

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



February 2019 – Fresh Flavor

Spring has not quite arrived in Northern California, but I'm starting to crave some fresh flavors after a long winter of comfort foods. Herbal and citrus flavors often bring that burst of freshness when spring and summer produce is still underground. Here is a simple, homestyle meal that can be cut in half to make an intimate meal for two or scaled-up to make a party for eight.

Gin & tonic is one of my go-to drinks that is both fresh tasting and uncomplicated. The drink evolved from an herbal medicine in the Middle Ages. To be considered a gin, the liquor's predominant flavor must be juniper berry. Juniper berries are not actual berries but similar to pinecones; they just happen to look like berries. The juniper flavor is reminiscent of pine but is a bit more citrusy. When mixed with tonic water and a squeeze of lime, this citrusy drink goes surprisingly well with a butter lettuce salad that has crispy prosciutto, tangy blue cheese, and a slightly sweet balsamic vinaigrette. The fresh herbaceous flavor of the drink picks-up on the herbal flavors of the vegetables. The salty, fatty prosciutto and cheese offset the alcohol, and the bitterness from the juniper is countered by the sweet vinaigrette.

Albariño from Spain or California fits the bill perfectly as a fresh, winter white wine. Albariño has herbal, grassy aromas with citrus and stone fruit flavors and is full-bodied; a weight that is welcome on cooler days. It is a wonderful, dry white wine that would be a lovely complement to Spinach and Feta Stuffed Chicken Breast. The tangy feta cheese mimics the acidity in the wine, and the herbs and fresh spinach picks up on its grassy aromas. I like this dish with some simple steamed rice and fresh asparagus alongside.

A terrific sweet end to this light meal is small, seedless mandarin oranges, often labeled "Cuties." They look beautiful piled high in a big bowl and are delightfully interactive. Finish off your meal on a simple fresh note, with no beverage required.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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

Prosciutto & Blue Cheese Salad

INGREDIENTS

Salad:

- 8 cups butter lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces
- 1 cup cucumber, peeled and cubed into ½" dice
- ¼ cup red onion diced fine
- 4-6 oz. prosciutto, cooked crisp and crumbled
- ½ cup blue cheese crumbles

Dressing:

- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 2 Tablespoons granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
- ½ cup olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Blend dressing ingredients. Toss vegetables with three to four tablespoons of dressing (store any unused dressing in the refrigerator). Add blue cheese and prosciutto and toss again.

Yield: 4 servings

Spinach and Feta Stuffed
Chicken Breast

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 2 Tablespoons chopped fresh dill
- 5 ounces baby spinach
- 2 ounces crumbled feta cheese (about ½ cup)
- 4 (6-ounce) skinless, boneless chicken breasts
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1½ teaspoons olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Heat a large skillet over medium heat. Add one tablespoon olive oil to the pan. Add onion; cook eight minutes, stirring frequently. Remove pan from heat; stir in dill, spinach, and feta cheese. Cool ten minutes. Cut a horizontal slit through the center of each chicken breast to form a pocket. Stuff each pocket evenly with spinach mixture. Close pockets with toothpicks. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Heat skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1½ teaspoons olive oil to the pan. Add chicken; cook four minutes. Turn chicken. Cover pan, reduce heat to medium, and cook five minutes or until chicken is done.

Yield: 4 servings