

Well read &

By **Stephanie E. Ponder**

LET'S BE HONEST. Talking about books is only part of what makes a book club fun. There's also the social aspect of getting together with friends, and then there's the food.

Whether a dish reflects an author's heritage, the story's setting or essential plot points, thematic food is a great way to enhance the book club experience.

After enjoying the simple pairing of food and books in their own clubs, Judy Gelman and Vicki Levy Krupp, friends and Costco members, set out to serve up a collection of recipes ideal for book club meetings.

Delicious details

First the duo decided which books to include. They began by talking to friends, and soon they were talking to book clubs around the country.

It led them to find the website BookClubCookbook.com, followed by the publication of *The Book Club Cookbook* (Tarcher, 2004). For the book, they split their reading list and set out to identify key foods to pair. "About halfway through the process we contacted all of the living authors," says Krupp. "When it comes to speaking with authors, it's typical that they're excited to be asked about food, because it's a question they don't often get."

Their chat with author Markus Zusak for the 2012 revision of *The Book Club Cookbook* focused on a cookie. His novel *The Book Thief* includes a scene where the mayor's wife leaves a plate of cookies out for the story's young heroine.

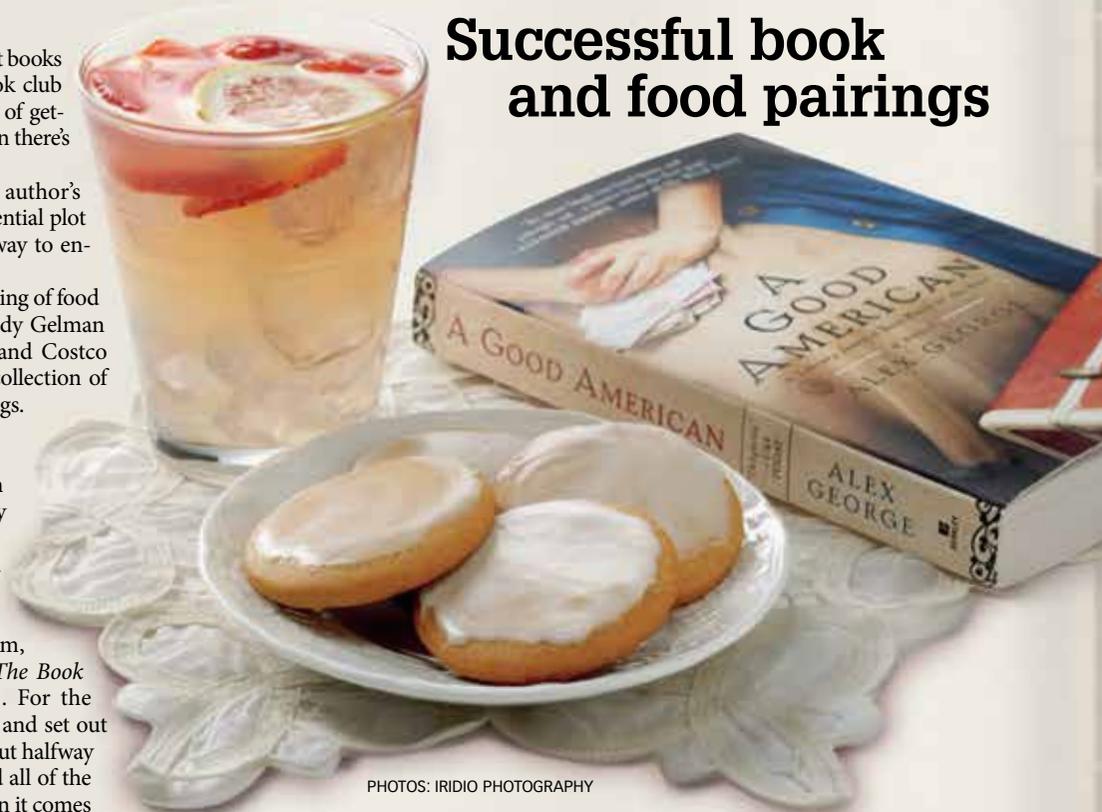
"He said he knew exactly what kind of cookies they were going to be: vanilla kipfelfers," says Gelman. "It's a cookie he associates with his childhood. Those kinds of authentic details help make a story ring true."

While books such as *Chocolat*, by Joanne Harris, lend themselves to food pairing, Krupp says she and Gelman often have to be creative. She cites John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* as an example. "Some books deal with deprivation and hunger. Food is something that is longed for," she tells *The Connection*. "So we called the Steinbeck Center in Salinas, California, and they gave us a recipe with foods that are grown in that area."

Food for all

Having spent the last decade talking to book club members from across the

Successful book and food pairings



PHOTOS: IRIDIO PHOTOGRAPHY

country, Gelman says they've noticed all kinds of dynamics.

Some members might be intimidated by having to cook for everyone, so they "try to include some simple suggestions." For example, one book club member brought alphabet cookies to a discussion of Myra Goldberg's *Bee Season*, which features a child who has a gift for spelling.

They've also heard about meetings where everyone brings a dish and the other members guess its relationship to the book. "It's a good way to get into elements of the plot," adds Gelman.

Another observation, says Krupp, is that "book clubs tell us all the time that they're intrigued by something they haven't tasted." That proved especially true for Gelman and Krupp, who were curious about lebkuchen after reading this month's Book Buyer's Pick, Alex George's *A Good American* (page 53).

While the following recipes make it easy to know what to serve when you discuss *A Good American*, Krupp says finding the right recipe is part of the fun.

She says, "The process of finding foods and making them gives you something to talk about; it's part of the whole experience." ☺

• Frog Lemonade (above)

• Frog Lemonade was named in honor of the New Orleans Times-Picayune's "Weather Prophet," the Picayune frog, who was pictured on the newspaper's daily weather report from 1894 to 1982.

- 2 cups sugar
- 2 cups fresh lemon juice (approximately 6 to 8 lemons)
- 1½ cups pineapple juice
- 2 quarts water
- 2 quarts seltzer water
- 3 dozen strawberries, sliced
- 1 pineapple, thinly sliced
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced
- Sugar to taste
- 1 large ice chunk
- Crushed ice, for serving

• Place sugar, lemon juice, pineapple juice, water and seltzer water in a large punch bowl and stir. Add strawberry, pineapple and lemon slices. Sweeten to taste and add ice chunk to bowl. When ready to serve, fill glasses ¼ full with crushed ice and then fill with lemonade. **Makes about 20 servings**

• **Note:** For a grown-up version of this punch, replace the water and pineapple juice with a 750 milliliter bottle of champagne, a 750 milliliter bottle of slightly dry white wine and ½ cup of curaçao.

well fed

Lebkuchen (left)

For the cookies:

- ¾ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 cup light brown sugar, packed
- 1 cup vegetable shortening
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 3½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten

For the glaze:

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 3 to 4 teaspoons milk
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

To make the cookies: Place the honey, water and brown sugar in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Boil for 5 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in the shortening and allow to cool slightly.

Transfer honey mixture to the bowl of an electric mixer. Add the salt, cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, flour and baking soda, and combine. Add eggs and mix well. Cover and store dough in the refrigerator overnight.

Preheat oven to 325 F. Grease two cookie sheets or line them with parchment.

On a floured surface, roll out the dough to ¼-inch thickness. (Dough will be difficult to remove from bowl. If it is too stiff to roll, allow it to sit at room temperature for a few minutes.) Cut out cookies with a 2½-inch round cookie cutter. Transfer dough rounds to prepared baking sheets. Bake 15 minutes or until nicely browned.

To make the glaze: While cookies are baking, in a small bowl, whisk together confectioners' sugar, 3 teaspoons of milk and the vanilla until glaze is smooth. Add additional milk if necessary to reach desired consistency. While cookies are still hot, brush the top of each cookie with glaze. Allow glaze to dry for several minutes.

Yield: about 36 cookies

Adapted from Melting Pot of Mennonite Cookery, 1874–1974, by Edna Ramseyer Kaufman (Bethel College Women's Association, 1983).

The Costco Connection

Costco warehouses carry a variety of foods and books to satisfy both culinary and literary appetites.

Shrimp Jambalaya (Jambalaya aux Chevrettes)

The original recipe does not call for green pepper or celery, but as many jambalaya recipes today commonly include these vegetables, we've listed them as options here. We've also added andouille sausage, which gives a spicy flavor to the dish, as an optional ingredient.

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 large white onion, finely chopped
- 1 green pepper, finely chopped (optional)
- 2 celery stalks, finely chopped (optional)
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves finely chopped
- 2 sprigs fresh parsley, leaves finely chopped
- 2 dried bay leaves
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- ½ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes or fresh jalapeño or other chile pepper, finely chopped
- 1 or 2 large tomatoes, chopped, juice reserved
- 6 cups seafood or chicken broth, heated to boiling point
- ¾ cup white rice, rinsed
- Salt and cayenne pepper to taste
- 1 to 1½ pounds large shrimp (raw), peeled and deveined
- 1 andouille sausage (approximately 3 ounces), sliced (optional)

Although the jambalayas in The Picayune's Creole Cook Book did not combine meats and seafood, many of today's recipes do call for this combination. You can use dried crushed red pepper flakes or finely chopped fresh chile pepper, such as jalapeño.

Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, and green pepper and celery, if using, and stir for 2 to 3 minutes. Add flour, and stir well. Add chopped herbs, bay leaves and garlic. Cook 5 minutes longer, taking care not to let the mixture burn. Add chile pepper and tomatoes with juice, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer gently for 10 minutes.

Add hot broth, return to boiling and stir in the rice, salt and cayenne pepper. Return to boiling, lower heat and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes, stirring occasionally, until rice is fully cooked.

While jambalaya is simmering, prepare shrimp and sausage, if using: Bring a pot of well-salted water to a boil. Add shrimp and boil for 10 minutes, or until shrimp are completely cooked. Run shrimp under cold water and drain. Meanwhile, in a small frying pan, cook sausage over low heat until slightly browned.

When jambalaya is ready to serve, remove bay leaves and stir in shrimp and sausage. Serve hot. **Makes 4 to 6 servings**

Shrimp Jambalaya and Frog Lemonade adapted from The Picayune's Creole Cook Book, by The New Orleans Times-Picayune (Random House, 1987), originally published in 1901.

