Tequila!

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History

• Tequila is made from the fermentation and distillation process of the head of Agave tequilana Weber azul.
• Tequila was originally a drink for some of the poorest people in Mexico before it became popular among wealthy people.
• Grupo José Cuervo was founded 251 years ago in 1758 making it the oldest of the three largest Tequila companies (Casa, 2006).
• Sauza and José Cuervo are the two largest players in the tequila market. Together, they produce 47% of tequila, and they account for 60% of total tequila exports from Mexico.
• By 1870, people in the United States and Europe were drinking tequila.
• The European Union signed the Denomination of Origin in 1997.
Mexican law specifies that tequila is a drink of Mexican origin and can only be produced in the following Mexican states: Jalisco, Nayarit, Tamaulipas, Michoacán, and Guanajuato (Peña-Alvarez, 2006).
• Leaves spread radially
• 1.2-1.8 m tall
• Short, thick stems are 30-50 cm tall
• 20-25 umbels of green flowers
• Optimal temperature for blue agave growth is 15°C at night and 30°C during the day

• Large amounts of the fructose polymer inulin in the head
• Inulin can easily be converted into a simple sugar that can be processed by the Saccharomyces cerevisiae yeast. (Iñiguez-Covarrubias et al. 2001)

Agave tequilana Weber azul
Blue agave fields in Jalisco
A worker cuts off the leaves from the blue agave plant, separating the piña.

A worker crushes the piña in half, prior to cooking in a steam-heated-brick oven or in a stainless steel autoclave.

After cooking for 1.5-3 days, the blue agave juice has been converted from a complex carbohydrate into a simple sugar that can be digested by yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*).

Fermented blue agave juice is placed in stainless steel boilers for distillation.

Tequila is stored and aged in oak barrels.
Tequila blanco must be clear like water and must be a pristine product of the second distillation. The alcohol content can be diluted by demineralized water. Higher quality tequila blanco has a smoky, peppery smell and it has herbal, fruity and citric aftertastes, while lower quality tequila blanco can leave a burning sensation on the lips and has a petrol aftertaste. (Valenzuela and Nabhan, 2003).
Mexican law says that tequila reposado can have additives and must be aged in oak or pine barrels for at least two months. This type of tequila achieves a fine balance between the tannins from the oak barrels and the agave sugars. Reposados that have been aged for different periods of time can be mixed together. Reposados can have a variety of aftertastes: cherry, woody, vanilla, and herbal. The agave aroma is enhanced by the aging process, and reposados usually have a straw or tawny color. This is a higher quality tequila and should be sipped instead of taken in shots and mixed drinks (Valenzuela and Nabhan, 2003).
Añejos are extra-aged, and additives can be used. The aging process sets them apart. Añejos must be aged in small oak barrels for at least 12 months. Different types of añejos can be mixed together, and their listed age is the weighted average of the mixture’s components. There is a large variety of qualities and the flavors can range from cognac-like to tannin-heavy grappa-like flavors. Añejos can be aged from one to 10 years. The longer the tequila is aged, the more tannin-rich woody flavor it assumes. The aging process makes añejos darker, giving them an amber-like color (Valenzuela and Nabhan, 2003). Generally this is considered the highest quality tequila.