

## Tasty and Trendy Spiker's Shrubs

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PHOTO BY BRAD MINTZ

Kate Broughton walks a fine line when talking about her new line of mixers. She developed Spiker's Pure Fruit Shrubs, an intense concoction of vinegar, fresh fruit, and a hint of sugar, as a way to enjoy an adult beverage without the alcohol.

"But it makes a darn good margarita, too," Broughton laughs. Even the name itself suggests a boozy drink, but Spiker is a family surname—her grandfather's, a coal miner and a lover of life's finer things.

“It seemed like a nice way to connect the generations,” she says, adding that her daughter, Tess Brady, works with her at the start-up, which launched this spring. Broughton first started experimenting with syrups for mocktails, but found them too sweet. Her solution harkens back to Colonial times, when so-called drinking vinegar was a byproduct of using vinegar to preserve fruit. The balance of fruity sweet-and-sour with zingy acid brings balance to cocktails, or livens up a seltzer.

“Shrubs are light, but intensely flavored,” Broughton says, adding that she has been having a great time tinkering with flavor combinations—so much so that Lisa Sutton, the owner/founder of Kitchen Local, where Broughton mixes up her concoctions, calls her a “mad scientist.” Broughton says her home kitchen is filled with bottles of all shapes and sizes, in which she tries out a variety of shrubs using her cold-brew method, which starts with macerating fresh fruit in sugar overnight before adding vinegar. Although Broughton says heating the fruit and sugar mixture would speed up the process, she feels her method yields a cleaner flavor.

Spiker’s Shrubs offers a rotating array of more than half a dozen flavors, depending on what’s in season. Cider Hill in Amesbury and Tendercrop Farm in Newbury have been providing raspberries for the Raspberry Lime, peaches for Peach Crisp, and tomatoes for the Tomato Medley. Using local fruit wasn’t as easy as she expected—because she is a licensed wholesaler, she needed to get specific permission from the FDA to buy from those two spots.

“It’s not so simple as just heading to the farmers’ market,” Broughton says. Anything she uses must have a paper trail leading to the source. She also encountered another surprise—the FDA did a background check to ensure she was not a bioterrorist.

“Some of [the red tape] starts to make you paranoid,” she laughs. “People in cooking are arty and don’t necessarily want to put on a businessperson’s hat.” But with expertise in e-commerce, Broughton is comfortable with the business end. The list of retailers carrying her line includes Tendercrop and Cider Hill, as well as Shubie’s. And the Hawthorne Hotel wants to develop a line of drinks using Spiker’s.

The Hawthorne has seen a surge in requests for natural and “skinny” cocktails and mocktails, says Claire Kallelis, assistant general manager. “The [hotel] is well known for its traditions, [but] we also pride ourselves on being ahead of the trends.” [spikersshrubs.com](http://spikersshrubs.com)