

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Argentina's
climate yields
great wines

Mendoza, Argentina — Argentina's premium grape growing region surrounds the city of Mendoza, east of Santiago, Chile, across the Andes Mountain range. Here vineyards are planted in the high desert of the Andes, as high as 5,000 feet above sea level. Stony, dry soils produce wines with exceptional aroma and flavors. The fresh fruit character of the wines is preserved by the broad day-to-night temperature differential of the vineyards.

■ In a climate that receives only eight inches of rainfall per year, controlling water to the vines can be accomplished with precision. By intentionally restricting water after spring, grapes ripen to biological maturity.

Water, sourced from melting snow caps high in the Andes, is applied to the vines by drip irrigation as well as an elaborate pre-Columbian canal system. In a climate that receives only eight inches of rainfall per year, controlling water to the vines can be accomplished with precision. By intentionally restricting water after spring, grapes ripen to biological maturity.

According to Robert Pepi, winemaker at Andretti Winery in the Napa Valley, who consults at Valentin Bianchi winery in Argentina, "The soils of Mendoza are typically well-drained and not overly fertile. This, in combination with light rainfall, creates wines with intense fruit character."

Low humidity and minimal rainfall lead to a low incidence of grape pests. Thus, Mendoza vineyards are virtually pesticide-free. This, combined with a new generation of viticulturists, has brought state-of-the-art techniques for grape growing to Argentina.

Two wines are unique to Argentina. Torrontes is a white varietal with aromas of roses and apricots, together with spice reminiscent of gewürztraminer. Malbec, an historic red Bordeaux grape variety, is at home in Argentina. Sparse soils, minimal rainfall and 60-year-old plantings yield concentrated, well-structured wines with plum, blackberry, black pepper and spice qualities.

Brands to look for

Santa Julia is made by the Zuccardi family who are farming 1,500 acres of vineyards near Mendoza. Wines are priced in three tiers: Varietal \$7, Reserva \$12 and the highest quality "Q" \$20 will be in Michigan in the near future. We like the fresh, floral Torrontes and the rich, velvety Malbec. Terrazas is the still wine facility of Moet-Hennessy. Much research was done to match grape varieties to soils and vineyard elevation; especially important since climate and soils change dramatically with elevation.

Please see WINE, B2

NEW SCOTCH SINGLE MALT

Winbow, the leading U.S. importer of premium Italian wines, expanded its spirits portfolio with Bruichladdich (Brook-Leddie) Islay 10-year-old Single Malt (about \$52). It became available in Michigan on April 31, 2002. Bruichladdich is the only Islay Distillery owned and operated by a small, genuinely Scottish company. For the first time since the days of illicit distilling, Islay spring water was used to bring the ideal alcohol strength to 46 percent.

In an attractive decanter-style bottle with modern equine packaging, the malt signals not only a departure in traditional malt whisky labeling but a light, fresh, slightly briny style with sweet oak presence. Bruichladdich 10-year is both a sophisticated pre-dinner malt or ideal when a lighter, silky smooth style is preferred after a heavier meal.

Brunch with Mom

Crepes, cookies at home or dining out



Sweet: Crunchy-Pecan Sour Cream Coffee Cake (pictured far right) and Double-Blueberry muffins make interesting treats to add to a Mother's Day brunch.

Treat mom to coffeecake, muffins

CRUNCHY PECAN-APPLE SOUR CREAM COFFEECAKE

Prep time: 35 minutes
Bake time: 55 minutes plus cooling

1-1/2 cups Post Selects
Greats Grains Crunchy
Pecan cereal, divided
1 cup chopped pecans, divided
1/3 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1-1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/3 cup flour
3/4 cup (1-1/2 sticks) butter or margarine, divided
2 medium tart green apples; peeled and cored. Slice thin (about 2 cups).
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1-3/4 cup flour

3/4 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 eggs
1 container (8 ounces) sour cream
20 caramels, unwrapped
2 tablespoons half-and-half

Heat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Mix 1 cup cereal, 1/2 cup pecans, brown sugar and cinnamon in a large bowl for pecan mixture. Set aside. Mix remaining 1/2 cup cereal and 1/3 cup flour in medium bowl. Cut in 1/4 cup of the butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in 3/4 cup of the pecan mixture to form streusel crumb mixture. Set both mixtures aside.

Toss apple slices with lemon juice; set aside. Mix 1-3/4 cups flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt in medium bowl. Beat remaining 1/2 cup butter, granulated sugar and vanilla in large bowl with electric mixer on medium speed until well blended. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add flour mixture alternately with sour cream until blended, beating on low speed.

Microwave caramels and half-and-half in small microwavable bowl on HIGH 1 to 2 minutes or until caramels are melted. Stir; set aside. Spread 1/2 of the batter into greased 9-inch springform pan; sprinkle with reserved pecan mixture.

Please see RECIPES, B2

Some food ideas for Mother's Day

BY LANA MIN
STAFF WRITER
lmin@oe.homecomm.net

"We have foods to satisfy every mother," said Alex Sakellaris, Ernesto's Italian Restaurant's banquet manager.

With fresh fruit, homemade bread, seafood antipasto, many meats, eggplant and more, one of the busiest days of the year at Ernesto's, 41661 Plymouth Road in Plymouth, is because of Mom. To honor Mother's Day, Ernesto's is hosting brunch and dinner buffets Sunday, May 12.

Since Mom, in most households, was the family chef who creatively prepared meal after meal while raising the family, it makes sense that Mother's Day buffets are becoming increasingly important events at many eateries from the family casual to the trendy upscale. What better way to celebrate Mom than over a good meal at home or dining out?

At Ernesto's, the buffets are in such high demand there are two: The brunch noon to 2 p.m. and the buffet 2-6 p.m.

Foods for Mother's Day are also becoming increasingly sophisticated; area restaurants are serving dishes like blintzes and crepes, shrimp and scallops or nine-herb cheese ravioli.

At the newly opened Kettles 'N' Krepes at 172 N. Old Woodward in Birmingham, owner Scott McCammon is expecting a robust Mother's Day crowd.

Regularly closed on Sundays, he'll open Kettles 'N' Krepes 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. that day and serve sweet crepes like chocolate mousse, Very Berry and Grape Sundae; plus savory breakfast crepes like vegetables and cheese.

McCammon's quaint order-at-the-counter eatery concept was sparked on the East Coast.

"My brother in Boston picked up on the crepe idea," McCammon said.

At Too Chezy Bistro on 27155 Sheraton Drive in Novi, the restaurant will be open specially for Mother's Day brunch 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and again at dinner 4-8 p.m.

Brunch will feature omelet and roast stations plus a main buffet with baked salmon, asparagus, eggs benedict, waffles, quiche and more. Dinner will offer more traditional bistro foods from burgers to char-grilled filet mignon.

And at Appletoaster, 6585 Commerce Road in West Bloomfield, Mother's Day specials will include foods like Grilled Atlantic Salmon, Chicken Florentine with sautéed spinach, chopped roma tomatoes, mushrooms and Gorgonzola cheese with roasted red skin potatoes; or blackened swordfish with mango salsa.

Still nothing may be better than a home-cooked meal prepared by Mom's kids. Try the recipes accompanying this story for simple, yet elegant brunch foods.

Life is just a bowl of strawberries

American Institute for Cancer Research — Dr. William Butler, a 16th century English writer, wrote of the strawberry, "Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did." And when local strawberries are at their peak, it would be hard to find anyone to argue with him.

As if their sweet taste were not enough, strawberries are a natural health food. The ancient Romans prized wild strawberries for their medicinal properties. Ounce for ounce, strawberries have more vitamin C than citrus fruit — a cup of strawberries provides as much vitamin C as a medium orange. A rich source of iron, potassium and fiber, they have recently been found to be a great source of ellagic acid, a powerful antioxidant and cancer-fighting agent.

Take advantage of the strawberry season by buying locally-picked berries. Farmers' markets, roadside stands, or pick-your-own farms are often the

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best sources for the freshest, most flavorful strawberries.

Strawberries don't ripen after they're picked, so look for very red berries and pass on the ones that

are white around the stem or tip. Good, ripe berries should also have an aroma. And if a box of berries contains any that are soft or moldy, pass them by, too — a bad berry can spoil the whole box. While large strawberries look beautiful, the smaller ones often have more taste.

Strawberries keep best refrigerated in a shallow, moisture-proof container, in a single layer on paper towel, for two to four days. Removing the stem speeds up the loss of vitamins and minerals, so wash and stem them just before using.

While nothing beats popping a juicy, sweet strawberry right in the mouth, they are wonderfully versatile as part of other dishes. Strawberry shortcake is a seasonal classic and in recent years, strawberries have been paired with aged balsamic vinegar as a topping for ice cream or frozen yogurt.

Strawberries can be sliced and tossed into green

Please see STRAWBERRIES, B3