

Brandywine Table

A Shrub Story

A FAMILY-OWNED FOOD COMPANY CELEBRATES 35 YEARS OF ITS HISTORIC DRINK MIXERS.

Alyssa Thayer



Kim Tait in one of their high tunnel greenhouses

AUGUST'S UNRELENTING HEAT HAS US REACHING for something quenching, tangy and perhaps a bit fizzy. Something like shrub.

Shrub is an old colonial recipe that comes in the form of an acidic fruit concentrate. It's most commonly enjoyed with sparkling water as a refreshing spritzer.

"Shrub is simple, festive and fun," says Kim Tait, owner of **Tait Farm Foods**, located just outside State College. "And for us, it's the product that started it all."*

In recent years, this sweet and tart syrup has found its way into the hearts of mixologists and home cocktail enthusiasts, but this wasn't always the case. When the Tait family introduced shrub 35 years ago, no one had ever heard of it. "People thought we were grinding up bushes and putting it in bottles," laughs Kim, remembering the steep educational curve they faced early on.

The Tait shrub story began in 1986 when a bumper crop of black raspberries hung precariously on the canes after weeks of heavy rain. As anyone who's tried to keep raspberries in their fridge knows, they are highly perishable and mold easily. To avoid losing the harvest, the Tait family elected to pick all two acres of berries and freeze them, with hopes of finding a market later in the year. After several failed attempts at selling the berries, they decided to try their hand at a value-added product of their own.

A family friend came to David Tait (Kim's late husband) with the recipe for shrub, and it was just quirky and tasty enough to pique his interest. That year, the first Raspberry Shrub was bottled in David's kitchen and sold at their local farmers market.

Since then, Tait Farm Foods has come a long way, developing an extensive line of gourmet food products, including jams, chutneys and vinaigrettes while expanding their shrub offerings to 15+ flavors.

In April of 2021, on what would have been David Tait's 75th birthday, news that the original Raspberry Shrub had been awarded the Gold soft by the Specialty Food Association popped into Kim's inbox. "It was a great honor and validation of 35 long years of making and selling this product. And it was auspicious that it came on David's birthday. It was always his dream to win the soft," Kim says fondly.

In the food world, winning a soft is like getting an Oscar — you even get a gold statue. To date, Tait Farm Foods now has been honored three times, including this year's Best New Product for their Lime Mint Shrub.

Whether you're creating a signature cocktail, adding a splash of flavor to lemonade or tossing together a summer salad, shrub might just be the perfect addition. Check out these recipes for ideas on how to use it and find many more shrubs on their website, TaitFarmFoods.com, or in other specialty food stores.

*Editor's Note: Writer Alyssa Thayer is Kim's proud daughter.



Shrubs and soft awards



Kim Tait winning an award in June



Kim Tait and fellow farmer Sabine Carey circa 1990 when the farm was a pick-your-own asparagus and berries farm

Basic Cocktail Recipe

The nice thing about these general recipes is you can customize them to fit your fancy. It's an open invitation to mix up your own signature drink!

Serves 1

- 1 1/2-2 oz. spirit of choice (vodka, rum, tequila and gin work particularly well, but try it with anything)
- 1/2-1 oz. Tait Farm Shrub, any flavor
- 1/2-1 oz. fresh citrus (lemon, lime, grapefruit, etc.)
- 2 dashes cocktail bitters (optional, but fun to experiment with)

Watermelon Lime Agua Fresca

These simple drinks are easy to make and refreshing to enjoy. Mix and match your favorite fruits to find your perfect combination.

Serves 1, multiply as necessary



- 1 C. chopped fruit (favorites include pineapple, strawberry, cantaloupe, watermelon and cucumber)
- 1 C. water, as needed (omit if using watermelon)
- 1/2 medium lime, juiced
- 1-2 oz. Tait Farm Lime Mint Shrub
- Optional: 2 large mint leaves (perfect with cucumber)

Combine fruit, water, lime juice, shrub and optional mint leaves in a blender. Puree on high until smooth.

Taste and adjust to your liking, adding more lime and/or shrub, as well as water, to reach desired consistency.

Blend briefly again and enjoy immediately.

Summer Shrub Sangria

Light, bright and elegant, this unique take on sangria is simple enough for a home happy hour, yet refined enough for a garden party. Cheers!

Makes 1 pitcher or 8 servings

- 8 oz. Tait Farm Shrub, any flavor (recommendations below)
- 1 bottle dry white wine (riesling or sauvignon blanc recommended)

Shrub Starter

While shrub is beginning to be more mainstream, it's still new to many. Here are a few facts and FAQs to get the party started.

- 1. Worldly words** – The term "shrub" is derived from the Arabic word sharāb, meaning "to drink." It can be traced back to the 17th century (pre-refrigeration) when vinegar was used to preserve berries and other fruits.
- 2. Barrel-brewed** – There are several ways to make shrub. Tait Farm Foods infuses fresh fruit into barrels of vinegar for about a month. Once finished, the liquid is strained and sweetened with organic cane sugar and pasteurized to make it shelf-stable.
- 3. Custom-made** – The great thing about using something from concentrate is that you can decide how strong you want your drink to be. The standard ratio is six parts sparkling water to one part shrub, but you can dial it up or down depending on your taste.
- 4. Seasonable sips** – While you can enjoy most flavors year-round, Kim says citrus and berry flavors are quenching in warmer months and flavors like cranberry and spiced pear/apple are popular during cooler months. "Our family has a Thanksgiving tradition of making a pitcher of cranberry shrub for the table. We toss in sliced oranges and fresh cranberries to make it festive."
- 5. Mixer magic** – The acid of the vinegar and the bold fruit-forward notes make it the perfect mixer. It's often used in highball cocktails, subbed in as the sours, or simply used as a splash of extra flavor.
- 6. Family-friendly** – Shrubs aren't just for the bar-going crowd. Kim's grandchildren enjoy the taste as a natural soda treat, calling the drinks "fizzies."
- 7. Shelf-stable** – Since vinegar is a preserving agent, shrubs can be stored for at least two years (even after opening!).
- 8. Taste is king** – While vinegar's pungent bouquet takes over at first sniff, its acidity and fruity sweetness make for a delightful first sip.



Mixed fresh fruit: sliced oranges, limes, lemons, peaches, plums, berries

Ice

1-liter bottle sparkling water

In a large pitcher, combine the shrub, wine and chosen fruit. Let flavors combine and infuse for half an hour.

Just before serving, add ice and sparkling water.

Favorite Combinations:



- Lemon shrub, fresh citrus slices and raspberries
- Raspberry shrub, oranges and berries
- Rhubarb shrub, strawberries and oranges
- Peach shrub, peaches and raspberries
- Strawberry basil shrub, strawberries and fresh basil leaves

Seasonal Salads with Shrub Vinaigrette

The acidity of the shrub makes it work for savory applications as well. Here's a basic dressing recipe along with some favorite salad combinations.

Makes 1/2 cup of dressing



- 2 T. Tait Farm Shrub (see ideas below)
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper
- 1 small clove garlic, finely minced
- 6 T. oil, safflower, canola or light olive

Whisk all the ingredients together until emulsified. Can be sealed and kept in fridge for later use (simply re-mix or shake before using).

Raspberry:

- Spring mix, sliced pears, blue cheese and walnuts

Ginger:

- Asian greens, snow peas, radishes and grated carrot

Lemon, Lime or Orange:

- Spring mix, sliced oranges and avocado

Strawberry Basil:

- Spinach, feta cheese, fresh strawberries and pine nuts

Spiced Apple:

- Mixed greens, sliced apples, blue cheese and walnuts

Cranberry:

- Mixed greens, dried cranberries and pecans

Spiced Vanilla Pear:

- Mixed greens, sliced pears, gorgonzola and chopped hazelnuts

Cilantro Lime Black Bean and Corn Salsa

This festive and vibrant dish can be enjoyed with chips, over a bed of greens or alongside your grilled protein of choice.

Serves 4

- 1/2 C. fresh cilantro leaves, finely chopped
- 3 T. lime juice (about 1 1/2 fresh limes)
- 1 T. lime shrub
- Generous pinch of sea salt + more to taste
- 2 C. cooked sweet corn, either thawed frozen kernel or cooked, cooled and cut off the cob
- 1/2 C. sweet pepper (bell or other variety), chopped
- 3 green onions, finely sliced (green only)
- 3/4 C. black beans, cooked and drained (canned works great)
- 3 T. plain yogurt (any fat content will work)
- 1/8 tsp. coriander
- 1/8 tsp. chile powder
- 1/4 tsp. cumin
- 1/3 C. Cotija cheese, crumbled
- Optional: jalapeño, thinly sliced



Pineapple Shrub Sorbet

This luscious, sweet and all-natural frozen dessert couldn't be simpler to make. All you need is a high-powered blender or food processor.

Serves 2-3

- 10 oz. frozen chunks of pineapple
- 2 T. shrub of choice (we used 1 pineapple, 1 lime)
- 2 T. water

Using a high-powered blender or food processor, blend all ingredients on high until smooth and creamy in consistency.

Enjoy right away or transfer into a freezer-safe container and enjoy at a later date. ♦



Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.

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