

WINE AND FOOD

May marks beginning of wine tasting season

April showers bring May flowers, but what do May flowers bring? Wine tasters! While April may have been Michigan Wine Month, May marks the beginning of the wine tasting and wine tourist season.

■ National Kidney Foundation of Michigan Spring & Summer Wine Tasting, Thursday, May 13

The National Kidney Foundation of Michigan presents a Spring & Summer Wine Tasting at Ferndale's Assaggi Bistro from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Thursday, May 13. Savor samples of this season's most delectable wines with pairings of scrumptious dishes featuring Assaggi's signature Mediterranean blending, taking inspiration from the cuisines of Italy, France, Morocco, Spain, Greece and the Middle East.

The price of admission is \$50 and includes hors d'oeuvres, wine samples, live entertainment and silent auction. Sampled wines will be available for purchase.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) of Michigan, which has led the fight against life-threatening kidney diseases since 1955, enhancing the lives of many Michigan residents through its patient services, research and education programs. RSVP to 734-222-9800, ext. 223 or kmumma@nkfm.org.

■ Michigan Wine Dinner, Friday, May 14

The Bavarian Inn in Frankenmuth is offering a gourmet five-course dinner served with five complimentary wines prepared by their famous Chef Phil. Menu details are coming soon. Cost is \$55 per person. Reservations and advance payment are required. To make reservations, call

800-228-2742.

■ Spring in Bloom Wine Tour Weekend, Friday and Saturday, May 14 & 15

The Homestead Resort is offering a special wine tour weekend package that includes two nights' lodging (in Fiddler's Pond, Little Belle or The Inn), continental breakfast each morning, and a tasting tour of the three Leelanau Peninsula wineries on Saturday, with transportation and a to-go lunch.

On Saturday evening, guests will enjoy an exquisite five-course winemaker dinner — featuring local wines — prepared by The Homestead's Executive Chef, John Piombo. Packages start at \$238 per couple, per night.

The Leelanau Peninsula, flanked by Lake Michigan to the west and Grand Traverse Bay to the east, is an ideal grape-growing region — one of four federally recognized American Viticulture Areas in Michigan. The waters of Lake Michigan help with the warming and cool-

ing of the land — a "lake effect" that pairs well with the area's placement along the 45th Parallel to create a "cool climate" region like no other. Throw in the rolling hills, sprawling vineyards and orchards and quaint charm, and you have the premier scenic destination.

For more information, visit The Homestead website at www.thehomesteadresort.com or contact Jamie Jewell at 231-334-5100.

■ Wine Stroll – Downtown Royal Oak Saturday, May 15, noon-5 p.m.

Wine Stroll offers patrons the opportunity to sample a variety of wines and signature dishes from more than 15 participating restaurants

and retailers. Tickets are \$40 in advance and \$50 on the day of the event. Ticket quantities are limited, so you are encouraged to purchase them before the event.

Event proceeds benefit Stagecrafters and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southeast Michigan. The Wine Stroll is sponsored by the Royal Oak Restaurant Association in conjunction with Downtown Royal Oak.

For more information, visit www.rorainfo.com.

The first two readers to e-mail me at Supermarketsommelier@oakpress.com will each receive two tickets to this event. You must be 21 to enter, include your name, birth date and address in the email. Winner selection is based solely on the date and timestamp of your email.

■ A Michigan Wine Tasting – Lathrup Village Municipal Building, Saturday, May 15, 7-10 p.m.

The Lathrup Village Lions Club will host a Michigan Wine Tasting featuring exclusively Michigan vineyards. Tickets for the wine tasting are \$25 for one and two for \$45. Participating wineries include Bel Lago Vineyards, Lone Oak Estate, and Sandhill Crane Vineyards. The Lions Club will be serving appetizers and hosting a silent auction.

For more information, contact Lion Dick Maxwell at 248-642-9561.

■ Lone Oak Vineyard Estate Dinner Concert Series, Saturdays, May 15, 22, & 29

Visit Lone Oak Vineyard Estate Saturday evenings for great music, wine and food. If you haven't attended one of their dinner concerts yet, you've been missing out. With seating for just 42, this is a cozy, intimate music venue. Reservations are required. Dinners are optional and must be ordered in advance. Appetizers and dessert are also available, along with our hand-crafted, estate grown wines.

Call 517-522-8167 for reservations and more information.

■ Great Lakes Great Wine Tasting, Thursday, May 20

Oakland Community College's Farmington

Hills campus hosts this annual event which just keeps growing. This year there will be more than 500 wines to sample, including world famous Ice Wines.

Cost is \$50 per person in advance or \$55 at the door. Enjoy wine, food from top area restaurants and live music by the Shelby Brown Jazz Trio.

For more information, visit www.oaklandcc.edu/culinary.

■ Make It A Wine Tasting Weekend, Friday and Saturday, May 21 - 22

Spend the night on Friday at Stafford's Perry Hotel. Enjoy a Wine Makers Reception held at Mackinaw Trail Winery Tasting Room with hors d'oeuvres and wine. On Saturday, there will be a four-course Tasting Dinner for \$44 per person, including tax and gratuity (without lodging package), with "new release" wine pairings offered with each course.

The lodging package price is \$199 per couple and includes a Saturday night stay at Stafford's Perry Hotel's Park House Room, the Mackinaw Trail Winery Tasting Dinner, Sunday Breakfast at Perry Hotel in the H.O. Rose Room. Reservations are required. Call 231-347-4000.

■ An Evening with Edible WOW, Saturday, May 22

Edible WOW magazine is hosting a local wine and food party with wine tasting, appetizers, and a cellar tour at Sandhill Crane Vineyards in Jackson. Fantastic door prizes include a chocolate class with Sweet Gem Confections, wine-themed glass art, and a big basket of local food and wine.

Cost is \$35 per person. Space is limited. Call 248-731-7578 for reservations.

To join our weekly Twitter wine tasting site or, better yet, become a Twaster, log on to www.twitter.com/sprmktsommelier. We waste almost every Thursday at 7 p.m. Remember, you don't have to pay a lot to enjoy a great bottle of wine. Look, smell, taste, you decide.

If you would like to comment on our selections or share your own opinion, e-mail Supermarketsommelier@oakpress.com.

SUPERMARKET SOMMELIER



BILL GING

Southern cooking grows in popularity

By MARY FOSTER
Associated Press Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Contemporary southern cooking is getting a taste of something fresh — respect.

Even above the Mason-Dixon Line, the food of the South no longer is about fried chicken and barbecue clichés. It's a celebration of local, vibrant produce and carefully raised meats; of exotic ingredients like collards, okra, pork bellies and grits; and of traditions and cultures as deep, varied and flavorful as the foods.

"The South has always been cyclically hip," says John T. Edge, director of Southern Foodways Alliance. "But now it's become a permanent condition. America is coming to appreciate the range of culture and tradition in the South."

That appreciation has made it possible to dine on great down-home food in places as varied as Oregon, Illinois and New York.

At Hungry Mother in Cambridge, Mass., for example, chef Barry Maiden serves up what he and his partners call "contemporary American" food. The menu sports cornmeal-dredged catfish and other southern classics that draw on Maiden's childhood in rural southern Virginia.

"For a few years now, I think southern cooking has become known as a serious type of cooking," Maiden said.

That interest also has produced a flood of award-winning cookbooks and chefs that can do better than just hold their own against the rest of the country.

This year's James Beard Foundation cookbook awards, for example. All three of the finalists for top American book are southern — "My New Orleans," by John Besh; "Real Cajun," by Donald Link; and "The Lee Bros. Simple Fresh Southern," by Matt Lee and Ted Lee.

Food & Wine magazine will even devote its September issue to the region and its food.

"We've seen a huge rise in interest in the food of the South outside the South," says Dana Cowin, the magazine's editor-in-chief. "We're seeing an expansion of ideas for southern food being adopted by cooks in other areas. There are people doing wonderful southern cooking in New York, in Boston, in Chicago."

In many ways, the South has benefited from a growing national interest in local and crafted foods.

"A few years ago, you used to go to the farmer's market and everything was from Florida or California," says Kathleen Purvis, food editor at the Charlotte Observer and chair-

woman of the James Beard Book Awards Committee. "Now it's locally grown for the most part, and that is certainly a reflection of southern cooking, which is closely tied to the land."

She also thinks the interest isn't all that new, pointing out that Craig Claiborne was writing about the South during the '70s, and Joe Dabney won a Beard award in 1999 for his cookbook "Smokehouse Ham, Spoon Bread, & Supper-nong Wine."

In explaining the appeal, Edge points to the variety of southern cooking, which includes Cajun, Creole, soul and seafood.

"It's an area comparable in size to Western Europe," he says. "And it has the same range of cultures."

Television also has played a role, giving voice to advocates such as Paula Deen and her sons, Jamie and Bobby Deen, who have launched their own shows and cookbooks.

The scattering of southerners across the country that has taken place in recent years — some forced by Hurricane Katrina — may also account for some of the spread of down-home fare.

"I used to take the pimento cheese sandwiches my mother made for my lunch, the red velvet cakes for my birthday, the grits for Sunday breakfast for granted," says Bon Appetit magazine restaurant editor Andrew Knowlton.

Moving north made him appreciate the rich culinary traditions of the South, says Knowlton, who grew up in Atlanta.

"When chefs started focusing on local food, the South was a natural place for them to focus," he says. "Both in terms of flavor and tradition."

Because of that, Knowlton says he now can get such southern delights as boiled peanuts, deviled eggs and his beloved pimento cheese in cities from Portland, Ore., to Portland, Maine.

"And you practically can't find a restaurant now that isn't serving Anson Mills grits," he joked, referring to the Charleston, S.C., company that specializes in heirloom grains.

Besh, one of the contenders for this year's Beard award, says he sees the interest as a sign that the country's culinary appreciation is maturing, that Americans all over are taking pride in the nation's various cultures.

"We're finally comfortable with where we are as a country," he says. "We are more open to the traditions in this country now, and the South has



The Associated Press

Fried tomatoes with aioli and other contemporary southern cooking has moved well beyond the classic image of fried chicken or barbecue. Rethink southern fried food with these tomatoes.

remained true to those traditions, especially its food traditions."

Those traditions are celebrated at the Southern Foodways Alliance, the goal of which is to "document, study and celebrate Southern food cultures," according to Edge.

"The South has always been close to its roots," he says. "There is a food tradition here that continues and is celebrated."

Fried whole cherry tomatoes may sound unusual, but they are beautiful and delicious. John Besh, author of the cookbook "My New Orleans," gives them a simple tempura-like batter and an easy aioli sauce for dipping.

Any small, cluster (on the vine) tomatoes work in this recipe. Most grocers sell several varieties this way.

Fried Tomatoes With Aioli

Start to finish: 30 minutes
Servings: 6 to 8
For the aioli:
6 cloves garlic
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon ice water
2 egg yolks
Salt
2 cups extra-virgin olive oil
For the tomatoes:
1 quart olive or vegetable oil
1 cup all-purpose flour
Pinch salt
1 1/2 cups club soda

24 to 36 small cluster (on the vine) tomatoes

To make the aioli, in a food processor combine the garlic, lemon juice, water and egg yolks. Process until thick and evenly pureed. With the processor running, add a pinch of salt, then slowly drizzle in the olive oil.

If the aioli looks oily, add a touch more ice water. The color should be pale yellow and the texture should be matte, not glossy. Set aside.

In a deep heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high, heat the oil to 350 F.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl whisk together the flour and salt. Add the club soda, whisking gently to keep the batter fluffy. The batter will be thin.

Use scissors to cut the tomato vines to divide them into small clusters. Rinse the tomatoes and pat them dry.

Working in batches, dip each cluster into the batter, coating them all over, then carefully slip them into the hot oil. Fry the tomatoes until the batter is lacy, crisp and golden brown, about 1 minute. Using metal tongs or a slotted spoon, carefully transfer the tomatoes to paper towels to drain. Serve with aioli.

(Recipe from John Besh's "My New Orleans," Andrews McMeel, 2009)

This dense, rich cake from Joan Aller's forthcoming cookbook, "Cider Beans, Wild Greens and Dandelion Jelly"

(a collection of recipes from southern Appalachia due out in June), is remarkably easy to make, but incredibly flavorful.

Mountain Molasses Stack Cake

Start to finish: 1 hour 40 minutes (40 minutes active)

Servings: 8

For the cake:

1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature

1 large egg

1/2 cup molasses

1/2 cup buttermilk

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 cups all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

For the filling:

2 cups finely chopped apples

1/2 cup water

1 cup firmly packed brown sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon

To make the cake, heat the oven to 350 F. Lightly oil and flour the bottoms of two 8-inch round cake pans.

In a large bowl, use an electric mixer to cream the brown sugar and butter until light. Slowly add the egg and molasses, then blend well. Beat in

the buttermilk, vanilla and nutmeg.

In a second bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Slowly add the flour mixture to the molasses mixture and mix until thoroughly incorporated.

Pour half of the batter into each of the prepared cake pans. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted at the center of each cake comes out clean. Let the cakes cool in their pans on a wire rack.

While the cakes cool, make the filling. In a medium saucepan over medium, combine the apples and water. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the apples are tender. Stir in the brown sugar and cinnamon. Bring to a boil and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens and is syrupy.

Place one of the cooled cake layers on a serving plate. Spread half of the filling on top. Place the second cake layer on top, then spread the remaining filling over it.

Nutrition information per serving (values are rounded to the nearest whole number): 452 calories; 106 calories from fat; 12 g fat (7 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 53 mg cholesterol; 84 g carbohydrate; 5 g protein; 1 g fiber; 433 mg sodium.

(Recipe from Joan Aller's "Cider Beans, Wild Greens and Dandelion Jelly," Andrews McMeel, June 2010).