

Sweeteners

Most cocktails have some form of sweetener. Sugar is the most common and brings sweetness as well as mouth feel. No other sweetener completely replaces sugar. Other favorite sweeteners are honey, agave and liqueurs. Honey and agave are used as syrups. Honey syrup is 1:1 honey and water. Heat the two gently on the stove until the honey is dissolved. You cannot put straight honey into a cocktail – it has to be heated to dissolve. Agave comes as a syrup (or nectar which is the same thing). For a time agave was thought to have a lower glycemic index than honey or sugar. That was wrong. Choose the sweetener based on the flavors you're seeking.

Here is how to make simple syrup.

Now for sugar substitutes. No matter what you try, your cocktails will not be the same with a sugar substitute. Especially if you are trying to replace sugar that goes directly into the drink. It's less noticeable if you are putting the artificial stuff into an ingredient.

I do have to observe that people really go for reduced calorie or low carb foods and drinks. You can really knock the calories and carbs if you reduce the sugar. For instance, a margarita with 2 oz tequila, 4 oz sour mix and 1/4 oz curacao will have 300 cal and 27 gms of carbohydrate. Using an artificial sweetener in your sour mix would make that 200 calories and 2 grams of carbs! Your lady friends will think that's cool. So your parties may be more of a hit in some circles.

I use Equal in one of my margaritas because all I'm looking for is sweet to off set the bitterness of the lime. It also dissolves more easily than sugar. I don't want to heat the lime juice to dissolve the sugar and I want the juice undiluted by simple syrup. So I use Equal.

Once again, if you want a real craft cocktail, forget the artificial sweeteners.

I don't think there is anything wrong in general with artificial sweeteners. There has been a lot of research on these and nothing has shown that you'll sprout horns or get earlobe cancer. Like most things, they are all different which makes one better than another for a given application. So, here are my thoughts on Equal, Sweet'N Low, Splenda and WheyLow. I think Stevia has an unpleasant taste so I don't have much experience with it.

Equal and Sweet'N Low dissolve at room temperature or even colder, (Equal slightly better.) However, you cannot cook with them. When you consider that 2 packets of either one in a glass of tea or cup of coffee will substitute for 50 calories of sugar, it makes sense. Especially when you might drink several glasses or cups. I don't use these often for adult beverages since they are sweet but lack the mouth feel of sugar.

Splenda can be used in drinks and in cooking. It is especially good for sprinkling over fruit since it tastes sweet unlike Equal or Sweet'N Low which are bitter. Some people complain of a chlorine smell. I have only noticed the odor when the Splenda is dissolved in water. You can make simple syrup or sweet and sour mix with Splenda, but they will not be syrups, they're just sweet.

We've been using WheyLow in everything from baking to drinks. WheyLow is fructose and milk solids. It has 5 calories and 1 gram of carbohydrates per teaspoon – 1/5 that of sugar. It makes a very thick syrup if you can bring the liquid to a rolling boil. There are draw backs (in addition to expense.) It's difficult to get into solution in any alcohol. You can do it, but it won't last. In fact, WheyLow will eventually come out of any solution. We make pomegranate syrup (grenadine) with WheyLow, but it only lasts about 2 weeks.

Then again, most sugar syrups will go bad by then anyway.
WheyLow comes in a granulated form as well as powdered and brown varieties.