Brazil ages the stuff of caipirinhas with radiation

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Excuse me, waiter, but why is my caipirinha glowing? Researchers in Brazil say they've found a faster way to age the liquor used to make the country's signature cocktail—zap it with gamma radiation for a few minutes, rather than let it sit in barrels.

This supercharged version of the sugarcane moonshine known as cachaca carries with it no radiation risk, said Valter Artur of the Nuclear Energy Center at the University of Sao Paolo.

"Tests have shown this cachaca can be consumed right after it is irradiated," Artur was quoted as saying in Monday's edition of the newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo.

So far the technique has only been used in university labs.

The gamma rays ionize the cachaca and this speeds up chemical reactions that take place naturally during the aging process, he explained.

But making juice like this would be expensive on an industrial scale because each radiation machine costs $3.5 million.

Jairo Martins da Silva, a cachaca expert, pooh-poohed the technique, saying zapped moonshine has room for improvement, he said.

"I think there is no substitute for aging it in barrels," he said.