

Here's to a happy Fat Tuesday

Make merry on Mardi Gras with these classic New Orleans cocktails.

by : Megan Headley

Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday," has been celebrated since the Middle Ages by the French, who indulged without remorse the day before embarking on a 40-day period of prayer, penitence and self-denial in the name of Catholicism. In New Orleans, this day of debauchery has been translated into weeks of reckless consumption and wanton nudity in the name of beads, followed by a 40-day period of liver detox, credit card debt and Facebook photo untagging.

It's too late to celebrate in the Big Easy, but you can still live it up right here in Rivanna River City by spending today enjoying decadent, earthly pleasures—especially if Lenten restriction is in your future come tomorrow. And, since it just so happens that the cocktail was invented in New Orleans, there's no better way to join the party than to mix up one (or all) of these storied Mardi Gras classics.

Sazerac

America's oldest cocktail and the "official" cocktail of New Orleans (and those are some big shoes to fill in a city with 3,000 bars), the Sazerac has a widely disputed history. Its creator most likely was Antoine Peychaud who mixed it with his bitters in the early 1800s. It once used cognac as its base liquor, but by 1870 was made exclusively with the rye whiskey by the same name.

Combine a sugar cube, 1.5 oz. rye whiskey, three dashes of Peychaud's bitters, and a twist of lemon peel in an old-fashioned glass rinsed with .25 oz. of absinthe, or another anise-flavored liquor, like Herbsaint, Chartreuse or Pernod.

The Hurricane

New Orleans tavern owner Pat O'Brien is credited with the invention of this cocktail in the 1940s when he needed a way to get rid of the less popular rum that local distributors forced him to buy whenever he bought scotch or whiskey. He originally served it in hurricane-lamp-shaped glasses, but if you want to feel truly authentic, drink it from disposable plastic cups just like the 2 million parade-goers do.

Mix 2 oz. lime juice, 2 oz. passion fruit syrup, 2 oz. light rum, and 2 oz. dark rum in an ice-filled cocktail shaker. Pour into an ice-filled hurricane or collins glass and garnish with a cherry or pineapple spear.

Brandy Milk Punch

A classic brunch drink made famous by some of the Big Easy's swankiest places (Brennan's, Galatoire's, Commander's Palace), the Brandy Milk Punch is a common remedy for those needing a hair of the dog who bit them. During Mardi Gras though, when the partying sees no sleep and when bars have no limits to how late (or how early) they serve, this elixir might well be needed around-the-clock.

Pour 1.5 oz. brandy, 1 cup whole milk, and 1.5 oz. simple syrup into a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake until frothy, pour into an old-fashioned glass filled with ice, and garnish with freshly grated nutmeg.

Ramos Gin Fizz

Invented by Henry C. Ramos at Meyer's Restaurant in New Orleans in 1888, this cocktail became so popular that the restaurant employed dozens of "shaker boys" to keep up a steady supply of the concoction during the bar's busiest times. The Governor of Louisiana from 1928-1932 was such a fan of the Fizz, in fact, that he brought a New Orleans bartender to New York to train bartenders there so he could have a properly made version whenever he was in the city.

Combine 1.5 oz. gin, .5 oz. lemon juice, .5 oz. lime juice, 1.25 oz. simple syrup, 2 oz. cream, a small egg white, and 2 dashes orange flower water in a cocktail shaker filled with ice. After shaking vigorously (like, until your arm hurts), pour into a collins glass filled with ice and top with soda water.

