

# PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



## December 2019 – Red Wine Party

Red wines don't often go well with classic finger foods found at holiday parties. This may seem surprising, but the basis of this statement is rooted in the fact that red wine is generally high in tannins and low in acids. The low acidity means that you can't have anything too acidic with it. And, the high tannins mean that it can't be anything cold, spicy, or vegetal. The good news is that there are some great options and general guidelines you can use to make your party foods work for the red wine drinkers in the crowd.

Folks seem to believe that all cheese goes with red wine. In reality, many kinds of cheese can make red wines taste metallic or flat. Tangy cheeses like goat cheese or strong cheese like blue, in my opinion, don't work with big red wines. My favorite red wine cheese is Manchego cheese from Spain. It is firm and nutty. Go one step further and tie in the red fruit flavors in the wine by spreading a touch of quince paste on each thin triangle of the cheese. Quince paste is a firm jam made from quince fruit that is neither too sweet nor too sour. As for which red, why not try a Rioja? You can go for a less expensive and lighter style Crianza Rioja, or kick it up a notch with a bit more aging and oak flavor with a Reserva.

If you really want your appetizers to sing with the red wines at your party, you need meat with heat. The fact of the matter is that fat makes red wines taste smooth and supple, while cold fat is generally off-putting. Sausage Stuffed Mushrooms work with just about any red wine, and Syrah is one of the best. Often characterized as the "meatiest" of reds, Syrah has substantial tannins and tobacco notes that give it a smoky flavor. With tons of umami from the pork sausage, garlic, and Parmesan cheese,

these stuffed mushrooms will keep the red wines going down smooth.

Sweet Bourbon Bacon Crackers are a sweet and savory bite that almost makes you willing to forgo an actual dessert. I like them with a fruit forward Zinfandel. They work with high tannin, mountain Zins from places like Santa Cruz and Howell Mountain, as well as slightly sweet Zins found in many valley floor areas like Lodi and Sonoma Valley.

So, go on. Pair Up!

*Maria Terry is a Certified Sommelier and Wine Educator in the San Francisco Bay Area. [www.LaSommeliere.com](http://www.LaSommeliere.com)*

## Sausage Stuffed Mushrooms

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds large mushrooms, stems removed and reserved
- 1 pkg. Jimmy Dean® Premium Pork Regular Roll Sausage
- 1 clove garlic, minced, or 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 4 ounces cream cheese, cubed, softened
- ¾ cup dry Italian breadcrumbs, divided
- ½ cup (2 ounces) grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley or 1 tsp. dried parsley
- 1 Tablespoon olive oil

### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F. Finely chop enough mushroom stems to measure one cup; discard any remaining stems. Place mushroom caps, top side down, in lightly greased shallow baking pans.

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Cook sausage, chopped stems, and garlic in a large skillet over MEDIUM-HIGH heat for 8-10 minutes or until sausage is thoroughly cooked, stirring frequently; drain. Return to skillet. Add cream cheese, ½ cup breadcrumbs, ¼ cup Parmesan cheese, and parsley; mix well. Spoon into mushroom caps. Combine remaining breadcrumbs, remaining Parmesan cheese, and oil; sprinkle over mushrooms. Bake 20 minutes or until mushrooms are tender and stuffing is lightly browned.

Yield: about 50 mushrooms

### **Sweet Bourbon Bacon Crackers**

#### **INGREDIENTS**

2 sleeves Ritz crackers  
One pound of bacon, cut into 1" pieces  
About ½ cup brown sugar or bourbon smoked brown sugar.

#### **DIRECTIONS**

Preheat oven to 275°F. Cover a baking sheet with foil. Fit a wire rack over foil.

Arrange crackers on wire rack. Place a piece of raw bacon on top of each cracker. Top each piece of bacon with about ½ tsp. of sugar.

Bake for about 2 hours. The bacon will become crisp and the sugar will melt and caramelized over bacon. Remove from the rack soon because the sugar hardens as it cools and can cause the crackers to stick to the rack.

Yield: about 48 crackers