

It's Tea Time, Folks!

Forget wine. Try pairing your food with tea now!

by Veenu Singh

THE NEXT time you are invited to attend a food pairing session, be warned. It may not be about how you should match your whisky or wine with food; there's a good chance the session will be all about pairing food with tea.

Since when did plain old chai become so fancy? "We have tea and biscuits or tea and pakoras," says tea sommelier Neetu Sarin. "But we never think about whether it tastes good with 'a particular' kind of food, perhaps because we didn't have too many varieties of tea. But today, there's a wide range to choose from [masala chai, green tea, Arabic tea and even white]."

THE SCIENCE

Tea pairing more or less follows the same principle as wine pairing, so lighter teas like green tea

EASY ON THE PALATE

Lighter teas like green tea work better with lighter foods like salads



Tea readies and refreshes the palate to savour the next course in your meal

DESI DUO

Masala chai is a good match with spicy fried pakoras

best with patties or tea cakes, the Arabic tea goes well with kebab wraps and hummus and organic tea with basil pesto and vegetable panini." Similarly, Typhoo, which also has a wide range of flavours, offers interesting suggestions about what to pair your favourite tea with. Says the brand's spokesperson, Renu Kakkar,

"Typhoo Darjeeling goes excellently with creamy desserts, while Typhoo Classic Assam is perfect with rich red meats, pastas and samosas. You can sip the English Breakfast with your egg bhurji and aloo paratha while the Earl Grey is good with mild English cheeses, lemon-flavoured cakes and desserts, like rabdi, falooda and kulfi."

work better with lighter foods like salads, while the stronger black tea pairs best with more strongly-flavoured and spicy foods. Many tea brands now suggest specific foods you can eat with their teas. They're also roping in chefs to create special menus that showcase the versatility of the beverage.

Tea brand Typhoo got chef Vicky Ratnani to create a distinct menu that could be offered with different teas. "Not everyone drinks alcohol or wine," says Ratnani. "And flavoured tea offers a variety of taste and enriches the accompanying food too. Tea is like any small mid-course palate cleanser, a great flavour bridge from one course to the next." It refreshes and readies the palate to savour the next course and is a healthier accompaniment to food than wine.

A SWEET MATCH

Light teas like jasmine and chamomile go with most chocolate flavours

PAIRING TRICKS

Ratnani pairs Moroccan spiced cottage cheese or chicken with mint tea. "Moroccans use a lot of mint in their food, so I thought mint tea would go well with this cuisine. Similarly, something like Oolong tea would go nicely with grilled Oriental food, and jasmine tea with, say, grilled chicken," he explains.

Cha Bar, the tea café chain, also pairs their wide in-house variety of teas with different kinds of food. "Whenever we have a cup of tea, we like to have something with it whether it's a cookie, a toast or our favourite pakoras," says Priti Paul, owner of Cha Bar and a passionate tea aficionado herself. "So after talking to various tea drinkers, we decided to work out the combinations so that the next time you want to have chai with something, you know exactly what to ask for. So, while our masala chai or the chai Hindustani works with pakoras, the breakfast teas work

UNUSUAL MATCHES

Interestingly, the brew that most of India has with biscuits is also a good match with a variety of chocolates. According to Rajesh Variyath, corporate chef, Radisson Blu MBD, Noida, most heavy, rich chocolates go well with light teas. "You can pair an orange truffle chocolate with honey-ginger tea," he says. "In case you are trying a dark chocolate then go for strong black tea like Oolong, or Earl Grey with more fruity fillings. Light teas like jasmine and chamomile also go with most chocolate flavours."

However, don't go by the book. "In the end you should just go by what suits your own palate," says tea sommelier Anamika Singh.

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EXOTIC COMBO

Moroccan mint green tea works very well with couscous and veggies



Photo: CHA BAR



Photo: RADISSON BLU MBD, NOIDA



Photo: TYPHOO