

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



December 2017 – Winter Wonderland

All over the northern hemisphere, we turn to warm and hearty foods in the winter. This menu satisfies your cravings with an appetizer of gooey cheese, an entrée of meaty stew, and a grand finale – a fluffy coconut cake. Then, the grand finale, a fluffy coconut cake. It will have you dreaming of softly falling snow, even when it's well above freezing outside.

As a child of the '70s, I remember my mom serving fondue at many of her parties. Fondue is like "raclette," a traditional melted Swiss cheese dish popular in Alsace, France. The recipe below includes two swiss cheeses, Gruyere and Emmental. Lightly seasoned with wine, lemon, and mustard, this is an interactive appetizer. It is good with just about any white wine but outstanding paired regionally with one of the four noble grapes of Alsace: Riesling, Pinot Gris, Muscat, or Gewürztraminer. The white wines of Alsace have remarkable acidity. Riesling and Pinot Gris tend to be more fruit flavored, and both Muscat and Gewürztraminer are very floral. All are delicious.

A comforting stew is easy on the hostess because it can be made in advance and guests can serve themselves. I have chosen a recipe for lamb stew featuring the classic trio: celery, onion, and carrot. The meat is cooked in a tomato and wine broth until it is falling off the bone. A versatile dish, it goes with just about any red wine. You can pick your favorite. However, continuing on a regional theme, why not seek out a Lagrein from the Alto-Adige region of Italy? It has ripe cherry flavors and smoky notes of roasted coffee. You won't be disappointed.

The crowning glory of your cozy winter meal is a three-layer Coconut Cake that looks like it has been dusted with snow. This

cake comes together remarkably fast and can even be assembled three days ahead! Talk about a hostess's dream dessert; all the work is done except for a quick frosting of the cake the morning of the party. Be warned, this is a super sweet cake. Personally, I vote for pairing it with hot black coffee, but if you want to keep the party flowing, choose a sweet sparkling wine like Doux Champagne or Prosecco. The bubbles refresh the palate, and the sugar matches the sweetness of the cake.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Classic Cheese Fondue

INGREDIENTS

½ pound Gruyere, coarsely grated
½ pound Emmental, coarsely grated
2 tbsp. cornstarch
1 garlic clove
1 cup dry white wine
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 tbsp. Kirsch (dry cherry brandy)
½ tsp. dry mustard
Pinch freshly grated nutmeg
Freshly ground black pepper
Dipping items of your choice (e.g. bread cubes, granny smith apples, or blanched veggies)

DIRECTIONS

In a small bowl, coat the cheeses with cornstarch and set aside. Rub the inside of the ceramic fondue pot or 2-quart saucepan with the garlic and discard.

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Over medium heat, add the wine and lemon juice and bring to a gentle simmer. Gradually stir the cheese into the simmering liquid. Melting the cheese gradually encourages a smooth fondue. Once smooth, stir in cherry brandy, mustard and nutmeg.

Yield: 4-6 servings

Italian Lamb Stew

INGREDIENTS

3 lbs. various cuts of lamb
2 carrots chopped
2 celery stalks chopped
1 large onion chopped
2 cups tomato sauce
1 cup white wine
1 cup beef or veal stock
1 cup cannellini beans
Salt and pepper
All-purpose flour for dredging
Extra virgin olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Lightly dredge lamb pieces in flour and place in a hot pan with some olive oil. Cook for five minutes on each side or until nicely browned. Remove lamb and set aside.

In the same pan, add onion, celery and carrots sauté for five minutes until veggies are soft. Now add tomato sauce, beans, stock and white wine and cook an additional five minutes until well blended and warmed through. Place lamb in the sauce, cover, and place in a 400°F oven for 1½ hours.

Yield: 4-6 servings

Coconut Cake

INGREDIENTS

1½ cups (3 sticks) butter, divided
2 cups sugar, plus ¾ cup for filling
4 large eggs, room temperature
3 cups self-rising flour, sifted
1 cup unsweetened coconut milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract, plus 1½ teaspoons for frosting
1 cup sour cream
¼ cup whole milk
½ cup sweetened coconut flakes, plus more for sprinkling
2 (8 oz.) packages cream cheese
2 cups confectioner's sugar, sifted or whisked to remove lumps
½ cup sweetened cream of coconut

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter and flour three (9-inch) round cake pans.

Cream one cup butter and two cups sugar together in a standing mixer outfitted with the paddle attachment until light and fluffy, about seven minutes. Add the eggs, one a time, beating well after each addition. Add the flour and coconut milk, alternately, beginning and ending with the flour. Mix in two teaspoons vanilla.

Divide the batter among the three prepared cake pans. Bake for 25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean. Cool on wire racks for ten minutes, then remove cakes from pans and cool completely on the wire racks.

To make the filling: Mix together the sour cream, ¾ cup sugar, milk, and coconut flakes in a large bowl.

Once cake layers are cool, poke all over with a wooden skewer. Spread 1/3 of the

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filling over the first cake round, letting the filling fall into the holes you have poked. Top with a second round, spread another 1/3 of the filling over the top. Place the final layer and spread the remaining filling over the top. The filling step can be done up to three days ahead of time so the cake can fully absorb the layers.

To make the frosting: In a bowl, beat together the cream cheese and ½ cup butter using an electric hand-held mixer. Gradually add the confectioner's sugar and beat until light and fluffy. Beat in the coconut cream and 1½ teaspoons vanilla.

Frost the top and sides of the cake, and then sprinkle the tops and sides with remaining coconut flakes.

Yield: one big cake