

# The Making of Tequila

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My hope is that since the last newsletter you have continued to drink your tequila. I seem to enjoy tequila much more when I am in La Mision with my friends while watching and listening to the ocean in front of me. I feel a great connection to the amber liquid because of the work I did while at the Desert Botanical Garden. I bonded with these agaves and I continue to feel that bond today. My position with the Garden allowed me to meet many wonderful and interesting people. The reference for my article on the production of tequila comes from a book written by two botanists. Ana Velenzuela and Gary Nabhan co-authored the book, "Tequila", A Natural and Cultural History, available on amazon.com.

When Agave tequilana is around 8 years old, it is beginning to reach maturity. The farmers, called jimadores, recognize the maturity by the appearance of the individual plant. The inner leaves, as they unfurl, begin to curl inward. They also change in their texture; they become softer and less rigid. The base of the plant begins to thicken and round out.

It is at this point that the leaves are cut completely off, leaving only the cabeza or heart of the plant. The cabezas are then transported to the distillery to begin the process of steaming, baking and cutting to ready the cabeza for the process of distillation. Ana and Gary's book comes into much greater detail for those of you, who are interested in the whole process and tradition.

Mexican industry standards are very strict for the labeling of true blue agave tequila. The agave plantation must be located within the tequila zone in central Mexico, state of Jalisco. Bottling and distillation must be completed in the same location to ensure that only agave sugars have been used. Certain additives can be used but the final product cannot be labeled 100% Blue Agave. These tequilas are considered to be mixtos.

There are four distinct kinds of tequilas:

Tequila blanco or plata: These are clear in appearance, intense in flavor and usually cheaper in price. Commonly used in mixed drink (margaritas), but can be served as a shooter.

Tequila joven or oro: This gold colored tequila is also used as shooters or in margaritas. Their flavor is somewhat mellowed by the addition of caramel, or diluted with water.

Tequila reposado or aged: My personal favorite! They must be aged in oak or pine barrels for at least two months and up to 12 months. It is the most fragrant of all the types of tequila and in my opinion the one that tastes the most like true agave.

Tequila anejo: The most expensive of all tequilas. The aging process must be at least 12 months on the anejos in oak barrels. It is not uncommon to find some anejos to have aged for 2-10 years. The tequila market has become so popular that these very old anejos are available to the tequila connoisseur. They are dark in color and their flavors vary from fruity to very hearty.

Hopefully, this will help in your search to find your favorite tequila. But most importantly...enjoy!!!!