

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



December 2012 – Christmas Ale

I love traditions because taking part in them allows you to recall fond memories of years past. Traditions are worth preserving, whether it is spending time with people you see only once a year or making recipes with seasonal foods. This year, my family will start a new tradition for our Christmas dinner. We will pair our meal with a Christmas ale, a beverage that is only available during the holiday season.

Christmas ales range in weight from medium to heavy and usually have classic Christmas spice flavors like ginger, clove and nutmeg. Start your meal with the creamy Butternut Squash Bisque below and choose a medium weight Christmas ale to go with it. Look for those labeled red or brown ale, which have alcohol levels of five to seven percent. These pretty, red-colored beers will look beautiful with the orange color of the soup and echo the nutmeg flavors nicely.

When moving on to the main course, look for a beer that falls in the “stout” category. Created in the 18th century, stout beers are characterized by extra hops and made extra strong, so they kept well on the long voyage from England to Russia. Their higher alcohols are balanced by the rich complexity developed by longer roasting of the malt. They are usually a tad more bitter than lighter beers and often have flavors of coffee and chocolate. Stouts are the perfect partner to the Brown Sugar-Pineapple Ham recipe, as the sweetness in the glaze will offset the bitterness of the beer. Accompany the ham with Mashed Sweet Potatoes and Green Bean Casserole and you have a traditional holiday meal.

To end the meal on a warm note, choose a single malt Scotch whisky and pair with Coconut Fruit Cake (find the full recipe at

www.lasommeliere.com). The nutty sweetness of the coconut and condensed milk provide a rich backdrop for the pungent liquor. Additionally, the fruits in the cake are echoed in the dried fruit and orange peel so often found in good quality Scotch.

Maria Terry is a Certified Sommelier and Wine Educator in the San Francisco Bay Area. www.LaSommeliere.com

Butternut Squash Bisque

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp. canola oil
2 tbsp. unsalted butter
1 cup diced onion
1-1/2 cups diced carrots
8 cups peeled and cubed butternut squash
6 cups vegetable stock
salt and ground black pepper to taste
ground nutmeg to taste
1 cup heavy cream (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Heat the oil and melt the butter in a large pot over medium heat. Cook and stir the onion in the butter and oil under tender.

Mix the carrots and squash into the pot. Pour in vegetable stock, and season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer until vegetables are tender.

In a blender or food processor, puree the soup mixture until smooth. Return to the pot, and stir in the heavy cream. Heat through, but do not boil. Serve warm with a dash of nutmeg.

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Yield: 8 servings

Brown Sugar – Pineapple Ham

INGREDIENTS

1 7 - 9 pound fully cooked ham
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup maple syrup
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
4 canned pineapple rings, thinly sliced

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 275°. Place the ham face down in a roasting pan. Cover tightly with foil and bake for 1 1/2 hours.

Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan, combine the brown sugar, maple syrup and mustard and bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. Cook until reduced slightly, about 2 minutes; set aside.

Brush the baked ham with the glaze, then top with the pineapple rings, securing them with toothpicks. Return the ham to the oven and bake uncovered until heated through, 25 to 30 minutes

Yield: 1 ham

(on website)

Coconut Fruit Cake

INGREDIENTS

14 ounces sweetened flaked coconut
8 ounces chopped sugar rolled dates
16 ounces pecan pieces

8 ounces candied cherries
8 ounces diced candied pineapple
2 (14 ounce) cans sweetened condensed milk

DIRECTIONS

Place coconut, dates, and pecan pieces in a very large (7 quart or larger) bowl. Mix well (hands work best). Add the cherries, pineapple, and sweetened condensed milk. Mix well, rest at room temp.

Spray 2 - 9"x5" loaf pans and line with waxed (or parchment) paper so the paper comes up past the side of the pan. Spray the paper and fill with mixture. Wet hands to keep batter from sticking and pack mixture firmly into pan. Bake at 300° for 1 hour, or until lightly browned. Remove from oven and let cool for 10 minutes in pan.

Loosen the paper/cake from pan and turn pan upside down onto a paper-lined cookie sheet. Lift pan from the cake. Remove paper from bottom of cake right away. Cool completely and wrap in waxed (or parchment) paper, then in heavy duty aluminum foil. May be refrigerated up to 3 months or frozen up to 1 year.

Yield: 2 loaves