

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



September 2017 – Veggie Break

After a long summer of BBQs, I like to dedicate a day to meat-free eating. I want something different than the usual salads that accompany grilled meats, and I want these foods to burst with a variety of flavors: sweet, sour, salty, savory, and even a little bitter.

Since September is often the hottest month in the San Francisco East Bay, I still find myself craving cold soups. Gazpacho is one that makes you want to smack your lips when you take a spoonful. It is the perfect way to take advantage of the last of the sweet summer tomatoes and crisp cucumbers. I love it with a creamy dollop of sour cream as a garnish, and sometimes I throw in a jalapeño with the bell peppers if I am craving a little spice. To pair, Grüner Veltliner is the highly sought after grape from Austria that immediately comes to mind for these intense vegetal flavors. Grüner has flavors of lime zest and white pepper, with a searing acidity that stands up to the acid in the soup. If you can't find a Grüner, a Sauvignon Blanc will work; however, do try to seek out this unique wine. If you have never had Grüner before, I think you will be surprised at how exciting it is, and it may even become a new favorite.

I could get lost in a main course of ratatouille, a Southern French country dish, accompanied by some really good French bread and a bottle of Southern Rhone red wine but my husband would probably boycott dinner if I didn't serve some kind of meat alongside. So, for those folks who are inclined, an accompaniment of just about any grilled meat will go nicely. For me, the earthy flavors of eggplant, peppers and zucchini mingled with tomatoes, garlic and fresh herbs spiked with a hit of red wine vinegar provide enough texture and flavor to

satisfy my appetite. As for the wine, this is a perfect time to keep things regional. Look for a Southern Rhone red made from a blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre. Southern Rhones tend to have flavors of bright red fruit that are deepened by notes of dark earth and an herbaceous quality that mimic those exact flavors in ratatouille.

Finish off your meal with a Pinot Noir from your favorite wine growing region and the Candy Cap Mushroom Cheesecake. A candy cap mushroom doesn't taste like any other mushroom you've ever tasted. It tastes more like French toast, pancakes, or waffles with maple syrup. And, when used in the recipe below, it takes on a savory, sweet quality that works with the earthy, savory, and sweet fruit flavors in the Pinot.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Gazpacho

INGREDIENTS

- 1 hothouse cucumber, halved and seeded, but not peeled
- 2 red bell peppers, cored and seeded
- 4 plum tomatoes
- 1 red onion
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 23 ounces tomato juice (3 cups)
- 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup good olive oil
- 1/2 tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

Roughly chop the cucumbers, bell peppers, tomatoes, and red onions into 1-

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inch cubes. Put each vegetable separately into a food processor fitted with a steel blade and pulse until it is coarsely chopped. Do not over process!

After each vegetable is processed, combine them in a large bowl and add the garlic, tomato juice, vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Mix well and chill before serving. The longer gazpacho sits, the more the flavors develop.

Yield: 4-6 servings

Ratatouille

INGREDIENTS

1 can (28 ounces) whole peeled tomatoes
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 large eggplant (1 pound), cut into 1-inch pieces
Coarse salt and ground pepper
2 large yellow onions (1 pound total), diced large
1 head garlic, cloves smashed and peeled
2 bell peppers (any color), seeded and diced large
2 large zucchini (1 pound total), diced large
1 bay leaf
1 tbsp. fresh marjoram or oregano leaves
2 to 3 tbsp. red-wine vinegar

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place tomatoes and juices on a rimmed baking sheet and use your hands to break tomatoes into 3/4-inch pieces. Drizzle with two tablespoons oil and bake until thickened, 30 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a colander, toss eggplant with 1½ teaspoons salt. Let sit 20 minutes, then squeeze out excess liquid. In a large Dutch oven or heavy pot, heat four

tablespoons oil over medium. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, five minutes. Add garlic and cook until onions and garlic are soft, five minutes. Add peppers and cook, stirring, until crisp-tender, four minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Add tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, bay leaf, and marjoram to pot. Cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture comes to a simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low, partially cover, and cook at a gentle simmer until vegetables are tender but not mushy, 15 minutes. Season to taste with vinegar, salt, and pepper. Remove bay leaf before serving.

Yield: 10-12 servings

Candy Cap Mushroom Cheesecake

INGREDIENTS

Syrup:

½ cup water
½ cup sugar
¼ oz. dried candy cap mushrooms

Crust:

8 full graham crackers
6 Ritz crackers
6 tbsp. melted butter
1 tbsp. brown sugar

Filling:

1 (12 oz.) container fresh whole milk ricotta, drained
2 (8 oz.) packages cream cheese, room temperature
¾ cup sugar
¼ cup candy cap mushroom simple syrup

1 tsp. lemon zest, grated

Candied Bacon Topping:

12 slices bacon
Finely ground black pepper

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1/3 cup light brown sugar

DIRECTIONS

Make syrup:

Using a mortar and pestle or a coffee grinder, grind the candy cap mushrooms into a very fine powder. In a small saucepan, combine equal parts water and sugar. Boil and stir constantly until it is reduced by half and starts to thicken. Add the mushroom powder, one tablespoon at a time.

Make bacon:

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

Put bacon slices in a bowl, season them with pepper and toss with the brown sugar. Cover a baking sheet with parchment or foil and arrange the bacon in a single layer on top. Sprinkle any sugar left in the bowl over the bacon.

Place the tray in the center of the oven and bake for 20 minutes. If it is not golden brown and fairly crispy, cook it for 10 to 15 minutes longer. The bacon will “crisp” up as it sits.

Make crust:

Combine butter and sugar. Place graham crackers and Ritz crackers in a Ziploc bag. Crush until coarse crumbs result. Place in large bowl and combine with butter and sugar until it just holds together.

Make cheesecake:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Wrap the outside of a 9-inch springform pan with 2 3/4-inch-high sides with 2 layers of heavy-duty foil. Press the crumb mixture over the bottom (not the sides) of the prepared pan. Bake until the crust is golden, about 7 minutes. Cool the crust completely on a cooling rack.

Blend the ricotta in a clean food processor until smooth. Add the cream cheese and sugar and blend well, stopping the machine occasionally and scraping down

the sides of the work bowl. Blend in the candy cap syrup and lemon zest. Add the eggs and pulse just until blended.

Pour the cheese mixture over the crust in the pan. Place the spring form pan in a large roasting pan. Pour enough hot water into the roasting pan to come halfway up the sides of the spring form pan. Bake until the cheesecake is golden and the center of the cake moves slightly when the pan is gently shaken, about 1 hour and 5 minutes (the cake will become firm when it is cold). Top with crumbled candy bacon.

Transfer the cake to a rack and cool 1 hour. Refrigerate until the cheesecake is cold, at least 8 hours and up to 2 days. Cut the cake into wedges and serve.

Yield: 6-8 servings