

# Charleston Mercury

## MAGAZINE

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# Mango-ing for broke

*Georgia Dunn Belk offers a new tropical treat*

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**Mango Mimosa, the most recent offering from Harriott's historical beverages.**

Southern history is many things — a centuries-long rhythm of remarkable people indelibly marked, for good and for ill, with the customs and mores of our sunny South. Although your old friend Rollover is a proud son of South Carolina, longtime readers know of my interest in that sometimes-strange southernmost state in our union, Florida (refer back to my 2018 piece on John Gorrie, father of air-conditioning and a notable personage bridging the Palmetto and Sunshine States). And a compelling beverage has recently come my way that I want to tell you about, and that means talking about ... the mango.

The story of the mango, that green, red and orange treat with an inside of pure gold, starts far away from our shores, of course. It comes to us from the Indian subcontinent, where its seductions are seen as not merely culinary but carnal as well. There the tale is told that Kamadeva, son of Brahma, carries a Cupid-like quiver of arrows decorated with a range of springtime flowers, among them the blossoms of the mango tree. Sanskrit poems composed before the time of Christ extoll the joy of mango ... and its power to stir romantic passions.

Slowly but surely, the fine fruit made its way to the Americas, first arriving via the globetrotting Portuguese, who planted it in Brazil in the early 1500s. Mangos came to the Caribbean in 1742, when they were propagated on Barbados. Spanish travelers brought cultivars of the crop from both the West Indies and the Philippines to Mexico in the early 1800s. But mango had a hard row to hoe, as they say, here in the United States.

Dr. Henry Perrine, the American consul to the Yucatan, attempted to establish the crop in Florida in the 1830s. Perrine was an agricultural pioneer making advancements in the growth of Key limes, avocados and other tropical plants, but his efforts to make the mango commercially viable in the States were ended along with his life, cut short during the Second Seminole War. Another crop was attempted near Miami during the War Between the States, and although it was not commercially successful, the trees did grow and provide seed stock for the area for generations.

Then came 1886, a year synonymous with disaster here in South Carolina, which brought disaster for the Florida fruit industry as well. Winter temperatures took a precipitous and altogether unexpected drop, reportedly going as low as 18 degrees. Oranges froze solid in the trees; reptiles and amphibians became catatonic; rivers and inlets were choked with dead fish. Few mangos survived this disaster, and multiple efforts to establish Indian varieties came to a sudden icy end.

Things take a decidedly Floridian turn at this point in the tale, thanks to a long-bearded Baptist minister and college professor from Kansas — born on Christmas Day, no less — named Elbridge Gale. Gale was teaching horticulture at Kansas State University when, in 1884, health issues led him to seek out the warmth and sun of Florida. In addition to his many civic interests, Gale became a bit obsessed with tropical fruit, and no crop intrigued him more than the mango. His 160-acre farm at Lake Worth (named “Mangonia”) became his testing station for many kinds of mangos: The U.S. Department of Agriculture would send seed down to the good reverend, and Gale would grow, grow, grow. Eventually a single specimen of “Mulgoba” mango survived thanks to his love and care, and from its seed stock would come the first commercially successful mango cultivar in these United States.

It’s easy to understand why Gale succumbed to mango mania. Few fruits taste so tantalizingly exotic as the sunshine-shaded flesh of the mango. And now, to the delight of your old friend Rollover, one can enjoy the pure flavor of the fruit without getting out the paring knife, thanks to a new beverage called “Harriott’s Mango Mimosa.”

You’ve seen its sister brew in the salmon sheets before; refer to the feature “Tasting the Turks and Caicos — With a Carolina Connection,” a deep dive into Caribbean-born, Carolina-made Islander Ginger Beer. The perfect Dark and Stormy or Moscow Mule can now be complemented with the perfect Mango Sunset or Mango Margarita with just the twist of a bottle top, thanks to this new brew from Georgia Dunn Belk. Her family legacy of brewing and her quest for simple perfection are evident in every sip.

Alcohol is five percent right out of the bottle and tastes, quite simply, like mango. Real mango, fresh squeezed. It is a testament to her no-compromises pursuit of pure water, great ingredients and no funky stuff in the recipe. That’s why you can find it at Whole Foods; Harris Teeter and Total Wine now carry it as well. Harriott’s Mango Mimosa tastes great mixed or right out of the bottle, and is as far away from cloying, candy-flavored hard seltzers as the West Indies are from their Eastern Hemisphere namesake.

I hear it is good for wherever one might use mango — not just for the barkeep but for the cook as well. Although it surely makes a fine dressing or marinade, you know me well, dear reader. When summer weather makes South Carolina feel as hot as South Florida, I’ll be reaching for a cold one, straight from the bottle. Listen to ol’ Rollover and do the same.

*Rollover Tillman is the Charleston Mercury’s go-to expert on potent potables. His thirst is strong, and his unwillingness to discuss his relatives in the Upstate is absolute. You can find him at the end of the day on the porch of his farmhouse, reading long-forgotten books of Southern history and lore, with a stiff drink near at hand. Learn about Harriott’s Mango Mimosa, Harriott’s Hard Lemonade and much more at [HarriottsLegacy.com](http://HarriottsLegacy.com).*

## **Mango Sunrise cocktails for two**

**Take two cordial glasses and fill with ice. Add a jigger or two of tequila (I use Don Julio or El Jimador), then fill with Harriott’s Mango Mimosa. Add a tablespoon of grenadine, swirl gently and let settle for a minute — long enough to get a pretty “sunrise,” not so long the ice starts melting. Sip slowly while picturing yourself on a white-sand beach.**

