

Pair of white wines for pair of butternut squash recipes

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Now that fall has arrived, the air is turning crisp and we are beginning to think about the harvest and heartier fare.

To take advantage of the end of the seasonal bounty at the local farmers markets, we are focusing on hard winter squash, which is abundant and reasonably priced.

We settled on two butternut squash recipes and two white wines - Viognier and Pinot Gris - to accompany the dishes. Red wines do not pair well because they tend to be dry, tannic and lack sweetness.

About the wines

While Viognier is not overly acidic, its lush honey and peach notes and exotic aroma make this a seductive wine. Its traditional pairing is with fish and fruit dishes. This slightly sweet wine also pairs well with butternut squash soup, especially when garnished with smoked cheddar.

The Northern Rhone Valley in France gives Viognier its prominence in the wine world. However, its production is small and the wine pricey. Locally, California is having some success with this wine.

The lack of acidity concerned us and we found a perfect solution at Pine Ridge, a lovely Napa Valley winery we had the pleasure of visiting last year. They make a blend of 80 percent Chenin Blanc for crispness and 20 percent Viognier for complexity, aroma and mouth feel. And it is reasonably priced!

France can also boast about the other white wine featured in this column. The Alsace region in northern France is home to some of the best Pinot Gris in the world. Compared to Italian Pinot Grigio, the Alsatian whites are richer and slightly aromatic, with a lingering finish. As these whites offer good acidity, we were confident they would pair well with our butternut squash dishes. In the United States, Oregon is producing quality wines that are similar in style to the Alsatian whites.



Viognier or a Pinot Gris are a good accompaniment for butternut squash risotto. *Courtesy of The Garloughs*

Bill's Wine Picks

We selected Pinot Gris and the Viognier blend from Pine Ridge because their bright acidity and sweetness pairs well with creamy pasta dishes (risotto) as well as pumpkin and squash soups. Here they are accompanied by their with suggested retail prices:

- Pine Ridge Napa Chenin Blanc and Viognier - \$11
- McManis California Viognier - \$10
- Big Fire Oregon Pinot Gris - \$13
- King Estates Oregon Pinot Gris - \$14
- Elk Cove Oregon Pinot Gris - \$17
- Trimbach Alsatian Pinot Gris Reserve - \$22

Recipes

In both of these recipes you can either oven roast or boil the squash. Roasting is the easiest - you cut the squash in half, scoop out the seeds, and bake. Roasting will produce a slightly sweeter and nuttier squash. Boiling a squash requires peeling of the vegetable, then cubing before placing in the broth. The advantage of boiling is speed - about 15 minutes if you cut the squash in smaller cubes. Boiled squash has a more delicate flavor.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

2 pounds butter nut squash
Olive oil
1/2 cup chopped onions
2 tablespoons butter
3 cups chicken broth
1/2 teaspoon dried marjoram
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/8 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup smoked cheddar - grated (optional garnish)
1 cup half and half cream (optional)

Cut squash in half, scoop out seeds, rub with olive oil, season with salt and pepper and roast in a 400 degree oven for 45 minutes or until tender. In large saucepan, sauté the onions in the butter until translucent but not brown. Add the broth and seasonings, cover and slow simmer. When the squash is ready, scoop the flesh into a blender and add some of the broth. Puree the squash and add back into the saucepan. Season to taste. Enjoy the earthiness of your butternut squash soup as is or add the cream for a more elegant soup. Do not boil.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH RISOTTO WITH LEEKS

2 pounds butternut squash
2 tablespoons olive oil
6 cups chicken broth
2 leeks thinly sliced (about 3 cups)
2 cups Arborio rice
1/2 cup dry white wine (or the white wine you are serving)
1 tablespoon fresh sage - chopped
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan or Grana Padano
Crisp, crumbled bacon as a garnish

Cut squash in half, scoop out seeds, rub with olive oil, season with salt and pepper and roast in a 400 degree oven for 45 minutes or until tender. In a separate pot, heat the broth.

In large saucepan, sauté the leeks in olive oil until soft but not brown. Add the rice and sauté for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Add the wine and stir until it is absorbed. Add \hat{A} 1/2 cup of the hot stock and simmer until absorbed, stirring frequently. Add remaining stock \hat{A} 1/2 cup at a time allowing stock to be absorbed before adding more. Stir frequently until rice is tender and mixture is creamy - about 25 minutes. Scoop out the flesh of the squash, coarsely mash and fold the squash and sage to the rice mixture. Season with salt and pepper. Top with grated cheese and crumbled bacon.

Bill and Karen Garlough are the owners and founders of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the winner of the U.S. Chamber's 2007 Small Business of the Year award. Bill Garlough is a level 1 master sommelier and can be reached at info@mychef.com.