Canned cocktails are just one manifestation of the shakeup reinventing RTD beverage alcohol.

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From Spritz to Sizzle: Flavor-Forward Innovation Reshapes the RTD Alcohol Boom

Flavor-forward innovation is shaping the RTD landscape, spanning spritzes, tea cocktails, nostalgic hard sodas, elevated RTS formats, tequila drinks, and next-gen beer and flavored malt beverages.

The ready-to-drink (RTD) category has become one of the most dynamic flavor innovation platforms in beverage alcohol. As this report shows, growth is being driven less by base spirits or format and more by bold, expressive flavor systems spanning spritzes, tea infusions, nostalgic sodas and tequila-led cocktails.

For flavor and beverage product developers, flexibility is now foundational. Successful RTD concepts increasingly rely on modular flavor architectures that can flex across ABV levels, carbonation styles and positioning, from indulgent nostalgia to functional "better-for-you" cues. At the same time, consumer appetite for novelty is accelerating iteration cycles, pushing developers to balance speed-to-market with distinctiveness and sensory depth.

What emerges is a category where flavor is the primary differentiator—and where the most successful innovations will be those that translate emotion, occasion and cultural relevance into scalable, ready-to-drink formats. -Editor

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Spirit-Based and Wine-Based Ready-To-Drink Fuel Alcohol Sales

The global ready-to-drink (RTD) and high-strength premixes market is expected to be valued at $24.1 billion in 2026. It is projected to reach $ 32.8 billion by 2033, with a CAGR of 4.5%, according to Persistence Market Research[a]. NielsenIQ's data[b] shows spirits-based RTDs increased by 30% in dollars and now account for 28% of total spirits volume in off-premise channels.

Wine-based RTDs increased by 14%, while malt-based RTDs declined. For the 52 weeks ending December 27, 2025, dollar sales of wine-based cocktails surged 30% to $1.2 billion in off-premise channels, including grocery, drug, mass merchandise, dollar, convenience, and liquor stores, according to NielsenIQ[c]. The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States[d] reported that premixed cocktails, including spirits-based RTDs, reached $3.8 billion in 2025. Flavor-forward innovation is shaping the RTD landscape, spanning spritzes, tea cocktails, nostalgic hard sodas, elevated Ready-To-Serve (RTS) formats, tequila drinks, and next-gen beer and flavored malt beverages (FMBs).

Flavor Freedom: How RTDs Are Redefining Beverage Innovation and Consumer Demand

Like other food and beverage categories, flavor is a significant purchase driver and source of innovation.

Mintel notes, "Unlike beer and wine, which have limited flexibility, RTDs, often made with neutral spirits/bases, offer greater versatility to fully explore bold and unique flavor profiles. These beverages don't need to mimic traditional cocktails, giving brands the freedom to experiment and innovate with new and exciting flavors."

Likewise, Mitch Madoff of Keychain states, "RTD cocktails' variety of flavor options and on-the-go convenience align with younger consumers who are seeking flavorful, lower-sugar, lower-carb options that match their functional and better-for-you preferences."

Trending flavors include berry, citrus, mango, passion fruit and peach. Brands are reimagining classic cocktails by swapping in alternative bases such as cognac, gin, and wine, and non-carbonated formulas.

Spritz Surge: Low-ABV RTDs Lean Into Citrus, Fruit, and Effortless Refreshment

Refreshing and low-ABV Spritz RTD drinks are on trend. This season, brands are introducing a variety of citrus and fruit-forward flavors.

For example, Fabrizia Spirits launched a new 7% ABV spirits-based Spritz Cocktail Variety Pack, featuring Blood Orange Spritz, Blueberry Spritz, and Limoncello Spritz. All the beverages are crafted with sparkling Italian wine and soda water. The Blood Orange Spritz features Fabrizia Blood Orange Liqueur, while Blueberry Spritz highlights Fabrizia Blueberry Liqueur and Limoncello Spritz contains the brand's all-natural Limoncello.

Italian spirits company Campari Group has launched the Aperol Spritz To Go, a canned RTD lower-ABV version of its bottled Aperol Spritz. In the United Kingdom, Gordon's added Pink Gin Spritz and Tropical Passionfruit Spritz, each combining Gordon's gin with a sparkling mixer "for a light, refreshing serve that pours perfectly over ice."

In the Netherlands, De Kuyper Royal Distillers launched a Peachtree Spritz RTD, which combines peach liqueur with sparkling water, Prosecco, and lime at an ABV of 4.5%. Additionally, the brand expanded its portfolio of RTD cocktails with 200 ml single-serve cans in Amaretto Sour, Espresso Martini and Passionfruit Martini.

Dre and Snoop's latest collab is a collection of non-carbonated Hard Iced Tea and Lemonade in four varieties: Iced Tea, Iced Tea & Lemonade, Peach Iced Tea, and Pink Lemonade. The canned cocktails are made with brewed tea, fruit flavors, and the brand's signature Still G.I.N.; courtesy of Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg.

Image courtesy of Dre and Snoops

[a] *https://www.openpr.com/news/4517108/rtd-high-strength-premixes-market-us-24-1-bn-to-us-32-8-bn*

[b] *https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights/report/2025/the-fourth-category-a-mid-year-update-on-beverage-alcohol/*

[c] *https://www.marketwatchmag.com/rtds-in-the-wine-space/*

[d] *https://distilledspirits.org/news/distilled-spirits-council-annual-economic-briefing-2025/*

Tea Time, Reinvented: Vodka, Gin and Celebrity RTDs Drive the Next Wave of Infused Innovation

From vodka to gin-based, tea-infused RTDs are gaining momentum. Sun Cruiser debuted a White Tea + Vodka RTD line, containing 100 calories and 1 g of sugar per serving. The non-carbonated, low-calorie beverage is available in Berry Hibiscus, Blackberry, Passionfruit and Peach flavors.

Boston Tea Party joins Night Shift's RTD vodka-based range in four flavors: Lemon, Mango, Peach, and Raspberry. At 4.5% ABV, Boston Tea Party is lightly carbonated and gluten-free.

Holla Spirits refreshed its RTD Crush cocktail lineup and introduced Grapefruit, a new Crush flavor. The brand also introduced CrushTea, "a first-of-its-kind canned cocktail innovation," that blends its popular Orange Crush flavor with tea. Holla's vodkas are seven-times distilled, gluten-free, non-GMO, and vegan, and feature a custom-molded Italian eco-beverage cork made from plant-based materials.

Dre and Snoop's latest collab is a non-carbonated, 5.9% ABV Hard Iced Tea and Lemonade canned cocktails line made with brewed tea, fruit flavors, and Still G.I.N. There are four varieties: Iced Tea, Iced Tea & Lemonade, Peach Iced Tea, and Pink Lemonade.

The RTD canned wine-based Dirty Shirley is a nostalgic nod to the iconic Shirley Temple. It is fruit-forward, featuring cherry, pomegranate, and hints of lime with light carbonation; courtesy of DrinkTempted.

Sip of the Past: Nostalgia Drives the Next Wave of Hard Sodas and RTD Innovation

Nostalgia-inspired vodka-based hard sodas are launching throwback fruit flavors. Inspired by the iconic 1990s SunnyD commercial "Purple Stuff," SunnyD Vodka Seltzer unveiled Purple, a limited-time RTD vodka seltzer. The 4.5% ABV beverage delivers a nostalgic blend of berry and grape.

American model Sommer Ray released Tempted, a spiked Shirley Temple brand. Tempted Dirty Shirley "offers a distinctly adult upgrade to the iconic soda mocktail." Lightly carbonated, it features cherry, pomegranate, and hints of lime at 7% ABV and is available on Gopuff.

In Canada, Dandurand Wine & Spirits and Popsicle collaborated on the Popsicle Vodka Soda. Inspired by the nostalgic popsicle flavors, the drinks come in Cherry, Grape and Orange varieties at 4.5% ABV.

Following Fresca Mixed, Fresca soda added Fresca Hard to its portfolio. The flavored malt beverage at 4.6% ABV is offered in Grapefruit Citrus, Pineapple Citrus, Peach Citrus and Watermelon Citrus flavors. Each 12 oz can contains 99 calories.

Crooked Pop is a new hard soda entrant, formulated with USDA-certified Organic Super Dry Alcohol (OSA), a proprietary fermentation method derived from ancient grains including quinoa, amaranth, millet and cassava. The 80 calorie RTD is available in Blackberry, Cherry Lime, and Orange Cream flavors with no artificial colors or sweeteners.

The Little Sun Calimocho Duo is "a brand-new drink inspired by a 100-year-old classic" of combining equal parts wine with soda. Calimocho Classic blends California red wine and classic cola, while Calimocho Blanco pairs white wine with lemon-lime soda.

Cocktails Go Big: RTS Formats Expand Into Elevated, Multi-Serve Occasions

RTS cocktails are expanding with higher ABV bottled formats and multi-serve options offering convenience, elevated flavors, and versatility across occasions. Hennessy debuted the Hennessy Henny Cocktails series at 18-22% ABV in 375 ml glass bottles that can be served over ice or used as the base for a customized drink.

The cocktails come in three flavors: Henny Berry, Henny Iced Tea, and Henny Rito. The Henny Berry is a cognac-based mojito-inspired beverage, featuring

Image courtesy of DrinkTempted

The Hennessy Henny Cocktails series features Henny Berry, Henny Iced Tea and Henny Rito, all modern takes on classic cocktails showcasing Hennessy Very Special cognac; courtesy of Hennessy.

blackberry and blackcurrant with a twist of lime. Henny Iced Tea contains "crisp black tea, bright citrus notes, and the signature soft vanilla and spice character of Hennessy Very Special cognac." Henny Rito is a twist on a classic Margarita, featuring "bright natural flavors of lime with the round citrusy and toasted notes of Hennessy Very Special cognac."

Rancho La Gloria expanded its range with three agave wine-based cocktails: Cosmopolitan, Espresso Martini, and Lemon Drop, sold in 750 ml bottles, at 17% ABV.

European brand Punch Club, known for its RTD cocktails, non-alcoholic mocktails, and functional zero-sugar drinks, launched in the U.S. with nationwide distribution through Total Wine & More. Punch Club offers multiple formats for different consumption occasions, including 250 ml RTD single-serve cocktails, 500 ml RTS bottled cocktails, and 3L bag-in-box cocktails for events. The brand's RTS portfolio includes a variety of spirit-based cocktail flavors, such as Aviation, Cosmopolitan, Negroni and Whiskey Sour.

Margarita Momentum: Tequila Innovation Spans Spicy, Fruity and Zero-Proof Frontiers

Margarita-inspired cocktails, fruity and spicy profiles, and zero-proof alternatives are leading innovation in tequila-based beverages. Mission Craft Cocktails added the Tamarind Margarita to its range. It is formulated with premium tequila, handmade orange liquor with lime, tamarind, agave nectar, watermelon, and chili. Through its partnership with Feeding America, the One Bottle = One Meal program turns every bottle purchased into a meal for someone in need.

On The Rocks launched two new products: On The Rocks Passion Fruit Margarita, a limited-edition RTS, and On The Rocks Sparkling Watermelon Margarita, a permanent canned cocktail. Both are crafted with Hornitos Blanco Tequila, and the Sparkling Watermelon Margarita contains house-made triple sec and cane sugar. In the UK, Whitebox partnered with Selfridges to launch an exclusive Spicy Mango Margarita. Described as "fricy" (fruity + spicy), the 19.5% ABV RTD combines tequila, lime, chili, and mango.

Inspired by a margarita, Recess introduced a Zero-Proof Margarita Mini Party Pack featuring their classic Lime flavor with three new expressions: Spicy, Strawberry, and Watermelon. These 0% ABV mocktails are infused with adaptogens, guayusa, and L-theanine "to help drinkers unwind." Similarly, Ritual Zero Proof entered the RTD category with three canned non-alcoholic cocktails, including a Margarita, G&T, and Spritz.

Tamarind Margarita is the newest flavor to join Mission Craft Cocktails' range. It is crafted with premium tequila, handmade orange liquor with lime, tamarind, agave nectar, watermelon, and chili; courtesy of Mission Craft Cocktails.

From top: Image courtesy of Hennessy; Mission Craft Cocktails

Flavor Under Pressure: Beer and FMB Innovation Leans Into Bold, Experimental Taste Profiles

The market is saturated with brands, and consumers' relationship with alcohol is evolving. The total beer/flavored malt beverages/hard cider/hard seltzer has declined by 3.7% for the 52 weeks ending January 3, 2026, according to NielsenIQ[e]. However, brewers are experimenting with a wide spectrum of flavors, from botanical and fruity to sweet and gourmand. According to Innova Market Insights[f], 45% of consumers cite that taste experience influences their purchases, and flavor remains central to beer innovation. Peach is the top flavor, followed by vanilla, mango, orange, and pineapple in beer and cider launches.

For example, Modelo introduced Modelo Chelada Suprema, two RTD Cheladas that mix Mexican beer with blended fruit flavors, featuring an 8% ABV formula. Modelo Chelada Suprema Mangonada contains mango and chamoy, while the Modelo Chelada Suprema Tropical features guava and pineapple.

Pabst Blue Ribbon and Grillo's Pickles have joined forces on a limited-edition PBR x Grillo's Pickle Beer, at 4.7% ABV. The flavor is "bright and tangy, which balances the maltiness of PBR's classic lager."

[e]*https://www.bevindustry.com/articles/98127-2026-beer-market-report-moderate-outlook-for-us-beer-market*

[f]*https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/trends/beer-trends-in-the-us-and-canada/*

Junior's Restaurant and Other Half Brewing[AM11] teamed up on a four-style limited-edition dessert-inspired beer line. The Black and White Cream Ale (4.8% ABV) is brewed with cacao nibs and vanilla, echoing the flavors of the iconic NYC black-and-white cookie. Egg Cream Milk Stout (6% ABV) is brewed with Fox's U-Bet syrup to mimic Junior's classic egg cream. Key Lime Cheesecake Sour IPA (6.5% ABV) combines fresh lime with graham crackers, milk sugar, and oats. Inspired by Junior's classic Strawberry Cheesecake, the Strawberry Dream Imperial IPA (8.5% ABV) is a hazy strawberry Oat Cream IPA.

FMBs continue to tap into fruity and tropical directions. For the summer, Captain Morgan introduced the Sliced Colada Style Drink Variety Pack. The lineup highlights Piña Colada flavors, including classic Mango, Passionfruit, Piña Colada, and Strawberry. Chillitas is a new RTD at 8.1% ABV, described as "the authentic fruit cart experience, canned and ready to pour." The drinks are inspired by the salt and spice of a Chelada with a "fruit-forward upgrade." It comes in four flavors, including Chilli Mango, Pica Pina, Sandia Loca and Wild Paloma.

The Boston Beer Company released Lytt Electric Coolers, a novelty line of six RTDs packaged in a patent-pending lightbulb-shaped resealable plastic container that glows in the dark. At 15% ABV, the malt range consists of Blue Raspberry, Grape, Long Island Iced Tea, Peach Mango, Strawberry Rita, and Tropical Punch.

Brooklyn establishments Junior's Restaurant and Other Half Brewing collaborate on four limited-edition dessert-inspired beers: Black and White Cream Ale, Egg Cream Milk Stout, Key Lime Cheesecake Sour IPA, and Strawberry Dream Imperial IPA; courtesy of Junior's Cheesecake.

Final Sips: Convenience, Flavor and Occasion Drive Cross-Category Innovation

To meet consumers' demand for convenience, versatility, affordability, and experiences, the RTD landscape is innovating across segments, with spirit and wine-based cocktails driving alcohol growth. Flavor experimentation fuels innovation as brands lean into spritzes, tea-infused beverages, nostalgic soda-inspired profiles, elevated RTS offerings, margarita tequila-based and zero-proof alternatives, and flavorful beers and FMBs. Watch as existing brands and new entrants develop sophisticated RTD cocktails across spirits, wine and malt bases, featuring diverse flavor profiles, low-ABV formulas and non-carbonated formats.

Image courtesy of Junior's Cheesecake