



# NOTABLE EDIBLES: On the Counter

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It might sound like something off the drinks menu at Applebee's, but at Counter, the modern vegetarian restaurant in the East Village, the pumpkin pie martini is no prepackaged quaff with flavors from a lab. Instead, there's honest to-goodness gourd that the restaurant infuses into the vodka itself. Shaken over ice with a drop of maple syrup, this dessert in a glass bears no relation to

the Mudslide.

The drink got its start five years ago when Counter got its liquor license. Owner Deborah Gavito, who's run the Union Square Greenmarket stand Body and Soul for 18 years, was developing a line of organic cosmetics, including an avocado butter lotion used on Queer Eye for the Straight Guy called Testicle Cream, since the Aztec word for avocado also refers to testicles.

“One product I did was an aftershave,” says Gavito, “which, as you know, has lots of alcohol in it. I didn't know that much about liquor because I drink wine, but it smelled so fragrant that at one point our bartender and I decided to try the aftershave. It tasted pretty good!”

It wasn't long before she was adding herbs to spirits for drinks like a root beer float cocktail with sarsaparilla and wintergreen, or a paella drink made by infusing white wine with sage and garlic. The Dirtiest Martini, meanwhile, is vodka infused with basil and mixed with olive juice.

“Vodka will take on any flavor,” says Gavito. “I was thinking of a pumpkin pie—I just wanted to see if it was possible to make vodka taste like [it].” The only wrench in the works is that New York State law requires barkeeps to pour liquor from the vessel it was bottled in, and mixing around the red tape results in serious fines: Counter once snagged a \$1,000 ticket for barely boozy popsicles. This means Gavito can only add ingredients that fit through the neck of then bottle, or make infusions in simple syrup and then add them to the vodka.

If you're trying this out in a home kitchen, however, that's not a problem. And Gavito shares the method to her mixes: “Take a pumpkin or sweet potato and roast it, adding anything you like— say vanilla or maple syrup. Then put maybe a cup of the puree in a bottle of vodka.” Gavito recommends testing it periodically and keeping track of the developing flavor in a log of tasting notes. The longer the product rests, the stronger the infusion. When you've achieved the flavor you're after—a few weeks, say—strain it through a chemical-free coffee filter and use it to mix a drink.

And if you decide to serve it with jalapeño poppers and hot wings, we certainly won't tell.

Counter: 105 First Avenue; between East Sixth and East Seventh Streets; [counternyc.com](http://counternyc.com)