

Sangria well-suited for stifling summer days

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By Bill Garlough

We are now in the dog days of summer, when it is hot and muggy. A patio beverage that offers cool refreshment and summertime fun is sangria. Let's explore.

History lesson

Created in Spain, sangria is a wine fruit punch that has been enjoyed by Europeans for hundreds of years. Sangria is traced back to the Rioja region, which is considered Spain's greatest wine region. It is renowned for red wines made from the Tempranillo grape varietal. The blend of red wine and fruit juice created a blood-red color. This color inspired sangria's name, as it is derived from the Spanish word for blood.

In 1964, sangria was introduced to the United States at the New York World's Fair. This cool refreshing beverage was poured at the Spanish World area of the fairgrounds and was an immediate success. Based on this popular reception, this beverage was soon imported under the Yago Sant'gria label. Although Sangria was traditionally made with a red wine - sangria rojo - it also is made with white wine, termed sangria blanco. Today, Europeans enjoy white sangria as much or more than the red style. In this country, white sangria does not get the recognition it deserves.

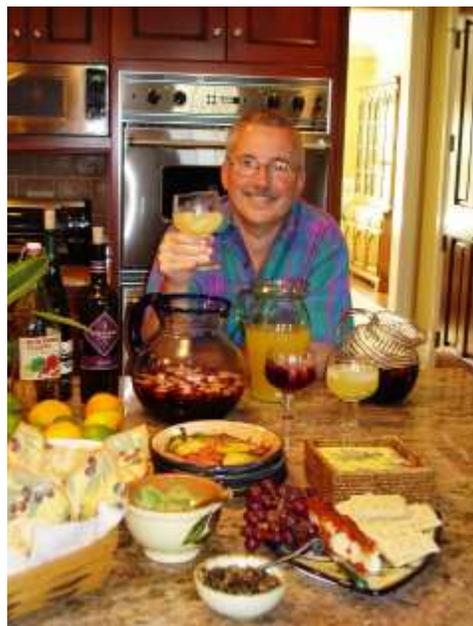
Making sangria

Although Spanish in origin, sangria is served all over the world. It is a versatile, refreshing, summertime beverage that works for most outdoor parties. It now has the cache of being retro, increasing its appeal and popularity. Sangria is typically made from wine, fruit juices, cut fresh fruit, sparkling water or ginger ale or 7 Up and an optional spirit - brandy, rum, vodka or gin.

The secret to good sangria is to pick a wine that is young, fruity, not tannic and was fermented in a stainless steel vat. Oak barrel ageing adds tannins that are generally unpleasant with sangria. The next key is to match the type of fruit with the wine base. White wines are naturally more acidic and citrusy, and match well with citrus fruits such as lemons, limes and oranges. Red wines match better with fruits such as cherries, apples and pears.

What is fun about sangria is that you modify your punch to taste. You add ingredients until you perfect your ideal balance. Inexpensive wines from Spain (grenache, tempranillo), Australia (shiraz) and Argentina (malbec) all are available at reasonable price points of \$6 to \$7, and are well-suited for sangria. Ask your favorite wine merchant for suggestions.

During a recent trip to Binny's, the knowledgeable staff pointed out several bottled, pre-made sangrias including Rea I Sangria at \$6 and de la Costa Sangria at \$10. It is worth noting the alcohol content of pre-bottled sangria. If it has more than 10 percent alcohol, the sangria will have more of a wine flavor; less than 10 percent offers a more fruity experience. These pre-



Food pairings

Sangria is best paired with dishes that have spicy or bold flavors. Some suggested foods include:

- Spicy olive tapenade or spicy marinated whole olives
- Guacamole and chips
- Shrimp crostini with a garlic remoulade
- Grilled asparagus wrapped with serrano ham or prosciutto
- Bacon-wrapped dates
- Baked mushroom caps stuffed with spicy sausage

bottled sangrias offer convenience but, for many, the fun is the fresh creation that fits your personal taste and budget.

It is best to prepare your sangria the day before and let it sit in the refrigerator overnight to give the flavors time to blend. The next day, pour your creation into a pitcher with ice cubes and add some fresh fruit. Some sangria lovers slice sections of fruit, place them on cookie sheets and put them in the freezer for a day or two. Adding these frozen pieces of fruit helps keep the sangria cold on warm summer days.

Here are a few sangrias to try:

DOWN UNDER SANGRIA - RED

- 1 bottle of New Zealand or Aussie red wine (shiraz would be good)**
- 2 cups of ginger ale, 7 Up or club soda**
- 4 kiwis, peeled and sliced**
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice**
- 1/4 cup sugar - use superfine or bar sugar; it easily dissolves in cold liquids**

Pour the wine in a pitcher or glass container and add sliced kiwi. Mix the sugar with the fruit juice until dissolved; add to the wine mixture. Chill overnight. Add the soda just before serving. If you want to serve this right away, chill the red wine in the bottle for 15 minutes in ice water, then prepare the recipe.

CARIBBEAN SANGRIA - WHITE

- 1 bottle of sweet white wine (muscat, riesling, gewürztraminer)**
- 1 lemon, cut in wedges**
- 2 oranges, cut in wedges**
- 1 lime, cut in wedges**
- 2 cups pineapple chunks**
- 1 cup red plums - large dice**
- 2 cups passion fruit juice**
- 2 cups pineapple juice**
- 1 cup Captain Morgan's Original Spiced Rum (optional)**
- ¼ cup superfine sugar (optional)**
- 1 cup ginger ale**

Pour wine in an oversized pitcher or glass container. Squeeze the juice from all the wedges into the wine (try to keep all seeds out of the mixture). Discard the wedges. Add the fruit juices, pineapple, plums and spiced rum if you want a little kick. Chill overnight. Before serving, check the sweetness level and add a little sugar to taste. Add ginger ale just before serving; serve over ice.

Bill Garlough is a Level One Master Sommelier. He also is part owner of My Chef Catering of Naperville, the 2007 Recipient of the US Chamber of Commerce's Small Business of the Year Award. He can be reached at www.mychef.com or winepairings@mychef.com.