



With Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur, life can be a bowl of cherries.

By Jose Martinez

It always seems that great bartenders possess that one secret ingredient to make their cocktails really soar. They can also be privy to a 'cheat in a bottle' that can fix any overtly medicinal tasting cocktail. One such handy dandy ingredient is Maraska Kosher Maraschino Cherry Liqueur from Croatia.

You might already be familiar with Luxardo maraschino cherry liqueur but a side by side comparison with Maraska, although perhaps not entirely fair, proves an astonishing difference in taste.

The Maraska cherry liqueur has been made in Zadar, Croatia since the 16th Century. Zadar is home to the maraska cherry and the result is a nice balance between the bitterness and sweetness of the maraschino cherry. Whereas the Luxardo brand offers more bitter notes with some almond flavor as well, Maraska is sweeter with creamy and spicy notes, in addition to being more floral. You can practically smell it a mile away. As a result, craft cocktail mixologists love to play with Maraska Maraschino Cherry Liqueur.



“Maraska Maraschino strikes a nice balance between the bitterness and sweetness of maraschino,” explains Casey Levental of Cocktail Compound and Compendium in Los Angeles. “It has a distinct cherry flavor but keeps itself from going too much down that path to the point it conjures up the flavor of cough syrup. As such, I can drink it neat or mix it in a stirred cocktail. Many bartenders consider maraschino to be a quick shortcut way to add flavor, but I disagree. In the right proportion, it can add a delicious note to a cocktail. I think that’s why, way back in the day, if you added a little maraschino to a cocktail, it gained the descriptor of being an “improved” cocktail.”

“I love that Maraschino liqueur has such a complex and unique explosion of flavors,” says Jesus Gomez, head barman at The Raymond 1886 in Pasadena, California. “Luxardo tends to have more bitter notes and dies much faster as compared to Maraska, which has fruit and a sweeter profile that lasts much longer on your tongue. Both make an incredible Improved Whiskey Cocktail if you choose the right rye whiskey. At home I use Willet 4-year as my well spirit or Rittenhouse, both are high proof and pair perfectly with Maraska, using this with Luxardo starts great but those notes vanish as your large rock adds dilution to this beautiful cocktail.”

Gomez, in fact, is currently using Maraska in three of his current menu cocktails; a Mary Pickford, East India Cocktail, and an Improved Whiskey Cocktail.

“These cocktails would completely work using Luxardo but it would not be as complex and unique,” Gomez points out. “Maraska makes these cocktails taste

stronger, richer and brighter. Using any other liqueur wouldn't give me the same balance and quality we're committed to."

Maraschino liqueur is a component in the classic Martinez cocktail. And Maraska works perfectly in this drink. And that fact is not lost on the industry's leading bartenders.

"I prefer a maraschino like Maraska in stirred cocktails," Levental notes. "Luxardo has its benefits, especially in shaken cocktails. There are very good Italian and French maraschinos—Boudier is very good in my opinion—but Maraska is made local to the maraschino cherry origin in Croatia. That means they likely have access to the best cherries of the region and have more control over how and when they go through production. Interestingly, Luxardo used to have the same advantages, as they were based in Zadar, Croatia, but the family and business had to move to Italy to escape political persecution after WWII."

And if you want to enjoy it neat, Maraska is not too saccharine unlike other brands. Then, just like with Campari, the question arises if it is an aperitif or digestif?

"A lot of people in Italy enjoy this liqueur on its own as an aperitif but it's tricky because today we can make a nice Mary Pickford and enjoy it before dinner or we can make an excellent Brooklyn as after dinner cocktail," Gomez says. "It could be used for both but if I had to pick I'd say it's more of a digestif."