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THE DISH!

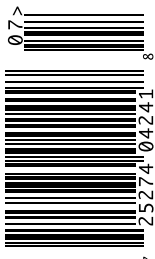
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FARM-TO-TABLE COCKTAILS Clockwise from top left: the Cucumber Rose at The Grove and the Treehouse, near Discovery Green park Downtown; the herb garden at T'afia in Midtown; T'afia's Mojito-Tejas with mint grown on the premises; and Rawaad Semaan, muddling peaches at The Grove.

Local Brew!

Texas produce isn't just for dinner anymore

| By Peter Barnes | Photography by Shannon O'Hara |

Your cocktail is getting fresh with you. The farm-to-table philosophy of dining—the idea that using just-picked produce and other locally sourced ingredients makes healthier, better food, and aids the environment and regional economy—has spilled over from the dining room to the bar, where mixologists have shelved corn-syrupy sour mix in favor of fare from farmers markets.

“It makes all the difference when you're using fresh juices, fresh herbs,” says Ryan Rouse of **Beaver's Ice House** (2310 Decatur St., 713.864.2328). Beaver's uses fresh ingredients from nearby sources. It even boasts an herb garden beside the deck where a hip crowd swarms.

The bar manager pours a measure of Maker's Mark, muddles sugar and half a lemon and shakes it with whole opal basil leaves for an Opal Smash. Purple and sweet, this isn't the basil in pasta sauce. Its distinct flavor with a hint of licorice interplays with the tang of the lemon.

Rouse regularly peruses farmers markets. Lately he's experimented with cacao nibs, garden-grown chocolate mint and Texas peaches. The bourbon in which it's all steeping will be a key component of a Manhattan-type drink with sweet vermouth and peach bitters.

Fresh ingredients are also bar staples at restaurants like **Textile** (611 W. 22nd St., 832.209.7177), where they serve the Bee's Knees, with Hendrick's gin, Meyer lemon juice and local honey—and at bars like new **Anvil** (1424 Westheimer Rd., 713.523.1622), where a Gin Gin Mule comes with mint, lime and house ginger beer.

“Depending on the season, we play with the drinks, switch it up,” says Rawad Semaan. While managing **The Grove** and its terrace bar, **Treehouse** (1611 Lamar St., 713.337.7321), Semaan thinks up ways to incorporate produce from the establishment's rooftop garden.

“I grew up in a house that had all these fruits and vegetables, so fresh means a lot to me,” says Semaan, who hails from Lebanon, where his childhood home sits



on the site of a century-old winery. Now, jars of pineapple-infused vodka decorate the bar behind him as he describes how local ingredients help him achieve the vivid colors and long finish he prizes in a cocktail.

“People want local stuff, healthier stuff,” he says. The Grove's Cucumber Rose, for example, combines cucumbers with Hendrick's gin, bitters, ginger ale and crushed Iranian rose petals. The flavor of the veggie is delicately preserved, an ode to Texas-grown, never-shipped freshness.

At **T'afia** (3701 Travis St., 713.524.6922), where chef-owner Monica Pope helped establish the farm-to-table concept, the staff went so far as to bring the market to them. As most Houston foodies well know, the Midtown Farmers Market takes place Saturday mornings at the restaurant. In addition to the Kaffir limes, thyme and tarragon that flourish in the restaurant's landscaping, market-fresh fruit and vegetables enrich the cocktails. “It's another way we get to play,” says Joe Apa, a T'afia chef who helps run the market.

Take the restaurant's Green Garden Gibson, which includes herb-infused Tito's Vodka and fat pickled pearl onions. The concoction tastes as fresh as the market smells. Plus, imbibers can try one knowing they're helping small Texas farmers prosper. Who wouldn't drink to that? ☑