



Barry's secret ingredients

by Barry Seaman of Richmond Catering

This year everyone is wondering if the traditional office Christmas party has come to an end. There's never been such an important time to reward staff and help keep morale high.

If budget is a problem here are a few cost effective suggestions:

Consider a different menu option

Opting for a bowl food menu instead of a costly 3 course dinner menu for example can provide a similar amount of food but is slightly less formal

Guests are stood and therefore you can look at slightly smaller venues hopefully helping with costs

Moving the event from the evening to the daytime

Venue costs are normally very competitive for day hire rates as they can often be at a premium for an evening in December

Ensuring guests arrive on time will enable you to reduce the length of your drinks reception and therefore you make savings on reception drinks

Wrapping up your event after speeches allows the younger crowd to continue the party at a near by bar should they so wish and everyone else can have an early day. This means further savings on drinks

Fingers crossed with the day finishing earlier you should have a few more fresh faces the following morning!

Look for special offers to ensure you get the most for your money

Many events venues such as Pewterers Hall in the city will do special offers: book your Christmas event in December and receive 10% of your next event booked in the New Year

If budget is simply too tight hold it in your offices and get the caterer to come to you

Your office can be transformed by adding simple lighting and Christmas theming and you can discuss with your caterers the best menu to suit your requirements, facilities and space available

Alternatively if your budget is so slim this year you are doing it yourself here is the recipe for a tasty treat to get you started...

Dark Chocolate shots with Cointreau or Grand Marnier

Ingredients

8 oz Dark chocolate broken into pieces

¼ pint double cream

½ pint boiling water

3-4 tablespoons of liqueur or to taste

Steps

Put all of the ingredients into a heatproof bowl and place onto a pan of boiling water

Allow the mixture to melt, stirring occasionally

Once everything has melted whisk thoroughly until the mixture comes together and looks smooth

If it is not quite runny enough (it should be a little thicker than double cream) add some more boiling water and keep whisking until the required consistency is achieved

Pour into your favourite shot glasses and serve warm

Variations

This recipe can be made with white chocolate. Simply replace the dark chocolate with the same quantity of white chocolate and substitute the liquor for vodka

'All change' with Autumn well and truly here! At Zafferano we are gearing up to make the most of the season's colourful offerings, to inspire our equally colourful and seasonal menus.

Anyone who has recently taken a stroll anywhere the least bit rural will undoubtedly have noticed the abundance of wild fruits now burgeoning on the branches of trees and bushes, awaiting the first frosts to soften their flesh. We are currently experimenting with Rowan berry jelly to compliment another great discovery we have made, Blue Monday cheese from Juliet Harbut and Alex James. Named after the classic New Order track, it is a wonderfully soft purple veined cheese produced in Scotland, that we use in place of Italian gorgonzola. I must thank Chef Mark Hix for bringing it to my attention on a menu we worked on together at Tyringham Hall. Try Carpaccio of venison with Blue Monday and Rowan berry jelly.

Rosehips also make a fine jelly that replaces rose petal confit on our baked paneer with pineapple chutney, and our homemade rosehip syrup makes an excellent alternative to the sometimes oversweet rose syrup when mixed with Prosecco in a rosehip Bellini.

Pumpkins are a must at this time of year, and with so many varieties and colours to choose from they are one of the most versatile ingredients around. The dense flesh and vibrant orange colour of Fairytale or Cinderella varieties is perfect for pumpkin fondant. Pair this with honeyed goat's cheese and sage crisps for a truly autumnal canapé. We also use pumpkin to make excellent spiced chutney with saffron and pear which is great with a hearty terrine of confit duck and foie gras, served with baby vegetables a La Grecque.

English apples are coming in to their own now, especially with the arrival of Egremont Russets. With their characteristic firm crisp flesh and faint tartness, they make a great accompaniment to pork dishes. We condense their flavour by oven drying them in thick slices and use them to garnish soft pork rilette with crusty bread and rhubarb compote. They are equally good when cooked with the last of the season's damson plums in a damson apple tansy with black treacle ice cream.

Heavy crops of such fruits as Rowan berries, rosehips and haws are said to forewarn of a hard winter ahead, but I'm prepared to suffer that for these seasonal delights. ●

Jonathan Gilbert

Executive Chef, Zafferano

Jonathan trained as a chef in rural France and Paris before returning to the private clubs and restaurants of London's Mayfair. After ten years in the restaurant industry he took a three-year sabbatical to study Fine Art at Central St. Martins School of Art. However, after graduation, with his passion for fine food still burning, he began working for some of London's biggest and most stylish events companies. Jonathan has worked for Zafferano for over three years, and also lectures part time at the Food Academy of West Herts College. In his spare time he is usually found with his partner and young daughter on their allotment, growing mushrooms, tayberries and heritage vegetables.



New season New ingredients