

VOTED #1

Chicago Tribune

Bloody Mary

Surely there is nothing complicated about making a Bloody Mary mix. Countless home bartenders perform the rite regularly prior to a weekend brunch: Tomato juice is poured from a can or jar into a pitcher and seasoned, in varying amounts, with some or all of the following: lemon juice,

Worcestershire sauce, hot pepper sauce, ground black pepper, salt, celery salt or celery seed.

Vodka is poured separately into a glass (if you order a bloodless or virgin Mary, the vodka will be omitted), the mixture follows, then ice cubes and an optional vegetable garnish—usually a stalk of celery.

Such a combination is child's play to the scientific mixologists who put together the Bloody Mary mixes on sale in supermarkets, wine and spirits shops and almost anywhere else alcohol is sold.

We happened to glance at the ingredient list on a bottle of the best-selling Mr. & Mrs. T Bloody Mary Mix, counted 22 and immediately decided a tasting was in order.

Most mixes begin with tomato concentrate (or paste) and will contain citrus and vinegar flavors, pepper tame and hot, salt, garlic and/or onion powder,

finely minced vegetables or herbs that may be visible, and sugar.

So we knew the mixes would be sweet. What we didn't know, and we tasted them chilled but without vodka to avoid possible distortion of the mix or disorientation of the tasters, was to what a great degree the pepper flavors would overwhelm and dominate the others. After tomato, the flavors and aromas most often mentioned were citrus/lemon, hot pepper, Worcestershire and black pepper.

Keep this torrid heat factor in mind if using a mix to "pep up" a soup or sauce.

Three of the mixes tasted are Midwestern products. Totally Chipotle is produced by the Chicago firm Rock & Roll Chef, Uncle Dougie's is in Barrington and Finest Call comes from New Albany, Ind.

Below are the results of our blind taste test, with averages of scores on a 1-to-9 point spectrum, with 9 being highest.

Prices are based on what we paid for the bottles at the store and may reflect sales or discounts from frequent-shopper cards. Per-ounce prices are rounded off to the nearest cent.

William Rice

And the winners are...

① **Totally Chipotle from the Rock & Roll Chef** (32 ounces, \$4 at Market Place, or 13 cents per ounce, 6 points.) "Medium-thick but smooth, with lots of heat." "Brownish red with specks of herb and vegetable." "Lots of heat! This is for spice lovers."

② **Uncle Dougie's Torpedo Juice** (32 ounces, \$3.50 at Sam's Wines & Spirits, or 11 cents per ounce, 5.4 points.) "Thick, almost chewy, with rich tomato flavor." "Celery taste, chili pepper heat." "Yikes!"

③ **Mr. & Mrs. T** (33.8 ounces, \$3 at Sam's Wines & Spirits, or 9 cents per ounce, 4.8 points.) "Sweet with a spicy black pepper aftertaste." "Tomato red color with an orange cast, somewhat thin." "Complex vegetable tastes with lemon and pepper, less acid than others."

Others tested

4. Red Eye Original-A Texas Style Bloody Mary Mix (4.6 points). 5. Finest Call (3.8 points). 6. Mr. & Mrs. T Rich and Spicy (3.4 points). 7. Major Peters (3.2).

Tribune photos by James F. Quinn



TotallyChipotle.com