Pear sidecar

This sweet (but not too sweet) drink should be made one at a time in a cocktail shaker. Energetic shaking and a proper drink-to-ice ratio—possible only in a shaker—are key: The ice dilutes and softens the "edges" of the cocktail, encouraging the otherwise sharp flavors to meld together.

PREP TIME 10 minutes

MAKES 1 cocktail

NOTES To make simple syrup, cook ½ cup each sugar and water in a small pan over medium heat until sugar dissolves and mixture turns clear; cool before using. Can be kept, covered and chilled, for 6 months.

¼ cup pear brandy
2 tbsp. unsweetened pear juice or nectar
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 tbsp. simple syrup (see Notes)
1 or 2 slices fresh pear, about ½ in. thick

Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Pour brandy, pear juice, lemon juice, and simple syrup over ice. Cover and shake vigorously for 1 minute. Strain and pour into a chilled martini glass. Garnish with sliced pear. Serve immediately.

PER COCKTAIL 252 CAL., 1% (1.8 CAL.) FROM FAT; 0.2 G PROTEIN; 0.2 G FAT (0 G SAT.); 41 G CARBO (0.9 G FIBER); 4.6 MG SODIUM; 0 MG CHOL.

Caramelized pear and sage crostini

Sweet pears and sharp blue cheese create an exciting yet homey appetizer. Serve them with the pear sidecar cocktail (recipe precedes), sparkling wine, or a slightly sweet white wine.

PREP AND COOK TIME 30 minutes

MAKES 16 crostini

NOTES Baguette slices can be toasted up to 1 day ahead and kept in an airtight container until ready to use.

4 tbsp. butter, divided
3 ripe Bartlett pears, cored, peeled, and chopped
½ tsp. salt
½ white or whole-wheat baguette
6 sage leaves, chopped
¼ cup crumbled mild blue cheese
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Melt 3 tbsp. butter in a large frying pan over medium heat. Add pears and salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until pears are soft, about 10 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, cut baguette into 16 slices (¼ in. thick; see Notes). Spread slices with remaining 1 tbsp. butter and arrange on a baking sheet in a single layer. Bake slices until well toasted, 10 to 15 minutes.

3. When pears are soft, stir in sage and remove from heat. Top toasted baguette slices with pear mixture and blue cheese. Sprinkle with pepper. Serve warm.

PER CROSTINO 90 CAL., 40% (36 CAL.) FROM FAT; 1.8 G PROTEIN; 4 G FAT (2.3 G SAT.); 12 G CARBO (1.1 G FIBER); 217 MG SODIUM; 9.3 MG CHOL.

Braised pork with pears and chiles

The gentle heat of the dried chiles is highlighted by the sweet pears, which become soft and a bit savory while cooking in the pork juices. With a side of greens, this is one of our favorite fall dinners.

PREP AND COOK TIME 3 hours, plus overnight chilling

MAKES 8 servings

2 tsp. salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 pork butt or shoulder (about 3½ lbs.), tied as a roast
3 tbsp. vegetable oil
½ cup dry white wine
2 tbsp. lemon juice
½ cup chicken broth
8 to 12 garlic cloves, peeled
2 dried arbol chiles
1 large mild dried chile, such as New Mexico
6 Bosc or Anjou pears

1. Rub salt and pepper all over pork. Cover and chill overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 350°. Heat a large ovenproof pot over high heat and pour in oil. When hot, add pork. Brown pork on all sides until well browned (about 4 minutes per side), adjusting the heat to keep the pork sizzling but not burning. Transfer pork to a plate or platter.

Pick your pear

Most of our nation's pears come from Oregon and Washington. Here's a guide to the types commonly grown there and when they (versus imports) are in season and available in markets.

Anjou Sweet and juicy, with a mild flavor and firm texture. Can be green or red. Good for eating raw or for cooking. *Green: October through June. Red: October through May.*

Asian Crisp (even crunchy) texture and a delicate, refreshing flavor make this pear great for eating raw. There are many varieties of Asian pears; most from the United States look like round, beige apples. *August through October.*

Bartlett The juiciest pear, it turns very soft and loses its shape when cooked. *August through January.*

Bosc Crisp fruit with a soft, grainy texture, russet skin, and beautiful aroma. The most pear-shaped of all pears. Holds its shape when cooked. *September through April.*

Comice A finer texture than other pears and a fruity scent make it excellent for eating raw. *September through February.*