

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



July 2014 – Lemon Sunshine

Lemon is an appealing flavor to me all year around, but somehow is even better on a hot summer day. This menu, based on lemon-flavored recipes, is fun and results in a meal that is packed with flavor.

Lemonade and beer are a terrific flavor combination - sweet and sour from the lemonade, bitter and savory from the beer. This combination is commonly called a Lemon Shandy. Some breweries bottle their own versions, but you can make your own with the recipe provided. Shandies are light and refreshing and go down easy on a hot summer afternoon. Additionally, the low alcohol, slight spritz, and yeasty/lemony flavor combination make it a beverage that will go with just about any food. I like the idea of pairing it with a cool yogurt dip that has an abundance of fresh herbs and a bright burst of lemon. This versatile dip is good for almost anything you can eat with your fingers, including vegetables, pita, crackers, and even chicken wings. This pairing will create a leisurely feel, perfect for a relaxing afternoon.

My kids inspired the main course. They love lemon chicken at a local Chinese restaurant. I sought out this recipe so I could make it for them at home. Deep-frying is better for keeping the coating on the chicken, but pan-frying leaves a little extra flavor in the pan for the sauce. Even if you lose a little of the coating, the result is very tasty. I like this recipe with steamed jasmine rice, pea pods, and a refreshing Albariño (a white wine from Spain). The Albariño grape makes a white wine with peach and lemon flavors that cut through the rich fat and stands up to the intense flavors of the chicken. However, if you can't find an Albariño, a Riesling will be a fine substitute.

For dessert, I got a little help from a boxed cake mix to bake a super quick, easy cake that is beautiful when sliced. What should be its partner? How about an ice-cold limoncello? When sipped alongside, it is like having a little extra glaze with a bit of an alcoholic kick.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Lemon Shandy

INGREDIENTS

1 cup sugar
3 cups water
Four 3-inch strips lemon zest, removed with a vegetable peeler
1 cup fresh lemon juice
2 fresh mint sprigs
Chilled beer, such as pale ale

DIRECTIONS

In a small saucepan bring sugar and 1 cup water to a boil, stirring until sugar is dissolved, and stir in zest. Cool sugar syrup to room temperature.

Transfer syrup to a small pitcher and stir in remaining 2 cups water, lemon juice, and mint. Chill lemonade until cold. (Makes about 4½ cups lemonade.)

Pour ¼ cup lemonade, or to taste, into each of 4 chilled beer glasses and top off with beer.

Yield: 4½ cups lemonade – 18 shandies

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Lemon Herb Yogurt Dip

INGREDIENTS

1 cup plain yogurt (Greek-style preferred)
1 tablespoon minced green onion, white and light green parts only
3 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill
1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives
1 tablespoon thinly-sliced fresh basil
1 teaspoon sherry vinegar
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
Salt and pepper, to taste
Fresh vegetables, pita bread, chips and crackers, to serve

DIRECTIONS

In a small bowl, whisk all ingredients together. Taste and adjust the seasoning, adding salt and pepper to taste. Serve with your favorite fresh vegetables, pita bread, chips or crackers. Cover and refrigerate leftovers and enjoy within 3 to 4 days. Note: For a slightly less tangy dip, substitute half of the yogurt for sour cream.

Yield: 1 cup

Asian Lemon Chicken

INGREDIENTS

1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts
1 teaspoon sesame oil
1 tablespoon sherry
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 egg white
2 tablespoons cornstarch
Vegetable oil for cooking

Garnish: sliced scallions and lemon wedges

For the sauce:

5 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
3 tablespoons sugar
Pinch of salt
2-1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
6 tablespoons cold water

DIRECTIONS

Cut chicken into strips about 1/2-inch wide and transfer to a mixing bowl.

Add the sesame oil, sherry, ground ginger, salt and pepper to the chicken. Mix well and marinate at room temperature for about 15 minutes.

In a separate bowl, whisk the egg white and cornstarch together until white and frothy. Add to the chicken and combine well.

Whisk the cornstarch and water together for the sauce and set aside.

Deep fry at 325° or pan fry (heat vegetable oil in a non-stick wok or frying pan over medium-high heat) until cooked through and golden brown on all sides, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate and set aside.

Return the pan to the heat and add the lemon juice, sugar and salt. Bring to boil, then add the cornstarch-water mixture. Stir constantly until the sauce is smooth and reaches a syrupy consistency, 1 to 2 minutes. Return the chicken to the pan and toss to coat with the sauce. Add the scallions, cook for 1 minute, then transfer to plates and spoon any sauce remaining in the pan over the chicken.

Yield: 4 servings

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Lemon Blueberry Cake

INGREDIENTS

1 package light yellow cake mix
1 cup water
1/3 cup lemon juice
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 8 oz. block of fat free cream cheese,
softened
3 large egg whites
1 large egg

1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries, thawed

Topping:

1 cup sifted powdered sugar
4 tsp. lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°.

Grease and flour at 12-cup Bundt or loaf pan.

Combine cake mix all ingredients other than blueberries in large bowl. Beat at low speed of a mixer 30 seconds and continue at medium speed 2 minutes. Fold in blueberries. Pour cake batter into prepared pan.

Bake 50 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool cake in pan 10 minutes: remove from pan. Cool completely on a wire rack.

Combine the sugar and 4 teaspoons lemon juice in a small bowl, and drizzle glaze over cake.

Yield: 8-12 servings

Limoncello

INGREDIENTS

10 lemons
1 (750-ml) bottle vodka
3 1/2 cups water
2 1/2 cups sugar

DIRECTIONS

Using a vegetable peeler, remove the peel from the lemons in long strips (reserve the lemons for another use). Using a small sharp knife, trim away the white pith from the lemon peels; discard the pith. Place the lemon peels in a 2-quart pitcher. Pour the vodka over the peels and cover with plastic wrap. Steep the lemon peels in the vodka for 4 days at room temperature.

Stir the water and sugar in a large saucepan over medium heat until the sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes. Cool completely. Pour the sugar syrup over the vodka mixture. Cover and let stand at room temperature overnight. Strain the limoncello through a mesh strainer. Discard the peels. Transfer the limoncello to bottles. Seal the bottles and refrigerate until cold, at least 4 hours and up to 1 month.

Yield: 7 cups