

## Platter up

by Elli Jacobs

# All on board!

Tips and tricks for arranging the ultimate charcuterie plate for your holiday table.

A charcuterie board is essentially a culinary choose-your-own-adventure story. It's made up of an assortment of cold, cooked and cured meats, and supported by a selection of cheeses, dips, spreads, tangy pickles, crackers and fresh fruit and vegetables.

Originating from the French *char* ("flesh") and *cuit* ("cooked"), and pronounced "shar-coo-tur-ree", the dish originated hundreds of years ago in Europe as a "mezze" of cured meats that highlighted traditional forms of meat preservation and flavour enhancement.

Nicola Romano, the Italian-born head chef at Melbourne restaurant Oster, says that for Italians, a charcuterie board will appear at the table without fail when friends or family get together.

"The wonderful thing about a charcuterie board is its versatility," he says. "You can mix and match flavours to magnify enjoyment and combine textures and colours to offer variety and visual appeal, which make it an ideal centerpiece for a festive gathering, either to serve as a host or to take as a guest."

To build a first-class charcuterie board, Romano suggests first answering the following questions:

- Do you want to focus on a particular food culture, or combine items from different countries?
- What can you buy at your local supermarket? Do you need to visit a specialty grocer?
- What dietary needs do you need to accommodate?

As a guide, if the charcuterie is to be served as a starter, you'll need about 50g of cured meat per



person. If it's a main, estimate roughly 150g per person. "And ideally for your vegan and gluten-free guests make separate boards as it's a way of showing respect towards them," he adds.

For instance, you can remove bread or crackers from a gluten-free board, substitute fig "salami" for Italian salami and hummus for pate or make a mushroom pate or cashew cream for a vegan board.

### Meat

**Salami:** Hard salamis are a must on any charcuterie board. Romano particularly recommends cacciatore salami, also known as hunter's salami. "This dry-cured salami is flavoured with juniper berries and Chianti wine, yet it's surprisingly mild and delicate in flavour."

**Prosciutto:** Italian ham that's salted and air-dried, usually thinly sliced and served raw.

**Speck:** Although a close cousin to prosciutto, its distinguished smoky

flavour is a result of first salt-curing then slowly cold-smoking the best part of the pork leg over wood.

**Mortadella:** A fine-textured cooked sausage made from heat-cured pork meat. Cubes of fat in the mixture give mortadella its signature white "polka dot" look. Some mortadella is flavoured with black pepper, pistachios and even myrtle berries.

**Bresaola:** "One of the few renowned cured meats not made from pork, Italian beef tenderloin is salted, air-dried with a sweet musty smell," says Romano.

### Seafood

If you prefer fish, Richard Longden, chef at Eyre Peninsula Seafoods, recommends choosing two or three types of seafood.

**Octopus:** Longden suggests marinating raw octopus overnight in red wine, garlic and bay leaves, before cooking in the oven at 180C for two hours. Just before serving,

grill for a few minutes then drizzle with olive oil and lemon. "The smoky, garlic and lemon aromas will definitely wow your guests."

**Prawns:** "Simply buy large whole cooked Australian prawns, defrost and serve," says Longden. If you prefer fried prawns, simple favourites include pub-style beer-battered or garlic butter prawns.

**Oysters:** A luxurious delicacy, Longden suggests serving small, sweet Pacific oysters on the half shell with a dressing.

**Mussels:** "Barbecue pot-ready mussels until they all open, remove one shell, add a teaspoon of gremolata (a mix of garlic, lemon juice, lemon zest, chopped parsley and olive oil) and season with freshly ground pepper," recommends Longden.

### Cheese

Choose a variety of flavours and textures, ranging from soft to hard, advises Tassos Dermetzoglou of The Thornbury Fromagerie.

**Mild-soft:** Maffra Brie is a lovely creamy brie-style cheese made in Gippsland. Another option is L'artisan Extravagant, a triple cream cheese from a third-generation French cheesemaker in Victoria.

**Strong-soft:** Milawa King River Gold is a Victorian washed rind with a soft interior and a slightly gritty, orange-ish rind. It has a strong scent and a rich, almost smoky and nutty flavour that gets stronger as the cheese ripens. Berry's Creek Tarwin Blue will change your perception of blue cheese, says Dermetzoglou, who describes it as "fudgy and dense with a decent ammonia hit and earthy qualities".



PHOTOS: ISTOCK, DOMINIC LORRIMER



### Adam Liaw's

## Oyster platter with homemade hot sauce

Oysters are the perfect entertaining food. They are lovely with a drink and require almost no effort on your part. I usually budget on two oysters for each person, but you know your friends better than I do.

### INGREDIENTS

2 dozen oysters  
lemon wedges

### Oyster hot sauce (makes about 1 litre)

400g large mild red chillies (or a mix of chillies as you like)

2 eschallots, peeled and chopped

1 cup white vinegar

2 tbsp caster sugar

2 tbsp fish sauce

1 tsp salt

2 tbsp vodka

juice of 2 lemons

### METHOD

#### Step 1

For the hot sauce, combine all of the ingredients except the vodka

and lemon juice in a non-reactive saucepan with 750ml of water. Bring to a boil and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Allow to cool to room temperature, then place into a blender with the vodka and lemon juice. Blend to a smooth puree, then pass through a sieve to remove any solids. You can skip the straining if you prefer.

#### Step 2

Bottle the sauce into a number of small bottles. It will keep in the fridge for up to three months. Arrange the oysters on a platter and serve with the hot sauce and lemon wedges. Keep the remaining bottles of hot sauce to give as gifts.

Serves 8-10