

Tea & Food Pairings (Fresh Cup Magazine, 2001)

by Tomislav Podreka

I would like to tell you that pairing food with tea is a science, but in reality, pairing relies greatly on an individual's "informed" opinions. The ability to understand and relay these opinions is the crux of why pairing of any sort is important. Pairing illustrates that you have explored the natural interplay between food and tea. It is a marvelous way to heighten a dining experience and expand the universe of profiles that define tea. To be able to enhance the presence of food or emphasize the flavors of a given tea is a truly rewarding challenge.

When I discuss the importance of pairing tea and food in foodservice environments, I always stress that the best that can be offered is a guideline - a helping hand to achieve a nicely balanced list of tea that complements the food offered by your establishment. Whether your menu consists of foie gras or bagels and cream cheese, I don't believe the process has to be any more complex. Rather, pairing tea with food should be an enjoyable step in designing your overall menu.

Before you begin, you must realize that tasting doesn't require an extremely sophisticated knowledge of food or tea. If you already enjoy food on any level, then you probably have a tasting vocabulary, however expansive or limited it may be. Never be afraid to express what comes to mind when you are tasting tea, because no impression is too slight, and all observations lead to Rome, so to speak.

To illustrate my point, let's take a complex but marvelous example - oolong.

When tasting a lightly oxidized Tung Ting Oolong, you will notice many different characteristics. Initially, you will probably take in the AROMA, the single most influential element of tea. The range of bouquet should immediately lead you to a floral impression. Soon your senses will target a more specific fragrance, perhaps white flowers of some sort. Finally, you might pinpoint that wonderful aroma as that of a gardenia.

After you smell the tea, you'll experience its TEXTURE and taste. The texture of this Tung Ting Oolong will probably impart a buttery feel - a coating sensation.

Beyond texture lies TASTE. With this tea you should notice fruity notes perhaps flavors of coconut, pineapple and peach - and then there will be earthy notes, predominately of fresh cut wood and nuts. Bring the taste of the fruit, specifically peach, together with the wood and nut notes, and imagine sucking on the pit of a peach after you have eaten the flesh of the fruit. Now you have a peach-pit flavor. This is the ideal flavor profile of an oolong, especially a Tung Ting.

So what does it all mean? Well, now that you have broken down the complex profile of a single tea you should understand how important it is to match that profile with complementary smells, textures and flavors of food.

For example, the floral bouquet of the aforementioned oolong would make it the perfect counterpart to a spicy dish. At the same time, its buttery texture would combine well with baked goods and chocolates, and its fruity notes would work with various types of fish and meat. This

may seem like quite a lot for a single tea to handle, but tea is deliciously versatile. You'll know when you've discovered the perfect marriage of flavors; simply let your palate be a guide.

Sometimes a laundry list can best illustrate the art of pairing tea with food. On the following pages is a suggested pairing table. If what you are looking for is not listed, look for a similar item and ponder the possibilities.

Desert & Tea Pairings

Baclava	Darjeeling, Oolong (any), Ceylon Black and Green
Carrot Cake	Sencha, Dragon well, Darjeeling, Ceylon, Assam
Cheesecake	Sencha, Dragon well, Ceylon Green and Black, Darjeeling, Keemun
Creme Brulee/Caramel	Darjeeling, Ti Kuan Yin, Dragon well, Assam, Ceylon Green and Black
Crepes	Darjeeling, Oolong (any)
Dessert with Apples	Darjeeling, Dragon well, Ti Kuan Yin
Dessert with Apricots	Oolong (any), Darjeeling
Dessert with Bananas	Ti Kuan Yin, Tung Ting Oolong, Pouchong, Ceylon
Dessert with Black currants	Dragon well, Darjeeling, Oolong
Dessert with Coffee	Yunnan, Assam, Pu-erh
Dessert with Raspberries	Darjeeling, Ceylon Green and Black
Dessert with Strawberries	Darjeeling, Dragon well, Ti Kuan Yin
Fruit Compote	Ceylon, Darjeeling, Yunnan, Dragon well, Ti Kuan Yin
Pecan Pie	Oolong (any), Darjeeling, Assam, Ceylon
Pumpkin Pie	Dragon well, Ceylon Green and Black, Darjeeling
Vanilla	Keemun, Ceylon, Darjeeling, Nilgiri

Chocolate & Tea Pairings

Dark chocolate	Pu-erh, Assam, Darjeeling, Oolong (any), or Gyokuro.
Milk chocolate	Yunnan, Dragon well, Sencha, Darjeeling, or Oolong (any).

Fresh Fruit & Tea Pairings

Any Fruit	Sweeter greens & lighter black teas, First-Flush Darjeeling or lightly oxidized oolong.
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Herb & Spice & Tea Pairings

Basil	Oolong, Darjeeling, Dragon well, Gunpowder, Qui Ding Cha
Capers	Gunpowder, Ceylon, Uva

Chilies	Assam, Yunnan, Keemun, Formosa White Tip Oolong
Cinnamon	Yunnan, Assam, Autumnal Darjeeling, Formosa White Tip Oolong, Pu-erh
Garlic	Sencha, Gunpowder, Gen Mai Cha, Dooars
Ginger	Tung Ting Oolong, Jasmine Pouchong, Darjeeling
Mint	Darjeeling, Tung Ting Oolong, Pouchong, Gunpowder
Mustard	Gunpowder, Chun Mee, Nepalese and African Varieties
Nutmeg	Assam, Darjeeling, Yunnan, Ceylon
Vanilla	Keemun, Tung Ting Oolong, Pouchong, Vietnamese Black, Kenyan

Mushroom & Tea Pairings

Chanterelles	Assam, Nilgiri, Ceylon, Pu-erh
Common	Assam, Ceylon, Nilgiri, Dooars
Morels	Assam, Tung Ting Oolong, Autumnal or Second-Flush Darjeeling, Pu-erh
Porcini	Assam, Ceylon, Nilgiri, Dooars, Pu-erh

Cheese & Tea Pairing

Asiago	Keemun, Pai Mu Dan
Brie	Dragon well, Ha Giang, Darjeeling, Tung Ting Oolong
Camembert	Dragon well, Chun Mee, Gunpowder, Ha Giang, First-Flush Darjeeling, Sikkim
Cheddar	Tung Ting Oolong, Darjeeling
Cream Cheese	Ceylon, Darjeeling, Cameroon
Edam	Ceylon, Autumnal Darjeeling
Gorgonzola	Chun Mee, Ha Giang, Ceylon, Pouchong
Muenster	Tung Ting Oolong, Pouchong
Provolone	Ceylon, Nilgiri

Chicken & Tea Pairings

Curry	Darjeeling, Pouchong, Dragon well, Jasmine Green
Fried	Assam, Ceylon, Nilgiri, Kenya
Lemon	Tung Ting Oolong, Darjeeling, Ceylon, Gunpowder
Roast	Ceylon, Gunpowder, Assam

Fish / Seafood & Tea Pairings

Fried	Dragon well, Chun Mee, Gunpowder
Grilled	Dragon well, Chun Mee, Gunpowder, First-Flush Darjeeling
Smoked	Oolong (any), Darjeeling, Ceylon, Dragon well

Ham & Tea Pairings

Baked Ceylon, Assam, Kenya
Smoked Oolong (any), Darjeeling, Dragon well

Miscellaneous Food & Tea Pairings

Anchovy Ceylon Green, First-Flush Darjeeling, Gunpowder, Chun Mee, Pouchong
Antipasto Dragon well, Pouchong, Ceylon, Dooars, Nilgiri
Avocado Tung Ting Oolong, Pouchong, Darjeeling, Sencha
Bacon Assam, Gunpowder, Ceylon
Baked Beans Ceylon, Assam, Kenya, Yunnan
BBQ Fish Gunpowder, Hojicha, Chun Mee
BBQ Meat Ceylon, Yunnan, Gunpowder
Beef Ceylon, Yunnan, Formosa Oolong, Kenya, Nilgiri, Gunpowder
Blinis with Salmon Tung Ting Oolong, Darjeeling
Buffalo Wings Ceylon, Darjeeling
Carpaccio Tung Ting Oolong, Darjeeling, Ceylon
Clam Chowder Dragon well, Chun Mee, Ceylon Green
Corn Sencha, Hojicha, Chun Mee
Corn Bread Ceylon, Assam, Kenya, Yunnan
Couscous Ceylon, Assam, Nilgiri, Yunnan, Gunpowder
Curry Darjeeling, Jasmine Black or Green
Eggplant Ceylon, Darjeeling
Eggs Darjeeling, Oolong (any), Keemun, Assam, Ceylon, Kenya
Hamburgers Ceylon, Darjeeling, Assam, Nilgiri, Kenya
Lamb Ceylon, Darjeeling, Yunnan
Lasagna Assam, Ceylon, Nilgiri
Macaroni and Cheese Sencha, Ceylon
Meat Loaf Yunnan, Keemun, Nilgiri, Kenya
Mexican Assam, Ceylon
Pizza Ceylon, Yunnan, Keemun
Polenta Darjeeling
Pork Darjeeling, Ceylon, Oolong (any), Hojicha, Lapsang Souchong, Dragon well, Gunpowder, Chun Mee
Potato Salad Oolong, Pouchong, Darjeeling, Dooars, Nilgiri, Ceylon
Prawns Dragon well, Ti Kuan Yin, Dragon well, Ha Giang, Ceylon Green
Quiche Darjeeling, Ceylon, Sencha, Dragon well, Chun Mee
Salami Ceylon, Nilgiri
Salsa Vietnamese Green, Ceylon Green
Turkey Oolong (any), Darjeeling, Ceylon, Yunnan
Vegetables (raw) Ceylon, Nilgiri, Chun Mee, Sencha