

# PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



## April 2014 – Spring Fling

This month I throw caution to the wind and suggest a menu entirely based on cocktail pairings. Cocktails can be a challenge to pair with foods because of their high alcohol content. This is why they are usually served with salted nuts; salt tames the heat of the alcohol. I have chosen two drinks that have additional non-alcoholic ingredients, which make them more food friendly. And, there is a strong cheese to complement a strong drink at the end of the meal.

Although our local berries have not yet come into season, blackberries from South America are fairly well priced and readily available in California. Start your evening off with a Blackberry Thyme Bramble, the perfect blend of sweet fruit, lemony thyme and woody gin. This refreshing gin-based drink is an excellent choice to pair with a creamy goat cheese spread on salty crackers. Both the cheese and the drink are tangy and light.

A hearty entrée of Cuban Pork Roast with Red Beans and Rice should be classically paired with its brethren, the mojito. The mojito, Cuba's national cocktail, it gets its name from the African word *mojo*, which means, "to cast a spell." Keep in mind, making mojitos in a pitcher doesn't work—it's impossible to distribute the lime and mint evenly, plus, the club soda tends to turn flat. Instead, muddle a large batch of mint, limes and sugar, then pour the mixture into glasses and top with ice, rum and club soda.

Finish off your meal with a classic pairing of sweet, salty and savory. Blue cheese, which is made all over the world, is a bold partner to stand up to the potent crispness of an appetizer. Furthermore, sliced apples are convenient vehicles for

eating cheese. Serve a plate of sliced apples with your appetizer and include a couple varieties of blues: Stilton (English), Roquefort (French), Gorgonzola (Italian), Cabrales (Spanish) and the eponymous, Blue Cheese from the US.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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## Blackberry Thyme Bramble

### INGREDIENTS

2 oz. gin (London dry style)  
1 oz. fresh lemon juice  
1 oz. thyme-infused simple syrup (see below for recipe)  
1/4 cup fresh blackberries  
Club soda  
Fresh thyme sprigs for garnish

### Thyme-infused simple syrup

1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 cup water  
3 sprigs fresh thyme

### DIRECTIONS

For the syrup: Place the sugar, water and thyme sprigs into small saucepan. Heat over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Use the spoon to lightly crush the thyme sprigs in the sugar syrup. Heat until the sugar has dissolved in the water. Do NOT let it come to a boil! Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature.

Remove the thyme sprigs and pour the syrup into a small container and store it in the refrigerator. It should last for a few months in the fridge.

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For the cocktail: In a tall glass, pour in your thyme-infused simple syrup and the blackberries. Using a muddler or a long spoon, crush the berries into the sugar syrup. Add the lemon juice and thyme-infused simple syrup. Mix with a long spoon. Next, fill up the rest of your glass with ample ice, add the gin and top with club soda. Stir briefly and serve with fresh thyme springs and a few whole blackberries as garnish

Yield: 1 drink

## Mojito

### INGREDIENTS

1/2 lime, cut into 4 pieces  
1/4 cup fresh mint leaves, torn, plus 1 mint sprig for garnish  
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon granulated sugar  
Ice cubes  
1/4 cup (2 ounces) white rum  
1/2 cup club soda, chilled

### DIRECTIONS

In a tall glass, muddle the pieces of lime with the mint leaves and sugar until the sugar is dissolved. Fill the glass with ice and stir in the rum and club soda. Garnish with the mint sprig and serve right away.

Yield: 1 drink

## Cuban Pork Roast

### INGREDIENTS

2 teaspoons cumin powder  
1/2 teaspoon black pepper  
4 cloves garlic, chopped  
2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon dried oregano  
1/3 cup orange juice  
1/3 cup dry sherry  
3 tablespoons lemon juice  
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
4 pounds pork shoulder, trimmed and tied

### DIRECTIONS

Make a paste with cumin, pepper, garlic, salt, and oregano. You can also do this in the small bowl of a food processor. Transfer to a small bowl, and stir in orange juice, lime juice, lemon juice, sherry, and olive oil.

Place the pork in a large resealable plastic bag. Pour citrus marinade over meat, and seal. Refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours, turning the bag over occasionally.

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C).

Transfer pork and marinade to a roasting pan, and place in the oven. Roast for about 2 1/2 hours, basting with pan juices occasionally, or until an instant read thermometer inserted in the center reads 145 degrees F (63 degrees C). Add small amounts of water to the pan if it dries out.

Transfer the pork to a carving board, cover loosely with foil, and let rest for 15 minutes. Carve, and serve.

Yield: 8 servings

## Red Beans and Rice

### INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 cup chopped onion

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1 green bell pepper, chopped  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1 teaspoon salt  
4 tablespoons tomato paste  
1 (15.25 ounce) can kidney beans, drained  
with liquid reserved  
1 cup uncooked white rice

## **DIRECTIONS**

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Sauté onion, bell pepper and garlic. When onion is translucent add salt and tomato paste. Reduce heat to low and cook 2 minutes. Stir in the beans and rice.

Pour the liquid from the beans into a large measuring cup and add enough water to reach a volume of 2 1/2 cups; pour into beans. Cover and cook on low for 45 to 50 minutes, or until liquid is absorbed and rice is cooked.

Yield: 6 servings

## **Appletini**

### **INGREDIENTS**

3 shots of Vodka  
1 shot of Apple Schnapps or Calvados  
1 shot of Cointreau  
Green Apple slice for Garnish

### **DIRECTIONS**

Add ice cubes to a cocktail shaker. Add vodka, apple schnapps and Cointreau into the shaker. Shake to mix well. Strain the content of the shaker into a chilled martini glass. Garnish with a green apple slice.

Yield: 1 drink