

Food Fireworks for July 4th

Picnics, fireworks and parades...it's that time again and I'm sure most of you are well on the way to finalizing plans for this Independence Day celebration. Now the object of this whole discussion is to try the best we can to keep you out of the kitchen and let you jump into the "corn hole" tournament, have a quick swim with the kids and still put great food on the table that is sure to produce those "I'm in heaven!" looks with everyone's first bite.

I love grilled chicken and barbecued pork, but July 4th just seems more about big juicy hotdogs and two-fisted burgers loaded to the max. I'll leave the dogs to you with just one suggestion...buy great quality and people will notice. Try to stay with 100% beef that's not loaded full of chicken or pork parts and remember that good quality kosher dogs like Hebrew National really do taste better.

As far as your burgers I want to encourage you to think out of the box this holiday and urge you to try this recipe that is partially based on suggestions by Julia Child and includes some things we did at our restaurant, Cups & Corks, in our Mega Burger. It really is a great burger but whether you use our recipe or stay with a basic hamburger plan, remember, the beef does make all the difference in the world.

Great burger experts long before yours truly began cooking all agreed that over handling the ground beef is a burger killer. Over handling the beef makes a burger tough and prevents you from getting good results on the grill. If you take your hamburgers seriously have a butcher ground your beef for you no earlier than the day before your event and go with a selection like ground chuck that has some fat in it. Fat = Juicy...otherwise you may as well go to a veggie burger or a boneless, skinless chicken breast. Hello!!!??

When preparing the patties, gently form them the morning of your picnic, separate them with wax paper and hold them in the refrigerator. Here's the recipe I'll be using this weekend:

Winedog's Mega Burger

(makes 6 burgers)

2 lbs. freshly ground chuck
1/2 cup sour cream
1 cup finely minced sweet Vidalia onion
3 tablespoons Worcestershire Sauce
6 slices mild cheddar cheese (if desired)
6 fresh plain Kaiser Rolls
sea salt
fresh ground black pepper

Gently pull apart your ground chuck in a large bowl. Spread your onions evenly over the meat, distribute the sour cream in small dollops along with your Worcestershire Sauce.

Working slowly and carefully begin to form the meat into a loaf, distributing the other ingredients evenly and doing the best you can to keep from pressing the beef and destroying the individual strands of ground meat as they came out of the grinder. Work slowly and just try to be aware of what your goal is. The burgers when they are formed should not be pureed in appearance; the meat should still have texture with bits of onion visible throughout the burger. Your effort will pay off big time in your results. Salt and pepper your patties right before you head to the fire.

On a hot grill, place your burgers out evenly and sear the first side until you see grill marks and the meat is showing brown halfway up the side. Flip them carefully and sear the other side. Lower your temperature once they are seared to medium high and proceed to grill the burgers until you reach your desired level of doneness. Medium, which is the level most people prefer is when juices run clear from the burger. If you're doing cheeseburgers place your slices on the burgers one minute before they come off. Serve immediately.

On the day before your picnic is the best time to make your side salads, which will taste better after letting the flavors bind in them over night. This is also a great way to free your time up so you can have some fun with everyone else.

Shrimps n'Shells Salad

(serves 6 plus)

1 lb. pasta shells, cooked al dente
1 cup mayonnaise
¼ cup Dijon mustard
½ cup sour cream
2/3 cup chopped celery
2/3 cup sliced and chopped red bell pepper
1 lb. cooked salad size shrimp
fresh dill to taste
1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese

Place cooked pasta into a large bowl and allow it to cool, mix in mayonnaise, mustard, sour cream until evenly distributed. Add celery, red bell pepper, shrimp and cheese and mix thoroughly. Finish up with dill and taste as you add to be sure your seasoning level is to your taste. Chill overnight and serve over bib lettuce.

I've found a remarkable wine for July 4th and it is not only perfect for the foods most people serve but also to enjoy in warmer weather well chilled. The 2004 Joliesse California Shiraz Rosé is a lush summertime wine with flavors of cherries, strawberry and watermelon. It is absolutely one of the prettiest wines I've ever seen and the perfect dry rosé for warm weather. Take this one really seriously despite its low price; it has received a Silver Medal two years in a row in one of the stiffest California wine competitions in the United States, the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition.

Have a wonderful celebration this weekend and remember to be safe. If we can be of assistance always call us at 888-288-0668 or visit us online at www.winedog.com. Cheers.