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Grand match for Petite Sirah

Lynne Char Bennett



Summertime, warm weather, grilling and barbecuing -- what could be better than a succulent, marinated beef tri-tip, cooked rare and served with a juicy, voluptuous Petite Sirah?

The wine has deep, inky color with blackberry, black cherry and cassis flavors, often a touch of black pepper and a tannin structure that holds up well with grilled and barbecued meat.

Although Petite Sirah shares many of the same aroma and flavor characteristics as Syrah and Shiraz, it is its own varietal. Nonetheless, a Petite Sirah will complement many of the foods you would match with Syrah.

Salty cheeses like Parmigiano-Reggiano, feta, goat cheese and drier styles like dry Jack give a nice howdy-do to Petite Sirah. The sometimes earthy, herbaceous notes in this wine would be good with the gaminess of lamb, venison or dark-flesh game birds. Rare to medium-rare grilled or roasted meat and oily fish like salmon would stand up to the hearty character of the Petite Sirah, with its evident yet not overpowering tannins.

Today's recipe marinates a beef tri-tip in peppery extra-virgin olive oil, red wine, soy sauce and stone-ground mustard. The red wine helps tenderize the meat, adding some acidity while the soy brings some saltiness and umami for depth. Coarsely ground black pepper and the peppery notes found in some extra- virgin olive oils support the black-pepper qualities in the wine.

The Blackberry & Onion Relish adds another level of interest. The berries echo the black-fruit essence of the Petite Sirah, and the vinegar helps makes the relish savory. The slightly caramelized onions also add a touch of vegetal sweetness.

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While more wineries are producing Petite Sirah (a few confusingly label it as Petite Syrah), production lags behind that of other varietals and the wines listed today may be more difficult to locate. But if you enjoy full-bodied, dry red wines with a bite of tannin that offer deep dark-fruit aromas and flavors, try a Petite Sirah -- and a nice bite of grilled meat.

MARINATED BEEF TRI-TIP

Marinating is easy when you use a resealable plastic bag. Remove the air in the bag before you seal it, which allows the meat to be fully immersed in the flavorful marinade.

INGREDIENTS

2/3 cup hearty red wine

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 teaspoon stone-ground mustard

6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper

6 medium garlic cloves, smashed and peeled

4 bay leaves

4 sprigs of thyme

1 1/2 pounds beef tri-tip

Kosher salt to taste

Blackberry & Onion Relish (optional; recipe follows)

INSTRUCTIONS

Mix the red wine, soy sauce and mustard together. Slowly whisk in the olive oil. Add the pepper, garlic, bay leaves and thyme. Add the meat, and turn to coat with marinade. Refrigerate and let marinate at least 2-3 hours, but not more than 12.

Remove the meat from the marinade and season well with kosher salt. Grill to desired doneness. Remove from heat, cover loosely with foil and allow to rest for 10-15 minutes before slicing thinly across the grain. Serve with Blackberry &

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Onion Relish, if desired.

Serves 4-6

PER SERVING: 162 calories, 25 g protein, 0 g carbohydrate, 6 g fat (3 g saturated), 71 mg cholesterol, 57 mg sodium, 0 g fiber. The calories and other nutrients absorbed from marinades vary and are difficult to estimate. Variables include the type of food, marinating time and amount of surface area.

Therefore, the marinade is not included in this analysis.

BLACKBERRY & ONION RELISH

This is good with pork and beef. For very tart berries, use less vinegar and/or more sugar. If you make relish ahead of time and chill, do not reheat or the texture of the berries will be lost.

INGREDIENTS

1 pint fresh blackberries

1 tablespoon oil

1/2 medium yellow onion, chopped

1/2 teaspoon minced garlic

1 tablespoon Champagne vinegar or to taste

1 tablespoon red wine

1/2 cup beef broth

Kosher salt to taste

Large pinch of freshly ground black pepper

Generous pinch of brown sugar

Generous pinch of chopped thyme, or to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

Cut the berries in half, reserving a few whole ones for garnish. Heat the oil in a saucepan; add the onion and saute over medium to medium-low heat for 7 minutes, or until soft and slightly browned. Add the garlic and cook briefly.

Add the vinegar and wine, simmering until almost dry. Add the beef broth, and simmer until almost

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dry. Stir in the halved berries, then remove from the heat.

Season to taste with salt, pepper, brown sugar and thyme. You want just enough sugar to balance the tartness of the berries. The residual heat from the pan and onions will soften the berries.

Garnish with the whole berries. Serve warm or at room temperature, or refrigerate if not using soon. Let come to room temperature before serving.

Serves 4-6

PER SERVING: 62 calories, 1 protein, 9 g carbohydrate, 3 g fat (0 g saturated), 0 mg cholesterol, 7 mg sodium, 3 fiber.

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