



WINE COUNTRY TABLE

*With Recipes that Celebrate
California's Sustainable Harvest*

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ZINFANDEL-POACHED PEARS WITH MASCARPONE CREAM

SERVES 6

After several hours of steeping in a red wine syrup, these poached pears turn a rich ruby color. But that inky hue is only skin deep; slice and fan the pears to reveal their pale interior. The pears can be poached a full day ahead for an easy fall or winter dinner-party dessert. Bartlett and Bosc pears are both good choices for poaching.

WINE SUGGESTION: *California Port-style Zinfandel*

2 cups (500 ml) Zinfandel
2 cups (500 ml) water
¾ cup (150 g) sugar, plus more if needed
2 lemon zest strips
1 whole clove
3 large, ripe but firm pears

MASCARPONE CREAM:

½ cup (125 g) mascarpone
¼ cup (60 ml) heavy cream
2 teaspoons sugar
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract

Put the Zinfandel, water, sugar, lemon zest, and clove in a saucepan large enough to hold the pears in a single layer. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring to dissolve the sugar.

Peel the pears with a vegetable peeler. Add them to the simmering wine mixture and turn them gently with two rubber spatulas or wooden spoons to coat their whole surface evenly with the wine. Cut a round of parchment paper slightly larger in diameter than the saucepan and place it over the pears, tucking the edges under the liquid to hold the round in place. Adjust the heat to maintain a gentle simmer and cook the pears for 10 minutes. Remove the parchment, gently turn the pears over in the liquid, replace the parchment, and continue simmering until the pears are barely tender when pierced, 10 to 12 minutes longer. (They will soften more as they cool.)

With a slotted spoon, transfer the pears to a deep refrigerator container. Raise the heat to medium-high and simmer the poaching liquid until reduced to 1 cup (250 ml), 10 to 15 minutes. Let the wine syrup cool to room temperature, then pour it over the pears. Cover and refrigerate for 8 hours, turning the pears in the syrup every couple of hours so they are deeply and evenly colored. Remove and discard the clove.

Shortly before serving, make the mascarpone cream: Put the mascarpone, cream, sugar, and vanilla in a bowl and whisk until soft peaks form.

To serve, cut each pear in half lengthwise and core with a melon baller. Put each pear half, cut side down, on a work surface. Thinly slice lengthwise, leaving the slices attached at the stem end. Gently press on the pear half to fan the slices.

Divide the wine syrup among six plates. Top with a fanned pear half and put a dollop of mascarpone cream alongside. Serve immediately.

