*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**Simple mulled wine recipe adds holiday cheer**

I love the holiday season. It is time for sharing, caring and giving. I wish the season would come more often.

As much as I don’t like the cold weather, I am starting to learn to love everything about living in the cold country. There are so many things to do in the winter. And while we consider it fun and exciting, the southern folks (yes, my family from California) would look at us and say, “What? You do what? Going out and fishing on a frozen lake? Are you nuts? What if the ice cracked all of a sudden and you just fall right in?”

Ah, a thousand “what ifs” indeed. Yet, year after year, we folks go ice fishing anyway, and cross-country skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling or just doing nothing but staring out the window, watching the fresh-fallen snow clinging to the windowpane, forming snowflakes with a million different designs. And, of course, enjoying a glass of mulled wine while cozying up with your loved one in front of the fireplace is optional, but highly recommended.

I never heard of mulled wine until I started working in the hospitality industry. And it is not till I worked with a restaurant up north that I learned more about this gem.

Mulled wine is a European beverage that is “mulled” with different fruits and spices and can be served with or without alcohol. It is served hot or warm in cold countries. Yet, in Spain, the same drink is served chilled, called sangria.

The recipe is rather simple, it is heated wine that is mixed with fruits and spices. It depends upon different regions and the fruits and spices available, but mostly the fruits are orange, lemon, lime, apples, berries or tangerines. And spices include cinnamon, nutmeg, star anise, clove and ginger.

The spices may be combined and boiled in a sugar syrup (or honey) before wine or brandy is added. And talk about adding a hint of fresh holiday scent to your home while the wine is mulling. Biting your tongue, you might wish winter would last a little longer.

So, how to make a perfect mulled wine. Well, forget it, there’s no such animal. Just like cooking, there is no recipe that would please everyone. There is always someone who cannot stand certain ingredients.

While most of your guests would love what you have created, there will always be a few that find it totally distasteful. So, take their names and cross them off your invitation list next year. Life is simple. Enjoy it with those who share your love and passion.

So, how to mull your wine? Well, set aside the ingredients you need. After a few tries, you will come up with your very own specialty and then name it after you or someone you love. But before your mulling, pick a clean pan/pot that you’ll use only in mulling the wine. Do not ever use a regular cooking pan for this mulling purpose, as it will totally ruin the flavor and give it a very disagreeable taste.

So, are you ready to do your own mulling? It is really easy and simple. And once you’ve mastered your first batch, you’re on your way to become a mulling master. As the batch is made up with all different fruits and spices, you do not need to add an expensive wine.

Here is one of my creations:

**Amery Amy’s Merry Nip**

Ingredients:

* 1 bottle red wine
* 4 cups water
* 1 orange/tangerine
* 1/2 cup brandy, vodka or gin
* 2-3 star anise
* 8-10 whole cloves
* 2-3 cinnamon sticks
* 1/2 cup honey

Heat 4 cups of water in your mulling pot; add all spices when boiling. Use your imagination. You can add lemons, limes or cranberries (which are plentiful here in the Northwoods) to the batch. Boil for 10 minutes, then turn the heat down and add the wine and liquor. If you want it nonalcoholic, just add one quart of apple juice instead.

Again, what makes Amery Amy merry? The trick is, it has to be served hot. And rather than heating the whole batch every time, just microwave each serving for a minute. Add the cinnamon stick and star anise before you set the timer. Trust me, the whole room will be permeated with the holiday scent. Now you have the recipe, adjust the profile to your liking.

Living up here in the Northwoods, it seems like everyone is either Norwegian, Danish or Swedish. It is hard for a Chinese guy with gray hair to blend in. But, somehow, I did manage. What wonderful friends they make. I’m counting my blessings every day.

My Swedish friends taught me a few things about mulling. First, it is called glogg in Swedish, and oftentimes, it is made with fruit juices instead of wine. However, for those who have lived in the Northwoods long enough, stronger spirits are added — brandy, vodka or akvavit. And glogg is a popular drink during the Christmas season.

Anyway, don’t wait to start mulling. Start today and enjoy the season. Who knows? Pretty soon we’ll be complaining about the intense summer heat.