

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



December 2015 – Winter Heat

Hot drinks are warm and cozy to have inside when the weather is cold outside. Interestingly, other than simple black tea or coffee, most hot drinks are sweet. For this reason, they pair well with sweet foods. Often, they are topped with whipped cream and become a dessert in their own right. I am partial to hot drinks paired with crumbly textured desserts like cakes and cookies. For savory dishes, the sugar can serve as a counter-balance for foods that are spicy or salty.

Real estate agents often tell clients to make Hot Apple Cider for an open house. This is because the smell of cinnamon and apples is very inviting; it's an aroma that may even make you think of chestnuts roasting on an open fire. Or, even better, chestnuts wrapped up in bacon and slathered with sweet and sour sauce. Bacon-Wrapped Water Chestnuts are a classic appetizer that my mom made for her parties in the 70s. They are the perfect combination of salty and sweet flavors and have both crunchy and chewy textures. They are delicious whether they bring back memories of the past or allow you to start new memories today.

Mulled Wine is scented with classic baking spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and allspice. These spices are also found in Chai Tea, the definitive beverage pairing for Indian food. This is what inspired me to pair it with Indian-Spiced Chicken. The slightly sweet, fruity wine complements the spices found in the dish. And, the fat from the cream in the sauce tames the tannins found in the wine. Serve with steamed basmati rice and a simple vegetable to balance the intense flavors in the chicken and the wine. By the end of the course, this pairing will make you warm all over.

Irish coffee is made with one ounce of Irish cream liqueur to every one cup of coffee. While this treat can be a dessert on its own, very few people can resist pairing it with a Russian teacake cookie (for one recipe, see Pair Up, Sept. 2015). Again, this is a recipe from my childhood. My favorite cousin, Sue, made them for the family every Christmas. These cookies are primarily finely chopped walnuts held together with butter and rolled in powdered sugar. They are buttery, salty and sweet, all at the same time. This pairing is a terrific example of why hot coffee with crunchy cookies is enjoyed worldwide.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Hot Apple Cider

INGREDIENTS

4-5 cups apple juice
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg, 3 ounces spiced rum (optional)
Cinnamon sticks and apple slices to garnish.

DIRECTIONS

In a small pot heat the apple juice, spices and rum (if using) over low/medium heat. Stir often while the mixture is heating so the spices will blend into the juice (you don't want any spice clumps). Once it's hot, pour into mugs and garnish with apple slices and cinnamon sticks. Serve warm.

Yield: 4 servings

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Bacon-Wrapped Water Chestnuts

INGREDIENTS

1 pound bacon, cut in half
2 (8 ounce) cans water chestnuts
1½ cups ketchup
1 cup packed brown sugar

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 375 °F. Wrap 1/2 strip of bacon around each water chestnut. Combine ketchup and sugar in a small bowl and mix together; dip each wrapped water chestnut into this mixture. Place water chestnuts in a lightly greased 9x13 inch baking dish and bake covered in the preheated oven for 20 minutes, or until bacon is crisp.

Yield: 10 servings

Mulled Wine

INGREDIENTS

1 bottle (750 milliliters) fruity red wine
1 cup brandy
1 medium orange, sliced
1 medium lemon, sliced
1 cup sugar
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 cinnamon sticks (3 inches)
1/2 teaspoon whole allspice
1/2 teaspoon aniseed
1/2 teaspoon whole peppercorns
3 whole cloves

DIRECTIONS

In a large saucepan, combine the wine, brandy, orange, lemon, sugar, and nutmeg. Place remaining spices on a double thickness of cheesecloth; bring up corners of

cloth and tie with string to form a bag. Add spice bag to wine mixture.

Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat; cover and simmer gently for 20 minutes. Cool; cover and refrigerate overnight.

Strain; discard fruit and spice bag. Reheat wine; serve warm in mugs.

Yield: 4 servings

Indian-Spiced Chicken

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 pounds boneless skinless chicken breasts
1 cup whole milk plain yogurt
3 large cloves garlic, pressed
1-inch piece ginger, grated
8 cardamom pods, cracked with the back of a chef's knife
1 tablespoon curry powder
1/2 teaspoon dried red chili flakes
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 tablespoon sweet paprika
2 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoon salt
20 grinds black pepper
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 medium onion, cut into medium dice
3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 cups half-and-half

DIRECTIONS

Cut the chicken breasts roughly into 2 by 2-inch pieces. Mix together the yogurt, garlic, ginger, cardamom, curry powder, chili flakes, coriander, paprika, honey, salt, and pepper until thoroughly combined. Add chicken pieces to yogurt mixture, cover, and

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refrigerate at least 1 hour or as long as overnight. Bring to room temperature before cooking.

In a large skillet, heat the vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook until translucent. Stir in tomato paste until evenly distributed and then add the half-and-half. Slide in the chicken and marinade, stir well, and bring mixture to a simmer. Reduce the heat so that the liquid remains at a low simmer. Cook about 15 minutes until chicken is no longer pink in the middle but still tender and moist. Serve immediately over basmati rice.

Yield: 4 servings

Russian Teacakes

INGREDIENTS

1 cup butter
1/3 cup brown sugar
¼ tsp. lemon zest
1 tsp. vanilla
½ tsp. salt
2 cups flour
2 cups finely chopped walnuts or pecans
Confectioners' sugar

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 375°.

Cream butter, brown sugar, lemon zest, vanilla and salt. Add flour and incorporate well. Add nuts and thick soft dough will form. Refrigerate to cool.

Roll in palms to form small balls the size of walnuts.

Bake on ungreased cookie sheets for 12- 15 minutes. Cool slightly, but while still warm roll in powdered sugar.

Yield: 4 dozen cookies