

Versatile watermelon adds splash of flavor to dishes, drinks

By Jody Feinberg

GateHouse News Service

Posted Aug 19, 2008 @ 09:01 PM

Watermelon is such a perfect food for a hot summer day that most people are content to eat it in its simplest form — right off the rind or cut in chunks.

Juicy, sweet and colorful, it's a favorite side dish or dessert for picnics and barbecues. But watermelon also can take center stage as an accompaniment to beef, seafood and other entrees. Or it can be turned into an appetizer, salad, tapas or drink that brings summer to the table.

"It's such a great summer fruit and one of the most versatile," said executive chef Richard Garcia, of Abington, Mass., who will showcase watermelon when the new restaurant Tastings Wine Bar and Bistro opens this week at Patriot Place in Foxboro, Mass. "You can do anything with it. It balances out a lot of dishes."

Ken Oringer, owner and executive chef at Clio in the Back Bay and Toro in the South End, agrees.

"People think of it one way — to cut into a wedge and eat it, so you have to think outside the box to see how versatile it is," he said. "It's so crunchy and refreshing and flavorful."

To showcase the melon's versatility, Garcia serves a dish called Watermelon Flight — it's five skewers of watermelon topped with one of the following: creme fraiche and salmon caviar; jalapeño and black sea salt; balsamic vinegar; and extra virgin olive oil and tomato pulp.

"A lot of people don't realize that watermelon goes well with savory foods," he said.

As an accompaniment to tenderloin, he makes a watermelon relish with cilantro, red onion, chives and jalapeño. Another favorite is a ceviche of shrimp and scallops marinated in citrus juice, ginger, red onion and jalapeno.

Garcia, 29, has his roots in Quincy, Mass., but his cooking reflects the journey his life has taken from high school in Miami, to the Marines, to Spain and the Caribbean, and back to the South Shore. In the Virgin Islands, where he held his last post before moving to Abington with his wife and children, his cuisine at the restaurant Havana Blue was recognized for its creativity.

"I like to use fresh, local ingredients and to push the envelope a bit," Garcia said.

He even grills slices, serving watermelon "steak" with cranberry honey, dried cranberries and feta cheese, the latter a popular accompaniment in the Middle East.

Oringer likes to pair watermelon with feta cheese and the Spanish cheese idiazabal because their saltiness brings out the melon's sweetness. For one version of watermelon salad, he combines cubes with idiazabal, Spanish ham and heirloom tomatoes; for another, he uses feta, sugarplums, and the herbs calaminth and shiso.

Watermelon, low in calories and rich in vitamins A, C, and B6, also adds color and brightness to summer drinks, such as a martini flavored with watermelon juice.

Even the rind and seeds are tasty. Garcia makes watermelon rind, a favorite in the South. It has a sweet and sour flavor that comes from simmering the white part of the rind until it is fork tender and then refrigerating it in a mixture of white vinegar, sugar, cinnamon sticks and ginger. He also likes roasted watermelon seeds, a popular snack food in China.

August and September are when watermelons are most juicy and sweet. For peak flavor, it's important to select a watermelon that was picked recently.

If you're buying a cut melon, choose one with bright red flesh and dark seeds. An abundance of white seeds means it was picked too early. It should be wrapped tightly in plastic and refrigerated, otherwise it will lose its flavor.

With a whole melon, listen for a deep rich sound when you thud it. You also want the melon to feel heavy, another sign that the water has not evaporated.

"You want one picked in its prime, because it won't ripen much after it is picked and will never develop its full flavor," he said.

Jalapeno Watermelon Ceviche

Serves 6 to 8 as a tapas (small plate portion)

1/2 cup fresh squeezed orange juice

1/4 cup fresh squeezed lime juice

1 cup diced (1/4 inch) seeded watermelon

1/2 teaspoon finely grated peeled fresh ginger

1 1/2 tablespoons finely diced red onion

3 teaspoons finely chopped fresh green jalapeño

1/2 teaspoon salt

3/4 lb sea scallops, muscle removed from side and cut into 1/2-inch pieces

3/4 lb large shrimp, peeled, deveined, and cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint

Stir together orange juice, lime juice, watermelon, ginger, onion, jalapeño and salt in a large bowl.

Bring a 1-quart saucepan three-fourths full of salted water to a boil. Add scallops. Reduce heat to simmer and poach scallops until just cooked through, 30 seconds. Transfer with a slotted spoon to a bowl of ice and cold water to stop cooking.

Return water in saucepan to a boil and poach shrimp in same manner. Drain shrimp in a colander and transfer to bowl of ice water to stop cooking. Drain scallops and shrimp well and pat dry.

Add scallops, shrimp and mint to watermelon mixture and toss. Season with salt. Chill covered for 1 hour. Ceviche can be chilled up to 3 hours — any longer and the scallops and shrimp will begin to break down.

Courtesy of Richard Garcia, executive chef, Tastings Wine Bar and Bistro, Foxboro, Mass.

Watermelon & Red Onion Relish

Serves 4 to 6 as a complement to grilled beef dishes

1 medium red onion, thickly sliced

1 cup cubed watermelon (about 1/2-inch cubes), chilled

2 tablespoons high quality extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon sherry vinegar

1 tablespoon chopped chives

1 tablespoon chopped cilantro

1 teaspoon finely minced jalapeño

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Preheat grill. Grill onion slices for 2-3 minutes per side. Chop onion slices into 1/4-inch pieces.

In a large bowl toss chopped onions with remaining ingredients and adjust seasoning as needed. Cover and chill for at least 30 minutes to allow flavors to develop.

Fresh Watermelon Martini

Serves 1

1/2 ounce fresh lime juice

1 ounce vodka

1 1/2 ounces fresh watermelon juice (puree watermelon chunks in a blender and strain)

1 watermelon slice for garnish

Pop Rocks (fun optional ingredient)

Chill a martini glass for 10 minutes in freezer.

Rub a cut lime around the rim of the glass, dip the rim in pop rocks (as you would salt for a margarita).

Slowly add the ingredients in a cocktail shaker and shake with ice cubes for 10 seconds.

Strain and pour into the martini glass and garnish with a few fresh slices of watermelon.

Recipes courtesy of Richard Garcia, executive chef, Tastings Wine Bar and Bistro, Foxboro, Mass.

Copyright © 2008 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons license](#), except where noted.

Versatile watermelon adds splash of flavor to dishes, drinks

By Jody Feinberg
GateHouse News Service
Posted Aug 19, 2008 @ 09:01 PM



Jeff Loughlin photos/The Patriot Ledger

 [Purchase this photo](#)

Richard Garcia, executive chef for the new restaurant, Tastings Wine Bar and Bistro, opening at Patriot Place, with some of the watermelon dishes that will be on the menu.

 Close

 Prev

Watermelon, a favorite summer treat, is more versatile a food than you think....

Photo 1 of 6



Watermelon skewers with chopsticks prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 2 of 6



Watermelon slices prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 3 of 6



Watermelon martini prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 4 of 6



Shoulder tenderloin with watermelon and onion relish



Versatile watermelon adds splash of flavor to dishes, drinks

By Jody Feinberg
GateHouse News Service
Posted Aug 19, 2008 @ 09:01 PM



Watermelon skewers with chopsticks prepared by chef Richard Garcia.

Close

Prev Next

Watermelon, a favorite summer treat, is more versatile a food than you think....

Photo 1 of 6



Watermelon skewers with chopsticks prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 2 of 6



Watermelon slices prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 3 of 6



Watermelon martini prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 4 of 6



Shoulder tenderloin with watermelon and onion relish



Versatile watermelon adds splash of flavor to dishes, drinks

By Jody Feinberg
GateHouse News Service
Posted Aug 19, 2008 @ 09:01 PM



Shoulder tenderloin with watermelon and onion relish prepared by chef Richard Garcia.

Close

Prev Next

Watermelon, a favorite summer treat, is more versatile a food than you think....

Photo 1 of 6



Watermelon skewers with chopsticks prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 2 of 6



Watermelon slices prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 3 of 6



Watermelon martini prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 4 of 6



Shoulder tenderloin with watermelon and onion relish



Versatile watermelon adds splash of flavor to dishes, drinks

By Jody Feinberg
GateHouse News Service
Posted Aug 19, 2008 @ 09:01 PM



Watermelon martini prepared by chef Richard Garcia.

Close

Prev Next

Watermelon, a favorite summer treat, is more versatile a food than you think....

Photo 1 of 6



Watermelon skewers with chopsticks prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 2 of 6



Watermelon slices prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 3 of 6



Watermelon martini prepared by chef Richard Garcia....

Photo 4 of 6



Shoulder tenderloin with watermelon and onion relish

