

# EatingWell®

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# Boozy Booch

Hard seltzer is so last summer. This year is all about hard kombucha. Crack, fizz, ahh. **By Beth Demmon**

**K**ombucha is ev-er-y-where—with sales poised to surpass \$5 billion by 2025. The latest iteration to hit the scene: hard kombucha. Between 2018 and 2019 the market for this extra-buzzy beverage shot up 247%. And here's a fun fact: The trend's very existence is largely attributed to a mistake. Regular kombucha's fermentation process naturally produces a tiny amount of alcohol. (All nonalcoholic beverages must be below 0.5% alcohol by volume, or ABV, per federal law.) Any extra booze is typically removed before it goes to stores, but it's possible for it to increase as it sits on stores shelves, from

continued fermentation.

In 2010, a routine supermarket audit in Portland, Maine, revealed that a number of kombucha brands surpassed the legal limit—some by a large margin. The store temporarily pulled all kombucha off shelves. One brand in the mix was Unity Vibration. Owners Rachel and Tarek Kanaan saw an opportunity to turn that accident into something new, and launched a line of intentionally hard kombucha—establishing themselves as the pioneering brand in the U.S.

Since then, other companies have followed suit, tweaking their brewing practices to get up into the 3 to 8% ABV

range (for comparison, the average beer is 5% ABV). “The segment is blowing up right now,” says Tarek, who adds that people are more willing to experiment with nontraditional alcoholic beverages and are also seeking a “better for you” drinking experience.

The probiotic benefits of hard kombucha are questionable, since the bacteria don't coexist well with alcohol. But, hard kombuchas do have their own unique offerings: they tend to have fewer calories than beer, less sugar than hard cider, and more fruit juice and other natural flavors than hard seltzers. And that's something everyone can raise a toast to.

## Aqua ViTea

This Vermont-based booch-maker offers a trio of hard kombuchas, dubbed AfterGlow. We particularly liked Citrus Rush, which marries grapefruit's bitter edge with blood orange's sweetness. And Ginger Blue (with blueberry) makes for a balanced and ever-so-slightly spicy experience.

## Local Roots

Made with organic ingredients, Local Roots reflects the SoCal vibe the brand is known for. Their Booch Mosa is a refreshing alternative to the classic brunch beverage. But it's the Cali Mule (made with ginger and lime juice) that could convert even the most devoted Moscow mule lover to the booch side.

## JuneShine

OK, jun isn't technically kombucha since it uses green tea and honey, rather than black tea and cane sugar. But we loved the flavor all the same. Wine drinkers will appreciate the tannic bite of JuneShine's Acai Berry, while beer drinkers can find familiar flavor profiles in the pineapple-y Hopical Citrus.

## Unity Vibration

Unity Vibration's higher-alcohol offerings—they're around 8% ABV—are also big on taste. Bourbon Peach radiates hefty peach aromatics with a hint of the woody spirit, and the K.P.A.'s (Kombucha Pale Ale) mild tartness and citrus bite make it a refreshing summertime beverage.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY RACHAEL STRAUSS  
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