

Beer and food matching gone wild

Where's your sense of adventure? That's what Monteith's is asking all New Zealanders during its 12th annual Monteith's Beer & Wild Food Challenge.

The Challenge kicks off nationwide on 1st June with bars, cafes and restaurants from around the country preparing their best wild food meals matched with Monteith's beer to win the title.

The ultimate challenge for participating outlets is to create a culinary sensation using a range of locally sourced wild food. Wild food is defined as anything that is not usually raised on a farm. The most successful dishes are a combination of rare ingredients, unusual cooking methods and exotic presentation.

The focus for this year's Challenge is for chefs to be adventurous with fresh local ingredients ideally sourced within a 100 kilometre radius of their kitchen.

And, for the first time, chefs will be judged by their most valued critics – the public. In the past, beer and food aficionados would dine at participating restaurants and rate the meal and the beer match. This year, the majority of the judging will be by text votes from diners.

The organisers say beer and food matching has become more popular and it is now time to give the dining public the opportunity to vote for their favourite dish.

"The Challenge has come a long way from its inception 12 years ago. The food and beer matches are now of a very high standard. In addition diners have a better understanding of beer and food matching which is why we want them to take part in deciding the winner," says Russell Browne from Monteith's.

"And with the focus on locally sourced ingredients, diners will be supporting not only the restaurant but local suppliers as well," he says.

Public text votes will determine the highest scoring dishes that will then be judged by Convenor of Judging Kerry Tyack and a special guest at a live "cook-off" in August. There will be six national finalists taking part in the live event. These six will be announced by Kerry on 31st July.

Kerry says he hopes people get involved and vote. "For 12 years I have been judging this competition and I have seen vast improvement over that period. I'm confident that this year's dishes will give diners such a unique and enjoyable experience that they will eagerly take the next step after the meal and show their appreciation by submitting their vote," he says.

As an incentive, every text vote returns two complimentary Monteith's beers to the voter.

The robust voting system will be heavily vetted to prevent manipulation. Each voter can only vote for an outlet once and the final results are based on the rating average rather than the number of votes.

The Monteith's Beer & Wild Food Challenge is the longest running beer and food matching competition in the country. The 12th annual Challenge runs from 1st June until 26th July. The grand winner will be announced following a live "cook-off" on 10th August.

Information about entrants and a running tally of votes can be found at www.monteiths.co.nz

Helpful hints for beer and food matching

Lagers and Lighter Ales (e.g. Monteith's Radler and Monteith's New Zealand Lager)

Mild lagers and lighter ales are great with food with more subtle flavours (like shellfish or chicken). However if you are looking for a contrast try these beers with spicy foods or a good curry.

Pilsners and More Bitter Beers (e.g. Monteith's Original and Monteith's Pilsner)

Dishes with herb flavours, tomato or capsicum sauces and those that have used smoked ingredients are superb with more bitter beers. The distinct hop aroma and flavours complement the herbal and grassy ingredients in the dishes. Some Pilsners also work well with spicy food.

Malty Beers (e.g. Monteith's Celtic Red)

The malty flavour and well-balanced bitterness of robust ale styles are ideal for the meat connoisseur. Enjoy these with lamb, beef, veal or even roasted pork. Ales also go well with more strongly flavoured foods. Increase the seasoning or choose more strongly flavoured ingredients and the beer flavour must also be more intense.

Dark Beers (e.g. Monteith's Black and Monteith's Doppelbock)

Dark beers are balanced by red meats in rich sauces and gravies. To establish your own benchmark try a glass with a thick juicy steak cooked to perfection on the grill or roast beef served with lashings of rich dark gravy. To appreciate how well old favourites have stood the test of time, try the traditional pairing of a dark beer with raw oysters. The dark beers also go with some cured meat such as corned beef served warm.