** The stunning blooms are a garden showpiece, attracting butterflies and birds that feast off the berries.

**As Music:** In Eastern Europe, elder branches are used to make flutes.

**As Food:** Relishes and fruit pies are a delicious delicacy made from the berries and flowers in Austria, Italy, and Germany.

**As Magic:** Harry Potter fans may recall the most powerful wand in the world of wizards was called the Elder Wand because it was made from *Sambucus*.