

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



November 2009 – Classic Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a long day of eating and drinking. Choosing wines that are flexible and go with many different flavors is a must.

Sparkling wines go with just about every appetizer. For this day, try a Blanc de Noirs made from red Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier grapes. But just because it is made with red grapes doesn't mean it will have a dark red color. Most red grapes have clear juice and red wine gets its color from the juice spending time in contact with the skins. Blanc de Noirs is left on the skins a short time so it has a soft pink color. Its red fruit flavors with a touch of earth make it particularly good with mushroom appetizers, like the creamy Mushroom-topped Polenta recipe listed on this page. It can be made up ahead of time and popped back in the oven for 5 minutes to warm-up before serving.

Your turkey's stuffing should guide you when choosing a wine for the main event. If the stuffing is sweeter with raisins and nuts, go for a fruit forward, dry red Zinfandel. If your stuffing is savory with sage, sausage or mushrooms, Pinot Noir is the most versatile of the reds due to its soft tannins and earthy fruit. Unless you have the money to splurge on a really good Burgundy, look to California or Oregon and get the fruit that this meal needs. Mix some crunchy bacon into the green beans for a salty, meatiness that will complement any red. And, leave out the marshmallow from the sweet potatoes. Remember the food should never be sweeter than the wine.

For a not-too-sweet dessert, try the recipe for the Double Nut Torte. The perfect wine match will be a nutty, raisiny dessert wine called Banyuls. Produced in the South of France, Banyuls is an inexpensive fortified wine that is sweet yet tart and made from Grenache grapes.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Mushroom-topped Polenta

INGREDIENTS

2 tsp. olive oil
1¼ lbs. sliced shiitake and crimini mushrooms
2 tsp. minced garlic
1 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
¼ tsp. table salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
3 tbsp. cream cheese, regular or low-fat
¼ cup water
8 tsp. grated Parmesan cheese
Firm polenta cut into rounds, baked
2 tbsp. parsley, fresh, chopped
1 store-bought package firm polenta, cut into ¼" rounds and baked as per package instructions.

DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms and cook until softened, stirring occasionally, about 7 minutes. Stir in garlic, rosemary, salt and pepper; cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.

Stir cream cheese and water into skillet; cook over low heat until cream cheese melts and mixture looks creamy, about 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in parmesan last.

Top baked polenta rounds with mushroom mixture and garnish with parsley.

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Double Nut Torte

INGREDIENTS

4 cups finely ground, roasted nuts, one kind
or an assortment (1½ + 2½)
1½ cups sugar (½ + ¼ + ¾)
¾ cups butter (¼ + ½)
5 large eggs, separated
5 tbsp. all purpose flour (2 + 3)
1 tbsp. vanilla or (1½ tbsp lemon juice and 1
tbsp. lemon peel grated)

DIRECTIONS

Roast 1½ cups of the nuts in oven. When roasted, place in a food processor and grind until finely ground.

In a deep bowl beat egg whites with a mixer on high speed until soft peaks form. Gradually beat in ¼ cup sugar until the whites hold stiff, shiny peaks.

In a bowl beat ½ cup of sugar and ¼ cup of the butter until blended. Add the egg yolks, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Mix in the ground nuts, vanilla (or lemon juice/ lemon peel) and 3 tbsp. of the flour.

Gently fold the whites into the yolk mixture.

Spoon the batter into a buttered and floured 9" cheesecake pan with removable rim. Bake in a 350° oven until the torte is very lightly browned and the center feels just barely firm to the touch, about 20 - 25 minutes.

To prepare the topping, in a medium sized pot melt remaining ½ cup butter over a medium heat. Add the remaining sugar, flour and nuts. Stir the mixture until bubbling. Immediately spoon the toffee topping evenly over hot torte, pushing nuts with a spoon to arrange decoratively.

Return to oven and bake until nuts and topping are slightly browned, about 15 - 20 minutes longer.

Cool torte in the pan for 10 minutes, and then run a knife inside the pan rim to release. Remove pan rim. Serve torte warm with cinnamon ice cream or cool with cinnamon flavored whipped cream.