



Build your own charcuterie platter

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By Brian Aldrich

A charcuterie platter and beer are as perfect a pairing as peanut butter and jelly. There are a lot of bars and restaurants in the area that offer this awesome combination of meats, cheeses and sauces, all to put on some toast or crackers. Some of my favorite platters can be found at Portsmouth Brewery, Thistle Pig and Earth Eagle, to name a few. If you took my advice a couple weeks ago and have begun to plan your own beer tasting, how about making your own charcuterie platter to impress your friends? Luckily, the Seacoast has endless options to choose from when it comes to ingredients for the perfect platter.

Meat

Beer writer and enthusiast Ben Watts of Berwick introduced me to North Country Sausage (of Claremont), and I have put their chicken sausage in multiple dishes. Cooking up some of their meat will not only look and taste great on a charcuterie platter, it will also make your house smell like smoked meats, you're welcome. For a list of where you can find meats from North Country Smokehouse, head over to NCSmokehouse.com.

Sauce/Spreads

The folks at Little Acre Gourmet Foods of Dover were kind enough to send me over their Balsamic and Fig Whole Seed Mustard and their Bourbon and Berry Cranberry Sauce. These sauces inspired me to create my own platter of goodness. The mustard in particular is my favorite. The tangy flavor of aged balsamic vinegar, the sweetness of dried figs and a subtle hint of garlic is a great match for spreading on a cracker or smoked meat. Check out

www.LittleAcreGourmet.com for their assortment of sauces and locations where you can buy some. They also have a spicy ketchup that I bet would be the star of any meat and cheese plate.

Cheeses

While I am a big cheese fan, my wife is usually the one to order the cheese and cracker platter as a meal, so I get my cheese recommendations from her. Recently on her trip to Throwback they were serving up the Harbison cheese from Jasper Hill Farm in Vermont. and she raved about it. While Throwback does a great job of sourcing rare cheeses, you can find a lot of great cheeses at C'est Cheese in North Hampton.

Dried Fruits

Here's where you can become creative. Supermarkets and specialty food stores usually have a wide assortment of dried fruits. I would lean toward the apricots myself, which offer a nice, tart flavor to go with some of the smoother cheeses. But as you build your platter, you can adjust to a sweeter fruit like a pineapple or raisins, which has a good sweet-and-tart balance.

Crackers and Bread

Some say crackers and bread are just vessels to transport food from plate to face, but with a charcuterie plate, they are so much more than that. I recommend any hard, stoned wheat cracker, something that won't crumble when you spread anything on it. Besides crostini, you don't normally see bread often on these platters. No one says you can't buy a great loaf, slice it up and toast it to go with your meats and cheeses. Somersworth's Leaven's sourdough bread called Levain is a wise choice for this.

Are you hungry yet? Hopefully this gives you a nice head start to putting together a nice charcuterie plate for yourself or friends and family.

Cheers,

Brian

Brian Aldrich is the creator of Seacoast Beverage Lab, a beer blog and podcast established in 2010. Brian also co-wrote the book "New Hampshire Beer: Brewing from Sea to Summit." Read more of his From the Lab columns online at www.seacoastonline.com/topics/From-the-lab