

Wine and dine – Grilled salmon and pinot noir marinade a crowd-pleaser

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By Bill Garlough Special to The Sun

From the columnist: Given the joy my wife Karen and I have for entertaining our friends and family and our love of good food and wine, this column will be co-authored by both of us. Karen will focus on recipes, and may sneak in some entertaining tips, while I will pair wines with whatever Karen has cooking.

Most summers, my wife Karen and I try and take in a couple of concerts somewhere; local venues, Ravinia and downtown Chicago. It is always fun to go with several other couples and, although we usually dine near the concert venue, we also gather before the concert and grill a simple meal at home. This is comfortable, affordable and allows members of the group (who are not driving) to share some nice wine with a healthy meal.



Bill and Karen Garlough in the backyard of their Naperville home.

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On a recent weekend, we went to Ravinia. Instead of the traditional picnic on the lawn, the group opted for dinner at our home, then the trek to Highland Park. Karen asked me to select some wines for the occasion. We started out with a variety of finger foods - shrimp crostini, caprese skewers and a simple platter with Brie, sliced apples, clusters of red grapes and a sliced French baguette.

The dinner menu included grilled salmon with a pinot noir marinade, medley of white and wild rice, dried cherries and sliced toasted almonds and grilled asparagus with crumbled blue cheese and balsamic vinaigrette.

Wine basics

When entertaining a group, it is generally best to offer both a red and white wine. Summer picnic wines should be light, refreshing and easy to drink. They should also be able to be served slightly chilled. Karen's menu was easy to pair on the red wine side, as pinot noir wine is included in the marinade, pairs well with salmon and can be served slightly chilled with great results. I am a big fan of pinot noir because it is a versatile wine that works well with a variety of foods. Its acidity helps balance the rich, fatty nature of salmon, so it is a great choice.



A glass of white wine complements grilled salmon, wild rice with dried cherries, toasted almonds and grilled asparagus.

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On the white wine side, a light, crisp and refreshing wine is ideal. Italian whites are a great choice for Karen's menu, but the acidity of the balsamic vinaigrette dressing must be taken into account. While pinot

grigio is Italy's best known white and enjoys universal appeal, it is not the best match because of its acidity. A solution is to find a blended style wine of pinot grigio and another varietal that offers less acidity, resulting in better match for a vinegar-based dressing. One of my recommendations is Masi Winery's blend of both pinot grigio and verduzzo, a pleasant wine with a fruity style. Another Italian varietal that would pair well is trebbiano. It is a light and refreshing summer wine that pairs well with picnic fare.

So, to please a group and complement this particular menu, I would recommend you offer both a white and red wine, in this case a pinot noir and a pinot grigio blend or a trebbiano white wine.

Food pairings

Quick, easy and healthy - these are three perfect words we love to hear when thinking about dinner. This marinade calls for pinot noir, the perfect pairing with salmon. So, open the bottle of pinot a little early and steal a cup for this delicious marinade. The recipe is adapted from Harvest restaurant where they pan fry the fish (rather than grill) and serve it on a bed of mashed potatoes.

Grilled salmon with pinot noir marinade **2 salmon fillets, rinsed and patted dry**

1 cup pinot noir

2 shallots, peeled and sliced

2 springs fresh thyme, chopped

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon whole peppercorns

Serves two.

Combine marinade ingredients in a large zip-lock bag or non-reactive covered dish. Add salmon and turn to coat. Refrigerate, turning several more times, at least 30 minutes but not more than an hour. Place salmon in hinged grill basket. Grill for approximately 5 to 7 minutes per side or until fish flakes.

Bill and Karen Garlough are owners and founders of My Chef Catering in Naperville. My Chef is the winner of the Naperville, Aurora and U.S. Chamber's of Commerce's Small Business of the Year. Bill is a Level 1 Master Sommelier. Bill and Karen can be reached at info@mychef.com.