



CHEF KATIE BUTTON'S TIPS TO ADD A POP OF SPANISH FLAVOR TO YOUR EVERYDAY MEALS

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Infusing Spanish flavors into your daily cooking doesn't have to be complicated. Whether you're a mac-and-cheese devotee or a master of artisan sandwich-making, the addition of simple Spanish ingredients can transform your favorite dish with minimal fuss.

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“I love the simplicity of Spanish cuisine,” says Katie Button, the Asheville, North Carolina-based chef and owner of Cúrate Bar de Tapas and La Bodega by Cúrate.

“It's all about finding the best products...and then preparing them super simply.

That's really my favorite way to cook, because it takes the pressure off.”

Button refers to ingredients like pimentón (Spain's smoked paprika), sherry (Jerez PDO) vinegar, and chorizo as “superpower ingredients.” A simple splash or pinch of any of these Spanish staples provides an easy way for home cooks to give everyday meals depth and a pop of flavor.

Not only are these ingredients fairly easy to find Stateside, but you can confirm their high quality by checking that they have Protected Designation of Origin (popularly known as DO or PDO) status, which guarantees the traceability, safety, and sustainability of everything from wine to extra-virgin olive oil. Spain is, after all, the number-one producer of organic foods and wines in Europe.

Here, Chef Button shares her best tips for easily transforming the flavor of go-to dishes like soups, sandwiches, pastas, and salads with a hint of Spanish flair. She also offers pairing suggestions with equally versatile and delicious Spanish wines.

ADD SOME CRUNCH





ADD SOME CRUNCH TO SIMPLE SALADS

Kikos—giant fried corn kernels flavored with salt and a variety of other seasonings—are popular in Spain. These delightfully crunchy morsels aren't just for snacking, however—they can also be used to give any simple salad a savory boost. “I crush them and toss them into salads often, or sprinkle them on some sauteed greens,” says Button. “They have a nice crunch, and that corn flavor is really delicious.”

Button also recommends pouring a measure of sherry (Jerez) to go with your salad (or whatever other appetizer you may be serving). “[Sherrys] are dry, and they have a nice salinity,” she says. “They're perfect with a charcuterie board and they're a great way to get a meal started, because that natural salinity makes your mouth water.”



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UMAMI-FY YOUR SANDWICHES

Spain is known far and wide for its delicious, savory snacking olives, from tangy and nutty Manzanillas to crisp and briny Hojiblanacas. Chef Button is particularly fond of anchovy-stuffed olives that have an extra dose of umami flavor. She likes to slice them to add to a tuna sandwich with an extra dash of olive oil. Occasionally she'll crank the flavor up a notch by making what she calls "Spanish pantry sandwiches," layering white asparagus, piquillo peppers, or sardines with a little alioli (extra virgin olive oil and garlic-based sauce associated with Catalonia) or mayonnaise between slices of crunchy bread.

PUNCH UP PASTA WITH TINNED FISH



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olives, canned tuna, extra virgin olive oil, and sherry vinegar. A big batch can stretch through multiple meals and makes an ideal easy lunch for her and her kids. “I like to serve it warm at night and then eat the leftovers for days,” she says. “Pasta salad is kind of a catch-all for all different kinds of ingredients that you might have in the pantry, like pickled and preserved things.”

Popping open a tin of fish also presents an excellent chance to explore the diversity of wine regions and grapes indigenous to Spain—particularly the refreshing whites. “The Albariños and Godellos are delicious and bright, and they do a really great job of cutting through fatty things,” says Button. “They have floral notes and are meant to go with all of the incredible tinned seafood.”





GUSSY UP A GRILLED CHEESE

There's no reason you can't also amplify the flavor of your kids' favorite gooey dishes—subtly, of course. “My kids' favorite cheese is Mahón,” says Button. “It's cow's milk cheese [from Menorca] and it melts really well—it's oozy, melty, and has a wonderful mild flavor. It makes the best grilled cheese.”

She'll sometimes add a few extras to her own grilled cheese, including sweet piquillo peppers and jamón, and she'll swap the Mahón for Idiazábal cheese. “It's another favorite cheese of mine [made from] sheep's milk [in] Basque country,” she says. “It's got this natural smoky aroma to it and that is really interesting.”

ADD DEPTH TO



ADD DEPTH TO CREAMED SOUPS

A staple of autumn meals, creamed soup made from butternut squash, mushrooms, or root vegetables like celeriac and parsnips calls for a splash of tangy sherry that's bursting with complex, nutty flavor. "A splash of sherry wine in mushroom soup is amazing," says Button. Sometimes she'll also grate some Roncal cheese into cream soups to add salinity and depth of flavor. "It's an incredible aged sheep's milk cheese that has a nice tangy sharpness to it."

Alternatively, she'll melt the cheese on toast points and then dip them in the soup—a perfectly cozy and hearty meal for cooler weather. Pair that with a glass of effervescent Cava, with its toasty, buttery notes, for an extra-special touch.

"If I'm making a meal at home and want something that's just going to go all the way from appetizers right up to dessert and be wonderful and delicious, Cava is the best—and they're incredibly made with centuries of tradition," says Button. "Wine production in Spain is as





SPICE UP ROASTED MEAT AND POTATOES

Whether you're planning to roast lamb chops or a sweet potato, Button recommends trying it with a healthy dose of pimentón, a smoky and sweet Spanish paprika that's amazingly versatile.

"Pimentón is one of those ingredients that brings out this smoky flavor in anything," she says. "It's one of my favorite ingredients."

"There is something about sweet potatoes and pimentón that [was] meant to be," she says. Button recommends tossing cubes of sweet potatoes, roasted with garlic, with pimentón and salt and pairing with a Spanish red made with Mencía or Bobal grapes. "Those two grapes are amazing, and they pair so well with so many things because they're the kind of wine that you can enjoy for a really long time. They're lighter bodied and a little more fruit forward."

DON'T FORGET

RECIPE!





DON'T FORGET DESSERT!

There are as many simple ways to add a punch of Spanish flavor to your desserts as there are to enhance your favorite winter meals. One of Button's favorite special-occasion desserts is cheesecake, and she'll replace a portion of the cream cheese with Little Friar Spanish goat's milk cheese. "Goat's milk gives a really interesting flavor in cheesecake, for making a Basque-style cheesecake," she says. "It totally changes it and can make the dessert incredible."

She'll also roast strawberries and then reduce them with Tempranillo wine "until they become this incredible syrup" that's great for topping cheesecake or ice cream. Alternatively, upgrade a scoop (or three) of chocolate ice cream with a drizzle of "a really nice bright sharp Spanish olive oil like a Picual, [which] would stand out against the chocolate," then top it with sea salt. "There are some great sea salts from Spain," Button notes, and advises adding chopped Marcona almonds for crunch. "I mean, who needs Rocky Road?"





INGREDIENT DEFINITIONS:



Pimentón:

Sherry (Jerez PDO):

INGREDIENT DEFINITIONS:

Pimentón:

Sherry (Jerez PDO):

Sherry vinegar (Jerez Vinegar PDO):

Piquillo peppers PDO:

Tinned fish:

Idiazábal PDO cheese:

Mahón: Menorca PDO cheese:

Marcona almonds:



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