

Cooking with Wine

By Tracy Rowand, Taste to Savour Catering Inc., www.tastetosavour.com

Wine brings many benefits to cooking -- my favourite being the glass you drink while cooking. In addition, wine intensifies and enhances the flavour of food. When used in a marinade, wine also helps tenderize meat.

While it is not necessary to use expensive bottles of wine when cooking, it is important that you like the taste of the wine. If you don't, the wine will have an adverse affect on your palate when you taste the food later. It is also important to note that the strongest characteristic of the wine will be intensified during the cooking process, such as fruitiness, sourness, etc., so take this into consideration when choosing the wine. Pouring yourself a glass first and tasting it before you add the wine to the sauce or marinade you are preparing is always a good idea.

To achieve the best results when cooking with wine, add the wine at the beginning of the cooking process rather than then end, as this will allow the wine to blend with the food and intensify the flavour. Adding wine at the end will create an acidic flavour.

Here is one of my husband's favourite recipes that is best with a nice citrusy white. I usually pair with wild green and a shallot vinaigrette, mashed potatoes, roasted tomatoes and French beans. You can serve the same white with dinner or, if you prefer red, choose a lighter bodied wine from Spain or a Pinot noir.

Chicken with Forty Cloves of Garlic

40 cloves of garlic, peeled (about 3 heads)

5 lbs of boneless skinless thighs or breast

Sea salt

Black pepper

1 tbsp unsalted butter

2 tbsp olive oil (doesn't need to be extra virgin)

¼ cup cognac

1½ cup dry white wine (my preference is a BC Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Blanc) plus 5 oz in a wine glass

1 tbsp fresh tarragon (thyme can be used if you are not a tarragon fan)

¼ cup heavy cream (33 or 36%, also called whipping cream)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Pour yourself a glass of wine and taste. Peel the garlic. Season the chicken on both sides with salt and pepper.

Heat the butter and oil in a heavy pan that has a lid and can go in the oven. On medium high heat, in batches, brown both sides of the chicken, removing from the pan and setting aside when done. Lower the heat to medium when done and sauté the garlic until it starts to brown, about 5-10 mins. Deglaze with the cognac and then add the white wine. Scrape any of the yummy brown bits up as you do this. Add the chicken back to the pan, put on the lid, and bake in the oven for about 30 minutes until the chicken is cooked through and tender. Don't forget to have another taste of wine.

Remove the chicken and garlic from the pan and set aside. Place the pan back on medium high heat and reduce the sauce by ½. Add ¼ cup of heavy cream and reduce to desired consistency. Finish with fresh tarragon and be sure to check your seasoning (salt and pepper) -- a sip of wine won't hurt either.

Place the chicken on a platter and ladle sauce on top. Garnish with a twig of tarragon. Enjoy!

Serves 4-6 people depending on appetites.

Tracy Rowand is chef and owner of Taste to Savour Catering in Vancouver, BC. When not busy with catering clients, Tracy can often be found tasting new wines to enjoy in and with her culinary creations.