



TAILORED TASTE TIDBITS

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Bitter

The word bitter connotes 'bad' as in the oft-used phrases *a bitter pill to swallow* or *bitter cold outside*. No pleasant food item leaps to mind when someone says bitter. Now think coffee, quinine, beer, olives, unsweetened chocolate, winter greens, and citrus peel. These are all bitter by themselves but combined with other tastes, they become delectable.

Bitter is one of the four (or five – jury's still out on that) tastes that our mouths are able to detect and probably the one that evokes the most nose-wrinkling. However, it is an essential part of some of our most tasty dishes.

Consider a tantalizing dark chocolate fudge brownie sweetened with sugar and swirled with a little sea salt just before baking. (Drooling yet?) What's gin without that tonic (sweetened quinine) or olives that haven't done their time in a brine? Without the bitter element each of these tasty treats would be incomplete.

Unlike the other tastes (salty, sweet, sour) we can bring bitter to the table through cooking methods not just from a naturally bitter ingredient. The char on a burger from the grill or the sear on a roast before going into the oven improves the flavor. And let's not forget burnt sugar in *crème brûlée* and caramel sauce. Or how wonderful do onions become when the natural sugars in them are gently burned (caramelized)? Bitter make all these foods better.

Interestingly enough, scientists believe our ability to detect bitter was an evolutionary protection preventing early man from ingesting lethal plants. And even today some products are intentionally laced with bitter compounds to prevent us from accidentally consuming them.

Though misunderstood and unfriendly alone, bitter in combination with its counterpart sweet, completes the flavor profile resulting in happy, balanced taste-buds.



Salted Fudge Brownie

Favorite Flavors

What flavors attract you the most? When you look at a menu are you drawn to the beef tenderloin, the caramelized onions, the chocolate for dessert? What about your dining companion's taste? Could you order exactly what they'd consider a perfect meal?

I thought about this because my husband and I play the ordering game when we eat out. After scanning the menu, we guess what the other person will order. Frankly I am the easiest – duck and caramel in all forms though generally not together. My husband's tastes run to seafood, especially stews such as *bouillabaise*. And his meal is not complete without vanilla ice cream and a double espresso.

Maybe because it's my job to notice what people like to eat, I find I'm able to discern patterns where others don't usually see them. For instance, a client frequently writes after a cook day saying she loved a particular dish on the menu. Inevitably it turns out to be something such as pork & pears, chicken with apples, or shrimp & mango. Ah, it's the meat with fruit taste she finds enjoyable – a combination that others cannot abide. I'll bet she's never noticed that's what makes her taste buds the happiest.

So take a look at what you crave in a dish – is it sweet with salty, bitter with sweet? Where does sour fit in? What are those tastes that make a meal most satisfying to you – besides your company of course?

Local Events

Women Chefs & Restaurateurs

(WCR)'s annual conference is being held in DC this year. The Awards Gala honoring the top culinary women across the country is open to the public for the first time – Sunday evening, Nov 1 at the Ritz-Carlton. Tickets are available through Open Table or on the WCR website www.womenchefs.org.

Tour de Champagne (Nov 6, again at the Ritz Carlton) sponsored by the French Wine Society with tastings from 20 champagne houses along with food from nearly as many restaurants. For details/tickets go to www.tourdechampagne.com. As a plus (as if you need one with all that champagne!) the proceeds benefit the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

Share Our Strength's 25th Anniversary Conference of Leaders – Nov 7-9 at the Fairmont Hotel. A weekend of community, service and fun. www.strength.org/conference

Tres Leches Lattes

In 'googling' for inspiration for coffee recipes, I found this one for a heavy-duty latte using the three milks of the traditional Mexican dessert Tres Leches cake.

- 1 can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 can evaporated milk
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 4 oz espresso PER CUP

Combine & warm the milks. If you have a machine that steams milk, use that for a frothier beverage. Brew espresso and place in a cup. Slowly add the warm milk mixture. You could stir with a cinnamon stick for added flavor. Enjoy!

Adapted from www.ineedcoffee.com

Holiday Help

For Thanksgiving prep or throwing that Open House in December, don't forget Tailored Taste can help with some or all of the food and logistics.

Books

Here are a few of the books I've made my way through since last October.

Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World by Dan Koeppel
Wow – who knew a seedless fruit could wreak such havoc on the world. Thought to be the actual "apple" that got Adam & Eve in such trouble, the author traces its history from Southeast Asia to the New World where it became the focus of corporate giants and corrupt governments. Fascinating.

The Widow Clicquot: The Story of a Champagne Empire & the Woman Who Ruled It by Tilar Mazzeo

A story about my favorite champagne, what could be better? Frankly just about any other book – this was a huge disappointment after 10 months of requesting this book from my library. It was dry (no pun) and because of the lack of historical documentation available, the author filled the book with words such as "perhaps" and "maybe." Perhaps/maybe if the author had taken the research and created an historical fiction, it would have been much more entertaining.

Cooking with Fernet Branca by James Hamilton-Paterson

A laugh-out-loud funny book about a mediocre ghostwriter with dubious culinary tastes living in a remote Tuscan village. His much-too-close neighbor is a composer from Voynovia, a former Soviet bloc country, who is unwittingly creating the musical score for a cult movie. Told in alternating chapters by these characters, the book lampoons the Tuscan idyllic life, pretentious food snobs, and national stereotypes. Many of the Brit-jokes went over my head, but it's still a hilarious read.

The Guernsey Literary & Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary Anne Shaffer and Annie Barrows

I probably would not have picked this book up were it not for a recommendation from a client and I am grateful that I did. I've always enjoyed stories told through letters – anyone remember *Griffon & Sabine*? Perhaps it's a sort of voyeurism to read other people's mail. Set in post-WWII England, the main character discovers a group of Guernsey residents who survived the German occupation of their home island. Despite being a little predictable I thoroughly enjoyed the story and the history presented through the various characters' viewpoints.

Other titles I've enjoyed include: *The Last Chinese Chef* (Nicole Mones), *Elegance of the Hedgehog* (Muriel Barbery), *United State of Arugula* (David Kamp), *Fortune Cookie Chronicles* (Jennifer 8 Lee), and *Loot: The Battle over the Stolen Treasures of the Ancient World* (Sharon Waxman).

What have you been reading lately?

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