

Have some fun - It's Mardi Gras

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By **BILL AND KAREN GARLOUGH For GO**

Trying to fight the winter blues? What this challenging winter calls for is some fun, and nothing is more fun in February than a Mardi Gras party.

Mardi Gras has French roots. The first known Mardi Gras was celebrated in Louisiana by early French settlers in 1699. Throughout Louisiana's history, political and social unrest and even war did not stop Mardi Gras celebrations. It later became known as Carnival and became a legal holiday in Louisiana in 1875.

With Mardi Gras' French heritage, we thought it would be appropriate to pair this cuisine with French wines. Let's see what works.

Wine basics

The classic Mardi Gras dish is jambalaya. With this hearty and spicy dish in mind, I chose Vouvray and Alsatian whites to pair with this dish. My concern was to find French white wines with sufficient body and fruitiness to stand up to this bold dish. Both work well and are worth a try.

Vouvray is an appellation or region of the Loire Valley of France. It is located on the western side of the country, between Paris to the north and Bordeaux to the south, and is along the Atlantic coast. Loire Valley is internationally famous for its whites made from Chenin Blanc grapes. Chenin Blanc wine can be complex, round and balanced, and offers wonderful acidity. This acidity makes this a very food-friendly wine. This age-worthy wine is known for its pear, melon and apple notes.

In contrast, the Alsatian region of France is located in the northeast corner of the country on the border with Germany and makes, almost exclusively, white wines. The most important grapes are riesling, pinot gris, gewurztraminer and pinot blanc. Alsatian whites are famous for their acidity and bold fruit flavors, and are generally fermented in stainless steel tanks (so the true fruit flavors come through). I prefer the complexity, aging potential and bold flavors of riesling and gewurztraminer wines. Both food friendly whites have lean, mineral characteristics. Riesling is also known for its peach and citrus notes while gewurztraminer offers honeysuckle, litchi nuts and gingerbread flavors.



*Bill and Karen Garlough,
owners and founders,
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Bill's Wine Picks
(with suggested retail prices)
Chateau Moncoutour Vouvray \$14
Domaine des Aubuigieres \$15
(Bernard Fouquet's Vouvray) Trimbach Riesling \$18
Lorentz Gewurztraminer Reserve \$19

Wine of the Month
2006 Chateau Moncontour Vouvray
Suggested retail price: \$14 This Vouvray is becoming more available and is recommended by local wine merchants as a good value wine. This Loire Valley white is made from Chenin Blanc grapes and offers mineral, lime and floral notes. While the 2006 vintage is not yet rated, the Wine Spectator gave a recent vintage 87 points.



Food pairing

When developing your Mardi Gras menu, start with a pot of jambalaya on the stove. We recommend that you do not over-spice this dish, as your guests can season to taste. Other dishes to consider include steamed crawfish, red beans and rice, sweet potato casserole, po' boy sandwiches, a Mardi Gras tossed salad (for fun, add purple cabbage, shredded carrots and golden raisins to green lettuce, for a salad with classic Mardi Gras colors) and top this menu off with a King cake or the classic Bananas Foster.

There are two terms that you will find with jambalaya -- Cajun and Creole. Creole style jambalaya is commonly called red jambalaya (because it contains tomatoes) and is more typical of what you will find in a restaurant. Cajun jambalaya is more prevalent in the southern parts of Louisiana and is a brown color because of the lack of tomatoes. Both versions of jambalaya include the "trinity" of vegetables -- green pepper, onions and celery and are simple, tasty and traditional.

EASY CAJUN JAMBALAYA WITH FRIED OKRA GARNISH

1 ½ lbs Chicken – boneless breasts or thighs
Creole Seasoning
1 Tbsp Olive Oil
1 Cup Onion, diced
1 Cup Green Pepper, diced
1 Cup Celery, diced
1 lb Smoked or Andouille Sausage – sliced
2 cans French Onion Soup (10 ½ oz cans, undiluted)
1 can Chicken Broth (14 ½ oz)
1 can Beef Broth (14 ½ oz)
½ Tbsp Creole Seasoning
1 ½ cups Long Grain White Rice - uncooked
Hot Sauce – on the side
Optional Garnish
½ lb Fresh Okra – sliced in ¼" rounds
Cornmeal
Oil for frying

Season raw chicken with Creole seasoning. In a Dutch oven or large pot, sear chicken until golden brown but not completely cooked through. Remove from pot and let cool. Add a little additional oil to the pot if necessary. Sauté the vegetables until onions are translucent but not brown. Cut the chicken into bite size pieces. Add the chicken, sausage, all the liquid and the Creole seasoning to the pot. Bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and add the rice. Simmer uncovered for approximately 40 minutes or until the rice is cooked. For optional garnish, put okra in a large zip lock bag and add enough cornmeal to dust. Fry until crispy. Place fried okra on top of individual bowls of jambalaya.

Bill and Karen Garlough are owners of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the 2007 U.S. Chamber's Small Business of the Year. Bill is a level one master sommelier. They can be reached at info@mychef.com.