

# TAILORED TASTE TIDBITS

VOLUME IV, ISSUE I JANUARY 2009 FOOD NEWS FROM TAILORED TASTE PERSONAL CHEF SERVICE

## Happy New Year

The madness of the holidays is behind us at last and now's the time to make a fresh start. Here's a good opportunity to sweep out the cobwebs and reinvigorate ourselves. Looking at the months ahead it's appropriate to think about how we'll fill that time and what, in these coming months, will make us smile at the state of our lives.



Where do you draw your inspiration? Art, books, food, movies, gardening, sports, travel, family, pets, solitude or busy-ness? Whatever the source, be sure to make time for it this year.

I wish you much happiness and prosperity in 2009!

## Ginger

One of my favorite flavors, for both sweet and savory dishes, is ginger. Although called ginger root, it is actually a rhizome (an underground stem) and is generally available year-round. In its natural state, ginger is low in carbs, high in potassium, and sugar-free. It is a digestive aid and has been shown to effectively prevent motion sickness.

Remember your mom giving you ginger-ale for an upset stomach?

It can be crystallized (cooked in sugar syrup and rolled in more sugar), pickled (in vinegar usually to accompany sushi), or dried and ground (frequently used in baking).

When selecting fresh ginger, make sure the skin is not wrinkled which is a sure sign that it is older and beginning to dry out. If a recipe calls for ginger juice, a good trick is to use a piece of ginger that has been frozen (the skin will be slightly darkened). The freezing breaks down the cell walls allowing the juice to flow more freely when you squeeze it.



Peeling ginger is best accomplished using a spoon – seriously! Just scrape the outside skin with the tip of a teaspoon and you'll soon have a naked piece of ginger ready for grating or mincing and enjoying in your favorite salads, main courses and/or desserts.



Laurie Bell is a tea educator – an expert on all things 'tea' such as how and where tea is grown, which parts of the plants make the best tea, how to cook with brewed or dried tea, and best of all (in my humble opinion) how to make a mean green tea-infused vodka martini.

Laurie owns/operates the Great Falls Tea Garden offering classes in Great Falls, VA. She can also bring tea knowledge to you with a customized class in your home. Laurie has created a seminar for my local chapter of US Personal Chef Association focusing on using tea in both savory and sweet dishes. We are anxious to see what types of tea complement which ingredients. Traditionally, black tea is used with sugar to smoke duck or chicken in Asian cuisines. We will learn what other combinations might enhance future meals.

Tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world and finally is being given its due here in the US. As wine and coffee have recently had their time in the beverage spotlight, tea is now inching closer to center stage. To enhance your knowledge of tea, check out Laurie's website at [www.greatfallsteagarden.com](http://www.greatfallsteagarden.com).

## Upcoming DC Area Food Events

**February 3, 2009** – Ovarian Cancer National Alliance – *Turn Up the Heat with Women Chefs!* at the Ritz Carlton West End, 22<sup>nd</sup> & M Streets, NW – [www.ovariancancer.org](http://www.ovariancancer.org)

**March 30, 2009** – Share Our Strength's *Taste of the Nation* at Andrew Mellon Auditorium, 1301 Constitution Ave, NW – [www.taste.strength.org](http://www.taste.strength.org)

**March 28-April 12, 2009** – Cherry Blossom Festival – activities around town including classes at restaurants – [www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org](http://www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org)

### Food & Wine & Mickey, Too

In late October I ran away for a long weekend to EPCOT in Orlando for the International Food & Wine Festival. It was two days of eating (and drinking) from a huge variety of cuisines such as those of New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, France, Poland, Canada, Morocco, and Louisiana.

Some stand-out dishes sampled were: maple-glazed salmon from Canada, lamb sliders on brioche from New Zealand, seared tuna loin with spicy pepper coulis from Spain, and ginger ice cream from China. Several of these have become inspiration for me as I create dishes with similar flavors and textures.

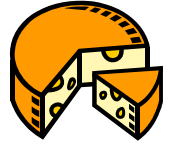
Travel is one of the activities I use as motivation and inspiration on both a personal and professional level. Experiencing new places and cuisines expands my palate and awakens new ideas for dishes that will please my family and my clients.



## All Things Cheese

There are people in this world who don't like cheese –shocking, I know. I even have one in my own family, but we love her despite this. I am firmly planted at the opposite end of the cheese spectrum, loving just about every cheese I've ever tasted.

Last Fall I took two classes on cheese – one was offered at the Disney Food & Wine Festival and focused on English cheeses paired with Port. The other class, offered closer to home at Cheesetique in Alexandria, concentrated on leaf-wrapped cheeses paired with white and red wines.



At Disney, the instructor, Erin Hedley from Artisan Premium Cheese in NYC, described herself as a “curd nerd” and proceeded to dazzle us with her cheese knowledge. For instance, the word *double* in Double Gloucester cheese refers to the fact that it is created from two milkings of the cows, one in the morning and one in the evening of the same day.

At Cheesetique, proprietor and Cheese Lady Jill Erber guided us around a plate ringed with bites of cheese that had been wrapped in leaves, bark, herbs, and straw. My favorites were: a French goat cheese mixed with olives and topped with a single olive leaf; a cow's milk Vento Estate from Italy wrapped in hay (firm, robust and with a minty-tasting rind); and a Valdeon from Spain wrapped in Sycamore leaves (sharp, salty but with a hint of sweetness).

At each class we tasted the cheeses with Ports or wines. I find this a fascinating activity – some cheeses are made better by certain beverages, some remain neutral and some are definitely worse off for these additions. Despite some “classic” pairings (Port & bleu cheese) this is truly subjective. As I peeked at the notes of a woman next to me in Florida, I discovered we were polar opposites when it came to which Port went with which cheese. And at Cheesetique, I discovered that lighter reds (Pinot Noirs) fare well with most cheeses, but acidic whites are even better suited. Another surprise was that heavy reds (cabernets) don't pair well with most cheese as both attach to the same taste receptors and thus block the flavor of the second one tasted. And of course, champagne does well with everything (at least in my world)!

The last fascinating bit of info noted at both classes was that young Autumn cheeses (those aged about 2-3 months) are generally fabulous because they are created from milk produced at the best part of the growing season. In July/August animals live off wonderful grasses and plants and so they produce equally wonderful milk. Who knew? I didn't, but now I'll be sure to buy soft ripened Autumn cheese every year.

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