

Seasonal cook



Photo: Domino Postiglione

MUSSELS WITH ZUCCHINI AND EGGS

- 1kg live mussels
- 200g zucchini
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small leek, trimmed and cut into 3cm strips
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme
- 3 eggs
- 2 tbsp grated pecorino cheese
- Salt and pepper

Wash mussels well and scrub if they have barnacles. Remove beards and set aside. Wash zucchini well, trim off both ends and cut into thin rounds. Heat olive oil in a large pot and gently fry leek, garlic and zucchini rounds for about a minute or until softened. Turn heat to full and add mussels to pot, along with thyme sprigs, stirring until mussels open fully. Beat eggs and cheese together and pour over mussels. Turn heat to low and stir in egg mixture until it just sets. Taste liquid and, if needed, add salt. Serve on large plates with freshly cracked pepper and some crusty bread.

Serves 4 as a first course (pictured)
Wine Chardonnay or viognier

MUSSEL, TOMATO AND CELERY SALAD

- 1kg live mussels
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 2 sprigs fresh oregano
- 1 punnet cherry tomatoes
- 1 celery heart
- 2 baby cos lettuce
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- Juice of a lemon
- Salt and pepper
- 3-4 tbsp parsley leaves

Wash mussels, scrub well and remove beards. Place in a large pot, add wine and oregano sprigs, turn heat to high and cover with lid. Cook for 2 minutes, shaking every 30 to 40 seconds to help mussels open. Remove from heat and drain liquid from mussels into a bowl then strain liquid through fine muslin or clean tea towel. Place strained cooking liquid into a small pot. Bring to the boil and reduce by two-thirds. Meanwhile, remove cooked mussels from shells, discarding shells and any mussels that are not open. Cut cherry tomatoes in half and put into a large bowl along with mussels. Thinly slice celery heart and add to bowl along with any tender celery leaves. Clean and trim baby cos and chop each top to bottom into six wedges. Place these in the bowl. Make a dressing by mixing olive oil, lemon juice and mussel liquid to taste. Dress salad and season with salt and pepper. Add parsley and toss. Serve on a platter or in individual bowls.

Serves 6 as a first course
Wine Young semillon or riesling

Full bottle

QUAFFING

BELLA RIVA KING VALLEY SANGIOVESE MERLOT 2010, \$18



The fruit for this juicy and savoury red is grown in the King Valley. I don't know the percentage of sangiovese to merlot (there's a splash of tempranillo in here, too) but it doesn't really matter. It's a delicious, uncomplicated drink on the lighter side of medium-bodied. Very fresh with a delicate perfume, it is soft on the palate. There is plenty of refreshing acidity that will cut through a bowl of rich spaghetti bolognese. One to drink now.

TRYING

KT CHURINGA VINEYARD WATERVALE RIESLING 2011, \$30



Reclining under shady trees, sipping this stunning wine makes me wonder why Australians don't drink more riesling. With the fruit immaculately grown and cared for on the Churinga vineyard, this is a gentle and subtle riesling. The purity of fruit flavour – especially citrus – alongside spice and florals makes it a very pretty drink. It is dry, yet incredibly mouth-watering and enticing, with crunchy, chalky acidity and superb length. All in all, a very fine drink from KT, aka riesling queen Kerri Thomson.

CELLARING

MONSANTO IL POGGIO CHIANTI CLASSICO RISERVA 2006, \$100



This is Castello di Monsanto's flagship wine. Taken from a single vineyard, it is 90 per cent sangiovese with some canaiolo and colorino. A powerfully structured yet medium-bodied wine, it has real beauty, balancing depth of flavour, complexity and drinkability. It reveals earthy, mocha and menthol nuances with a whiff of prosciutto. It is a fabulous wine with years ahead of it.

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Bearded beauties

Seasoned with seawater, mussels are a succulent and versatile treat, writes **STEVE MANFREDI**.

The mussel is a strange creature. Like all hinged bivalves, it gets its nutrients by filtering the surrounding water. It has a foot for moving on sandy surfaces and a beard that helps it cling to piers and rocks.

While the feet are edible, it is important to remove the beards. These dark, string-like filaments are inedible and must be removed when raw.

Like their oyster cousins, the liquid inside a mussel shell is more than just seawater. It acts as seasoning – less salty than the sea – and provides enough water to cook the flesh. Simply put a

large, heavy-bottomed pot on high heat, throw in the live, de-bearded mussels and cover. They should take about two minutes to steam open, with an occasional shake to help them along.

There are many mussel-friendly flavours. The classic is a touch of saffron with a couple of sprigs of thyme. Spinach and pine nuts work well, as do olives and capers. Other options include sorrel and cream, cumin and pepper, chilli and ginger, garlic and leek, pasta and tomato, and parmesan and pecorino.
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