

44 DEGREES

("It's a cookbook!")

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WELCOME TO "44 DEGREES"

Twenty five years ago, I headed to Canada to produce a television series called "Poltergeist: The Legacy." That was the beginning of a twenty year (and 13 different series) stint, where I bounced back and forth from Vancouver to Toronto (and one extremely cold winter in Edmonton). Spending the better part of twenty years on the road, I started cooking in earnest, and my collection of recipes grew accordingly.

This is the seventh iteration of my cookbook, and once again, I'm quite happy to make it available to anyone and everyone who wants to broaden their culinary experience. I've spent countless hours in the kitchen but have zero formal training, so I'm confident you can make everything herein if you have the patience, temerity and ingredients. Don't be put off by anything that may seem too complicated at the outset. If there's a recipe that sounds delicious but looks like a pain in the butt, take a deep breath and go for it.

As you peruse the recipes, you'll notice several are labeled with ☆ ☆ ☆ . These are the ones that I make repeatedly, and I can 100% attest to their consistency and deliciousity. If you're having trouble deciding between a couple of different things to try, look to the stars.

For those of you who've read previous versions of this collection, much of what I mention below is repetitive (so you can skip ahead to the recipes). However, for you **44 DEGREES** virgins, take a moment to check out these culinary tips:

Coastal White Cheddar – This remarkable aged cheddar hails from Ford Farm in Dorchester, England. We got hooked on it in Toronto and were gleefully surprised to find it at (of all places) Costco! Buy it. Eat it. You can thank me later.

Parmesan Cheese – While we're on the subject of cheese, let's have a tough love chat about Parmesan. Why would anyone go to all the bother of making a wonderful risotto or pasta, only to muck it up at the end with fake cheese? If the answer is "because real Parmigiano-Reggiano is expensive and not always easy to find," that's a lame excuse, and you know it. Seek it out and pony up. There's a lot of garbage in the cheese case of your local market that's called "Parmesan" but if it ain't made in Parma, it ain't real Parmesan. The worst perpetrator of this hoax is Kraft Grated Parmesan Cheese. You need to know that: a) there's little or no real Parmesan in there, and b) it contains 4% cellulose...AKA wood pulp. Just...don't ...eat...it!

Canned chilies – When looking for shortcuts, this one's a no-brainer. A lot of these recipes call for minced chilies...either green or jalapeno. First off, there's a profound difference between the docile green chili and the fiery jalapeno, so take notice of what you buy. Secondly, they're sold in 4 ounce cans and they're perfect for just about every peppery recipe. Grab a few cans of each and keep 'em in your pantry. They're cheap and don't take up a lot of space.

Shrimp sizing – A few years ago, the World Shrimp Consortium decided to upsize their designations for shrimp. No long ago, "large" shrimp meant healthy-sized crustaceans that you'd find in a shrimp cocktail at a swanky joint. These days, "large" = pretty small. The designation of "Colossal" means about 12-16 per pound, whereas "Extra Jumbo" are 16-20 and "Jumbo" are 21-25 per pound. I use 16-20s in all of these recipes unless otherwise noted.

Hot Sauce – I converted from Tabasco to Cholula because the latter is more about the flavor and less about the heat (to wit, Cholula is 1000 on the Scoville scale, whereas Tabasco is between 2500–5000). There are hundreds of hot sauces out there and this is totally subjective, but in all of the recipes that call for hot sauce I use Cholula (regular, chipotle or green pepper)...and will leave it at that.

White balsamic vinegar – I'm a huge proponent of white balsamic. I love the flavor and the fact that it doesn't turn sauces a dingy shade of brown. The only problem is good white balsamic is not readily available in your local market. I order mine online from Stonehouse Olive Oil in San Francisco. A little pricey, but in my estimation, definitely worth it.

Old Bay – I use this versatile seasoning so often that I take it for granted, but I'm betting many casual cooks don't have it in their larder. This blend of a dozen herbs and spices was created in Baltimore some 75 years ago to season shrimp and crab. In fact, its original name was "Delicious Brand Shrimp and Crab Seasoning." Besides being the ultimate seafood companion, I use it to season chicken, potatoes and even fried eggs. Next time you're at the market, grab a shiny red can.

Double concentrated tomato paste in a tube – Great for soups, stews and sauces. It's incredibly handy to have on hand, especially when a recipe only calls for a few ounces of tomato paste.

Better Than Bouillon – Another staple to have on hand. This is the everyday cook's version of demi-glace and comes in something like a hundred flavors. Just a spoonful adds incredible richness to your gravies, soups and stews.

Caramelizing Onions – Not long ago, I found a recipe that explained the science of caramelizing, along with the following recipe: slice the onion in half, then cut into thin ribbons. Melt a tablespoon of butter over low heat, add the onion, sprinkle with a little salt and toss to coat. Now COVER the onions and cook (on low) for about 12 minutes. The onions will release their liquid and that, my friends, is the key. Take the lid off, turn the heat up to medium and cook (while stirring) until the liquid is gone (about ten minutes). Finally, sprinkle the onions with a dash of balsamic vinegar, a pinch of white sugar and a pinch of brown sugar and continue cooking (and stirring) until they are golden brown (about 5-7 more minutes).

Stock vs. Broth – I use both stock and broth in soups, gravies and sauces. While stock is thicker and richer tasting, I find that it can be a bit overpowering in some dishes. Feel free to experiment and find out which you prefer.

Brining – Read the first page in the Birds And The Beasts section and you'll get the indoctrination speech. Bottom line...brining makes poultry much more succulent. I've become a devout practitioner of the fine art of infusing dead birds with salt water and sugar prior to charring their flesh.

Sous vide – This cooking method is simple, foolproof and results in perfectly cooked food every time. I resisted it for years, preferring to "go old school." I was a dope. Basically, you're cooking your meat/chicken in a temperature controlled water bath, then finishing it on the grill or in a skillet. It's a no brainer. Embrace it.

Dutch Ovens/Soup Pots – I have a couple of Le Creuset pots which I use for just about everything. They were pricey but have long since amortized to about 2 cents per use. I strongly recommend having a Dutch oven in your kitchen, but you don't need to spend a couple hundred bucks...you can pick up a 6 quart cast iron oven from Lodge for about \$60. Whichever way you lean, you should have a sturdy, multi-use covered pot that's overproof and can hold a lot of stuff.

Digital thermometer – A fantastic, inexpensive, and easy to use tool. Perfect for meat and fowl. The digital thermometer generates an instant readout so even the least competent chef can tell when that 2 pound game hen or that 15 pound Tom is perfectly cooked. This is also very handy when you're grilling, so you don't end up nuking that expensive sirloin or undercooking that pork roast...trichinosis is not a pleasant parting gift for your dinner guests. You have no excuse not to own one of these.

Potato ricer – Ricers have been around for about a hundred years, and I wonder why I ever made mashed potatoes without one. Basically, a ricer looks like a garlic press on steroids and is used to process potatoes by extruding them through small holes, which are not much wider than a grain of rice (hence the name). While this is a one-trick-pony in the kitchen, the resulting mashed tubers are so amazing it's worth owning.

Chopping vs. Dicing vs. Mincing – Just so we're speaking the same language when you're reading through the directions, in my kitchen parlance "chopping" is, as it denotes, creating chunks that are still kind of coarse; "dicing" is getting the food down to small, uniform pieces (say the size of a pencil eraser); "mincing" is shifting into high gear and really putting that chef's knife to the task.

Before you fire up the stove, please take heed of this simple but important tip: **read the ENTIRE recipe before making the dish.** I'm still guilty of occasionally not following this basic rule, and I've been known to utter an expletive or two when I get halfway through making something, only to realize I need to let it rest for an hour, or that I was supposed to save those egg whites I just tossed down the disposal. I've indicated throughout when you need extra time to prep, marinate or cook. This is key to getting the food on the table at the desired hour.

Fellow cooks: this compilation is a labor of love, not commerce, so please feel free to pass it along to anyone who may find some enjoyment and enlightenment in the contents.

Fellow readers: I've written a novel which was a labor of love **and** commerce and think it would be a wonderful side dish to any of the foodstuff contained herein. The book is entitled **GIDEON** and is available at Amazon. If you like a little mystery and mayhem with your braised beef, check it out! Here's a small preview:

Dr Kelly Harper lives the good life. She has a dream job working alongside her father at their urgent care clinic in San Francisco, and a longtime boyfriend who's a Homicide Inspector with the SFPD. But everything suddenly and drastically changes when her father is brutally murdered. As Kelly tries to pick up the pieces of her shattered reality, she discovers that her father had a shocking secret; he'd led a dark and ruthless double-life. This stunning revelation puts Kelly in jeopardy and forces her to make life-altering choices, cross moral and ethical lines, and eventually embrace her father's sinister past to save her own life.

Now, strap on that apron and make something delicious!

START YOUR DAY OFF RIGHT

Buttermilk Pancakes	13
German Pancakes	14
Buttermilk Waffles	15
Sunday Morning Omelet	16
Zucchini And Mushroom Frittata	18

STIMULATE YOUR APPETITE

Shrimp & Crab

Grilled Shrimp With Chipotle Dry Rub	20
Jamaican Pepper Shrimp	21
Mexican Shrimp Cocktail	22
Peel And Eat Shrimp In Beer	23
Southwestern Ceviche	24
Crab Parfait	25

Salmon & Tuna

Gravlax	26
Lomi Lomi Salmon	28
Salmon Tartare With Smoked Salmon	29
Spicy Salmon Tartare	31
Spicy Sesame Tuna Poke	32
Tuna Tartare	33

Finger Food

Gougeres	34
Parmesan Cheese Balls	35
Vegetable Empanadas	36
Kenyan Beef Empanadas*	38
Beef And Cheese Empanadas*	39
Poblano And Corn Empanadas*	40
Zucchini And Red Onion Flatbread	41

*denotes a new recipe

DIPS, SALSAS & SAUCES

Guacamole	43
Laura-Lee's Tapenade	44
Tzatziki	45
Hot Crab And Artichoke Dip	46
Red Pepper Dip	47
Sun-Dried Tomato Dip	48
Choose Your Own Salsa Adventure*	49
Charred Pineapple Salsa	50
Mango Salsa	51
Pico De Gallo	52
Quick And Easy Blender Salsa	53
Salsa Verde	54
Caramelized Onion Jam	55
Meyer Lemon Cranberry Sauce	56
Pizza Sauce	57
Turkey Gravy	58

IT AIN'T CAMPBELLS

Butternut Squash Soup	61
Crab Curry Soup	62
Cauliflower Curry Soup*	63
French Onion Soup	64
Gazpacho	65
Potato Leek Soup	66
Rich And Thick Cream Of Tomato Soup	67
South Of The Border Turkey Soup	69
Spicy Fish Chowder	70
Sweet Potato Curry Carrot And Apple Soup	71
Tomato And Tortilla Soup	72
Tomato Basil Crab Bisque	73
Turkey Vegetable Soup Over Rice	74

A LITTLE ON THE SIDE

Potatoes

Bishop's Potato Latkes	77
Creamy Yukon Golds	78
Crispy Smashed Potatoes	79
Horseradish (Or Wasabi) Mashed Potatoes	80
Mashed Potato Puffs	81
Oven Baked Chips	82
Pan-Fried Potatoes With Oregano And Parmesan	83
Pan-Fried Potatoes With Onions And Peppers	84
Potato Pancakes	85
Potato Zucchini Pancakes	86
Scallion Griddle Cakes	87
Sue's Potato Pie	88
Grilled (Or Baked) Sweet Potato Rounds*	89
Sweet Potato Flavor Bombs	90
Sweet Potato Hash	91
Sweet Potato Pancakes	92

Grains & Pasta

Basic Risotto	93
Curried Shellfish Risotto	94
Risotto With Shrimp And Saffron	95
Coconut Rice	96
Dominican Yellow Rice	97
Cornue's Quinoa	98
Quinoa Salad	99
Mint Couscous	100
Orzo Salad	101

Slaw

Asian Slaw	102
Corky's Slaw	103
Horseradish Slaw	104
Sunstone Slaw*	105
Sweet Slaw	106

Vegetables

Chilled Asian Broccoli*	107
Cucumber Sunomono	108
Del Mar Chopped Salad*	109
Roasted Pepper, Cuke And Tomato Salad	110
Grilled Corn Salad*	111
Grilled Vegetable Salad	112
Roasted Beets And Goat Cheese*	113
Vegetable Hash	114
Creamed Spinach	115
Sautéed Spinach With Pine Nuts	116
Spanakopita	117
Spinach, Tomato And Char*	119
Mushroom Ragout	120
Roasted Butternut Squash	121
Zucchini Quesadillas	122
Stewed Lentils And Tomatoes*	123
Stir Fried Baby Bok Choy	124
Sesame Stuffing*	125

UNSELFISH SHELLFISH

Shrimp

Black And White Sesame Crusted Shrimp	127
Chili-Lemongrass Shrimp	128
Grilled Colossal Shrimp	129
Kung Pao Shrimp With Cashews	130
Louise's Salt And Pepper Shrimp	131
Pan-Seared Shrimp With Ginger-Hoisin Glaze	132
Shrimp And Avocado In Tamarind Sauce	133
Shrimp And Penne	134
Shrimp Cakes	135
Shrimp Curry	136
Shrimp Summer Rolls*	137
Shrimp Taco Salad	138
Sizzling Salt And Pepper Shrimp	140
Spicy Shrimp And Broccolini Over Coconut Rice	141
Spicy Shrimp Salad	142
Sweet And Pungent Shrimp	144

Note: For all wok recipes, or whenever cooking over high heat, best to use grapeseed oil, since it has a higher smoke point than olive or vegetable oil

Crab

Crab And Shrimp Gumbo	145
Crab Cakes	146
Crab Louie	148

And More...

Cioppino	149
Shellfish And Pasta In Steaming Broth	151
Sautéed Scallops With Cherry Tomatoes And Scallions	152
Seared Scallops With Tangerine Sauce	153
Seafood Crepes	154
Steamed Clams With Cilantro	156

FINNED FARE

Fish Tacos*	158
Grilled Halibut With Honeydew Salsa	159
Halibut In Papillote	160
Pan-Seared Halibut Cheeks	161
Panko Crusted Halibut	162
Poissons Provençale	163
Pete's Cedar Plank Salmon	164
Poached Salmon	165
Grilled Sea Bass With Mint In Foil	166
Roasted Sea Bass Stuffed With Herbs	167
Sea Bass With Chili And Saffron	169
Tandori Sea Bass	170
Pan-Seared Tuna With Cilantro And Basil	171
Pan-Seared Tuna With Sesame Seeds	172
Orange Roughy With Mango And Peppers	173
Miso-Marinaded Black Cod	174
Red Snapper Veracruz	175

THE BIRDS AND THE BEASTS

Chicken

Asian Chicken Salad	179
Asian Coq Au Vin	180
Baked Chicken And Vegetables	181
BBQ Chicken With Red Currants And Wine Shallot Sauce	182
BBQ Chicken With Rosemary And Lime	183

Chicken (continued)

BBQ Orange Chicken	184
Chicken And Broccoli Casserole	185
Chicken And Rice With Chilies And Lime	186
Chicken And Rice With Tomatoes And Wine	187
Chicken Curry With Asian Pears	188
Green Curry Chicken	189
Pollo Alla Cacciatora	190
Roasted Chicken	191
Zeke's Chicken	192

Turkey

Braised Savory Turkey	193
Curry Turkey Salad	195
Dry Brined Turkey	196
Sloppy Toms	197
Turkey And Apple Sliders*	198
Turkey Jambalaya	199
Turkey Manicotti	200
Turkey Stew	201
Uncle Schmecter's Turkey Chili	202

Game Hens

Cornish Game Hens Grilled With Lemon And Herbs	203
Cornish Game Hens With Mustard And Rosemary	204

Beef

Beef Brisket	205
Braised Beef	206
Carne Asada	207
Joe's Special	208
Jet's Mongolian Beef*	209
Ina's Pot Roast*	210
Renita's Beef Stir Fry	211
Roasted Beef Tenderloin	212
Santa Maria Tri Tip	214

Pork

Honey Grilled Pork Loin	215
Notorious P.I.G. (aka Pulled Pork)	216
Red Beans And Rice (With Smoked Pork Shanks)	217
Tacos Al Pastor*	218
Trader Vic's Spareribs	219

Lamb

Lamb Burgers Stuffed With Goat Cheese	221
Lamb Stew	222
Lamb Tangine With Caramelized Onions	223
Moroccan Braised Lamb With White Beans	224

Woodland Creatures

Rabbit Ragu (aka Elmer's Revenge)	225
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AND IN CONCLUSION...

Cookies

Anytime Bars*	227
Blondies	228
Coconut Macaroons	229
Mini Maple Macaroons*	230
Meyer Lemon Bars*	231
Double Chocolate Cookies	232
Neiman-Marcus Chocolate Chip Cookies	233
Renita's Chocolate Chip Cookies	234
Pains Au Chocolat	235
Pine Nut And Almond Cookies	236
Spoon Cookies	237

Cakes

Blueberry Pudding Cake	239
Carrot Cupcakes	240
Charlee's Chocolate Lava Cake	242
Flourless Chocolate Cake	243
Laura-Lee's \$10,000 Cake	244
Lemon Pudding Cake	246
Mini Black Bottom Cheesecakes*	247

But Wait...There's More...

Almond Muffins*	248
Apple Cinnamon Crepes	249
Apple Tarts	250
Apple Turnovers	252
Banana Bread/Muffins With Pecans And Chocolate	253
Cherry Lemon Crumbles	254
Chocolate Bread Pudding	256

START YOUR DAY OFF RIGHT

Buttermilk Pancakes

German Pancakes

Buttermilk Waffles

Sunday Morning Omelet

Zucchini And Mushroom Frittata

And...check out all the delicious recipes in the dessert section as well.
I mean, who doesn't like banana bread in the morning?

BUTTERMILK PANCAKES

Everyone knows how to make pancakes, but how many of you have tried a dozen recipes to find the perfect pancake? Me neither, but I did stumble across this one and it's really, really good.

*2 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
2 cups buttermilk
2 eggs – lightly beaten
1 teaspoon vanilla*

1. Whisk together the dry ingredients in a large bowl.
2. In a separate bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, eggs and vanilla. Fold these wet ingredients into the dry ingredients until they're just combined. A few small lumps are okay. You don't want to over mix this.
3. Let the batter rest for 10 minutes.
4. Heat up a skillet over med-high heat. Brush with oil or butter.
5. Ladle your batter onto the griddle. You can make the pancakes whatever size your heart desires, but for maximum results, I'd suggest slightly less than ½ cup of batter per cake.
6. Once the batter bubbles, it's time to flip. Cook the B-side with the same attention and love until it's golden brown.

Eat 'em while they're hot (with butter and warm syrup of course!)

GERMAN PANCAKES

These aren't traditional pancakes that you get at IHOP. Also known as Dutch Puffs or Bismarcks, these are big eggy popovers and each one is a meal unto itself. My mom used to make these as a special Sunday morning treat, and if we were lucky, we saw them maybe twice a year (in retrospect, either my mother was lazy or my brother and I weren't actually deserving of a more frequent special treat. I suspect it was the latter.) This recipe makes two pancakes.

3/8 cup flour

1 1/2 tablespoons sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

4 eggs

3/4 cup milk

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon vanilla

syrup and/or jam and/or powdered sugar (for topping) – I use all three

1. First off you need the right equipment, which is two 9" round cake pans.
2. Preheat the oven to 425° and lightly butter the pans.
3. Dump all the ingredients (flour, sugar, salt, eggs, milk, cinnamon and vanilla) into a bowl and beat with a mixer.
4. Divide the flour/egg mixture evenly between the buttered pans and bake for about 10 minutes (until they are golden brown around the edges).
5. You'll be amazed to find that the pancakes have grown to wondrous proportions, blossoming out of the confines of the pan. This is a very good thing. When you take them out of the oven they'll drop a little, but fear not, this is normal.

Remove these confections from the pans and spatulate onto plates. Now comes the fun part. I learned to eat these with jam and powdered sugar inside, then rolled up like a German burrito and covered with syrup. You and your kids can eat them any way you please (and as often as you like).

BUTTERMILK WAFFLES

Your All-American breakfast (also works for lunch or dinner) made easy from the New Basics Cookbook. When I worked at Paramount, we were just down the street from Roscoe's House of Chicken and Waffles, and we ate there about once a month. I've never served these waffles along with fried chicken, but one of these days I've gotta give it a shot. This recipe will yield between 4 and 5 waffles.

*2 cups flour
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
¾ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon salt
2 cups buttermilk
½ teaspoon vanilla
2 eggs – separated
⅓ cup unsalted butter – melted and cooled*

1. Heat up your waffle iron.
2. In one bowl, mix together the flour, brown sugar, baking soda, cinnamon and salt.
3. In another bowl, stir together the buttermilk, vanilla, egg yolks and butter.
4. In yet another bowl, beat the egg whites until stiff.
5. Stir the wet stuff (from #3) into the dry stuff (from #2) until almost blended, then fold in the egg whites (from #4).
6. Give the hot iron a shot of Pam (or a little vegetable oil) and dollop in a load of batter.

Serve 'em up while they're hot.

SUNDAY MORNING OMELET

☆☆☆

It probably goes without saying that you can enjoy this any day of the week. One reason omelets are so popular at restaurants and at those overpriced, Sunday all-you-can-eat brunches at hotels, is that you can load them with whatever you want. Same thing applies here, except for the whole overpriced element. The recipe below is for my basic omelet, which serves two.

6 eggs (2 whole + 4 whites)

2 tablespoons of something wet – I usually use water, but it's even better if you have milk or cream lying about

1 tablespoon of chives – minced

S&P to taste

1 tablespoon butter

1 cup cheese – grated (your choice; if you're eating at my house, you'll get white cheddar)

I've been known to add: sliced mushrooms (sautéed), chopped tomatoes, grilled onions, goat cheese, and a whole bunch of other stuff that happened to be lying around the kitchen...

1. Put the eggs into a medium-to-large glass bowl. I like using more whites than whole eggs, but you can go your own way here. Just remember that at the end of the day, 2 whole eggs + 4 whites only equates to about 4 eggs total.

2. Add about two tablespoons of liquid. Water works fine; milk's okay; beer is acceptable; wine – not so much. Now whisk until the eggs are thoroughly beaten. Add some S&P and toss in the minced chives (again, optional, but they provide a lovely subtle onion flavor).

3. Your choice of frying pan is key since it'll determine the dimensions of the finished product. I use a 12" non-stick job and the results are perfection.

NOTE: the pan is going into the oven at one point, so make sure the handle is ovenproof. Heat the pan over medium heat and plop in the butter. When the butter completely melts, pour in your eggs (don't let the butter burn and turn brown).

4. Using a spatula, gently move the eggs away from the side of the pan and allow the uncooked egg from the middle to flow over and fill the space. While you're doing this, turn on your oven broiler. This is the secret step to making a perfect omelet, especially for all of us who are egg-flipping impaired.

5. Continue to move your omelet around in the pan until the bottom gets firmish, but not over-cooked. The top will still be a little runny, which is why you proceed to the next step.

6. Slide the pan into the oven under the broiler. Keep an eye on this, as the eggs will cook pretty fast. A minute or two should do it.

7. Pull out the pan and sprinkle about $\frac{3}{4}$ of your cheese over the omelet. Slide it back into the hot box and let the cheese melt (another minute or two).
8. Remove from the oven and add the rest of your fillings (on one side only, for reasons which should be obvious). Carefully flip over the unfilled side (you knew that) and you'll have a perfect looking omelet.
9. Finish this off by sprinkling on the rest of the cheese, scooting it back under the broiler for a minute, and you're done.

Cut the omelet in two and share it with someone you love

ZUCCHINI & MUSHROOM FRITTATA

A delicious and healthy meal for breakfast, lunch or dinner. A frittata is basically an open-faced omelet – or if you prefer, an eggy pizza. This'll serve two.

1 tablespoon oil

½ yellow onion – sliced thin

2 zucchini – thinly sliced

handful of mushrooms – thinly sliced

6 eggs (2 whole + 4 whites)

¼ cup parmesan – grated (can sub with a different hard cheese)

handful of basil – torn or chopped

1 tablespoon butter

1. Put a tablespoon of oil into a large skillet and heat over medium. Toss in the sliced onions and cook for about 5 minutes (until soft). Add the zuke and continue to cook for another 8 minutes or so. You want the zuke to lose some its moisture.
2. In another pan, sauté the mushrooms with a touch of oil.
3. While the stovetop is busy doing its thing, grab a large glass bowl and beat the eggs. Stir in the cheese, a few cranks of salt and pepper and the basil bits.
4. When the onion/zuke combo is done, add that to the egg/cheese combo. Same goes for the mushrooms.
5. Head back to that large skillet and put in a tablespoon of butter. The pan will already be oiled up from the onion/zuke, so you don't need a lot of extra emollient here. When the butter melts, dump in the egg (et al) mixture and let it cook.
6. As the frittata starts to set up, pull the egg away from the edges of the pan and let the uncooked, slimy part have a go at the heat. While you're doing this, turn on your broiler.
7. After a few minutes, the bottom of the frittata will be nice and golden brown, but the top will still look kind of gross. That's okay. Time to take the skillet off the stovetop and slide it under the broiler. Let this go for another few minutes, until the top of the frittata is cooked.

You can either slide the whole frittata out and cut it, or you can slice it in the pan with your spatula and dole it out in quarters. Great with salsa.

STIMULATE YOUR APPETITE

Shrimp & Crab

Grilled Shrimp With Chipotle Dry Rub
Jamaican Pepper Shrimp
Mexican Shrimp Cocktail
Peel And Eat Shrimp In Beer
Southwestern Ceviche
Crab Parfait

Salmon & Tuna

Gravlax
Lomi Lomi Salmon
Salmon Tartare With Smoked Salmon
Spicy Salmon Tartare
Spicy Sesame Tuna Poke
Tuna Tartare

Finger Food

Gougeres
Parmesan Cheese Balls
Vegetable Empanadas*
Kenyan Beef Empanadas*
Beef And Cheese Empanadas*
Poblano And Corn Empanadas*
Zucchini And Red Onion Flatbread

GRILLED SHRIMP WITH CHIPOTLE DRY RUB

If you're going to fire up the BBQ for dinner, why not give these a try as a starter? Despite the simple ingredients and ease of prep, these little crustaceans are kind of classy, especially when served with the dipping sauce. This recipe comes from an old cookbook by Montreal chef, Bob Blumer.

The Shrimp

*1 lb jumbo shrimp – shelled and deveined
2 tablespoons dried oregano
1 tablespoon dried thyme
2 teaspoons lemon zest
½ teaspoon chipotle powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil*

1. Mix all the spices together in a bowl. Add the shrimp and toss.
2. Grill for about 3-4 minutes per side.
3. Serve with cilantro dipping sauce.

The Cilantro Dipping Sauce

*1 cup fresh cilantro leaves
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice (2 limes)
½ cup sour cream*

1. Whirl the cilantro and lime juice in a blender until liquefied.
2. Pour into small bowl and stir in sour cream.

Put out and stand back so you don't get trampled by the horde.

JAMAICAN PEPPER SHRIMP

Sold by the bagful in Jamaica, where they call these "swimps" (beats the hell out of me). Don't be afraid of the chiles. While habaneros can be throat scorching, sinus clearing hot, most of the heat is in the seeds...which we're not using here. This recipe is just fiery enough to have a zing without stopping your breathing altogether. (Just so you know, jalapenos rate 5,000 on the Scoville Scale, whereas habaneros are around 200,000. So, there's that).

4 cups water

½ cup scallions – chopped

4 cloves garlic – crushed

3 habanero chilies – halved and seeded

Note: wear latex gloves when handling these. Seriously. If not, don't blame me when you rub your eye and have to go to the emergency ward

2 tablespoons salt

1 teaspoon black pepper

10 whole allspice (or about a tablespoon of the ground variety)

1 lb shrimp in the shell

1. Combine all ingredients (except the shrimp), in a heavy pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for about 20 minutes.
2. Stir in the shrimp (make sure they're covered by the liquid) and remove the pot from the heat.
3. Let this sit for about an hour, which'll give the shrimp time to cool and absorb the juices (it'll essentially cool down and heat up at the same time).
4. Remove from the pot and serve. You can also refrigerate and serve them cold.

Great with cocktail sauce and a big hunk of sourdough.

MEXICAN SHRIMP COCKTAIL

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This recipe comes from Rick Bayless of Frontera Grill (reprinted here without his knowledge or permission). Really simple and it tastes fantastic. I was originally put off by using ketchup in the recipe, but it works, so just trust me and Rick on this one.

*1 lb shrimp – peeled, deveined and cooked -OR- a pound of cooked bay shrimp
½ cup ketchup
1 tablespoon Cholula
½ cup cilantro – minced
1 lime – juiced
½ cucumber – peeled, seeded, and diced
½ cup sweet onion – minced
¾ cup clam juice
salt
1 avocado – chopped
tortilla chips*

1. In a large bowl combine shrimp, ketchup, hot sauce, cilantro, lime juice, cucumber and onion. **Note: use a sweet onion, like a Vidalia or Maui.** Since the onion is raw, a sweet variety is less harsh. If you can't find a sweet onion, go with a white onion and use a little less. **Onion hack:** if you want to take the sting out of a raw onion, soak the chopped pieces in ice water for 10 minutes before using.
2. Stir in the clam juice. Taste and add salt if necessary. If it's too thick add a little water as opposed to more clam juice.
3. Slide this into the fridge until ready to eat.

Serve in small bowls or martini glasses, topped with avocado. Chips and cold beer round out the dish.

PEEL AND EAT SHRIMP IN BEER

Tell the boys watching the (Superbowl...Final Four...World Series...Maine Cabin Masters) that food's on the way. What could be better than handfuls of delicious crustaceans soaked in beer?

Note: these have to chill for an hour after making them

*1 lb shell-on shrimp
1 bottle pale ale – the boys on the sofa will help you with the other five
1 cup water
1 lemon – juiced
few shakes of hot sauce
2 bay leaves
1 onion – chopped
2 stalks celery – chopped
2 dried red peppers
½ teaspoon dried dill
¼ teaspoon thyme
more lemons for serving*

1. In a big old pot, combine shrimp, beer, water, lemon juice, hot sauce and bay leaves. Bring it all to a boil.
2. Stir in onion, celery, red peppers, dill and thyme.
3. Cover the pot and simmer for 5 minutes.
4. Take it off the heat and let cool for about 1 hour, (which allows the shrimp to absorb max flavor)

One hour later...drain the shrimp and serve (along with some lemon wedges). Have a bowl for the shells, and lots of paper towels for wiping your hands.

SOUTHWESTERN CEVICHE

☆☆☆

I make this often during the summer and it never fails to evoke a standing ovation...or at least a heartfelt "damn, this is good!" Other than a lot of chopping, dicing and juicing, this is really easy. By the way...this makes about 6 appetizer servings.

Note: this is not a "make and eat it right away" dish. Needs to marinate for about 2 hours

¾ lb shrimp – shelled, deveined and parboiled (use smaller shrimp here)

¾ lb bay scallops (these are the small ones) – cut in half

¾ lb halibut – diced into ½ inch pieces

2 tomatoes – diced

1 mango – diced

½ cup red onion – minced

2 jalapenos – minced

3 cups lime juice (20-25 limes)

1 cup cilantro – minced

2 tablespoons sugar

1. Parboil the shrimp in hot water for about 3 minutes, then drain. You want to more or less cook the shrimp but be careful not to over-boil them and make 'em rubbery. Dice the now pink shrimp into ½ inch pieces (everything in this dish, except the onion and peppers, should be relatively the same size).
2. In a large non-reactive bowl combine scallops, halibut, shrimp, tomatoes, mango, onion, jalapenos and lime juice. Refrigerate for 2-2½ hours. If it stays in too long, the fish will be overdone.
3. Just before serving, drain off the lime juice, then add the cilantro, sugar, and S&P to taste.

Serve with tortilla chips. You can also serve with a side of guacamole, which offsets the wonderfully intense citrus of the ceviche.

CRAB PARFAIT

An extremely simple way to make a fancy appetizer that's sure to impress. A traditional French "parfait" is a frozen dessert of sugar, eggs and cream (and sometimes alcohol). In the States, we take the culinary liberty of calling anything that's artistically layered, a "parfait" because that's the way we roll.

*3 tablespoons mayo
1 teaspoon ketchup
pinch cayenne
½ teaspoon dry mustard
1 tablespoon shallot – minced
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 lb crabmeat – shredded
1 tablespoon capers
1 mango – diced
2 cups iceberg lettuce – chopped fine
1 baguette – sliced and toasted*

1. To make the dressing combine mayo, ketchup, cayenne, dry mustard, shallot and lemon juice. Season with S&P to taste.
2. Fold in the crabmeat and capers.
3. Line up four large martini glasses (or whatever you've got that will give this a classy look) and load them in the following manner: one heaping tablespoon of mango, a layer of the crabmeat mixture, then a layer of lettuce. If you have room, repeat layers. If not, top the greens with a final dollop of the crab mixture and serve with the toasted baguette.

GRAVLAX

☆☆☆

A Scandinavian delicacy of salmon cured in salt, sugar and dill from Gordon Ramsay. Many centuries ago, fishermen would salt slabs of salmon then bury them at the shore to ferment. That process resulted in the word "gravlax" ("grav" means grave, or hole in the ground, and "lax" means salmon...hence "gravlax" translates to "salmon in a grave"...what could be more appetizing?) Served with "gravlaxsas," (Swedish for gravlax sauce...those clever Swedes) it's my absolute go-to starter.

Note: it takes 24 hours for the salmon to cure

The Salmon

1 lb skinless salmon fillet – spend the money and get the good stuff
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon coriander
5 teaspoons course sea salt (NOT regular table salt)
1 teaspoon ground pepper
4 tablespoons prepared horseradish (the stuff in the bottle)
1 cup fresh dill – minced

The Sauce

2 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar (brown balsamic makes the sauce look extremely unappealing)
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon prepared horseradish
1 tablespoon fresh dill – chopped
1/3 cup olive oil

1 French baguette – thinly sliced and lightly toasted

1. Grab your salmon and make sure all the fat is trimmed and the bones are removed (for some reason, fish bones lodged in guests' throats tend to bring a dinner party to an abrupt end).
2. Mix together the sugar, salt, pepper and coriander in small bowl, then sprinkle half of this over one side of the salmon.
3. Now spread on 2 tablespoons of horseradish, followed by a half cup of the dill. Work it in a little, but don't get carried away.
4. Flip the fish over and coat the other side in the exact same manner. Embrace the symmetry.
5. Place the fish into a glass dish and cover tightly with plastic wrap, then slide it into the fridge for 24 hours. It absolutely needs to cure, so you can't short cut this timeline.

6. Sometime between now and tomorrow, you'll make **the sauce**, which is ridiculously easy. Combine the vinegar, mustard, horseradish and dill in a small bowl, then gradually whisk in the olive oil. That's it.
7. Flash forward to your dinner party...remove the gravlax from the fridge and gently, but with purpose, scrape the seasoning off both sides of the salmon and wipe the fish clean with a wet paper towel. Slice the fish thin with a really sharp knife.

Eating instructions are simple...bread, sauce, gravlax, mouth. Repeat.

LOMI LOMI SALMON

Lomi Lomi salmon is an appetizer (or side dish) in Hawaiian cuisine and was introduced to the Islanders by early Western sailors. "Lomi Lomi" means "massage" in Hawaiian, and this dish gets its name from the way in which the locals massaged the salted fish with other ingredients by hand.

Note: you need to cure the salmon for 24 hours before making this, so plan ahead...

*1 lb salmon fillet
2 cups (or a little more) Hawaiian or kosher salt
4 tomatoes – chopped
1 Maui (or any sweet) onion – chopped
1 bunch scallions – chopped
2 red chilies – chopped
1 pineapple
1 lime
small handful of macadamia nuts – crushed*

1. Cure the salmon for 24 hours. To do this, pour a layer of salt into a glass dish, lay salmon on top and gently press it down, and then rub salt over the top of the salmon. Top with still more salt, cover and place in fridge. DO NOT USE table salt.
2. Next day. Rinse the salmon thoroughly in cold water, then blot dry. Cut the fish into cubes and place into a bowl.
3. Add chopped tomatoes, onion, chilies and scallions.
4. Slice the pineapple in half lengthwise and cut out the meat, dicing into cubes. Toss the chunks into the bowl with the rest of the waiting goodness.
5. Squeeze in juice from that lime and then add in the crushed nuts. Add pepper (not more salt) to taste.
6. Toss together all the ingredients (if you haven't already), cover and put into fridge for an hour.

That's it. If you're really fancy, you can serve this in the scooped-out pineapple halves. If you're like me, you'll spoon this into a few bowls, grab a Primo, put Don Ho on the stereo and have yourself a luau.

SALMON TARTARE WITH SMOKED SALMON

☆☆☆

I don't much care for basic grilled salmon, but smoked salmon is something altogether different. This amazing appetizer features raw salmon blended with a magical variety of delicious bits, then surrounded with smoked salmon. Even if you're not wild about a slab of broiled Sockeye, you should give this dish a try. As an added bonus, it looks fantastic on the plate, which is why I often make this for guests. This'll serve 4.

Simple Variation to this: *you can leave out the smoked salmon wrapping and just serve the salmon tartare. While it's not as impressive, it saves some time and hassle.*

Note: *either variation requires at least an hour cooling prior to eating*

*1 lb raw, FRESH salmon – skinned, deboned and diced
1 egg yolk
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
½ tablespoon lemon juice
½ tablespoon lime juice
2 tablespoons shallots – minced
2 tablespoons capers – minced
1 teaspoon hot sauce
¼ teaspoon white pepper
½ cup vegetable oil (NOT olive oil)
2 tablespoons chives – minced
1 tablespoon fresh dill – minced
4 slices smoked salmon – cut into 1" wide ribbons*

1. Whisk together the egg yolk, mustard, lemon and lime juice, shallot, capers, hot sauce and white pepper (hold back the herbs for now).
2. Add the vegetable oil, a few drops at a time while whisking vigorously. What you want is for the oil to get incorporated into the mixture before adding more, so this is a s-l-o-w process. Deal with it. DO NOT pour all the oil in at once and then try to mix it in. It'll be a mess and you'll curse us both, and frankly I don't need that in my life.
3. Done with all that whisking? Then you're just about at the finish line. Put the diced salmon into a bowl and spoon in about half the sauce, then fold until well-mixed. You want to use just enough sauce to coat the salmon. **Note: save the rest of this sauce in the fridge...after all that whisking, you can be damn sure you're gonna use it**
4. Now fold in the fresh herbs.

5. Time to put the smoked salmon strips into circular molds. Use a glass custard cup and line it with plastic wrap. Put a ring of smoked salmon around the inside of the cup and then pack it with the smoked salmon mixture. Fold up the wrap tightly and put the whole thing into the fridge.

After an hour or so, they're ready. Put some of that leftover sauce on a plate, carefully plop out the beautiful mound of salmon atop it, and then drizzle a little more of the sauce on top.

Serve with a baguette - thinly sliced and lightly toasted.

If this sounds delicious but too complicated, call me before you come over for dinner and request it by name.

SPICY SALMON TARTARE

An excellent variation on smoked salmon. Only slightly more time consuming than buying a slab of lox and tossing it onto a plate. Give it a shot if you want to bring a little more class (and who doesn't?) to your next get-together.

¾ lb salmon – skinless and deboned, then diced into ¼ inch cubes – you're eating this raw, so get a good quality piece of fish

2 tablespoons Dijon

*2 tablespoons canned chipotles -**OR**- roasted red peppers – pureed*

¼ cup capers – drained

¼ cup scallions – minced

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons cilantro – minced

1. Combine all ingredients (except for the cilantro).
2. Mix well. Sprinkle with cilantro and serve.
3. That's it!

Serve on crackers, or thinly sliced French bread. If you want to add some color to the plate, you can adorn it with more cilantro and a few artfully cut lemon wedges.

SPICY SESAME TUNA POKE

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For the uninitiated, poke is a traditional Hawaiian raw fish appetizer, generally made with ahi. The dish originated with Hawaiian fishermen who seasoned the cut-offs from their catch and ate them as a snack. And no, the fishermen were not called "Poke-Men." This recipe, from the Cornue Speakeasy Bar and Grill in Burbank, is incredibly easy and delicious. Since you're serving it raw, use the freshest sushi grade tuna you can find. Feel free to adjust the ingredients to increase or decrease the amount of kick.

Note: needs at least 30 minutes to blend and chill

*1 lb ahi tuna – cubed (make sure it's "sushi grade")
2 teaspoons sesame oil
3 tablespoons soy sauce
1 teaspoon chili paste
¼ cup shallots – minced
½ cup scallions – minced
2 teaspoons toasted sesame seeds
pinch of sea salt*

1. Add sesame oil, soy, chili paste, shallots and scallions to a blender and let `er rip until smooth. Now add sesame seeds and salt.
2. Pour this over the ahi and thoroughly mix.
3. Place in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.

Serve on toasted baguettes, or use tortilla chips to scoop and eat.

TUNA TARTARE

Another high-degree-of-style, low-degree-of-difficulty appetizer. The ginger emulsion makes this dish, so you've gotta go all the way.

The Ginger Emulsion

1 egg yolk

3 limes – juiced

1 tablespoon ginger – minced

1½ cups olive oil (use regular olive oil, NOT extra virgin, which tends to be too strong for this delicate dish)

The Tuna

1 tomato – blanched and finely diced

1 lb sushi grade tuna – diced into small cubettes

2 tablespoons shallots – minced

2 tablespoons chives – minced

1 lemon – juiced

1. Let's start with the emulsion. Combine the egg yolk, lime juice and ginger in a blender and pulse to blend. With the blades running SLOWLY, add the oil, beginning with a few drops at a time until the mixture begins to emulsify (stiffen). Then continue pouring in a slow but steady stream. Season with S&P and put in the fridge until you need it.
2. Now to tackle the tomato. Fill a medium pot with water and bring it to a boil. In the meantime, fill a bowl with ice water. With a sharp, dangerous little knife, score an "X" on the bottom of the tomato and toss it into the boiling water. Ignore the faint screams. After 20 or 30 seconds, the skin will begin to split. Scoop that sucker out and plop it into the ice water.
3. Once the tomato cools, peel off its skin. Don't worry about losing the juice inside the tomato...we're only using the meat. Quarter the tomato lengthwise, scoop out any remaining seeds and finely chop up the remaining flesh. Put the pieces into a large bowl.
4. Add tuna, shallots, chives and ¼ cup of the ginger emulsion to the bowl. Stir gently until well mixed.
5. Stir in the lemon juice and some S&P.
6. Refrigerate until ready to serve. It'll be okay in there anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours, so you have time to torture some other fruit...maybe even grill some innocent vegetables.

To serve, put a large dollop of sauce on a plate, then place a nice scoop of the tuna on top of it. Drizzle a little more sauce on top and present it to your admiring guests.

GOUGERES

For uninitiated, "goo-jhairs" are light puff pastry balls made predominantly of eggs and cheese. These are easier to whip up than you might think. A quick look at the action verbs confirms this: whisking, stirring, mixing, baking, eating. Plan a cocktail party for this weekend if only to give these a go.

3 tablespoons unsalted butter – cubed

¾ teaspoon salt

1 cup all purpose flour

4 large eggs

1 cup Gruyere cheese – grated (about 4 ounces)

¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 400° and line a large baking sheet with parchment.
2. Dump one cup of water into a medium sized saucepan and add the butter and salt. Bring this to a simmer over medium heat. Whisk until the butter melts.
3. Add the flour, stirring rapidly with a wooden spoon until the flour absorbs all the liquid and you end up with a ball of dough. Keep stirring for another couple of minutes until the dough is no longer sticky.
4. Remove the pot from the heat, plop the dough into a bowl and let it cool for about 3 minutes. Using an electric hand mixer, beat the eggs into the dough, one at a time. Finally, stir in the cheese and pepper.
5. Drop rounded spoonsful of your mixture onto the baking sheet, spacing about 3" apart. Dampen your fingertips and press down any unwanted dough peaks. You want these puppies to be round.
6. Slide the tray into the oven for about 30 minutes. When the gougeres are done, the outsides will be golden brown and the centers will be slightly eggy and moist.

Serve 'em while they're hot.

PARMESAN CHEESE BALLS

A different take on appetizers; this one's got a subtle kick that cries out to be quenched by a chilled martini. Because of their handy size, people tend eat them like cheese crackers, and before you know it, they're gone.

Note: these need 30 minutes of pre-baking chill time

*1¼ cups flour
1 cup fresh Parmesan cheese – grated
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon white pepper
½ teaspoon dry mustard
dash cayenne
½ cup butter – melted*

1. Haul out the Cuisinart and dump in all the dry ingredients (everything except the butter). Pulse to mix.
2. Now add the melted butter and pulse so the mixture forms crumbs. When the dough is done, turn it out into a bowl.
3. Time to make the balls. Put a sheet of wax paper atop a dinner plate; this will be the temporary home of the cheesy orbs. Grab a little dough and press it together to form a ball that's about 1" in diameter (the size of a healthy grape). When finished, plop it onto the plate. You should end up with approximately 20 balls. Cover with more wax paper or loose-fitting plastic wrap and slide into the fridge for 30 minutes.
4. Crank the oven to 350° and spray a little oil onto a baking sheet (or line with parchment paper).
5. Once your balls are sufficiently chilled, move them onto the sheet and insert into the oven for about 13 minutes – then roll them over and let cook for an additional 8 minutes (they should be lightly browned; don't let the bottoms burn).

These are ready to eat now or can be stored in an airtight container until the guests arrive.

VEGETABLE EMPANADAS

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Empanadas originated in Spain in the mid 1500s, which means these stuffed pastries have been sating hungry folks for over 500 years (I wonder if people will still be eating Crunchy Flamin' Hot Cheetos and Sonic Oreo Peanut Butter Shakes 500 years from now?). What's great about empanadas is they can be filled with anything and are suitable as appetizers or as an entrée. They're a little work intensive, but don't be put off; it's not complicated. Be adventurous and give these a try.

The Dough

2½ cups flour

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup plain yogurt

The Filling

2 russet potatoes – peeled and cubed

1 tablespoon butter

2 carrots – peeled and diced

1 cup onion – minced

1 tablespoon ginger – grated

1 teaspoon mustard powder

1 teaspoon dried coriander

1 teaspoon cayenne

1 teaspoon curry powder

1 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons lemon juice

MAKING THE DOUGH

Put flour into a bowl and mix in the salt. Make a well in the middle and add the yogurt. Mix first with a spoon, then dive in with clean hands and work the dough. Next, toss it onto a lightly floured board and knead it for about five minutes. Plop the kneaded dough into a clean bowl, cover tightly and refrigerate until you're ready to assemble the empanadas.

THE FILLING

1. Carefully put your cubed tubers into a pot of boiling water and let them go until they're very soft (about 10 minutes). When they're done, drain the potatoes and mash 'em up. Set this aside.
2. While the taters are boiling, peel the carrots and dice 'em into tiny pieces. Place these into a small pan with some water and simmer on low until soft but not mushy (about 10 minutes). Drain and set aside.

3. Now for the savory onion mixture; melt the butter in a pan over low heat and add the onion. Let it go for a few minutes, then toss in the ginger, mustard powder, coriander, cayenne, curry powder and salt. Sauté for about 5 minutes. When done, the onions should be soft.
4. Time to fold it all together. First, gently mix the carrots into the mashed potatoes, then add the onion. Finish this off with the lemon juice.
5. Let the filling cool for at least 15 minutes before constructing the pastries.

THE PASTRY ASSEMBLY

1. Oil up a baking sheet and have it nearby, along with a little extra flour, a cup of water, a pastry brush and a fork.
2. Flour a clean surface and tear off a small hunk of dough. You'll basically want to make a ball about the size of a Titleist. Using a rolling pin, flatten this out into a 4" circle. Don't worry if it's neither circular nor exactly 4"... just get it thin.
3. Scoop a tablespoon of filling into the center of your dough disk, then brush the edges with a little water.
4. Fold the dough over the filling into a crescent shape and crimp the edges with a fork (which not only secures the dough, but makes it look authentic). You can trim off any big hunks of excess dough, and then put the finished empanada onto the oiled cookie sheet. Repeat. You should end up with about 20 little pies. **Note: you'll have leftover filling...this is the natural order of things so no need to wonder if you missed a step along the way.** If you're making these ahead of time, you can put the pies on a flour-dusted plate, dust the tops with a little more flour, cover tightly and pop in fridge.

ALL THAT'S LEFT IS TO COOK THEM

1. Brush the tops with a little oil and bake at 425° for 15 minutes.
2. Flip the pastries, reduce the oven to 375°, hit this side of the popover with a little more oil, and bake for another 10 minutes (for a total cooking time of 25 minutes). These babies should be golden brown.
3. Remove them from the baking sheet and put on a serving tray. Before you present these for consumption, use a sharp knife and make two slits in the tops of each little pie to let out some of the heat. I bit into one fresh out of the oven and it took a week to regrow the skin on the roof of my mouth.

Serve with chutney on the side. As you're eating these, you'll start thinking about what to fill them with next time. Well, I just happen to have a few variations on the next pages.

Come right this way →

KENYAN BEEF EMPANADAS

The African spices makes these uber-savory and perfect for either appetizers or part of a main course. Use the instructions for making the dough from the previous recipe.

The Filling

*½ pound ground beef (could substitute pork) – cooked
½ red onion – minced
4 ounce can diced chilies – drained and minced
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
½ teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon cumin
½ teaspoon harissa*
2 scallions – minced
1 tablespoon cilantro – chopped fine*

The Dipping Sauce

*½ cup plain yogurt
1 lime – juiced
2 tablespoons cilantro – minced
½ teaspoon harissa*

1. Once you've made your dough, combine all filling ingredients. Fill each empanada with a tablespoon of seasoned beef.
2. Bake per instructions on previous page.
3. Let them cool a bit, then serve with the dipping sauce.

*a note on harissa: this is a Tunisian seasoning which is made with paprika, caraway seeds, roasted red peppers and other spices. It's got a little kick and gives food a wonderful warm, North African flavor.

BEEF AND CHEESE EMPANADAS

These ingredients lean toward Italy, with the tomato paste, oregano and pecorino. In fact, if you substitute Italian sausage for the beef (and maybe toss in a little mozzarella), you're going to end up with something that approximates a mini-calzone, which is not a bad option. Like just about every recipe in here, tinker with it and make it your own.

The Filling

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 onion – minced

1 tablespoon tomato paste (use the stuff in the tube)

¼ teaspoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon cumin

pinch of cayenne pepper

12 ounces ground beef (85/15 is good blend for this)

½ cup beef broth

S&P

1 cup Pecorino Romano – grated

1 tablespoon cilantro – minced

1. Heat oil in skillet over med heat. Add onion and sauté until soft (5 minutes). Stir in tomato paste, oregano, cumin and cayenne and cook for about a minute.
2. Add the beef and stir for 5 minutes, then stir in the broth and simmer for about 8 minutes. You want it moist but not wet.
3. Season with S&P, then transfer to a bowl and slide into the fridge for 20-30 minutes until the ingredients are cool enough to handle.
4. Stir in the cheese and cilantro.
5. Follow previous instructions on how to make the dough, assemble and bake.

POBLANO AND CORN EMPANADAS

Back to Spanish roots with this one. Poblanos are mild, so don't be afraid of having too much heat. In fact, you might want to add a pinch or two of ancho powder to give this a little more gusto.

The Filling

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2-3 poblanos - stemmed, seeded and minced

3 scallions – white parts minced; green parts sliced thin

¼ teaspoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon cumin

1 teaspoon coriander

¾ cup frozen corn – thawed

S&P

1 cup Jack cheese – grated

1 cup queso fresco – crumbled

1. Melt butter in skillet over med heat and add chilies and the minced white scallions. Cook for 8 minutes.
2. Stir in oregano, cumin, coriander and cook for another 30 seconds or so, then add in the corn and season with S&P.
3. Transfer to bowl and into the fridge for 20-30 minutes to cool down.
4. Stir in the cheese, queso fresco and the green sliced scallions.
5. See previous instructions on how to make the dough, assemble and bake.

ZUCCHINI AND RED ONION FLATBREAD

Quick and easy. Not the fanciest appetizer, but not every dinner party is white linens and grandma's china.

10oz tube of refrigerated pizza dough

¾ cup herb cheese spread (like "Alouette") – room temp. There are lots of different flavors to choose from, so knock yourself out

¾ cup parmesan cheese – grated

1 small red onion – sliced thin

1 small zucchini – sliced into 1/8" rounds

some olive oil

some nonstick oil spray

parchment paper

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
2. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Spray the parchment with the nonstick oil, then unroll the dough onto the parchment.
3. Spread half of the herb cheese over one long half of the dough, leaving a ½" uncheesed border. Sprinkle half of the freshly grated parmesan over the herb cheese. Now, using the slick parchment as an aid, fold the plain half of the dough over the cheesy half, making a kind of cheese sandwich.
4. Spread the rest of the herbaceous tub-o-cheese over the top, followed by the rest of the Parmesan.
5. Time to bring your red onions to the party. Use the smaller diameter pieces to lay down the middle of the top of the bread.
6. Gather up those zuke rounds and lay them out on either side of the onion. Thus, you'll end up with three long rows of vegetables; zuke, onion, zuke. Got it? Excellent.
7. Brush the top of this with some olive oil, sprinkle on a little S&P and pop into the oven for about 25 minutes, or until the flatbread is puffed up and golden brown.

DIPS, SALSAS & SAUCES

Guacamole
Laura-Lee's Tapenade
Tzatziki
Hot Crab And Artichoke Dip
Red Pepper Cheddar Dip
Sun-Dried Tomato Dip
Choose Your Own Salsa Adventure!*
Charred Pineapple Salsa
Mango Salsa
Pico De Gallo
Quick And Easy Blender Salsa
Salsa Verde
Caramelized Onion Jam
Meyer Lemon Cranberry Sauce
Pizza Sauce
Turkey Gravy

GUACAMOLE



You don't have to be hosting a Cinco De Mayo party to have an excuse to break out the guac. It's a welcome addition to any gathering and always seems to magically disappear. Plus, avocados are available year-round so make it part of your appetizer arsenal, and you'll find more people eager to RSVP "yes" to your invites.

*2-3 large avocados – ripe but not mushy
1 tablespoon red onion – minced
2 oz diced green chilies – I use the canned chilies
handful cilantro – minced
few shakes of Cholula
½ lime – juiced
salt to taste*

1. Cut open the avocados, scoop the flesh into a bowl and mash to your desired chunkiness. If you want it thicker, use a fork to mash. If you want it smoother, use a potato masher.
2. Toss in the rest of the ingredients in any order that pleases you.
3. This needs a few healthy shakes of salt, as well as Cholula, to give it the desired flavor and heat.

One of the nice things about guacamole is you can vary the recipe as you see fit, and it still tastes pretty damn good on a tortilla chip alongside a cold cerveza.

Storing tip – to keep this green, put the guac in a bowl (or Tupperware container) and tightly cover the surface of the guacamole with plastic wrap. Oxygen is the enemy, as it will turn your concoction brownish.

LAURA-LEE'S TAPENADE

☆☆☆

This is one of my mom's recipes and it's always been a favorite in my family, usually served around the holidays. It was her take on a Provençal olive tapenade. The ingredients sound weird, but when it's all mixed together and served on crackers, it's a crowd pleaser.

Note: this needs to sit for a few hours to let the flavors blend

8 oz can pitted black olives – drained and minced

8 oz can green olives with pimentos – drained and minced

6 oz jar cocktail onions – minced (careful; they're slippery)

2 - 6 oz jars of marinated artichoke hearts – minced – just use the hearts, discarding the tough, leafy part. Also, don't throw out the liquid they come in...it's going into the finished product

3 oz tomato paste

few dashes Worcestershire sauce

1. Do the required mincing and dump everything into a bowl.
2. Add 1 tablespoon of the oily liquid from the artichoke hearts and stir.
3. Since no other liquid is being used, the end result of this mixture is pretty thick...that's okay.
4. Taste it now and adjust the flavors, but the real flavor of this dish doesn't come out for a while. Refrigerate until ready to eat.

Serve with crackers.

TZATZIKI

☆☆☆

The traditional Greek dip/condiment. Tzatziki is generally served with grilled meats but is also great with pita bread, chips or raw vegetables. I make this whenever I'm serving "Lamb Burgers Stuffed With Goat Cheese" or "Spanakopita" (those recipes are in here), or when I grill lamb.

Note: this needs a total of 90 minutes resting and chilling

1 large cucumber – peeled, seeded and grated

pinch of salt + ¼ teaspoon salt

1 cup plain fat-free yogurt

1 tablespoon mint – minced

1 tablespoon dill – minced

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1. Place the grated cuke on a few layers of paper towels; sprinkle with a pinch of salt to draw out some of the moisture. Let this stand for about 30 minutes.
2. It's now 30 minutes later in recipe time. Combine cucumber, yogurt, mint, dill, lemon juice and that ¼ teaspoon of salt. Stir until well blended.
3. This goes into the fridge for at least an hour before serving.

HOT CRAB AND ARTICHOKE DIP

I haven't ingested an actual artichoke since my Mom forced one on me in 3rd grade, but that doesn't stop me from using the hearts in combination with other tasty ingredients. If you have an aversion to artichokes, you can take a pass on this, or you can be adventurous and take a flyer. Worst case, your guests will polish it off for you.

*9 oz package frozen artichoke hearts
1 red bell pepper – minced
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons flour
1¼ cups half and half
3 scallions – thinly sliced
½ cup parmesan – finely grated
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1½ tablespoons jalapenos – minced
½ teaspoon salt
¾ lb crabmeat (canned crab is perfectly acceptable here)*

1. Preheat oven to 375°.
2. Cook artichoke hearts according to package, then drain and chop fine.
3. Sauté bell pepper in 1 tablespoon butter in a heavy saucepan over low-med heat; about 5 minutes. Stir in the artichoke, give it all a good blend, then transfer the mixture to a bowl.
4. Melt remaining butter in saucepan (still low-med heat) and add in flour. Stir for about 4 minutes to make a blond roux. Slowly add half and half, whisking all the while. Another 4 minutes or so.
5. Remove from the heat and stir in the artichoke mixture, scallions, 1/3 cup parmesan, lemon juice, jalapenos and salt. Gently stir in the crab.
6. Transfer all to a buttered, 1½ quart shallow baking dish and sprinkle with remaining cheese.
7. Bake uncovered on the middle rack in oven for 20 to 25 minutes.

Serve warm with chips or toasted pita. Dip can be prepared (but not baked) one day ahead, covered and chilled.

RED PEPPER CHEDDAR DIP

Anyone with even a low kitchen IQ can whip this up. The key thing is a food processor and a bunch of hungry guests. If this sounds good, also see "Sun-Dried Tomato Dip".

Note: this needs an hour in the fridge before serving

*4 oz cream cheese – softened to room temp
¾ cup sharp white cheddar – grated
¼ cup sour cream (or plain yogurt)
¼ cup mayonnaise
¼ cup bottled roasted red peppers – diced
1 teaspoon of lemon
½ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons Cholula*

Everything goes into the processor. Blend until smooth. Chill this for at least an hour. That's all there is to it.

Serve with bagel chips or pita chips.

SUN-DRIED TOMATO DIP

☆☆☆

If you've got a food processor and a measuring cup you can make this dip, and you should. Try it and I guarantee you'll come back to it often. See the "Red Pepper Cheddar Dip" for an alternative or companion dip...it's just as easy and just as tasty.

Note: needs to chill for an hour

8 oz cream cheese – softened to room temp

1 cup plain lowfat yogurt

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes (not the ones in the bag) – drained and chopped

1½ tablespoons shallots – minced

1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice (resist the urge to use more)

1 teaspoon lemon zest

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt

1. Dust off the Cuisinart and throw in all the ingredients. Blend together until smooth. Make sure to scrape the sides of the bowl a few times to ensure that you have everything (especially the shallots) reduced to a nice pinkish paste.
2. Now toss the whole thing into the fridge for at least an hour. Did I mention it was easy?

Serve with bagel chips, pita chips or vegetables.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN SALSA ADVENTURE

I found this in Bon Appetit Magazine and use it as a helpful guide to create some cool salsas. To quote, "Use this handy formula to select by the seasons, the flavors, or just whatever you have hanging out in the back of your fridge."

STEP ONE: Pick a fruit, vegetable or both

Start with three cups of one or more of these...

<i>Tomato</i>	<i>Tomatillo</i>
<i>Stone fruit</i>	<i>Tropical fruit</i>
<i>Melon</i>	<i>Cucumber</i>
<i>Jicama</i>	<i>Berries</i>

STEP TWO: Choose your heat

Add one of the following (either fresh or dried)...

<i>Anaheim</i> 🌶️	<i>Poblano</i> 🌶️
<i>Jalapeño</i> 🌶️ 🌶️	<i>Fresno</i> 🌶️ 🌶️
<i>Chipotle</i> 🌶️ 🌶️	<i>Serrano</i> 🌶️ 🌶️ 🌶️
<i>Thai</i> 🌶️ 🌶️ 🌶️ 🌶️	<i>Habanero</i> 🌶️ 🌶️ 🌶️ 🌶️ 🌶️

STEP THREE: Throw in some herbs

One handful is plenty. Make sure they're fresh...

<i>Cilantro</i>	<i>Mint</i>
<i>Parsley</i>	<i>Tarragon</i>
<i>Basil</i>	

STEP FOUR: Add the non-negotiables

- 1 cup diced onion*
- 1 diced garlic clove*
- 1 tablespoon lime juice*
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt*

STEP FIVE: How much time have you got?

- 10 minutes:* throw all items into a blender
- 20 minutes:* dice everything for a *pico de gallo* vibe
- 30 minutes:* Char everything (not the herbs) on a grill or under a broiler, then toss into blender.

CHARRED PINEAPPLE SALSA

☆☆☆

I saw this on a Jamie Oliver cooking show and it looked so good and easy, I gave it a try. It turned out to be a lovely (and effortless) addition to my salsa arsenal.

Note: give this two hours in the fridge before serving.

2 -3 cups pineapple – cut into chunks (if you can find a 12 oz container of pre-cut pineapple in the produce section, that's ideal)

4 ounces chili peppers – minced (I use canned mild peppers but you can use two fresh jalapenos for more heat)

1½ tablespoons mint – minced

½ cup red onion – minced

1 lime – juiced

olive oil

1. Dry fry the pineapple chunks over medium heat until you get some nice charring.
2. Finely chop the pineapple and toss into a bowl along with any accumulated juices.
3. Add the chilies, mint and onion to the bowl.
4. Squeeze in the lime juice and then hit this with a drizzle of olive oil.
5. A pinch of salt to taste. Don't overdo it.

Great on fish and pork tacos, topped with cilantro.

MANGO SALSA

☆☆☆

Another tropical fruit salsa. It's ideal with fish tacos, and it's versatile enough to use whenever you're whipping up a little Tex-Mex. No reason not to take your game to another level and turn a basic taco dinner into a fiesta.

Note: at least an hour to chill before serving

*½ cup mango – chopped
1 tablespoon red onion – minced
1 tablespoon jalapeno – minced
2 tablespoons cilantro – chopped
½ lime – juiced
pinch of sugar
S&P*

1. Ready? Combine all. Yup, that's it.
2. You could eat this immediately, but it's better when you let the flavors harmonize for about 60 minutes in the fridge.
3. The salsa will be good for 24 hours...in other words, make a little extra and have it with your breakfast burrito the next day. Rumor has it this works wonders for hangovers.

PICO DE GALLO

You want something even easier than "Mango Salsa?" Here it is. This classic topping is clean, flavorful and foolproof. If you can use a knife, you owe it to yourself and your guests to make this the next time you serve Mexican food.

*5 Roma tomatoes – seeded and diced
½ sweet (or white) onion – diced
2 jalapeno peppers – seeded and diced
handful of cilantro – stemmed and chopped
1 lime – juiced
salt to taste*

1. Combine the onion and lime and let this sit for 5 minutes. The citrus will break down the onion just enough to make it less harsh.
2. Now add the other ingredients to the bowl. Pop into the fridge until ready to eat. It's good to let this sit for an hour or so to allow the flavors to blend. Will keep for about a day.

QUICK AND EASY BLENDER SALSA

☆☆☆

It's quick! It's easy! It's salsa! Oh, and it tastes fantastic, or I wouldn't bother you with it. If you're making any kind of Mexican meal and want to include a side of salsa, go the extra half-mile and blend this up.

Note: at least 30 minutes in the fridge

2 (14 oz) cans fire roasted tomatoes – drained

1 lime – juiced

½ cup yellow onion – minced

½ bunch cilantro – minced

4 oz can diced green chilies – drained

½ teaspoon chili powder

½ teaspoon cumin

½ teaspoon oregano

1 teaspoon sea salt

1 teaspoon sugar

1. Dump EVERYTHING into a blender and pulse until you reach the desired consistency. And voila – that's it! Could it be any quicker and/or easier? I dare say not!

This'll keep for 2 days, but best to use same day you make it.

SALSA VERDE

☆☆☆

This green salsa comes from Bobby Flay, and it's the head of class in terms of flavor. Just what is a tomatillo? Also known as a Mexican husk tomato, the tomatillo comes from the nightshade family, making it a first cousin to tomatoes, potatoes and peppers. All you really need to know is tomatillos look like small green tomatoes covered in a sticky husk. What I love about this salsa is the combination of sweet, sour and spicy.

*6 tomatillos – husked, grilled and diced
1 tablespoon red onion – grilled and minced
½ tablespoon jalapeno – minced
½ lime – juiced
2 tablespoons cilantro – minced
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon honey
S&P*

1. Grill the tomatillos and the red onion until you get a lovely char. If it's not glaringly obvious, grill these before you chop 'em up.
2. Combine everything in a blender and pulse a few times (don't overdo this).
3. Slide the salsa it into the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes. Like the other salsas, this will last up to a day.

CARAMELIZED ONION JAM

☆☆☆

Easy to make and brings a restaurant quality zing to your burgers. Also delicious alongside roasted meats and/or fresh goat cheese. This is a modified version of a recipe from Canadian chef Hugh Acheson.

¼ cup olive oil

3 large sweet onions – diced

¼ cup white sugar

1½ teaspoons of light brown sugar

⅓ cup white balsamic vinegar

1. Get out a large pot and dump in the oil. Heat it over med-high until it shimmers.
2. Toss in the onions and cook, stirring every once in a while, for about 15 minutes. The onions will take on a sunset-like golden hue.
3. Sprinkle the two sugars over the onions and reduce the heat to low. Cook without stirring until the sugar melts (about 5 minutes).
4. Crank heat back up to med-high and continue to cook (and still no stirring!) until you get an amber caramel (which'll take about 8 minutes).
5. Now stir in the vinegar and simmer over med-low heat until the jam thickens up (about 10 minutes).
6. Hit the jam with a little salt and let it cool.

It'll be sweet (obviously) but the onions help to cut through the flavor.

MEYER LEMON CRANBERRY SAUCE

I'm not a big cranberry fan but this delicious sauce has given me something to serve with my bird at Thanksgiving or Christmas. Meyer lemons are the key here, since they're sweeter than the regular kind (originally from China, Meyers are thought to be a cross between a lemon and an orange). They're in season from early November to April, so you shouldn't have a problem finding them in mid-November. This is easy and impressive (what more could you want?)

12 ounces of cranberries

1 cup sugar

½ cup orange juice

1 teaspoon Meyer lemon zest

1 Meyer lemon – juiced

½ cup water

½ cup orange marmalade

1. Put the cranberries, sugar, OJ, zest, lemon juice and ½ cup water into a saucepan and simmer over med heat, stirring often, until the sugar dissolves and cranberries pop (about 10-15 minutes). If it gets all red and gooey, congratulations. You're ready to proceed.
2. Reduce heat to med-low, stir in the marmalade and cook for another 5 minutes. Take off the heat and let cool, stirring whenever you pass by the stove.
3. Once cool, transfer to a bowl, cover it up and pop into the fridge until well chilled. This'll keep for up to two weeks.

The only drawback to this recipe is every year I end up with half a jar of orange marmalade. I hate orange marmalade.

PIZZA SAUCE

I make pizza sauce from scratch because we live in a garlic-free zone. This is a simple and fairly basic rendition of pizza sauce, and you can add whatever you want to customize to your personal buds. This makes more than enough for two large pizzas.

28 oz can crushed fire-roasted tomatoes - drained

splash olive oil

splash balsamic vinegar

splash white wine

1 tablespoon dried oregano

1 tablespoon brown sugar

handful fresh basil – chopped

1. Dump the tomatoes into a pot over med-low heat.
2. Add in the other ingredients and let the whole thing simmer for 15 to 20 minutes to blend and thicken.
3. Along the way, give it a taste and adjust. You can add whatever else you have in the spice cabinet that you think will make it taste better (e.g. salt, ground pepper, maybe some red pepper flakes). Be creative.
4. Now scoop all of this into a blender and puree. Do yourself a favor and hold down the lid of the blender with a potholder or towel. This stuff is hot and it could blow.

That's it. Ready to use, or you can make ahead and refrigerate for a day or two.

TURKEY GRAVY

☆☆☆

We eat turkey year-round (when we can find it. For some reason there's a dearth of turkey in Oregon except around the holidays). When I feel like going old school and doing turkey with gravy and mashed potatoes, this is my 100% foolproof, delicious go-to. Best of all, no added turkey innards! You've gotta try this.

Note: allow two hours for this to come together

*2 tablespoons olive oil
2 turkey wings (or legs)
1 onion – chopped
2 carrots – peeled and chopped
2 celery stalks – chopped
1 cup white wine
1 tablespoon thyme
1 tablespoon oregano
2 bay leaves
6 cups chicken broth or stock
1 tablespoon chicken "Better Than Bouillon"
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ cup flour
a few shakes of Worcestershire sauce*

1. In a large heavy pot, heat up the oil and brown the turkey wings on med-high for 10-12 minutes.
2. Add a little more oil (if necessary) and dump in the chopped onion, carrots and celery. Cook for 15 minutes, stirring as needed.
3. Add the wine and bring to a boil. Cook until the wine is reduced by half (5 minutes).
4. Tie up your herbs in a cheesecloth bundle and add them now, along with the stock. Bring this up to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer for 35-40 minutes. Keep uncovered and stir occasionally.
5. While the gravy is simmering, you can add the "Better Than Bouillon." This magical stuff is concentrated and will add a lovely richness to the gravy.
6. After your 40 minute simmer, strain the savory stock into a separate pot, removing and discarding all of the solids. You'll end up with about 4 cups of liquid, which you'll put back on the stove and keep warm.
7. Time to make a roux. Melt the butter in a saucepan on med-low heat and whisk in the flour. Keep whisking (I use a rubber spatula instead of an actual whisk) until it's golden brown and smooth. This'll take about 15 minutes.

8. Whisking constantly, gradually pour a ladleful of warm stock into the roux. Once the liquid is completely incorporated, whisk in a second ladleful, followed by a third. You'll end up with a nice thick, buttery slurry which now goes back into the gravy to give it body and depth of flavor.
9. Simmer, whisking often for 8-10 minutes until the gravy thickens up (it should coat a spoon).
10. Add the Worcestershire sauce, a little S&P, and you're finally done.

This not only makes your turkey sing Broadway tunes, it makes your mashed potatoes, rice and/or dinner rolls do an endzone victory dance.

IT AIN'T CAMPBELLS

Butternut Squash Soup
Crab Curry Soup
Curry Cauliflower Soup*
French Onion Soup
Gazpacho
Potato Leek Soup
Rich And Thick Cream Of Tomato Soup
South Of The Border Turkey Soup
Spicy Fish Chowder
Sweet Potato Curry Carrot and Apple Soup
Tomato And Tortilla Soup
Tomato Basil Crab Bisque
Turkey Vegetable Soup Over Rice

BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

☆☆☆

Despite its simplicity, this is definitely company worthy. It can be a first course or the centerpiece of a terrific winter meal. Tastes buttery and creamy without containing either. In fact, this is one of the healthiest dishes in this whole compilation.

2/3 cup carrots – diced

2/3 cup onions – diced

2/3 cup celery – diced

4 cups butternut squash – peeled, seeded and cubed

(note: the orangier the flesh, the sweeter the squash)

4 cups low-sodium chicken broth

2 tablespoons olive oil

1. Heat up 2 tablespoons of oil in a soup pot then toss in the carrots, celery and onion – your basic mirepoix (who needs French cooking lessons when you’ve got the Food Channel?). Cook over medium heat for about 4 minutes.
2. Add the squash cublets and give this all a stir, then pour in the broth and crank in a little S&P.
3. Bring this to a boil then reduce the heat and let simmer for about 30 minutes.
4. Let the soup cool a bit, then puree in manageable batches. Remember, it’s really hot and will create some disfiguring steam, so hold onto the blender lid with a towel.

That’s it. Easy and delicious. Serve with some crusty sourdough bread and you’ve got yourself a meal.

CRAB CURRY SOUP

☆☆☆

*From the kitchen of the stodgy California Club in downtown Los Angeles. They may be elitists, but they do turn out some fine grub. This recipe serves 4 meal sized portions or 6-8 soup sized portions (see **bold** figures to reduce to dinner for two).*

16 oz container of lump crab meat (or the fresh equivalent)

1 small white onion – diced

1 red apple – peeled and diced

*3 stalks celery – diced (**2 stalks**)*

*8 oz butter (**4 oz**)*

*3 tablespoons Madras curry powder (**1½ tbsps**)*

*¾ cup all purpose flour (**3/8 cup**)*

*1 qt clam juice (**16 oz**)*

*1 qt chicken broth (**2½ cups**)*

*2 cups heavy whipping cream (**1 cup**)*

1 bay leaf

1. Combine clam juice, chicken broth and cream in a pot (this is not the ultimate soup pot) and heat up to warm but not aboil.

2. In a soup pot (this would be the ultimate soup pot), melt the butter and then cook the onion, apple and celery on medium heat until soft (5 to 6 minutes).

Note: the crab doesn't go in until the end!

3. Add curry powder and cook for 2 more minutes.

4. Now stir in the flour and give it a minute. It'll be gummy until you add the liquid so don't panic.

5. SLOWLY add the hot liquid (2 ladles at a time), whisking constantly to make a smooth consistency. It'll look a little thin, but that's okay. It'll thicken up later.

6. Add the bay leaf (just one single, flavorful leaf will do it), then crank in some S&P to taste.

7. Cook the soup uncovered, on low heat for ten minutes, then strain into a large bowl. Yes, you're tossing out the onion, apple and celery...they've already made their contribution. Now carefully pour the savory nectar back into your soup pot. **It's finally time to add the crab.**

8. Bring to a simmer for a few minutes, then turn off the heat and cover, keeping the soup hot. Let it sit for 10 minutes before serving.

Chunks of sourdough bread are a must with this.

CURRY CAULIFLOWER SOUP

From the Cancer Fighting Kitchen cookbook. Cauliflower is full of excellent cancer fighting enzymes. The key here is roasting the cauliflower, which gives it a sweet flavor and doesn't fill your kitchen with that funky cooked cauliflower odor.

*1 head of cauliflower – cut into florets
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon sea salt
1 cup yellow onion – minced
2 carrots – peeled and diced small
1 cup celery – diced small
1 tablespoon curry powder
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon ground coriander
6 cups broth – either chicken or vegetable*

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
2. Toss cauliflower with a tablespoon of oil and a teaspoon of sea salt, then spread out on a baking sheet lined with parchment. Slide this into the oven for 25 minutes.
3. In the meantime, heat the rest of the oil in a pan over medium heat and sauté the onion for 3-4 minutes. Now toss in the carrots and celery (with a pinch of salt) and let this whole thing go for another 8 minutes. You want the vegetables to begin to brown.
4. Add in the curry powder, cumin, coriander and give it all a stir, coating the vegetables. Pour in ½ cup of broth and cook until the liquid is reduced by half.
5. Grab your blender and pour in 3 cups of broth, along with half of the sautéed vegetables and half of the roasted cauliflower. Blend until smooth, then dump this mixture into a soup pot. Repeat this process with the remaining broth, veg and cauliflower.
6. Reheat the soup over low heat and taste. You may want to add salt or a spritz of lemon.

This soup is so healthy, you can afford to eat it with a chunk of sourdough bread.

FRENCH ONION SOUP

You can make this as a starter (it'll serve 6), or you can grab a loaf of bread, a glass or two of wine and you have yourself a complete meal. Onion soup has been around for centuries, but the French variation (which we eat today) came into fashion in the early 18th century. Today, a cup of French onion soup at Au Père Louis in Paris (rumored to be the best in the city) will run you €10.5 (plus tip). Save the plane fare and make it yourself.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

3 pounds red onions – thinly sliced

6 cups low sodium chicken broth (better for you and not as salty)

1¾ cups beef stock

¼ cup red wine

6 slices of French (what else?) bread

6 slices Swiss cheese – sliced thin

3 ounces Asiago cheese – grated

1. Melt butter in soup pot or big saucepan (large enough to hold everything).
2. Add onions and a pinch of salt and cook over low heat, stirring constantly, for about 30 minutes.
3. Pour in the broths and wine, season with S&P and bring to boil.
4. Cover and simmer over low heat for 20 minutes, stirring from time to time.
5. Fire up the broiler and toast the bread on both sides.
6. Pour soup into six oven-proof bowls, place a piece of toast in each bowl (right on top of the soup) and cover the toast with slices of Swiss (one slice per each piece of toast) then sprinkle with Asiago.
7. Slide the bowls under the broiler just long enough to melt and lightly brown the cheese.

If you're planning on making this every so often, spring for onion soup bowls, which come in either classy white or traditional reddish brown with the built-in handles. Even if you're not dining in a tiny, red-walled café a block from the Luxembourg Gardens, there's no reason not to dine in style.

GAZPACHO

☆☆☆

This is the ultimate summer soup. Not only is it refreshing on a warm day, but all the vegetables are in season, which brings out the very best in this recipe. Perfect for lunch or dinner. Slightly labor intensive in terms of dicing and mincing, but you can handle it. I know you can.

Note: this one's gotta sit for a few hours to blend. Really makes a big difference in terms of flavor, so plan accordingly

*2 lbs tomatoes – diced
1 cucumber – peeled, seeded and diced
¾ cup sweet onion – minced
1 yellow bell pepper – cored, seeded and diced
1 red (or orange) bell pepper – cored, seeded and diced
1 cup cilantro – chopped
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
1 tablespoon lemon juice
a few dashes of hot sauce
¾ pound cooked bay shrimp (optional)
1 ripe but firm avocado – diced (optional)
croutons (optional)*

1. Combine all ingredients (except shrimp, avocado and croutons) in large, non-reactive bowl.
2. Ladle this, in portions, into a blender and **pulse** it a few times. **DO NOT PUREE!** The object is to make it slightly smoother, not to be able to drink it through a straw.
3. Cover and chill until ready to serve (as noted above, best to give it a couple of hours).

Dress this up with shrimp and avocado. I toss in the croutons as I eat, otherwise they'll get soggy.

POTATO LEEK SOUP

This is tasty on its own, but if you go all out and top it with cheese and then hit it with a little heavy cream, it's awe inspiring. Great for a wintry lunch or dinner.

1½ tablespoons butter

1-2 leeks, white and light green parts only – chopped

Note: depending upon how oniony you want the finished product, you can go with either one or two leeks

1 lb Yukon Gold potatoes – peeled and cubed

4 cups chicken stock

1 bay leaf

few ounces of white wine

few ounces of white cheddar (optional)

few drizzles of heavy cream (optional)

1. Let's start with cutting and cleaning the gigantic green onion-smelling thing, better known as a leek. Chop off the leaves and the bottom, then slice the white and light green stalk lengthwise. Slice thinly crosswise, making a bunch of tiny onion crescents. Soak these in water for a minute to get rid of the accumulated dirt. Now they're ready to use.
2. Melt the butter in a heavy bottomed pot, then add the leeks and cook on med-low for about 10 minutes. You want them soft, but not browned.
3. Add the potato cubes, chicken stock, bay leaf and a couple ounces of white wine. Finish this off with a few dashes of salt and cranks of pepper. Bring this concoction to a boil, then reduce the heat, cover and let it simmer for 15 minutes.
4. Once the soup cools a bit, haul out your blender and puree this in batches.
5. Transfer the pureed nectar back into the pot to warm it (just a couple of minutes), then ladle the soup into bowls and top with some grated white cheddar and a drizzle of cream.

Like most rustic soups, this is best to enjoy with bread and booze.

RICH AND THICK CREAM OF TOMATO SOUP

☆☆☆

This old standby continues to be one of the best soup experiences you can possibly have. If you like tomato soup, this is a MUST. It's slightly work intensive, but at the same time, it's extremely easy recipe-wise. This is a guaranteed, money-back, sure-fire, go-to. Just make it. Yields four-six average servings. Excellent as a starter or as a meal (for two) onto itself.

2 - 28 oz cans whole tomatoes in juice

1½ tablespoons brown sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

½ cup shallots – minced (about 1 large shallot)

1 tablespoon tomato paste – the concentrate in the tube is perfect for this

½ teaspoon ground allspice

1½ tablespoons flour

2 cups chicken broth

splash dry white wine

½ cup heavy cream

salt and cayenne pepper

1. Put the oven rack in the middle position and preheat the oven to 450°. Line a large baking sheet with foil and have it nearby.
2. Drain the tomatoes in a strainer over a bowl **(you want that juice!)**. Using your fingers, gently open the tomatoes and remove the seeds. The juice'll go into the bowl, the seeds will be caught (and discarded) and the now gutless tomatoes will go onto the foiled baking sheet, skin side down. You'll end up with about 2 cups of tomato juice. **Note: some of the tomatoes will come out of the can kind of smushy. That's okay...don't discriminate. Just put 'em on the tray with all the other kids.**
3. Sprinkle the tomatoes with brown sugar (don't get carried away and use too much...the tomatoes can get too sweet.) Slide the tray into the oven and bake for about 30 minutes. The tomatoes will end up dry and charred, which is what gives the soup its rich taste.
4. About 20 minutes into the baking process, heat up the chicken broth and wine in a small pot. Keep it warm and handy.
5. While your broth is warming, melt butter in a soup pot over med heat. Add the shallots, tomato paste and allspice. Reduce heat to low, cover and sauté (stirring occasionally) for about 7 minutes (a nice side bonus is this makes your kitchen smell great).
6. Once the shallots are soft, stir in the flour then gradually whisk in the heated broth. You want the sticky stuff in the pot to be completely incorporated.
7. When the tomatoes are ready, add them and the saved juice to your soup pot. Gently simmer, covered, for about 10 minutes.

8. Let the soup cool a bit, then ladle it into a blender and puree until it's smooth.
9. Pour the soup back into your pot, add the cream and season with a little salt and a dash of cayenne.
10. Bring this to a simmer and serve.

If this all sounds too complicated, you can just grab a can of Campbell's. However, if you choose that road to culinary ruin, you should burn your apron and pass this book onto someone who cares.

SOUTH OF THE BORDER TURKEY SOUP

Nothing like some spicy turkey soup to warm you up. You can use leftovers from that Thanksgiving bird or, in those months that don't begin with "N," you can get yourself a couple of slabs of turkey (e.g. boneless breasts or some cutlets) and bake them.

*1 tablespoon olive oil
1 yellow onion – chopped
1 red bell pepper – seeded and diced
4 oz can chopped green chilies (or chopped jalapenos if you want extra heat)
1 tablespoon chili powder
1 tablespoon cumin
1 tablespoon dried oregano
6 cups chicken stock
½ cup white wine
16 oz can cut tomatoes
3-4 cups turkey – cooked and torn or shredded
8 oz frozen corn (yes, frozen)*

1. Put oil in a large pot then sauté the onion and bell pepper over medium heat for about 5 minutes.
2. Add chilies, chili powder, cumin and oregano. Stir to blend.
3. Pour in the stock, wine and tomatoes (along with their juice). Bring to a boil and let all the flavors marry for about 5 minutes.
4. Add the turkey and the corn and simmer for 7-8 minutes.
5. Season with salt and pepper.

Serve with a generous helping of tortilla chips and the cold beverage of your choice.

SPICY FISH CHOWDER

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Like many hearty soups, I serve this an entree. Inspired by Vancouver restaurant owner and chef John Bishop, this is a cold weather staple in our house and a meal that's definitely suitable for company.

*2 tablespoons butter
1 yellow onion – chopped
1 red pepper – seeded and chopped
2 stalks celery – diced
2 carrots – diced
2 cups white wine
2 cups water
28 oz can chopped tomatoes
¾ lb halibut – cubed
few shakes Old Bay
hot sauce to taste (I use a couple dashes)
¾ lb medium shrimp – peeled and deveined
handful of basil – chopped*

1. Melt butter in soup pot over medium heat.
2. Sauté vegetables in the butter until soft (10 minutes or so).
3. Add wine, water and tomatoes (along with their juice). Simmer uncovered for about 40 minutes.
4. Add the halibut (not the shrimp yet), the Old Bay and the hot sauce and simmer, covered, without stirring, for another 6 minutes.
5. Now toss in the shrimp and the basil and let it all go for another 3 minutes.

Serve with a hunk of bread and a chilled California Chardonnay, or a couple cold pints of your favorite Canadian lager (speaking of which, if you happen to be in Canada, seek out Steam Whistle Lager).

SWEET POTATO CURRY CARROT AND APPLE SOUP

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Sweet, healthy and easy to make. If you like sweet potatoes and curry, there is absolutely no reason I can think of why you aren't making this for dinner tonight.

2 tablespoons butter

1 onion – chopped

1 teaspoon curry powder

2 large carrots – peeled and diced

1 medium-large sweet potato – peeled and diced

4 cups chicken broth

1 tart apple (e.g. Honeycrisp or Fuji) – peeled and diced

½ teaspoon honey

few shots of cream (optional – but oh so good)

1. Melt the butter in a large pot, then add the onions. Cook over medium heat for about 6 minutes until soft (but not browned).
2. Toss in the curry powder, give it a stir and let this go for another minute.
3. Add the carrots, potatoes, broth and a dash of salt and bring this to a boil. Once you've got a boil going, back off the heat, cover the soup and let it simmer for 25-30 minutes.
4. Stir in the apple and honey, and let everything blend for a few minutes, then remove from the heat.
5. Let it cool a bit, then puree (in batches) and ladle into the waiting bowls. Top this off with a drizzle of cream for a little extra flavor.

You'll come back to this one over and over.

TOMATO AND TORTILLA CHIP SOUP

An incredibly rich, thick and flavorfully spicy soup. Everything in it is pureed, including the chips. Comes to you from The Mexicali Cocina Cantina in Studio City. Cinco de Mayo in a bowl.

*2 tablespoons olive oil
2 large onions – chopped
3 cups celery – chopped
2 tablespoons jalapeno chilies – seeded and chopped
2 tablespoons ground cumin
1 tablespoon chili powder
6 cups chicken broth
15 oz can tomato sauce
1½ cups cilantro – chopped
4 cups tortilla chips
1 lime – juiced*

1. Heat oil in heavy, large pot over medium temp. Add onions and celery and sauté until tender (about 10 minutes).
2. Add chilies and sauté for another couple minutes.
3. Add cumin and chili powder and sauté for another minute or so.
4. Pour in chicken broth, tomato sauce and 1 cup of that cilantro (you're holding back the other ½ cup for now). Simmer for 20 minutes (lid partially on...don't let it get too thick).
5. Stir in the chips and simmer for another 10 minutes or so.
6. Sprinkle in the remaining cilantro, and squeeze in the lime.
7. Let this cool a bit then, working in batches, puree the soup and return to the pot. Bring it up to a simmer, seasoning with S&P.

You can make this the day before. Just cover and refrigerate, then when you're ready to eat, bring it to a simmer.

TOMATO BASIL CRAB BISQUE

A very easy and sumptuous soup – everyone should have at least one bisque in their playlist for those elegant dinner parties. This will work for those non-elegant parties as well – in which case, you can unpretentiously refer to it as "pureed soup with crab" or "crab bisk."

*2 tablespoons unsalted butter
12 oz crabmeat (fresh or canned)
1 tomato – seeded and chopped
½ cup basil – chopped
⅓ cup flour
2 cups Clamato juice
1 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon ketchup (did I mention it was elegant?)
¼ cup clam juice
2 teaspoons Old Bay
couple shakes hot sauce
1 cup water
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice*

1. Melt butter in a heavy pot over medium heat. Add ¾ of the crabmeat, the tomato and most of the basil (hold back a little basil for garnish). Sauté for only two minutes...you don't want to burn the crabmeat.
2. Fold in flour and stir for 2 more minutes. This will get very gummy, but it'll all be fine in the end, so remain calm.
3. Stir in Clamato, cream, ketchup, clam juice, Old Bay and hot sauce. This will "un-gum" the glob from Step #2. Reduce heat to low and simmer for about 10 minutes. Let the soup cool a little before the next step.
4. Puree soup in batches in a blender. Return soup to pot and add the water and lemon juice. Bring back up to a simmer. Season with S&P.
5. Put soup into bowls and top with remaining crabmeat and some basil.

This can be made a day ahead. If you elect to go that forward-thinking route, let the soup sit uncovered and cool to room temperature, then cover and refrigerate.

TURKEY VEGETABLE SOUP OVER RICE

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A slightly different slant on turkey soup that is delicious, nourishing and healthy. This is unquestionably a meal unto itself.

*1 tablespoon olive oil
1 small yellow onion – chopped
1 red bell pepper – seeded and diced
1 large zucchini – diced
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
6 cups chicken stock
16 oz can cut tomatoes
3-4 cups turkey – cooked and torn or shredded
steamed white rice*

1. Put oil in a large pot then sauté the onion, bell pepper and zuke over medium heat for about 5 minutes.
2. Add chili powder, cumin and oregano. Stir to blend.
3. Pour in the stock and tomatoes (along with their juice) as well as the turkey. Bring to a boil and then simmer for 30 minutes.
4. Season with salt and pepper.

Shovel some steamed white rice into a bowl and then ladle the soup right on top.

A LITTLE ON THE SIDE

Potatoes

Bishop's Potato Latkes
Creamy Yukon Golds
Crispy Smashed Potatoes
Horseradish (Or Wasabi) Mashed Potatoes
Mashed Potato Puffs
Oven Baked Chips
Pan-Fried Potatoes With Oregano And Parmesan
Pan-Fried Potatoes With Onions and Peppers
Potato Pancakes
Potato Zucchini Pancakes
Scallion Griddle Cakes
Sue's Potato Pie
Grilled (Or Baked) Sweet Potato Rounds*
Sweet Potato Flavor Bombs
Sweet Potato Hash
Sweet Potato Pancakes

Grains & Pasta

Basic Risotto
Curried Shellfish Risotto
Risotto With Shrimp And Saffron
Coconut Rice
Dominican Yellow Rice
Cornue's Quinoa
Quinoa Salad
Mint Couscous
Orzo Salad

Slaw

Asian Slaw
Corky's Slaw
Horseradish Cole Slaw
Sunstone Slaw*
Sweet Slaw

Vegetables

Chilled Asian Broccoli*
Cucumber Sunomono
Del Mar Chopped Salad*
Roasted Pepper, Cuke And Tomato Salad
Grilled Corn Salad*
Grilled Vegetable Salad
Roasted Beets And Goat Cheese*
Vegetable Hash
Creamed Spinach
Sautéed Spinach With Pine Nuts
Spanakopita
Spinach, Tomato And Char*
Mushroom Ragout
Roasted Butternut Squash
Zucchini Quesadillas
Stewed Lentils And Tomatoes*
Stir Fried Baby Bok Choy
Sesame Stuffing*

BISHOP'S POTATO LATKES

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Unlike regular potato pancakes, which are made with shredded potatoes, these spuds are put through the blender, making them much lighter. Great side dish for meat or fish, and perfect on their own with applesauce and sour cream. You can thank John Bishop in Vancouver for this wonderful variation of the earth apple.

Note: also works great as an appetizer

2 large russets – peeled and cubed

½ cup onion – chopped

1 egg

1 scant tablespoon grain mustard

½ teaspoon smoked paprika

1 lemon – juiced

1 teaspoon salt

¾ cup flour

vegetable oil for frying

1. Preheat your oven to 225° oven and have a parchment lined baking sheet standing by.
2. Place everything except the flour into a food processor or blender. Puree these ingredients, ending up with a soupy mixture.
3. Pour this into a bowl and fold in the flour. Now it should be the consistency of a thin milkshake. Fight the temptation to drink it.
4. Put some vegetable oil into a large skillet and get it hot, then ladle a small amount batter into the pan (like you were making silver dollar pancakes). These have a tendency to be moist after they're cooked, so THIN is the key here.
5. Brown each side (3 to 4 minutes). Blot on paper towels and then transfer to your baking sheet and slide into the oven until crisp – about ten minutes.

You'll end up with about 15-20 small latkes. Serve with sour cream and chives.

CREAMY YUKON GOLDS

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Oven roasted Yukon Golds that I substitute for "chips" to serve alongside the "Panko Crusted Halibut" in this book. As advertised, these taters are toasty on the outside and creamy on the inside. Good as a side dish for any meal.

*2 pounds large Yukon Gold potatoes – unpeeled and cut into 6 wedges
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons sea salt*

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Toss the Yukon wedges with the oil and salt, then arrange them on a baking sheet. Make sure the potato points are facing up (in other words, the skin side is down). This will result in maximum brownosity.
3. Slide the tray onto the center rack in the oven and roast for 20 minutes, then reduce the heat to 400° (it's subtle, but it works, so just do it). Continue to roast until the wedges are tender and golden (about 15 minutes longer). Just so it's clear; we're talking a total of approximately 35 minutes cooking time.

You can serve with vinegar (British style), ketchup (American style), or poutine (Canadian style).

CRISPY SMASHED POTATOES

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These small buttery tubers are a great alternative to French fries or tater tots. The recipe below calls for herbs, but you can also take the basic route and go with sea salt or elevate the experience with some smoked paprika or chili powder.

2 lbs fingerling or "baby" potatoes – skin on

2-3 tablespoons olive oil

4 tablespoons butter – melted

2 tablespoons dried thyme

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Put the potatoes into a large pot and fill with cold water. Add a pinch of salt and bring to a boil.
3. Once you've got a nice burble going, reduce heat to med-low and cook the potatoes until fork tender (about 12 minutes). Drain these into a colander to cool off a bit.
4. Lightly oil a baking sheet and scatter the potatoes on top. Using a heavy bottomed glass, a potato masher (or whatever you've got in the kitchen that'll do the job), gently flatten the spuds. They'll splay out in irregular broken shapes, which is just fine.
5. Brush the now quasi-mutilated potatoes with half of the melted butter, sprinkle with S&P and bake for ten minutes.
6. After the initial 10 minutes, brush on the remaining butter and sprinkle on the minced herbs. Back into the oven for another 10 minutes (or until the potatoes are crispy).
7. Finish them off by sliding them under the broiler for two minutes for extra crunch.

HORSERADISH (OR WASABI) MASHED POTATOES

Give your basic mashed potatoes a flavorful and different kick. You can substitute wasabi paste for the horseradish, and you'll get a slightly more exotic flavor (which is great with Chinese dishes) without sacrificing any of the punch.

Figure these quantities for 4 people – do the math to increase or decrease. You're always better off with more than less – potatoes are cheap and can reheat the next day.

2 pounds russets

4 tablespoons unsalted butter – room temp

¼ cup sour cream – room temp

4 tablespoons bottled horseradish (use slightly more or less, depending upon your taste buds) -OR- about 2 tablespoons of wasabi paste (again, to taste)

1. Wash, peel and dice the spuds into 1" chunks.
2. Dump into a LARGE pot of water. Like pasta, they give off starch so if your pot's not big enough, you'll experience boil-over.
3. Let 'em go on med-high for about 10 minutes, occasionally stirring. Take the pot off the burner.

Note: see kitchen tips up front re: potato ricers

4A. IF USING A RICER - Use a slotted spoon (or a scoop) to transfer the potatoes into the ricer. Squeeze the tater flesh out through the ricer basket and into a large bowl. Continue until you have a mound of beautifully extruded potatoes.

5A. RICER FOLKS – Using a large stirring implement (like a Spontula™), blend in the butter, sour cream, horseradish/wasabi and finish with some S&P. You will be adored by everyone at the table.

4B. IF YOU ARE SANS RICER - Pour the potatoes into a colander to drain, then dump them into a large bowl and either use a masher or an electric mixer.

5B. NON RICER FOLKS - Plop in the butter, sour cream and horseradish/wasabi. Your efforts will be admired and appreciated, but you may fall slightly short of adoration.

Impress your guests by garnishing with a sprinkling of minced chives.

MASHED POTATO PUFFS

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A friend of ours asked us to dinner and requested I bring a "fun side dish." Hmmm. Kind of general directions, but I accepted the challenge and thought I'd try something new. I found this recipe somewhere online and gave it a shot. It turned out so well that it found its way into our regular dinner rotation and achieved 3 star status.

The Potatoes

*2 cups mashed potatoes (about 1½ russets)
3 eggs – beaten
1 cup grated cheese (parmesan, gruyere or white cheddar)
¼ cup chives – minced
⅓ cup sour cream
S&P*

The Sauce

*½ cup sour cream
1 tablespoon chives – minced
1 tablespoon horseradish
salt to taste*

1. Preheat the oven to 400°. Coat cups of a muffin tin with spray or oil (or use a silicon muffin mold).
2. Combine mashed potatoes, eggs, ¾ cup of cheese, chives and sour cream in a large bowl and season with S&P.
3. Ladle the mixture evenly into the 12 cups and use the remaining cheese to sprinkle on top of each mound. BTW, it's okay to use a little extra cheese.
4. Bake 17-20 minutes, until the puffs are browned on top and set. I'd recommend checking them after 17 minutes with a toothpick.
5. Let these cool for a few minutes before popping them out of the tin.

Eat 'em warm with the sour cream sauce on the side.

OVEN BAKED CHIPS

This is strictly Potato 101, but that doesn't mean they aren't tasty. These potatoes are cut thin (ala potato chips) and baked to perfection (unless you screw it up).

2 russets – peeled and sliced into 1/4" thick chips with a mandoline

1 or 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil or olive oil

Season with whatever suits your taste buds: sea salt, paprika, chili powder, the list goes on and on

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
2. Slice the potatoes and soak in cold water for 5 minutes to leach out some of the starch. When done, pat dry with a paper towel.
3. Brush your taters with a scant amount of oil to evenly coat. Too much oil will make them taste, well, oily.
4. Arrange the chips in a single layer on a heavy duty baking sheet and lightly season accordingly.
5. Slide into the oven for 12-15 minutes until they are crispy and light brown.

Eat these while they're hot, right out of the oven. Great as is or as a complement to your favorite dip.

PAN-FRIED POTATOES WITH OREGANO AND PARMESAN

The title gives away the whole plot. A variation to "Potatoes, Onions and Peppers" on the next page, I think this is a tick classier, but still exceedingly easy. A delicious side dish alternative to have in your arsenal.

2 tablespoons olive oil

1½ pounds Yukon Golds (4 or 5) – peeled and cubed

1 yellow onion – chopped

1 tablespoon dried oregano

3 tablespoons fresh parmesan cheese – grated

1. Cube the potatoes into $\frac{3}{4}$ " pieces and dump them into a pot of boiling water for about 7 minutes. You want them tender but not mushy. Drain.
2. Put a large frying pan (cast iron works great here) on med-high heat and add the oil. Toss in the potatoes and sauté for 10 minutes.
3. Reduce to medium heat and add the chopped onions and oregano. Continue cooking for another 10 minutes, until the potatoes brown. You may want to add a little oil or butter as you go.
4. When they're all brown and ready to eat, finish them off with that parmesan.

PAN-FRIED POTATOES WITH ONIONS AND PEPPERS

Another stove-top spud recipe that's about 96% foolproof. I use a large cast-iron skillet that holds everything and does a perfect job of browning. You can use a regular frying pan, but may need to cut down on the recipe, or spread it over two pans.

1-2 pounds of white or yellow potatoes – peeled and cubed

1 yellow, brown or sweet onion – chopped

1 red bell pepper – seeded and chopped

2 tablespoons butter

1 tablespoon olive oil

1. Cube the potatoes into $\frac{3}{4}$ " pieces and dump them into a pot of boiling water for about 7 minutes. You want them forkable. Drain.
2. Put a large frying pan (as noted, cast iron works perfectly here) on med-high heat and add the butter and oil. Toss in the potatoes and season with S&P. You can jazz this up with a little Old Bay or chili powder if you're so inclined. Let the spudlets go for about 10 minutes, stirring often.
3. Reduce to medium heat and add the chopped onion and pepper. Continue cooking for another 10 minutes, until the potatoes brown. You may want to add a little oil or butter as you go.

Make extra and use as a base for a delicious hash the next morning.

POTATO PANCAKES

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Potato pancakes are eaten the world over. Not only are they a staple in every Jewish household and deli in the country, but in Rzechta, Poland there's a two day festival dedicated to potato pancakes...that's some serious tuber worship.

3 russets – peeled and grated

1 onion – grated

2 eggs – lightly beaten

¼ cup flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

vegetable oil or olive oil for frying

1. Grate the potatoes and place the strands in a glass bowl. Let them sit for 15 to 20 minutes. The potatoes will release some strange alien-like liquid and turn red. Don't worry, that's normal.
2. Grate onions into another bowl and set aside.
3. Transfer potatoes to a large colander, spray with water for a few minutes, working the shreds in your fingers, washing out that otherworldly red starch and let drain for 10 minutes. Squeeze the potatoes, and then put them between paper towels and pat dry. OR, use my favorite tactic, which is to put the potato shreds into a clean kitchen towel and twist the ends, forcing out the moisture. Finally, transfer them to a clean bowl.
4. Using a fork, stir the grated onion into the potatoes. Then add the eggs, flour, baking powder and a little pepper. Mix thoroughly.
5. Heat oil in a large, nonstick skillet (med-high heat). Form the potatoes into small, thin cakes (like pancakes, but a little larger) and fry 'em up til brown.
6. You can serve these directly from the pan or keep them warm on a baking sheet in a 250° oven.

Great with sour cream, applesauce or as is.

POTATO ZUCCHINI PANCAKES

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A healthy variation on the potato pancake that brings more green into your diet. It's nice to change things up occasionally and the majority of us can always use a more of zucchini's vitamin C and B-6.

2 cups russets – peeled and grated (about one big tuber)

2 cups zucchini – grated (2 good sized zukes)

two teaspoons salt

½ cup onion – minced

2 eggs

½ teaspoon baking powder

¼ cup flour

vegetable oil or olive oil for frying

1. Mix potato and zuke strands with one teaspoon salt. Place in a colander for 10-15 minutes. There's a whole lot of water content in potatoes and zucchini, and the idea is to eliminate as much as you can. Push out the extra moisture with a paper towel.
2. In the meantime, toss the minced onion into a pan with a little oil and sauté on med-low for 4-5 minutes. You want these translucent, not browned. When done, set aside.
3. Whisk the eggs in a bowl (large enough to eventually hold everything) and then add the flour, baking powder and one teaspoon salt. Fold in the potato/zuke mixture and the onions. Give it all a healthy toss so everyone in the band is playing in the same key.
4. Now grab a large frying pan, add some olive (or vegetable) oil, crank the heat to med-high and start frying. The traditional pancake has about a 4" diameter (for those of you who flunked math, that's the measure across, not around).
5. Since this will yield about 8-10 pancakes, you'll have to either get two pans working, or turn your oven to 250° and keep the first batch warm on a baking sheet until the second batch is done. Best to eat these immediately (they get soggy as they cool).

Like traditional potato pancakes, these are good with sour cream and/or applesauce.

SCALLION GRIDDLE CAKES

When baked potatoes are too mundane and rice is too delicate, here's your answer. Scallion cakes look cool, taste fabulous, and can be made with extremely limited culinary talent. Here's how...

4 medium russets

½ cup scallions – diced

1 egg yolk

2 tablespoons oil

1 tablespoon butter

1. Bake the potatoes with skins on for about an hour at 425°. Remove from the oven and let cool for a few minutes.
2. Cut open the taters, dig out the hot, fluffy Idaho goodness and mash it up, then add the scallions, egg yolk, salt and pepper. Mix together and form into cakes (will yield six to eight, depending upon size of potatoes, and of course, the size of the cakes you construct...this is one of those times in life where smaller is better).
3. Heat up a large skillet, plop in the oil and butter and brown the cakes (about 6-8 minutes per side). Careful to keep the potato cakes intact when you flip them over...they have a tendency to break up.

The more often you make these, the more you'll experiment with adding different ingredients (chives, horseradish, chili powder, roasted peppers...)

SUE'S POTATO PIE

Sue Edwards has been making this family recipe for as long as I've known her, which is a long, long time. I've enjoyed it immensely on several occasions but never knew what went into it. She was gracious enough to share it with me on the condition I never told another soul. Fortunately, I'm not technically "telling" you anything, except that you're gonna love it. Oh, and don't be put off by the addition of cottage cheese...you'll never know it's in there.

1 lb low-fat cottage cheese

2 cups mashed potatoes

½ cup sour cream

2 eggs

1 teaspoon salt

a pinch of cayenne

½ cup chives – minced

10 inch unbaked pastry shell

¼ cup parmesan - grated

1. Put the cottage cheese through a ricer to make it smooth. If you don't have a ricer, you should invest in one. In the interim, you can use potato masher or something similar. The bottom line is to get the annoying lumps out of the cottage cheese.
2. Beat your potatoes into the now smooth cottage cheese.
3. Add the sour cream, eggs, salt, cayenne and chives. Give it all a good stir until everything is blended and smoothish.
4. Spoon this all into the pastry shell, top it with the parmesan and slide it into a 425° oven for 50 minutes.

Cut this into pie-like slices and enjoy.

GRILLED (OR BAKED) SWEET POTATO ROUNDS

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An easy and delicious way to do sweet potatoes (or yams) when you're grilling. You can also use this method with white or red potatoes, but I like the caramelization that comes from the sugar in the sweet potatoes. Recently, I've been baking sweet potato slices in the oven and the result is even better. Either way, you'll end up with a flavorful side dish.

2 sweet potatoes

1. Wash the potatoes (do not peel them) then slice into discs about 1/4" thick. Keeping the skins on helps the potatoes retain their shape.
2. Fill a large pot with water, get that water boiling, then drop in the potatoes.
3. Parboil the discs until they're just soft enough to poke with a sharp knife. Sweet potatoes take about 5-6 minutes and the softer yams take slightly less. Don't overcook them or they'll fall apart and create a mess. (In the event that this occurs, don't despair. You can always toss them into a bowl, add a little butter and mash them up).
4. Scoop the discs out of the boiling water, blot on a paper towel, and let them cool off a bit, then oil up both sides.
5. **If you're grilling**, place the rounds over direct heat for a few minutes per side. They're essentially pre-cooked, so all you're doing is getting some nice grill marks and (depending upon how long you leave them on) a lovely caramelized char.
6. **If you're baking**, place the potatoes on a lined baking sheet and slide into a 425° oven for about 12 minutes (until the rounds start to brown) and then flip 'em and shovel 'em back into the oven for another 5 minutes.

Great alongside meat and fowl.

SWEET POTATO FLAVOR BOMBS

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I'm totally obsessed with this recipe. If you like sweet potatoes, you have to try these. If you think you don't like sweet potatoes, these will make you a convert. Thinly sliced potatoes, layered and baked in a muffin pan, topped with cheese. Crispy on the outside and melty on the inside. And excessively easy.

2 skinny sweet potatoes – peeled and sliced (see below)

3 tablespoons butter – melted

1 cup fresh parmesan cheese – grated

¾ cup sharp cheddar cheese – grated

1. Preheat your oven to 375° and get out a muffin tin. **Note one: despite your best efforts, the potatoes will stick to the bottom of a metal pan.** Either use cupcake liners or, my choice - a silicone muffin mold.
2. On to the potatoes. You hopefully bought ones that aren't too thick around because the sliced disks need to fit into the muffin cups. If your tubers are too thick, go ahead and trim them to make them slimmer.
3. After you peel the potatoes, you'll need to slice them thin (less than ¼ inch thick). **Note two: I'd strongly recommend using a mandoline (just watch your fingers).** OXO™ makes a mandoline that's easy to use and easy to clean. If you're buying one, go the extra mile and get a protective glove for ten bucks. Trust me and my stumpy thumb on this one.
4. Toss the potato slices with the melted butter and parmesan, then start stacking the disks into the muffin pan. Each stack will be five or six tater slices high.
5. Top these with the grated cheddar. I use sharp white cheddar, but you can use whatever you'd like.
6. Bake for about 35 minutes. The edges will be browned, the bottoms will be slightly burnt/caramelized, as will the cheese, and that's most excellent.
7. If you're using a silicone mold, these nuggets will pop right out. If you're using a metal pan, you'll have to dig a bit.

These go with anything and everything. Perfect for a casual dish and novel and tasty enough for company.

SWEET POTATO HASH

There's a terrific restaurant in Santa Monica called the True Food Kitchen which specializes in vegetarian/vegan/basic healthy food. I like a good slab of beef as much as the next guy, but this place is delicious. Their hash is served as a side dish in lieu of fries, and it's amazing.

1 large yam (the sweet potato with the orange flesh) – diced with the skin on

1 small sweet onion – diced

2 carrots – peeled and diced

¾ cup vegetable broth

a few tablespoons of grapeseed oil (you can substitute olive oil)

1. Preheat the oven to 400°.
2. Scrub the yam, but don't bother peeling it. Dice it up into small, even pieces. You should end up with about 3 cups of cubes.
3. Pour your tiny taters and diced carrots into a baking dish along with the broth and a tablespoon of oil and roast for about 30 minutes. You want them tender but not mushy.
4. When the potatoes/carrots are almost done in the oven, grab a large skillet and heat on medium. Add a bit of oil and toss in the onions. Stir these around for 5-6 minutes until they soften.
5. Pull the yam/carrot mix out of the oven and add them to the onions in the skillet. Sauté everything together for about ten minutes. The desired result is to get the yams and onions brown and crispy.

Great as a side dish, and also works as a breakfast compliment to eggs.

SWEET POTATO PANCAKES

I was never a fan of yams growing up. My mother was an excellent cook, but back in the 60's she served Thanksgiving yams bubbling over with brown sugar, which I found truly revolting. As my taste buds and I matured, I discovered that yams had more to offer than to be smothered in butter, sugar, or (god forbid) marshmallows. This recipe leans more on the savory than the sweet. Give 'em a go.

3 cups yams (one or two potatoes) – peeled and grated

1 tablespoon kosher salt

2 eggs – beaten

½ cup onion – grated

a few cranks of pepper

2 tablespoons flour

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons oil

1. Grab a large bowl. Dissolve the kosher salt in 4 cups cold water then stir in the grated potatoes. Let this sit for 15 minutes.
2. Drain the potatoes, dump them into a piece of cheesecloth (or clean kitchen towel) then squeeze the hell out of them. You want the potato strands to be as dry as possible.
3. Whisk together the eggs, onion and pepper, then add in the potatoes and the flour.
4. Heat up the butter and oil in a large skillet over medium. Plop in ¼ cup of potato mixture for each pancake and flatten them out in the pan. These'll cook for 3-4 minutes per side. You want them brownish and crispy.
5. When done frying the first batch, blot the cakes on a paper towel and slide them into a 250° oven to stay warm until you're ready to serve.

BASIC RISOTTO

☆☆☆

One of my favorite dishes, especially when dressed up with things like shrimp, curry, saffron, mushrooms, etc. Risotto is easy to make but needs constant stirring. All your hard work will pay off, as the result is guaranteed to be incredibly satisfying. This will serve four as a side dish.

4 tablespoons butter

1 small white onion – minced

1½ cups rice – arborio, vialone nano, or carnaroli (aka Italian White Gold)

1 cup dry white wine

3 cups chicken broth

1 cup water

½ cup fresh Parmigiano Reggiano – finely grated

**1 lb mushrooms – a mix of white buttons and shitake (optional)*

1. Heat 2 tablespoons butter in a deep, heavy bottom pot over med-low heat. Add onions and cook until soft, about 6 minutes.
2. Add the rice to the pot and stir for 3-4 minutes to allow rice to gently toast.
3. Add wine and simmer. Continue stirring until the wine is reduced by half (3 to 4 minutes).
4. In the meantime, in a separate pot, combine chicken broth and 1 cup of water and bring to a simmer.
5. Add a few ladles of this broth to the rice and stir until the liquid has almost been absorbed. Continue to add broth and stir in same manner until rice is no longer chalky – about 30 minutes total. **Note: hold back one ladle of broth.**
6. **If you're adding mushrooms...clean, chop and sauté and add to the risotto just before you get to the next step.*
7. Remove the pot from the heat and add that final ladleful of broth, along with the remaining 2 tablespoons butter and the cheese. Cover the pot and let sit covered (off the heat) for 5 minutes.
8. Remove cover and stir. That's it. Serve it up.

If you have any left the next day, form the cold risotto into patties and fry them in a pan with a little oil and butter. These *might* actually be better than they were last night.

CURRIED SHELLFISH RISOTTO

Risotto with a Mediterranean flair, it carries a strong curry flavor and is chock full of seafood. This very hearty risotto is both filling and impressive and is definitely more of a main course than a side dish.

*1 BASIC RISOTTO RECIPE**

---And, the following---

2 tablespoons curry

¼ teaspoon chili powder

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ lb bay scallops – cut in half

½ lb med or large shrimp – shelled and deveined

1 cup diced tomatoes

handful fresh basil leaves – chopped

Note: *This calls for a slightly different approach to the basic risotto, since you are sautéing additional spices in the pot before you put in the rice, so please read carefully before you begin.*

1. Put 2 tablespoons butter in a heavy saucepan (or pot) over medium heat. Sauté onion (from your BASIC RECIPE) for 2 minutes, stirring constantly.
2. Add curry and chili powder and continue to stir for another two minutes. The whole house will be filled with the aroma. You're welcome.
3. Add rice, stirring to coat with the mixture in the pot.
4. Now proceed with making the basic risotto (beginning with Step #3) with all its ladling and stirring.
5. Here's the tricky part, especially if you're flying solo. While you continue making the risotto, it's time to get the shellfish ready. Put the olive oil in a separate skillet (not in with the rice) over med-high heat. Toss in the scallops and cook for a few minutes, then add the shrimp and cook for another 3 minutes. Season with S&P to taste and set aside.
6. Back to the big pot, which you've never left unattended, right? Complete Step #5 of the BASIC RECIPE.
7. Stir in the shellfish and add in the last ladle of stock. Then, stir in tomatoes, basil, butter and cheese.
8. Remove it from the heat and let it sit covered for 5 minutes, then serve immediately.

You must drink wine with this. Hey, I don't make the rules.

RISOTTO WITH SHRIMP AND SAFFRON

☆☆☆

If you like shrimp, saffron and risotto, you must try this recipe. It's in my top three of all time dishes. Great for company or when you just want a special treat. This is very rich and can be either a main course or side dish.

1 BASIC RISOTTO RECIPE

---And, the following---

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 lb med shrimp – peeled, deveined and cut into two pieces

¼ teaspoon saffron (you can use a little more if you want)

pinch curry powder (this is just for a whisper of flavor so don't overdo it)

2 plum tomatoes – diced

1. Heat oil in large skillet over med heat.
2. Season shrimp with S&P, toss them into this skillet and cook until pink (3-4 minutes).
3. Dissolve the saffron strands in a small amount of hot water and add this, along with the curry powder, to your skillet.
4. Stir in the chopped tomato and cook for another minute. Set the whole thing aside.
5. Now (this should be done concurrently if possible) make the BASIC RISOTTO RECIPE, and 5 minutes before the rice is done, add in the shrimp mixture. Finish cooking the rice and serve it up with some bread and vino.

Do yourself a favor and give this a spin. Or, if you come to my house for dinner, request it. I'm always happy to whip it up.

COCONUT RICE

This is an extremely easy and versatile rice recipe that's heartier than your run-of-the-mill steamed rice common in Chinese restaurants. Give it a try next time you're looking to serve something alongside fish or any dish with Southeast Asian flavors.

1½ cups white rice

1½ cups water

1 teaspoon sugar

1 cup unsweetened coconut milk

¾ teaspoon salt

few tablespoons cilantro – minced

1. Rinse the rice under cold water, drain and dump into a saucepan.
2. Add the water, sugar, coconut milk and salt.
3. Bring this to a boil, then reduce heat to low.
4. Cook for 20 minutes (covered) then remove from heat and let stand for another 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Garnish with the minced cilantro and you're good to go.

DOMINICAN YELLOW RICE

From Bon Appetite. This is excellent paired with any foods from south of the border (note to my Canadian friends... that's south of two borders) as well as with chicken or pork. A more exotic alternative to white, brown, fried, pilafed or Condoleezza.

*2 tablespoons olive oil
½ cup red onion – diced
½ red bell pepper – diced
1 celery stalk – diced
2 scallions (white and light green parts) – diced
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 cup white rice
2 cups chicken broth
pinch of salt
2 tablespoons cilantro – minced*

1. You're making this in a skillet, so grab one that's large enough and has a lid. Start by heating a few tablespoons of oil over med-high flame, then add onion, bell pepper, celery and scallions. Cook until softened, about 5 minutes.
2. Add bay leaf, cumin, turmeric and cook for another 2 minutes.
3. Stir in the rice, then add the broth and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil, stir once, and cover. Reduce to low and cook for 20-23 minutes (longer if your rice still isn't tender or is too wet).
4. Let the rice rest for 10 minutes then stir in the cilantro.

CORNUE'S QUINOA

Another dish from the Cornue Speakeasy (see "Spicy Sesame Tuna Poke"). Quinoa has been around for about 4,000 years and for some reason has recently become trendy. That's not a bad thing, since quinoa is high in protein and contains essential amino acids, calcium, phosphorus and iron. Like revenge, this is a dish best served cold.

Note: requires at least an hour to chill

*1½ cups quinoa
1½ cups water
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cucumber – peeled, seeded and diced
¼ cup red onion – diced
1 red bell pepper – seeded and diced
1 tomato – seeded and diced
¼ cup olive oil
⅛ cup white balsamic vinegar
1 lemon – juiced
1 lime – juiced
2 tablespoons cilantro – minced
2 tablespoons mint – minced*

1. Soak the quinoa in cold water for 5 minutes, then rinse twice. Drain the grain and place in a pot with 1½ cups water and salt.
2. Cover the pot, bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and cook quinoa for 15 minutes. When done, remove from heat and let the quinoa cool.
3. Combine all the vegetables in a bowl and add in the quinoa.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk together the oil, vinegar and citrus juices then pour over the quinoa/vegetable blend and mix thoroughly. Now fold in the herbs.
5. Chill in the fridge for an hour before serving.

If you don't finish this in one sitting, don't fret. It's delicious the next day.

QUINOA SALAD

I guess I've gotten swept up in the quinoa fad...to the extent that I've included two recipes here. This very simple recipe stems from a dish I frequently ate on location in Vancouver. Can be eaten warm or cold.

The Salad Part

*1 cup quinoa
¼ teaspoon salt
¾ cup asparagus – sliced thin
2 small carrots – diced
½ red pepper – diced
¼ cup cilantro – minced*

The Dressing

*2 tablespoons lemon juice
¼ cup olive oil
pinch of cayenne*

1. Soak quinoa in cold water for 5 minutes, then rinse twice. Drain the grain and place in a pot with 1½ cups water and salt.
2. Cover the pot, bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low and cook quinoa for 15 minutes. When done, remove from heat and let the quinoa cool.
3. Grab a frying pan and cover the bottom with about ½ inch of water, then toss in the asparagus, carrots and peppers. Get the water boiling and blanch the vegetables for about 5 minutes, then remove from heat and rinse in cold water. You want the vegetables slightly cooked but still crisp.
4. While the salad ingredients are cooling, make the dressing by whisking together the lemon juice, oil, cayenne and a little S&P.
5. Now gently combine the vegetables with the quinoa, then pour in the dressing. Finally, toss in the cilantro.
6. You can either eat this as is (warmish) or slide it into the cooler and let it chill down.

I tinker with this every time I make it. Experiment with different vegetables and herbs until you get something you're proud to call your own.

MINT COUSCOUS

In case you were wondering (I was), couscous is a traditional North African dish of steamed semolina. I always serve this with "Tandoori Sea Bass" (check it out – it's amazing). That said, this is excellent alongside just about any fish dish or whenever your entree features herbs and spices like cumin, paprika or cilantro. A good change up from rice...and much faster to make.

2 cups chicken broth

1 cup couscous

1/3 cup fresh mint – chopped

1 teaspoon unsalted butter

1. Pour the broth into a saucepan and bring it to a boil then add the couscous in a steady stream, constantly stirring.
2. When all the couscous is added, stop stirring, reduce the heat and simmer for two minutes.
3. Remove the pan from the heat and mix in the mint and butter, season with S&P, and let sit for five minutes. Fluff it up with a fork before serving.

ORZO SALAD

☆☆☆

My favorite cold pasta dish. Orzo is tiny pasta that looks like a large grain of rice. To make things more confusing, in Italy the word "orzo" means "barley." During our time in Toronto, we frequently bought premade orzo salad from a local market called Sobeys. I repeatedly attempted to duplicate it and finally gave up and developed my own recipe. This is perfect as a summery side dish or all by itself for a light healthy lunch.

Note: give this an hour to cool prior to consumption

1½ cups orzo

1 cup grape tomatoes – cut in half

½ yellow pepper – seeded and diced (should yield about ½ cup)

¼ cup basil – minced

1 cup mozzarella balls – these are the little ones, sometimes called "pearls" – about the size of a marble

2 tablespoons vinegar – either white wine or white balsamic

1½ tablespoons lemon juice

2 teaspoons honey

2 teaspoons Dijon

¼ cup olive oil

1. Dump the orzo into a large pot of boiling water. Reduce heat to medium and let it cook for about 10 minutes.
2. Rinse the orzo with cold water to get off the extra starch and to cool down the pasta. Transfer to a large bowl.
3. Stir in the tomatoes, pepper, basil and mozzarella.
4. Time to make the dressing: whisk together the vinegar, lemon juice, honey and Dijon, then slowly whisk in the oil. Add liberal cranks of pepper and salt. Adjust the flavors to your liking then pour this over the orzo.
5. Let this cool down in the fridge for about an hour.
6. When I serve this, I hit it with another shot of white balsamic, which gives it a nice sweet/tart edge.

When you make this a second time, tweak it to add your own touches.

ASIAN SLAW

The first of a handful of slaw recipes. "Cole slaw" comes from the Dutch "koolsla" meaning "cabbage salad." As such, this would be a Dutch dish by way of China. A great complement for summer barbeques, especially if you're grilling anything with Asian undertones or overtones.

*1 head green cabbage – shredded
1 tablespoon salt
¼ cup rice wine vinegar
3 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons sesame oil
½ teaspoon chili paste
1 tablespoon ginger – grated
2 carrots – shredded
3 scallions – minced
toasted sesame seeds to garnish*

1. Toss shredded cabbage into a large colander and set over the sink. Sprinkle with salt and let stand for 15 minutes (the salt will draw out some of the moisture, so the slaw remains crunchy).
2. In a bowl, whisk together the vinegar, soy, sesame oil, chili paste and ginger.
3. Put the cabbage in a large bowl and toss in the carrots and scallions. Now, pour the liquid mixture from #2 on top, add the sesame seeds, season with S&P, enthusiastically mix it all together and serve.

Best eaten on Day One since it will become very vinegary by Day Two.

CORKY'S SLAW

☆☆☆

A traditional quick and easy side for burgers, chicken and just about anything else that comes off the grill. The base of this recipe comes from Corky's, a southern BBQ joint with locations in Memphis, Germantown, Olive Branch, North Little Rock and Pigeon Forge. If they love it in Pigeon Forge, you know it's gotta be good.

Note: this needs two hours in the fridge before consumption

1 head green cabbage – chopped or shredded

2 carrots – peeled and grated

1 scant cup mayo

¼ cup grain mustard

1 tablespoon cider vinegar

½ lemon – juiced

pinch of sugar

1 tablespoon celery seed

few dashes of hot sauce (optional)

1. Toss together the cabbage and carrots in a large bowl.
2. In a smaller bowl combine the mayo, mustard, vinegar, lemon juice and sugar. Pour just enough of this dressing over the cabbage mélange to cover and toss gently (you'll most probably have some left over – don't drown the slaw).
3. Season with celery seed, hot sauce and S&P.
4. Cover and slide this into the fridge for at least 2 hours before serving.

Butt it up next to ribs, pulled pork or some BBQ chicken and just imagine yourself dining at Corky's at a cigarette burned table alongside a family of six from Cherokee Hills or Gatlinburg, admiring the sun setting over the Smoky Mountains...

HORSERADISH COLE SLAW

Compliments of Emeril (who calls this "cole sloor" because that's what people from Massachusetts do). Pronunciation notwithstanding, this is a great side dish with a kick. The fresh horseradish has an amazing flavor. This recipe will make a whole load of sloor...

Note: about 90 minutes of chilling time required

*half head green cabbage – shredded
half head red cabbage – shredded
2 large carrots – shredded
2 scallions – finely sliced
1 Granny Smith apple – peeled, cored and cut into matchsticks
2 teaspoons lemon juice
½ cup cider vinegar
2 tablespoons cup sugar
1½ teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon pepper
1 cup mayo
1 tablespoon grain mustard
6 tablespoons FRESH horseradish – grated*

1. Combine cabbages, carrots and scallions in a large mixing bowl.
2. In a smaller bowl, toss the apple with the lemon juice, then dump into the cabbage mixture.
3. In yet another bowl combine the vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper. Whisk until the sugar is dissolved. Pour this over the cabbage and toss. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for about 20 minutes.
4. In the meantime, combine the mayo, horseradish and mustard. Once the 20 minutes are up, drain the slaw, then add this mixture and toss thoroughly. Cover and refrigerate again for at least an hour.

SUNSTONE SLAW

☆☆☆

This has become our go-to slaw because it has no mayo (and no guilt). Healthy, fresh, has a delicious sweet tang and the pepitas give it a nice crunch.

Note: this needs an hour fridge time prior to eating

The Slaw

½ head of purple cabbage – shredded

½ head of green cabbage – shredded

(or – just use a bag of pre-shredded slaw mix)

2 cups carrots – shredded

1 cup cilantro – minced

½ cup scallions – finely chopped

½ cup pepitas (roasted pumpkin seeds)

¼ cup toasted, sliced almonds

The Dressing

3 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

1 teaspoon honey

1 tablespoon lemon

S&P

1. Combine slaw ingredients in a large bowl.
2. Combine dressing ingredients in a smaller bowl. Pour over slaw.

This is still okay the next day as well, but after that, jettison whatever might be left.

SWEET SLAW

This hails from The Hickory House in Oklahoma. If you prefer your slaw a little less kraut-like and a little more mayo-like, this is the one for you.

Note: like most slaw, this needs to be refrigerated for at least an hour

1 head green cabbage – shredded

2 oz bottle chopped pimentos – drained

For those of you who are curious about such things, a pimento is a sweet red pepper. Comes from "pimiento" which is the Spanish word for "pepper."

3 pieces celery – diced small

¾ cup mayo

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1. Put everything into a large bowl and toss (they like to keep it simple at the Hickory House).
2. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour. This tastes best when it's not sitting around all day, so eat it within two hours of making it (or make it within two hours of eating it...your choice).

CHILLED ASIAN BROCCOLI

☆☆☆

From Jet Tila's 101 Asian Dishes Cookbook, this has become our favorite way to eat broccoli. Despite the distinct Asian flavors, it's a wonderful compliment to any meat, fowl or fish.

2 lbs broccoli florets

¼ cup unseasoned rice wine vinegar

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1½ tablespoons honey

2 tablespoons soy sauce

2 teaspoons fish sauce

2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds

1. Make the dressing by combining the vinegar, sesame oil, honey, soy sauce and fish sauce. You could leave out the fish sauce, but it provides a nice umami flavor (or so they tell me).
2. Heat up a pot of water. Salt generously. Once it gets rolling, dump in your broccoli. You're only letting this go for about 2 minutes, until your broccoli is bright green. It'll be al dente, which is what you're looking for. Soggy = bad.
3. Immediately shock the brock in a large bowl of ice water, which will halt the cooking. Let this sit for about 3 minutes, then drain.
4. Slide your now drained and cooked/shocked broccoli into the fridge to chill for 10 minutes or so.
5. When you're ready, toss the broccoli with the dressing, and then sprinkle in your sesame seeds.

CUCUMBER SUNOMONO

☆☆☆

Straight from the local sushi restaurant to your table. Fairly effortless and very refreshing. If you're allergic to shellfish, you can leave out the bay shrimp, but in my opinion the shrimp makes the dish classier (but not so classy that it's worth closing off your windpipe). This yields 4 salad portions.

1 large English cucumber – thinly sliced. THIN is the key word here, so use a sharp knife or a mandoline

1 large carrot – finely grated

½ sweet onion – finely grated

1 cup seasoned rice vinegar

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon salt

large handful cooked bay shrimp (about ⅓ pound)

1. In a large bowl combine cucumber, carrot and onion. Toss to mix.
2. In a medium bowl combine vinegar, sugar and salt and stir until sugar and salt have dissolved.
3. Pour liquid mixture over vegetables, toss well, and let sit out on the counter (not in the fridge) for about 10 minutes before serving.
4. Add the shrimp and dig in.

The vegetables will become more vinegary as they sit in the dressing, so this doesn't save well for the next day. Make it, eat it, clean the bowl, move on.

DEL MAR CHOPPED SALAD

☆☆☆

The best pizza in Pasadena comes from The Luggage Room, which is so named because it used to be the actual luggage room for the adjacent Del Mar train station. They also have an incredible chopped salad there, which I've tweaked to the point that I can no longer call it the Luggage Room Salad. You may ask, "If the original salad is so fabulous, why change it?" Because that's what home chefs do, right?

The Vinaigrette

*½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 egg yolks
½ cup olive oil
¼ cup Champagne (or white wine) vinegar
1 teaspoon of lemon juice
S&P*

The Salad

*½ head of cabbage and ½ head iceberg lettuce – chopped
(You can go with just a head of lettuce if you aren't keen on cabbage)
½ cup white cheddar – chopped
½ cup cucumber – diced
2-3 tablespoons pistachios – shelled (just seeing if you're paying attention)
2 tablespoons toasted slivered almonds
2 tablespoons basil – julienned*

1. Start with vinaigrette. Whisk together the mustard and egg yolk.
2. Slowly whisk in the oil, followed by the vinegar and lemon juice. S&P to taste.
3. For the salad, simply toss together all the above ingredients.
4. Fold in half of the vinaigrette to start. Continue to add more until the salad is covered to your liking (you might have some dressing left over).

If you're curious, you can check out the original Luggage Room Salad here:
<https://www.latimes.com/recipe/the-luggage-room-pizzeria-chopped-salad>

ROASTED PEPPER, CUKE AND TOMATO SALAD

☆☆☆

An excellent companion to "Lamb Tagine" but you can serve this with just about anything. Best as a summer dish when the tomatoes are bursting with flavor.

*2 red bell peppers – roasted and cut into ½" pieces
3 tomatoes – seeded and cubed into ½" chunks
1 cucumber – peeled, seeded and cubed into ½" chunks
¾ cup cured black olives – pitted and quartered
¼ cup red onion – minced
3 tablespoons lemon juice
5 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup feta – crumbled*

1. Start with the peppers. You can char them on a gas range, under a broiler or on a grill... or buy them in a jar! If you're going from scratch, hold the peppers over a flame (or under the broiler) and turn a few times to make sure the skin is black all over. Toss the immolated peppers into a plastic bag and seal them up for about 15 minutes. Once the peppers are unquestionably dead, peel off the skin, strip out the seeds and cut the flesh into ½" pieces. (Truth be told, I just use the jarred variety).
2. Toss the pepper chunks into a large bowl, followed immediately by the tomato cubes, cuke, olives and onion.
3. In a small bowl, whisk 5 tablespoons of oil with the lemon juice, season with a little S&P, and then pour that over the pepper mélange.
4. Let everything sit and marinate for at least 15 minutes prior to serving.
(Note: this can be made up to 3 hours ahead.) If you decide to go the pre-prep route, cover the dish with plastic wrap and chuck it into the fridge.

Just before serving, top this with crumbled feta cheese.

GRILLED CORN SALAD

Corn is in season from May to September, and peaks in the middle of summer. I've found the bicolor corn (half white/half yellow) to be the sweetest, but ask the folks at your local farmer's market or grocery store what's best in your area.

This dish is great as a side, or as a bed for grilled shrimp or chicken.

The Salad:

*2-4 ears of corn – husked
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cups cherry tomatoes – halved
1 avocado – diced
1 red pepper – diced
½ cup red onion – minced
½ cup cilantro – chopped*

The Dressing:

*2 limes
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon balsamic
1 tablespoon honey
S&P*

1. Parboil the corn for ten minutes. Dry the ears off and brush on a little oil.
2. Fire up the grill and lay your corn on. You want some nice char marks.
3. Once the corn is cool enough to handle, cut the kernels from the cob, and then add the rest of the salad ingredients (except for the cilantro)
4. Whisk together the dressing and pour over the salad (I'm sure you figured that out all on your own).
5. Garnish with the cilantro.

This'll keep for a day, but the avocado will turn brown, so if you plan to save any leftovers, eat all the avocado chunks before you stash this in the fridge.

GRILLED VEGETABLE SALAD

☆☆☆

This has become a regular fixture at our house during the summer when everything's in season and flavors are maxed. Perfect for those times when you feel like eating something a little lighter and healthier. A great side dish with meats and poultry or you can make a meal out of it by adding some leftover turkey or chicken. This is also an excellent main course when topped with "Grilled Colossal Shrimp" (check 'em out).

*2 ears of yellow or bicolor corn
1 pound of asparagus **—OR—** two zucchinis
1 yellow (and/or red) bell pepper
handful of cherry tomatoes – halved
handful of crumbled feta
few shakes of balsamic vinegar and olive oil*

1. Fire up your grill. You're going to need room for the corn, the asparagus (or zuke) and the bell pepper.
2. Shuck the corn and dump them into boiling salted water for ten minutes. In the meantime, trim the asparagus, halve the zuke, and cut the pepper into halves or thirds. Brush these with olive oil.
3. Once the corn is done, dry it and brush it with butter or oil.
4. Grill up the corn, asparagus/zuke and pepper. Get a nice char, but you don't want anything to go limp.
5. Slice the corn off the cob*, chop the asparagus/zuke and pepper into fairly equal bite-sized chunks, then add the tomatoes. Give this all a toss.
6. Dress your salad with oil and vinegar then top with the feta.

*the easiest way to de-kernelize your cob is to place a small bowl upside down in the bottom a larger bowl and use that to elevate the ear of corn. The cut kernels fall into the larger bowl. The things you learn watching Diners, Drive Ins and Dives...

ROASTED BEETS AND GOAT CHEESE

I'm big fan of beets, but they can be sort of fickle to cook. I modified this recipe from Epicurious and it's a knockout. Great for a starter or a side dish. The amounts below are for four servings.

The Essentials:

*1 large or two small beets per person (golden and/or red)
8 ounces goat cheese*

The Dressing:

*¼ cup olive oil
¼ cup white wine vinegar
splash of balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoon Dijon
1 teaspoon sesame oil*

1. Preheat the oven to 400°.
2. I peel the beets before I roast them, but you can either do it before or after. Wrap the beets loosely in foil and roast until tender. Depending upon the size of the beet, this can go anywhere from 60-90 minutes. You want them soft enough to be pierced with a knife tip.
3. Let the beets cool and slice them into discs about ¼ inch thick. Serve by layering the beets with goat cheese, and then pour the dressing over the top.

You can also artfully arrange the beets and goat cheese on top of a traditional salad of greens and tomatoes.

VEGETABLE HASH

Great alongside your breakfast eggs or your dinner protein. This should go without saying, but you can add or subtract as you see fit. As a totally superfluous side note, you'll never see me write or hear me utter the word "veggie." That's right up there with "appies" when it comes to annoying culinary terms.

2 tablespoons olive oil

3 medium white or Yukon potatoes – peeled and diced

1 teaspoon paprika

1 medium onion – diced

2 stalks celery – diced

1 red bell pepper – seeded and diced

1 teaspoon thyme

S&P

1. Preheat oven to 375°.
2. Grab a large frying pan (big enough to hold everything above) and heat the oil over med-high.
3. Toss the diced potatoes into the pan. Hit them with the paprika and sauté until brown – about 10 minutes. You want the potatoes fairly well cooked before proceeding to the next step.
4. Add onion, celery and bell pepper and sauté for another 6 minutes. Your aim is to get everything almost cooked, but not mushy.
5. Add the thyme and season to taste with S&P.
6. Dump all of this into roasting pan and slide it into your oven for 20 minutes.

Have a bottle of Cholula standing by for your more discerning guests.

CREAMED SPINACH

From Tyler Florence. Creamed spinach is a chophouse favorite that often adorns a plate holding a thick slab of prime rib or a juicy New York steak. Also excellent as a holiday side dish with your roasted bird.

*1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon butter
1 yellow onion – minced
2 cloves garlic – minced
2 lbs fresh spinach – stems removed
½ cup heavy cream
½ teaspoon nutmeg – grated
sea salt and cracked pepper*

1. Grab a large pot. Heat up the oil and butter over medium heat. Sauté the onion and garlic until soft (6 minutes).
2. Add the spinach in batches, pushing it down with a pushing-down-implement (aka wooden spoon, spoontula, or anything other than your hand). Cook until the spinach wilts (this only takes a minute or two).
3. Keep adding more spinach until it's all in there. Lower the heat and continue to cook until the spinach is dry, then add the cream and nutmeg.
4. Stir and cook on low heat for ten minutes.

Season with S&P and you're good to go.

SAUTÉED SPINACH WITH PINE NUTS

This is another excellent way to get your greens. Easy enough for family dining and stylish enough for company. Spinach is loaded with iron, vitamin E and antioxidants, so if you like this dish, do your body a favor and work this into your regular rotation.

*¼ cup pine nuts – toasted
2 tablespoon olive oil
1 yellow onion – minced
2 lbs fresh spinach*

1. Lightly toast the pine nuts by heating them in a small dry frying pan over med heat. Toss `em around for about 3 minutes; don't let them burn. When done, scoop them out of the pan and into a waiting bowl.
2. Put the oil in a large frying pan and sauté the onion on med-low for about 6 minutes. When done, leave the onion in the pan, but remove the pan from the heat.
3. Grab those spinach leaves and cut off the tough stems, then rinse the leaves a few times. Put the wet leaves into a DIFFERENT frying pan (or wok) over med-high heat, cover and steam until they turn bright green and wilted. This'll only take a few minutes.
4. Remove the leaves from the heat, toss into a strainer and press the spinach with the back of a spoon to remove excess water. Once the spinach is cool enough to handle, coarsely chop it.
5. Dump the spinach and pine nuts into the pan with the onion and return this to med heat for about 2 minutes (everything's already cooked; you're just reheating it).

Finish this off with a little S&P and serve.

SPANAKOPITA

☆☆☆

Looking for yet another spinach dish? Good for you! Don't be intimidated by the myriad steps of this one. It's worth it. Spanakopita is a Greek savory dish of spinach, feta and phyllo (pronounced FEE-lo). This could be made like a pie or in a casserole dish, but I prefer making individual triangular servings (because I'm a bit of a kitchen masochist). You need to know up front that it's somewhat work intensive, but if you're game, go for it.

2 lbs fresh spinach – cleaned and stemmed

1 ½ cups feta cheese – crumbled

½ cup Pecorino Romano – grated (you can substitute parmesan)

½ cup Greek yogurt

3 scallions – thinly sliced

2 eggs – beaten

2 tablespoons mint – minced

2 tablespoons dill – minced

1 teaspoon lemon zest

1 tablespoon lemon juice

S&P

1 package of phyllo sheets – thawed (which may take a few hours)

Note: phyllo is fickle. You can do a kitchen cheat here and use puff pastry instead. It won't have the traditional flaky crust, but it will make life easier, if that's important to your mental health

1 stick of butter – melted

1. Preheat the oven to 375°.
2. First step is to make the filling (obviously). Start by steaming the spinach in batches. Transfer spinach into a colander and squeeze out as much water as you can.
3. Once the spinach has cooled down a bit, chop it up, squeeze out more water and then toss it into a large bowl.
4. Mix into the spinach the following: the cheeses, yogurt, scallions, eggs, herbs, lemon zest and juice. Add a few cranks of salt and pepper. Your filling is done. Just so you know, that was the easy part.
5. Onto the phyllo. Hopefully you paid attention above and you let it thaw. If not, do that now. Place the stack of paper-thin phyllo on a sheet of plastic wrap and carefully remove the top sheet.
6. Place the single phyllo sheet on a cutting board and lightly brush it with melted butter. Top this with a second sheet and butter that up as well. **Note: cover the remaining phyllo sheets with a piece of plastic wrap and a wet towel. Don't let it dry out.**

7. Get yourself a sharp knife and position the board so the phyllo is facing you horizontally (the longest sides going from left to right) and then cut the phyllo from top to bottom into 3" strips.
8. Scoop up a heaping teaspoon of spinach filling and put it near a corner of one strip, then fold over the corner of the phyllo to cover the filling to form a triangle.
9. Continue folding the strip like a ceremonial flag, maintaining the triangular shape. Put this on a large baking sheet and brush the top with butter. **Yeah, another note: you can make these up to three days ahead. If you do, arrange in one layer in plastic bags and freeze. When it's time to bake them, brush with butter and bake (do not thaw).**
10. Repeat this step until you use up all the filling, all of the phyllo, or feel like you've had enough of this process. You'll theoretically end up with 30-35 triangles.
11. Slide the baking sheet into the oven for 25 minutes. The dough should be light golden brown.

International Greek law states that you must serve these with a side of tzatziki (the recipe for which is handily included in his collection.)

SPINACH, TOMATO AND CHARD

If you're looking to occasionally take a break from animal flesh but still want something savory and filling, this dish hits the mark. Even if you're a basic "meat and taters" kind of guy or gal, do yourself a favor and try this some time. It's easy, healthy and tastes great. You can have a double cheeseburger tomorrow night. This can be made as a side dish, or as a main dish over rice. From the Ottolenghi cookbook.

¼ cup olive oil

½ cup sliced almonds

½ teaspoon paprika

2 cloves garlic – thin sliced

28 ounces canned plum tomatoes

1 lb swiss chard – leaves chopped

5 ounces spinach – shredded

1 lime – zest to get 1 teaspoon and juiced to get 2 tablespoons

1 cup mint – chopped

1 cup dill – chopped

8 green onions – chopped small

1. Place a large pan (with a lid) on medium heat. Add 2 tablespoons oil, the almonds and paprika. Fry for 2-3 minutes, until the nuts are golden brown, then transfer to a bowl.
2. Using that same pan (with fresh oil), fry the garlic for a minute, then add the tomatoes (with their juice), chard, a pinch of salt and stir, crushing the poor tomatoes as you go.
3. Cover the pan and cook for 15 minutes, stirring every once in a while. You want the chard wilted and the tomatoes broken down.
4. Remove from the heat, stir in the spinach, lime zest and juice, mint, dill and green onions.
5. Serve with the almonds sprinkled on top.

As mentioned above, this is a wonderful filling meal served over rice.

MUSHROOM RAGOUT

This is a rich and impressive side dish from the Bill Sonoma Cookbook and it goes with just about everything. Most excellent alongside hearty meat and potato dishes.

2 lbs fresh mushrooms – white buttons and baby bellas work fine, but feel free to go rogue – cleaned and chopped

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 red onion – minced

½ cup dry white wine

1 cup chicken broth

½ cup heavy cream

1 tablespoon chives – minced

1. You want the mushroom pieces to end up about the same size, so chop accordingly.
2. Slap a large frying pan on the stove and melt the butter over medium heat. Add onion and sauté for about 3 minutes.
3. Toss in the mushrooms and continue to sauté for another 5 minutes.
4. Season with a little S&P and add the wine. Raise the heat to med-high, and cook until the wine is just about evaporated, about 3 more minutes.
5. Add the broth, reduce flame to medium and cook until mushrooms are tender, 7 or 8 minutes longer.
6. Stir in cream. Taste and adjust the seasonings if needed.

Transfer to a serving dish, sprinkle with chives and serve.

ROASTED BUTTERNUT SQUASH

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I poached this recipe from a magazine ad for balsamic vinegar, which goes to show if you try enough different recipes, sometimes you get lucky (and sometimes you have to call out for pizza). Butternuts are those weird looking oblong beige ones (by the way: the orangier the color, the riper, drier, and sweeter the squash). The most popular variety is the Waltham Butternut, which originated in Waltham, Massachusetts, where it was developed by Robert Young...I'm guessing sometime between "Father Knows Best" and "Marcus Welby."

1 healthy sized butternut – peeled, seeded and cut into 1" cubes

¾ cup chicken broth

¼ cup balsamic vinegar

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup fresh parmesan – grated

1. Preheat the oven to 400°.
2. Bring about 3 quarts of water to a boil and drop in the cubed squash. Cook for 5 minutes or until just tender when poked with a knife. Drain and dump the squash into a waiting roasting pan.
3. In the meantime, combine the chicken broth, vinegar, olive oil and salt. Pour this over the steaming cubes and sprinkle on the cheese.
4. Shuffle this into the oven uncovered for 30 minutes.

Hit it with a little more parmesan and serve it up.

ZUCCHINI QUESADILLAS

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You laugh. Everyone does, until they try these. Then they become converts (unless they don't like zucchini, in which case they keep right on laughing). This is a fun and different way to do vegetables. You might even convince kids to eat these (just don't tell them that zucchini is squash). This recipe was lifted from Bobby Flay and I've modified it over the years.

2-3 large zucchini – sliced lengthwise in thin strips (1/8")

6 flour tortillas – burrito size (the big ones)

1 cup cheese – grated (the original recipe calls for Pepper Jack, but I use white cheddar. Feel free to experiment here, but I'd suggest sticking with a white cheese for the esthetics)

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
2. For each serving, lay 3 slices of zuke (you can trim the zuke to fit) over half a tortilla and sprinkle some cheese on top. Fold the tortilla over to make a semicircle (or half-moon).
3. Place these on a baking sheet and slide them into the oven. Cook for about 8 minutes on one side (they should be nice and brown). Carefully flip them over (try not to let the zuke slip out) and let them bake for another 3-4 minutes on side two.
4. Cut these in half and serve them with salsa while they're hot.

These are a wonderful side dish and go with just about anything. You can also make these as appetizers (if so, use smaller tortillas).

STEWED LENTILS AND TOMATOES

We decided to beef up our vegetable consumption (see what I did there?) and found a number of delicious options. This one hails from Ina Garten, who's evidently still wandering barefoot around her kitchen.

*2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large yellow onion – diced
3 carrots – peeled and diced
1 tablespoon garlic – minced
28 ounces whole plum tomatoes
1 cup green lentils
2 cups chicken stock or broth
1½ teaspoons mild curry powder
2 teaspoons thyme
2 teaspoons kosher salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar*

1. Heat oil on med-low heat in a large pot. Add onions and carrots and sauté until the onions start to brown (8-10 minutes), stirring occasionally. Add the garlic and cook for another minute.
2. In the meantime, dump the tomatoes (and their juice) into a food processor and pulse until the tomatoes are coarsely chopped. Don't get too ambitious and turn them into a puree.
3. Rinse and pick through the lentils to make sure there are no stones in the package. Yes, sometimes tiny pebbles make their way into lentils. I have no idea why.
4. Add the tomatoes, lentils, chicken broth, curry powder, thyme, salt and pepper to the pot. Bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer. Cover the pot and cook for 60 minutes (or longer if your lentils are firm...you want them tender).
5. Remove from the heat and leave covered for another ten minutes.
6. Finally, add that vinegar and serve.

STIR FRIED BABY BOK CHOY

Great side dish whenever you're doing something with an Asian kick. This also works well alongside grilled meats and hearty potatoes. Besides being very low in calories, bok choy is insanely rich in vitamins A, C and K as well as omega-3s and antioxidants. So, yeah...you should try it.

*1 lb baby bok choy
1½ tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry white wine
½ teaspoon sugar
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 tablespoon ginger – grated
1 tablespoon sesame oil*

1. Trim the rough bottoms off the bok choy and separate the leaves from the bulb. Rinse the choy well and pat dry.
2. In a small bowl combine the soy, wine and sugar. Set aside.
3. Heat up a wok over med-high heat then add the oil and swirl it around. Add the ginger and fry it for 20-30 seconds (don't let it burn).
4. Add the bok choy and fry for about 2 minutes, then add in the soy mixture and let this go for another 30 seconds.
5. Turn off the heat and drizzle in the sesame oil. Give it all a mix and serve it up.

SESAME STUFFING

Since I don't actually cram this into a bird carcass, I suppose this dish would more accurately be classified as "dressing," or "that good tasting breadly stuff that cooks all by itself in the oven." An added plus to this recipe is that it doesn't use turkey giblets. That might sound innocuous to you, but I've never been a big fan of fowl viscera. The sesame oil and sesame seeds give it a whisper of Asia.

*6 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon sesame oil
2 yellow onions – chopped
½ bunch celery – diced
½ pound mushrooms – diced
12 oz box of bread cubes
2 tablespoons sesame seeds – toasted
2 teaspoons paprika (sweet if you've got it)
2 eggs – lightly beaten
1 teaspoon fresh thyme or oregano – chopped*

1. Preheat oven to 400°.
2. Heat butter and sesame oil together in a very large skillet over low-med heat. Add onions and a little S&P. Sauté for about 7 minutes, until onions are soft.
3. Increase heat and add celery. Cook for another 10 minutes (until celery cries out for mercy).
4. Toss in the 'shrooms and let this go for another 5 minutes.
5. Transfer all of this to a large bowl and add the bread cubes. Toss it all until well combined. Add the sesame seeds, paprika, egg and herbs. Mix it all up with a little more S&P. **Note: You can make this the day before and pop it into the fridge, but if you do, take it out and allow it to warm to room temp before you cook it.**
6. Dump your concoction into a greased baking dish and cover with heavy foil then slide it into the oven for about 45 minutes.
7. After the aforementioned 45 minutes, rip off the foil and continue to bake the dressing/stuffing until it browns (another 5 minutes or so).

UNSELFISH SHELLFISH

(they give their lives for your dining pleasure)

Shrimp

Black And White Sesame Crusted Shrimp
Chile-Lemongrass Shrimp
Grilled Colossal Shrimp
Kung Pao Shrimp With Cashews
Louise's Salt And Pepper Shrimp
Pan-Seared Shrimp With Ginger-Hoisin Glaze
Shrimp And Avocado In Tamarind Sauce
Shrimp And Penne
Shrimp Cakes
Shrimp Curry
Shrimp Summer Rolls*
Shrimp Taco Salad
Sizzling Salt And Chili Pepper Shrimp
Spicy Shrimp And Broccolini Over Coconut Rice
Spicy Shrimp Salad
Sweet And Pungent Shrimp

Crab

Crab And Shrimp Gumbo
Crab Cakes
Crab Louie

And more...

Cioppino
Shellfish And Pasta In Fragrant Broth
Sautéed Scallops With Cherry Tomatoes
Seared Scallops With Tangerine Sauce
Seafood Crepes
Steamed Clams With Cilantro

BLACK AND WHITE SESAME CRUSTED SHRIMP

These look very cool, and that alone should be reason to give them a try. Easy to make, but be warned, the prep can get a bit messy.

½ cup sesame seeds – try to find both black and white (or beige) seeds and use ¼ cup of each. Of course, you can punk out and use all of one color, but then, why bother making this?

¼ cup flour (have more standing by as it gets kind of gloppy and might need refurbishing)

2 egg whites – beaten with 1 tablespoon water

1 lb shrimp – peeled and deveined (I use 21-25s – you can go bigger)

2 to 3 tablespoons olive (or grapeseed) oil

1. Mix the sesame seeds (if you're being creative and using two different colors. If you're lazy and boring, don't worry about this step).
2. Spread the seeds on a plate. The flour goes in one dish and egg whites in a separate dish. You've created your own little assembly line.
3. Working with a few shrimp at a time, dredge them in the flour (patting well to remove excess...this is important, otherwise they get pasty and gross), then dip them in the egg whites. Finally, coat with sesame seeds (again, patting to remove excess). Sounds easy, and it is, but everything starts getting a little gummy. When it does, chill out, and get some fresh flour and maybe a new mixture of egg whites and water.
4. Heat oil in heavy skillet (med-high heat). Add the shrimp and cook until they start to curl and are almost opaque (about 2 minutes per side).

Serve with your favorite dipping sauce. On their drive home, your guests will celebrate your culinary talents.

CHILI-LEMONGRASS SHRIMP

Despite a few quasi-exotic ingredients (mirin and lemongrass to name two) this is easy and fast. A different and flavorful way to put an Asian spin on shrimp.

1 tablespoon vegetable (or grapeseed) oil

1 tablespoon fresh ginger – minced

½ cup shallots – minced

1 lb shrimp – peeled and deveined

½ cup mirin (this is low alcohol rice wine – you can substitute sake if you can't find this)

3 tablespoons lemongrass – minced

½ cup chicken broth

¼ cup sweet hot chili sauce

soy sauce as needed

1. Heat a wok over high flame, then put in the oil. Add the ginger and shallots – sauté for about a minute.
2. Toss in the shrimp and cook until they start to turn pink, which'll be about three minutes.
3. Add the mirin and lemongrass, stirring constantly for about 3 minutes.
4. Pour in the broth and chili sauce and continue cooking until the shrimp are done...just another few minutes.

Season to taste with soy and serve over rice or Chinese noodles.

GRILLED COLOSSAL SHRIMP

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These are a crowd pleaser and have become a house staple during the summer. The combination of honey and balsamic vinegar gives these an amazing flavor. Completely effortless way to churn out an impressive repast.

Note: best to marinate for a few hours

5-6 "colossal" shrimp per person – peeled and deveined – you can obviously use any size shrimp you want, but I go with the big boys for this dish

The Marinade

1/3 cup olive oil

3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

2 tablespoons honey

1/2 tablespoon ground pepper

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano

1. Combine all marinade ingredients. Hold.
2. Skewer the shrimp. On the off chance that you're new to skewering shrimp, use two skewers and thread the shrimp onto them like rungs on a ladder. This allows you to turn them more easily. If you're using bamboo skewers, be sure to soak them in water for at least 20 minutes before bringing them into play, otherwise they'll end up like flaming tiki torches and your shrimp will run amok atop the grill.
3. Lay the skewered shrimp into a baking dish and pour on the marinade. Cover with plastic wrap and slide into the fridge until it's grilling time.
4. Grill for about 2-3 minutes per side, depending upon the heat of your BBQ.

You can make these as appetizers, but if you want to serve them as a main course, arrange the shrimp on a bed of rice and surround with steamed julienned vegetables. Our favorite way to eat these is atop the "*Grilled Vegetable Salad*."

KUNG PAO SHRIMP WITH CASHEWS

One of the reasons I like this dish is I can change it up (adding broccoli or asparagus) and it's consistently delicious. And the good news is we're just talking about protein and vegetables, so you can eat as much as you want and end up both sated and healthy.

*¼ cup orange juice
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1½ tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon sugar
1½ teaspoons cornstarch
1 cup cashews – toasted
2 tablespoons vegetable (or grapeseed) oil
1 lb shrimp – shelled and deveined (use 21-25s)
1 small onion – chopped
1½ teaspoons ginger – minced
½ teaspoon salt
1 red bell pepper – seeded and thinly sliced
6 small dried red chilies – halved
½ teaspoon sesame oil*

1. Grab a small bowl and mix the OJ, vinegar, soy, sugar and cornstarch.
2. Put the cashews into a dry frying pan over med-low heat and brown them up a bit. Keep an eye on these...they have a knack of going from "they're getting there" to "oh crap, they're burned" in a matter of seconds.
3. In your wok, heat the oil over high until smoking. Drop in the shrimp and stir until pink. 4 minutes. Scoop out and set aside.
4. Wok up the onion, ginger and salt for about 4 minutes.
5. Add the bell pepper and dried chilies and cook for another few minutes.
6. Now add back in the shrimp and let them reheat for about a minute.
7. Pour in the sauce (from Step #1) and cook until slightly thickened; about a minute.
8. Lastly, stir in the cashews and sesame oil. Give 'it all a swirl, and you're done.

Eat as is, serve over rice or butted up to some chow mein.

LOUISE'S SALT AND PEPPER SHRIMP

This was my favorite dish at Lew Mitchell's Orient Express on Wilshire Blvd when I was working at Paramount in the 70s and 80s. Lew held down the front of house and his wife Louise ran the kitchen with an iron fist. Louise was an amazing chef (a dragon lady with the staff...but a sweetheart with the guests). The last time I dined there (many years ago) I asked my waiter, the memorably named Mike Ear, "where's Louise?" His response, "Louise? She dead." And that marked my final trip to the OE. Incidentally, it closed shortly thereafter. So, in memory of Louise, here's her simple but flavorful dish.

*1 lb shrimp (shells on)
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon sugar
¼ teaspoon chili powder
3 tablespoons vegetable (or grapeseed) oil
1 tablespoon garlic – minced
1 tablespoon Anaheim chili – thinly sliced
2 scallions – thinly sliced*

1. Remove the shrimp legs but leave on the shells and tails.
2. Rinse the maimed shrimp and pat dry.
3. Combine salt, sugar and chili powder in a tiny bowl.
4. Grab a wok or deep, frying pan and crank up the heat (remember...hot wok, cold oil). When the pan's ready, swirl in one tablespoon of oil, add the garlic and sliced chili and stir-fry for about 30 seconds.
5. Add those legless shellfish and another tablespoon of oil and fry 'em up for about 2 minutes, or until the shrimp begin to turn pink.
6. Swirl in the remaining oil, add the salt mixture and let the whole thing go for another minute or two (until the shrimp are just cooked).
7. Toss in the scallions for a few moments, and it's ready to go.

Serve over steamed rice or julienned vegetables. And even though you probably never met her, raise a glass of Asahi to the lovely and talented (and "dead") Louise Mitchell.

PAN-SEARED SHRIMP WITH GINGER-HOISIN GLAZE

You'd assume that frying up shrimp is pretty basic, so why bother taking the space up with this recipe? 'Cause, there's "frying shrimp," and "frying shrimp with a little style," and which of us couldn't use that? So next time you want an easy but stylish way to make great-tasting shrimp, give this a try.

The Ginger-Hoisin Glaze

*2 tablespoons hoisin
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1½ teaspoon soy
2 teaspoons fresh ginger – minced
2 teaspoons water
2 scallions – thinly sliced*

The Shrimp

*1½ lbs shrimp – peeled and deveined
2 tablespoons vegetable (or grapeseed) oil
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 teaspoon sugar*

1. Combine all glaze ingredients in a small bowl. Hold.
2. Toss the shrimp with the salt, pepper flakes and sugar in a large bowl. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in skillet over high heat. Get the oil smokin'.
3. Add half the shrimp to the pan in a single layer and cook until the edges turn pink...about a minute. Remove the pan from the heat, and using tongs, flip the shrimp. Let them stand for another 30 seconds or so.
4. Transfer this shrimp to a plate and repeat the cooking process with the second batch.
5. When the second batch is done, return all the resting shrimp to the pan and toss them all together (the pan is now off the heat, right?). Add the ginger-hoisin sauce and toss to cover all the shrimp. Cover the skillet and let them cook through and absorb the sauce for another two minutes or so.
6. Serve while hot.

SHRIMP AND AVOCADO IN TAMARIND SAUCE

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A light dinner for two or classy appetizers for four. Tamarind is a fruit that originated in Africa and today is used predominantly in Southeast Asian cooking. It has a distinct and unique flavor, which makes this a memorable (and delicious) dish. Tamarind comes in pulpy blocks, paste and concentrate (I go with the concentrate) and is generally found in specialty shops or online (i.e., not at the corner grocery).

*2 tablespoons olive (or grapeseed) oil
1 large shallot – sliced thin and separated into rings
a pinch of brown sugar
½ cup cashews – roasted
1 tablespoon tamarind concentrate
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 lime – juiced
1 avocado – ripe but firm...you want chunks, not guacamole
1 tablespoon ginger – grated
1 lb shrimp – peeled and deveined*

1. Heat oil in a pan and fry the shallot rings. You're essentially making tiny little onion rings. Fry for 3-5 minutes, or until they're golden brown. Hit these with a pinch of brown sugar, let them go for another minute or two, then transfer them to paper towels and set aside. Keep the oil in the pan...you're gonna use it.
2. Put the cashews into a small dry pan and sauté over med-low flame until they start getting brown. You can also put them under the broiler, but whenever I do, I forget them and they burn...I like them where I can keep an eye on them.
3. Mix the tamarind concentrate with ½ cup of boiling water. Add in sugar, soy and juice from half a lime. Stir to dissolve sugar.
4. Cut avocado flesh into 1-inch chunks and toss into a bowl with the juice from the other half of that lime.
5. Time for the shrimp. Return to that waiting oily pan and heat it back up (over medium-high heat). Sauté the ginger and a dash of salt for about 30 seconds. Add the shrimp and continue to sauté for another 4 minutes, then stir in the tamarind mixture. Let this go until the shrimp are cooked through (about two minutes).
6. Spoon the shrimp into a bowl, layer in the avocado and then sprinkle with the cashews and the fried shallots. Top with the hot tamarind mixture left in the pan.

This is great over steamed rice.

SHRIMP AND PENNE

Excessively straightforward, quick and easy. One of the nice things about this, besides the aforementioned adjectives, is you can use it as a base recipe and add whatever you want (zuke, red bell pepper, Italian sausage) or simply eat as is. This serves two, but with a little 2nd grade math, you can expand this recipe to feed more.

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

½ lb penne

2 Roma tomatoes – chopped

small handful basil – chopped

1 lb shrimp – shelled and deveined

2 red jalapenos – minced (FYI – red jalapenos are riper, sweeter and milder than the green)

1 lime – juiced

fresh Parmesan – grated

1. Bring a big pot of water to a boil, toss in some salt, 1 tablespoon of the oil, followed by the penne. Check the package that the pasta came in for cooking instructions (penne generally needs about 13 minutes).
2. In the meantime, combine chopped tomatoes with another tablespoon of oil, basil, salt and pepper and set aside on the counter (not the fridge).
3. When the penne is about halfway cooked, get those shrimp going. Heat up the final tablespoon of oil in a pan over a med-high flame, and fling in the crustaceans. Give 'em about 2 minutes, toss in the peppers and turn the shrimp. At this point, squeeze in juice from half the lime. Let this go for another 2 or 3 minutes (you want them pink, but not overcooked) and finish off by squeezing in the juice from the other lime half. Set this pan aside.
4. If you've timed it out right, your pasta should be perfectly al dente. Drain it, toss it back into the pot for about 30 seconds to get off excess water, and dump in the tomatoes. Give it a stir, then add the shrimp. One more stir for luck and you're ready to serve.

Portion onto plates or into bowls and top with grated fresh Parmesan.

SHRIMP CAKES

★ ★ ★

I love crab cakes and have made/served/eaten them for years, but every once in a while, you need to change it up, hence this recipe. These are delicious as a main course and classy as appetizers.

Note: the cakes take an hour to chill/set up prior to frying

1 lb shrimp – shelled, deveined and chopped into ½" pieces

⅓ cup dried breadcrumbs

3 tablespoons scallions – finely chopped

1 teaspoon lemon zest – finely grated

1 teaspoon smoked paprika

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon pepper

2 large eggs – beaten

1½ cups panko (crunchy Japanese breadcrumbs)

Olive (or grapeseed) oil for frying

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1. In a large bowl, mix the chopped shrimp with the regular breadcrumbs, scallions, lemon zest, smoked paprika, salt and pepper, then fold in the beaten eggs.
 2. Scoop up a small handful of the mixture and shape into a patty. It's wet, but will firm up, so don't fret.
 3. Pour some of the panko onto a plate and delicately push the shrimp cake into the crumbs (do both sides), then place the crusted cake onto a platter lined with wax paper. Repeat until all the shrimp mixture is used up.
 4. Slide these into the fridge for at least an hour.
 5. Grab a large skillet and heat a few tablespoons of oil over med-high heat. Fry in two batches (don't crowd your pan). Cook until the cakes are browned and cooked through, about 3 minutes per side (results may vary depending upon a whole lot of factors).
 6. Transfer the first batch into a warmish oven (250°) while you add a little more oil and do the second batch.

I serve with a simple Spicy Paprika Mayo (see "*Crab Cakes*" for the recipe).

SHRIMP CURRY

☆☆☆

This homegrown concoction has become one of my absolute favorites. It's quick, easy and definitely "company worthy." If you like curries, I highly recommend this. Serves 4.

Note: you can use this same recipe to make lamb curry

1½ lbs shrimp – shelled and deveined

Note: if making this for two people, reduce to 1 pound of shrimp, but follow the rest of the recipe as is

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 cup onion – minced

1 tablespoon fresh ginger – grated

1½ tablespoons curry powder

14 oz can chopped tomatoes

½ cup coconut milk

4 oz can chopped green chilies - drained

handful cilantro – chopped

steamed rice – enough to serve this over

1. Get your rice going.
2. Heat up a large frying pan on medium heat, toss in oil and sauté the onions until limp, about five minutes. Add the ginger and cook for another minute or so.
3. Add the curry powder and cook for another minute. Things might be getting pretty dry in the pan right about now. You can add another dash of olive oil at this point if necessary.
4. Add the shrimp and tomatoes (along with the juices from the can) and simmer for about 4 minutes.
5. Stir in the coconut milk and add the chopped chilies. Let this go for another two minutes or so. Fold in the cilantro, then season with a little salt and you are ready to rock, Indian style.

Serve over rice with chutney on the side.

SHRIMP SUMMER ROLLS

Vietnamese rolls are a fun and tasty party food, or a healthy lunch option (lots of fresh vegetables herein). Try setting up a "summer roll bar" (like a salad bar) with different stuffing options. This comes to you from Food & Wine Magazine. Makes 16 rolls.

The Roll

*2 cups carrots – peeled and shredded
1 small red onion – thinly sliced
¼ cup unseasoned rice wine vinegar
2 tablespoons sugar
16 8-inch round rice papers
16 cilantro sprigs
1 head green cabbage – sliced thin
1 lb shrimp – cooked and halved lengthwise
2 yellow bell peppers – sliced thin*

The Dipping Sauce

*¼ cup soy sauce
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon ginger – minced
½ lime – juiced
1 teaspoon sesame oil
1 teaspoon fish sauce
2 teaspoons brown sugar
2 green onions – minced*

1. Toss carrots, onion and ¼ cup of rice wine vinegar, and 2 tablespoons of sugar. Let this stand for 30 minutes, then drain.
2. Soak the rice paper (ONE AT A TIME) in hot water until pliable. This only takes about 10 seconds. Transfer the floppy disc onto a work surface and lay some cilantro and cabbage on the lower third of the rice paper (yes, there is math involved).
3. Top the cabbage with 3 shrimp halves, add on some yellow pepper strips and the pickled veg (that would be your carrot/onion mixture).
4. Time to roll. Fold in the sides and roll up tightly. Place this beauty on a platter and get to work on the remaining 15.
5. To serve, slice the roll in half (with a sharp knife) and don't forget the dipping sauce.

Variations include: sliced or minced pork, cellophane noodles, vermicelli, mint leaves, basil, daikon sprouts, cucumber...

SHRIMP TACO SALAD

☆☆☆

This sounds like a lot of work, and the multitude of ingredients looks intimidating for a simple taco salad, but look again – it's quite easy. Just a bunch of chopping and frying. Great for a festive changeup from the usual salad fare. Dinner for 2 big eaters; starter salad for 4.

The Cold Part Of The Salad

½ head iceberg lettuce – shredded

2 tomatoes – chopped

handful cilantro – chopped

1 large avocado – chunked

1 cup cheese (either cheddar or Jack or a combination of both) – grated

The Dressing

3 heaping tablespoons mayo

1 tablespoon ketchup (more or less)

few dashes paprika

The Shrimp

1 lb shrimp – peeled and deveined (use 21-25s)

shot of olive (or grapeseed) oil

few shakes chili powder

few shakes cumin

few shakes Old Bay

pinch cayenne

1 lime – juiced

The Other Stuff

½ red onion – minced

2 oz chopped green chilies (canned is fine)

12 oz can black, red or pinto beans – drained and rinsed

1 bag tortilla chips

ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Step one** – make the cold part of the salad, combining lettuce, tomatoes, avocado and cilantro. Hold back on the cheese for the moment.
2. **Step two** – make the dressing (mayo, ketchup and paprika), which is basically Thousand Island with a little kick. You want this to look rich and pink, so adjust the amount of ketchup for the tastiest result.

3. **Step three – the shrimp.** Heat oil in pan over med to med-high. Assuming you've already cleaned the shrimp, cut in half width-wise, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and dump into the skillet. Now shake in the Old Bay, cumin, chili powder and cayenne (increase or decrease spices to taste). When the shrimp is just about done (about 3 minutes), cut that lime in half and squeeze the juice into the pan. Toss the shrimp around for a few more minutes and transfer to a bowl and hold (cover to keep warm).
4. **Step four – the other stuff.** Dump the onion and chilies into the same pan (you may want to add a few more drops of oil) and cook until they soften (about 6 minutes). Add the beans and let this go for another 4-5 minutes. Don't let the beans cook too long or they'll get mushy.
5. In the meantime, toss the salad (from #1) with the dressing in a large bowl, then divide this into individual servings and get ready for the next step.
6. Add the bean/onion/chili mixture (dividing equally among the bowls) and top with the shrimp. Finally, scatter some mixed cheese over the whole thing.

Serve with tortilla chips (you could even toss these right into the salad if you want), salsa and a couple of beers.

SIZZLING SALT AND CHILI PEPPER SHRIMP

From the Yee Han Restaurant in Hong Kong. Other dishes on the menu include: Squirrel Mandarin Fish; Chicken Feet in Black Bean Sauce; and Snapper Turtle Head Soup. Bad news...none of those recipes appear herein.

*1 lb shrimp (shells on)
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon sugar
¼ teaspoon chili powder
3 tablespoons olive (or grapeseed) oil
1 tablespoon garlic – minced
1 tablespoon green chili – thinly sliced (you can use whatever kind of chili you want, depending upon how much heat you like)
2 scallions – thinly sliced*

1. Remove the shrimp legs but leave on the shells and tails.
2. Rinse the shrimp and pat dry.
3. Combine salt, sugar and chili powder in a small bowl.
4. Grab a wok (or frying pan). Heat up the pan then swirl in one tablespoon oil and add the garlic and sliced pepper. Stir fry for only 30 seconds.
5. Add another tablespoon of oil and toss in the shrimp. Fry until they begin to turn pink (two or three minutes).
6. Swirl in the final tablespoon of oil and add the salt mixture and continue to stir for another minute or two.
7. Finally, toss in the scallions for a few moments and you're done.

Serve over steamed rice or alongside fried rice.

If you're still hungry, you might want to find that squirrel fish recipe (fyi – a "squirrel fish" is actually a freshwater fish that's deep fried and takes on the shape of a squirrel after being run over by a careless motorist)

SPICY SHRIMP AND BROCCOLINI OVER COCONUT RICE

☆☆☆

Another remarkably easy dish that's got your seafood, your starch and your green vegetable covered. This dish is simple and sumptuous. I definitely recommend taking it out for a test drive. Broccolini is a cross between good old American broccoli (the stuff your mother tried to make you eat) and Chinese broccoli (the stuff Chinese mothers tried to make their kids eat). It's sometimes mistakenly referred to as "baby broccoli." Once you try it, I'm betting you'll become a fan.

*1 lb broccolini
1½ lbs shrimp – peeled and deveined
1 tablespoon Sriracha sauce
2 teaspoons cornstarch
½ cup chicken broth
½ cup unsweetened coconut milk
1 tablespoon vegetable (or grapeseed) oil*

1. See the recipe for "Coconut Rice" and get it going.
2. Trim the broccolini and cut into 2" diagonal lengths. Hold.
3. Toss the shrimp with the hot sauce and a pinch of salt in a bowl. Hold.
4. In another bowl, stir together the cornstarch, ¼ cup of the chicken broth and the coconut milk until the cornstarch is dissolved.
5. Time to put it all together. Grab a wok (or a skillet if you are wokless) and crank the burner to high. Add a tablespoon of oil, then toss in the broccolini and stir-fry until it's bright green (just a minute or two).
6. Add the remaining ¼ cup chicken broth then add the shrimp, stirring, for 3 minutes.
7. Pour the cornstarch mixture down the side of the wok and boil until the sauce is thickened, about 3 minutes.

Fluff up and plate the rice, add the broc/shrimp and dig in.

SPICY SHRIMP SALAD

Very flavorful way to take a basic bowl of lettuce and tomatoes to the next level. If you don't want to deal with the whole salad thing, these little crustaceans are great on their own as appetizers.

The Remoulade (aka sauce)

*1 cup mayo
1 tablespoon whole grain mustard
2 teaspoons tomato paste
1 teaspoon shallots – minced
¼ teaspoon Worcestershire
½ teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
½ teaspoon sugar
½ teaspoon red-wine vinegar
pinch cayenne*

The Shrimp

*2 lbs shrimp – in shell w/o heads
1 lemon – thinly sliced
1 small, sweet onion – thinly sliced
2 celery stalks – thinly sliced
1 bay leaf
1 tablespoon Old Bay seasoning
1 teaspoon salt
12 oz lager-style beer
½ cup cider vinegar*

The Salad

Lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers...whatever you like...

1. To make the remoulade, stir together all the ingredients and chill, covered, one hour. If that was too complicated, please reread Step #1.
2. Onto the shrimp...combine lemon, onion, celery, bay leaf, Old Bay, and salt in large bowl (glass or metal) and toss in shrimp. Mix it all together, cover, and let sit at room temp for about 15 minutes.
3. You'll be using a steamer pot for this. Bring the beer and vinegar to a boil and put the shrimp/vegetable mixture into the steamer insert and steam this over the fragrant liquid for about 3 minutes. Stir, then continue to steam for another 4 to 5 minutes.
4. Whip up your salad. I've found that a simple oil and vinegar dressing on the salad is an excellent complement to the shrimp.

5. Pluck the shrimp out of the steamer (leave the rest of the stuff behind), peel the shrimp and mix them together with about half of the remoulade. Add these to the salad and you're ready to go.

Use the remainder of the remoulade for extra dressing.

SWEET AND PUNGENT SHRIMP

One of my favorite dishes at the Panda Inn, which originated in Pasadena, CA. If you're a fan of Chinese food and happen to be in the LA area, seek out the flagship restaurant. It's amazing. There are a lot of little annoying steps in this recipe, but all in all it's fairly simple and actually tastes like something out of their restaurant kitchen (well, close anyway).

*½ lb shrimp – shelled and deveined (use 21-25s)
1 tablespoon cooking wine/sherry
½ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons water
1 egg white – beaten
1½-2 tablespoons cornstarch
1 tablespoon vegetable oil + 4 tablespoons veg (or grapeseed) oil for frying
2 tablespoons scallions – chopped
½ tablespoon ginger – chopped
1 teaspoon chili paste
1½ tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons soy – mixed with 2 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon white vinegar
1 teaspoon sesame oil*

1. Combine wine, salt and water. Let sit for a few minutes, then add egg white and 1 tablespoon cornstarch. Stir. Now add a tablespoon of vegetable oil and mix.
2. Add a little more cornstarch to mixture...maybe another tablespoon. You want it thickened, but not gummy.
3. Add the shrimp to this mixture and stir to coat.
4. Heat wok and then add 2 tablespoons of oil for frying. Deep fry shrimp for 2 minutes...remove and drain. Remove oil from wok (I pour it into a glass measuring cup and put it in the freezer overnight, then dump it into the garbage in the morning).
5. Reheat the wok and add 2 more tablespoons of oil. Stir fry the scallions, ginger and chili paste until fragrant (which won't take long). Add sugar, soy-water and vinegar. Bring all to a boil.
6. Add shrimp and sesame oil and stir for a minute or two. Remove, grab your chopsticks and dig in.

CRAB AND SHRIMP GUMBO (hold the "gumbo")

When you look at the list of ingredients below, you'll notice that I don't use okra in my gumbo, despite the fact that okra is actually an African plant called "okingumbo"...which is where the dish's name originated. To me, okra tastes like the paste I used to eat out of the jar in preschool (don't judge). This recipe serves 6-8, so plan accordingly.

*¾ cup vegetable oil
1½ cups onion – chopped coarsely
1 red bell pepper – chopped
½ cup celery – chopped fine
3 tablespoons butter
¼ cup flour
6 oz tomato paste
6 cups water
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ teaspoon cayenne
1 teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon dried thyme
1 tablespoon salt
2 bay leaves
1 lb crabmeat (you can use canned or fresh here)
1 lb shrimp – peeled and deveined (I use 21-25s)
8 cups cooked long-grain white rice (for serving)*

1. Heat ¼ cup of oil in Dutch oven over med-low. Add onion, bell pepper and celery. Stir occasionally until vegetables are soft, 6 to 7 minutes. Remove this from the heat and set it aside.
2. In the meantime, make some roux. Get a large skillet and crank up the burner to medium. Melt the butter and add the flour. Cook, stirring constantly until chestnut brown (somewhere between blond and mahogany). This should take about 10 minutes. Transfer this sticky bit of nirvana to the Dutch oven, blending it in with the vegetables.
3. Add the tomato paste and water and give everything a stir.
4. Now add the pepper flakes, cayenne, paprika, dried thyme, salt and bay leaves. Let this simmer for 10 minutes.
5. Time for the good stuff. Stir in the crabmeat and the shrimp. Cook until the crabmeat is heated through, and the shrimp turn pink (about 4 minutes).
6. Remove and discard the bay leaves (what a waste, huh?)

To serve, fill individual bowls with steaming hot cooked rice and ladle the stew over the top. Put some *Dirty Dozen Brass Band* on the stereo, adorn yourself with some plastic beads and dig in...you'll swear you're at Mardi Gras.

CRAB CAKES

☆☆☆

This continues to be a reliable go-to and can be either a main course or an appetizer. You can use fresh crabmeat or go with the canned variety (available at my local Costco. Probably yours too). One of the things that sets this apart from many crab cake recipes is the minimal amount of bread binding, which means more good crab flavor. This is too tasty and too easy not to try.

Note: requires 2 hours to set, so plan accordingly

1 lb crabmeat (if you're using fresh crab, pick through it and get out all the shells)

1/3 cup dry breadcrumbs

2 tablespoons fresh chives – minced

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 tablespoon seafood seasoning (e.g. Old Bay)

1 tablespoon lime juice (about 1/2 lime)

2 eggs – beaten

1 cup panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)

oil for frying (can use either vegetable or olive oil)

1. Combine the crab with the basic breadcrumbs and gently mix.
2. Stir in the chives, pepper, seafood seasoning and lime juice. DO NOT CRUSH the crabmeat.
3. Add the beaten eggs, mixing gently.
4. Form a crab cake patty by scooping up a small handful (about the size of a small lime) of the mixture and shaping it in your hand...approximately 3 inches in diameter. Thinner is better than plumper. **Note: if you're making these as an appetizer, go smaller.**
5. Pour some of the panko onto a plate and delicately push the cake into the crumbs (do both sides), then place the crusted patty on a platter lined with wax paper. Repeat until all the crab mixture is gone (you'll end up with 12-13 cakes). Cover with more wax paper and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.
6. Flash forward to 2 hours later...heat up 2 tablespoons of oil in a large frying pan over med-high flame. Sauté the cakes until brown on both sides (3 to 4 minutes per side). Since you'll be doing these in batches, slide a baking sheet into a 250° oven and put the finished cakes in there to keep warm.

AND NOW... TO DRESS THESE UP...

Hot Lime Mayo

1 egg yolk

1 lime – juiced

¾ cup of vegetable oil

1 teaspoon sambal olek (or other hot chili sauce)

½ teaspoon lime zest

1. Put egg yolk and lime juice in blender and whirl. SLOWLY add the vegetable oil.
2. Add the sambal olek and lime zest, then transfer to fridge to cool down for at least an hour.

Spicy Paprika Mayo

½ cup mayo

1 tablespoon ketchup

1 teaspoon spicy paprika

1. Basically you're making a Thousand Island dressing, so as you combine the ingredients adjust the ketchup accordingly until you end up with a nice rose color.
2. Regarding the paprika; start out with less...you can always add more.

Drizzle the spicy mayo on the plates and arrange cakes on top. Dab more spicy mayo on top of each cake. For extra style points, add some lime wedges...now you're good to go.

CRAB LOUIE

Very simple and classy salad, which originated at Solari's in The City (that would be San Francisco...which, by the way, should NEVER be called "Frisco.") You can add your own personal touches and/or delete whatever doesn't appeal to you... then you can name it after yourself. Serves four.

*1½ lb jumbo crabmeat (SF style would be fresh Dungeness)
1 head of iceberg lettuce – shredded
2 tablespoons capers
a few tomatoes
a few hard-boiled eggs
a few lemons
Louie dressing (see below)*

Crab Louie Dressing

*1 cup mayo
¼ cup chili sauce
¼ cup scallions – minced
2 tablespoons green olives – minced
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoon horseradish
S&P*

1. Line 4 plates with shredded lettuce.
2. Put crab atop the lettuce (still with me?)
3. Garnish with all the other stuff (capers, eggs, tomatoes, lemon wedges) and serve dressing on the side.

Tough, huh? You can convert very easily to Shrimp Louie or Lobster Louie, or if you want to berate your guests while they eat, you can go with Crab Louie DePalma (for you Millennials, that's a *TAXI* reference, which was a classic sitcom. For you Gen Alphas, a *taxi* is a yellow version of what you call an Uber or Lyft).

CIOPPINO

☆☆☆

I love this recipe for two reasons: a) cioppino was developed in the late 1800s by Portuguese and Italian fishermen who settled in the North Beach section of San Francisco; and b) it tastes incredible. A few things you need to know about cioppino...it's work intensive, it's expensive, it's really messy, and it's worth it. Serves four hungry, adventurous people.

1/3 cup olive oil

1 large onion – sliced

1 bunch scallions – trimmed and sliced

1 red bell pepper – cored, seeded and chopped coarse

2 cups water

2 cups canned tomato puree

1 cup canned tomato sauce

1 cup dry wine (can be either red or white...whatever you're drinking while you're making this would be fine)

2 teaspoons salt

1 bay leaf

1/4 teaspoon dried rosemary

1/4 teaspoon dried thyme

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

3 Dungeness crabs – cut up, shells slightly cracked

12 clams – scrubbed and debearded

1 lb shrimp – peeled and deveined

1 or 2 loaves of sourdough bread (in keeping with the SF tradition)

1. Heat oil over med-high heat in a large, deep pot. Use a big one, because you've got a lot of stuff going in.
2. Add onions, scallions and red bell pepper, and sauté, stirring often, for about five minutes.
3. Add water, tomato puree, tomato sauce, wine, salt, bay leaf, rosemary, thyme and pepper. Bring to a boil, then lower heat to med-low, cover and let simmer for an hour (stirring whenever you get the urge).
4. **It's now one hour later** – add the crab and scatter the clams over the top. Push all of this (gently) down into the sauce. Cover and cook over med heat for 10 minutes.
5. We haven't forgotten the shrimp; their time has finally come. Toss them into the mix and let this all go for another 5 minutes.
6. When you're done, make sure all the clams have opened. Don't eat any that are still closed (since that means they are bad...and the last thing you want to do is choke down a bad clam). Scoop cioppino out into individual bowls and go for it.

Note: the messiest thing about this is digging the crab meat out of the shells (which are covered in **HOT** thick sauce) so make it easier on yourself and your guests and give the shells a little pre-crack before putting the crab into the pot. Unfortunately, you can't put the crab in unshelled, since it would fall apart and get mushy...and that's not good. You'll need crab forks and those shell crunching things that look like walnut crackers. They're cheap, so invest in them. Trust me, you'll make this more than once.

A memorable, delicious and messy meal. Be sure to supply a large bowl for discarded shells, finger bowls (I kid you not) and a roll (or two) of paper towels.

SHELLFISH AND PASTA IN STEAMING BROTH

Minimal prep and so easy it almost cooks itself, and yet it's great for company (it'll serve four). If you want to bulk it up a bit, you can add more seafood and noodles without increasing the other ingredients. How can you not give this a try?

4 cups chicken stock -OR- fish stock

2 tablespoons ginger – minced

8 sea scallops

12 shrimp – peeled and deveined

1 lb clams (see "Steamed Clams With Cilantro and Red Pepper" for cleaning tips)

1 lb noodles (your choice of shape – I like short pasta with this, like penne or rotini)

1 tablespoon of chili paste

a handful basil – chopped

2 handfuls cilantro – chopped

2 limes

1. In a steamer pot, bring the stock to a boil, add the ginger and simmer. Steam the seafood over this fragrant stock until the prawns are pink, the scallops are firm, and the clams are open for business. Figure about 8 minutes.
2. In the meantime, cook the noodles (in a different pot...was that too obvious?). When the pasta's ready, stir in the chili paste (you can use a little more chili paste if you want a bigger jolt).
3. Divide the cooked and spicy noodles between 4 deep bowls and lay in the seafood and herbs. Top this with the steaming broth.
4. Finish with a squeeze of lime.

You end up with a great tasting broth, so have some bread handy to soak it up.

SAUTÉED SCALLOPS WITH CHERRY TOMATOES AND SCALLIONS

☆☆☆

This is the best recipe I've come across for sautéed scallops. You get an amazing blend of flavors from the tomatoes and scallions. Plus, it's really fast and incredibly easy. This is definitely one to share with company. While you're busy frying up your scallops in a pan of blistering hot oil, ponder the fact that those little rascals were once very active swimmers – in fact, scallops are the only migratory bivalves.

*1 lb sea scallops (the large ones)
3 tablespoons olive (or grapeseed) oil
4 scallions – chopped
12 ounces cherry tomatoes
1 lemon – juiced
1 teaspoon sweet or smoked paprika*

1. Make sure the little side muscles are removed from the scallops (they get tough), then rinse the scallops and pat them dry with paper towels. Sprinkle with sea salt and pepper.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in large skillet over med-high heat. Add the scallops and sauté until brown on both sides (3-4 minutes per side). Transfer these to a plate and loosely tent with foil (you want to keep them warm, not cook them more).
3. Add another spoonful of oil to the same pan, lower the heat to medium and toss in the tomatoes. Sauté for a few minutes, then add the scallions (they'll burn a bit, which is okay.) Continue to sauté until the tomatoes begin to burst and release their juices.
4. Add the lemon juice, sprinkle in the paprika, and then add back in the scallops (and any juices that have collected on the plate). Heat these through (another minute or two).
5. Hit with a touch more S&P, and they are ready for consumption.

Serve with steamed white rice (or go with the "Coconut Rice"), which'll soak up the juices.

SEARED SCALLOPS WITH TANGERINE SAUCE

You can tell from the name that this is a very flavorful dish. It looks like a lot of work, but I found the whole process to be relatively painless. Like most wok recipes, it's all about the chopping and slicing. Serve with a side of rice and you've got yourself a meal.

*1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 teaspoon salt
1 lb sea scallops (those are the larger ones)
3 tablespoons tangerine juice
1 tablespoon hoisin sauce
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon brown sugar
1 teaspoon chili paste
1 tablespoon tangerine zest – minced
1 teaspoon ginger – minced
3 tablespoons vegetable (or grapeseed) oil
1 medium zucchini – halved lengthwise and thinly sliced crosswise
1 medium yellow squash – cut just like the zuke
1 small carrot – thinly sliced on the diagonal
½ onion – sliced
½ red pepper – sliced thin*

1. In a large bowl, mix cornstarch with a teaspoon of salt. Throw in scallops and toss to coat.
2. In a smaller bowl, mix tangerine juice with hoisin, vinegar, soy, sugar and chili paste.
3. In yet a smaller bowl, combine zest and ginger.
4. Grab a wok and heat up 1½ tablespoons oil over high heat. Add scallops in a single layer and cook **without stirring** until they're golden on the bottom, about 3 minutes. Turn 'em over and cook until they're firm, another 3 minutes or so. Transfer scallops to a plate.
5. Now put the remaining 1½ tablespoons of oil into the wok and toss in the tiny bowl contents (from Step #3), which would be the zest and ginger. Cook for about 15 to 20 seconds. This goes *FAST* so have the other stuff standing by and ready to go.
6. Add the zuke, squash, carrot, onion and red pepper and cook until they're tender, but crisp (about 5 minutes).
7. Stir in the middle bowl contents (the tangerine sauce) and cook until slightly thickened...only about 30 seconds.
8. Return the scallops to the wok, stirring until they are heated through (about 2 minutes), and serve.

SEAFOOD CREPES

☆☆☆

This dish is incredible, but it's slightly more work than most of the other recipes in this compilation. The sauce is a little complicated, but the filling's pretty easy, so it balances out. Bottom line? It's completely worth the effort once or twice a year. If you've got a small fancy dinner party coming up, or have a special occasion with a loved one, go for it.

The Sauce

*1 cup yellow onion – diced
2 carrots – chopped
2 stalks of celery – chopped
1 large shallot – minced
3 tablespoons butter
2 cups white wine
¼ cup clam juice
1 cup water
1½ cups heavy cream
some roux – (2 tablespoons butter + 3 tablespoons flour)
pinch white pepper*

The Filling

*2 tablespoons butter
8 ounces cooked bay shrimp – minced
8 ounces crabmeat **-OR-** lobster meat
2 plum tomatoes – seeded and diced
½ cup scallions – chopped*

The Crepes

Let's not get delusional here. Buy these pre-made.

START WITH THE SAUCE

1. We begin with a modified French mirepoix: toss the onions, carrots, celery and shallots into a large frying pan with the butter. Medium heat for 5 minutes.
2. Add the wine and bring to a boil, then reduce to a rolling simmer. Let this go until it's reduced by half (about 5-7 minutes).
3. Add the clam juice and the water and let this simmer for about 5 minutes. If you're worried about it looking too runny at this point, don't. It'll thicken up.
4. Strain this mixture and return the liquid to the saucepot. Just to be clear, you are **keeping the liquid and throwing away those vegetables**.
5. Add the cream and simmer for 5-7 minutes.

6. In the meantime, you'll want to have started the roux, which is simply a combination of butter and flour. In a separate small pan, melt the butter on medium heat and add the flour to form a paste. Stir until it just starts to brown (about 8 minutes). Don't be intimidated by this step because it's important (this is the thickener).
7. When the roux is done, add it to the sauce (I find it's easier to add some of the liquid to the roux, then dump that mixture back into the sauce). Simmer to thicken.
8. Season with white pepper.
9. Whew. You're done. Keep this warm.

THE FILLING

1. Relax. This is very straightforward. Heat up a skillet over medium heat, toss in the butter, then add the shrimp and crab. Let it cook through for about 3 or 4 minutes.
2. Pour in the sauce and let this all cook together for a few minutes.
3. Fold in the diced tomatoes and scallions and season with S&P.

Grab a crepe, fill it with some of the incredible seafood mixture and gently roll it up. You'll get 7 or 8 crepes out of this if you don't overload them.

Top the crepes with the remaining sauce/mixture.

If you've got some extra crepes, check out "*Apple Cinnamon Crepes*" for dessert.

STEAMED CLAMS WITH CILANTRO

If you like clams, this is simple and fast. Actually, this is simple and fast even if you don't like clams. This can work as an appetizer, or as a complete low cal, high protein dinner. You'll want to minimize the beach detritus in the clams because you're cooking them in the same broth that will later act as a flavorful liquid in your bowl; to that end, soak the clams for 20 minutes in fresh water with a little flour. As the rascals breathe, they'll be filtering through the fresh water and pushing the sand and salt water out of their shells. This also works with mussels. How many other about-to-be-eaten creatures have the courtesy to clean themselves? Serves four.

*4 dozen clams (I favor littlenecks or manilas)
5 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 bunch scallions – thinly sliced (about a cup)
1½ cups cilantro – chopped
2 cups sake **-OR-** dry vermouth
1 cup dry white wine
1 teaspoon Worcestershire
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes*

1. Melt 4 tablespoons butter in large pot over low-med heat. Add scallions and sauté for 3 minutes.
2. Add 1 cup of the chopped cilantro along with the sake, wine, Worcestershire and red pepper. Increase heat and bring to a boil.
3. Dump in the clams. Put the lid on so none of the pesky mollusks can escape.
4. Cook until clams open, shaking pot often (it keeps them awake as they die), about 6 minutes.
5. Transfer clams to bowls. **You know to discard any clams that don't open, right?**
6. Boil the remaining liquid over high heat for about 2 minutes, making it a bit thicker. Whisk in the remaining tablespoon of butter.
7. Season with S&P and pour broth over clams.

Garnish with remaining cilantro and serve with loaf of crusty French bread (sourdough's okay too, but rye just won't cut it here and don't even think about raisin bread).

FINNED FARE

Fish Tacos*
Grilled Halibut With Honeydew Salsa
Halibut In Papillote
Pan-Seared Halibut Cheeks
Panko Crusted Halibut
Poissons Provençale
Pete's Cedar Plank Salmon
Poached Salmon
Grilled Sea Bass With Mint In Foil
Roasted Sea Bass Stuffed With Herbs
Sea Bass With Chili And Saffron
Tandoori Sea Bass
Pan-Seared Tuna With Cilantro And Basil
Pan-Seared Tuna With Sesame Seeds
Orange Roughy With Mango And Peppers
Miso-Marinated Black Cod
Red Snapper Veracruz

FISH TACOS

There are dozens of variations of fish tacos, and none of them are written in stone, so the moral of this story is find a fish that suits your taste and build your taco with your favorite toppings. That said, here's my version.

1 lb halibut – sliced into a few pieces for ease of cooking

Tortillas – I generally use the 6" flour variety (labeled "Fajita size")

The Marinade

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons lime juice

1 teaspoon chili powder

1 teaspoon cumin

½ teaspoon paprika

½ teaspoon kosher salt

1. Place your fish in a baking dish and sprinkle with a little salt and pepper.
2. Whisk together the marinade ingredients and pour over the fish, then pop the fish into the fridge for 30 to 45 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 375°. Pat your fish dry and put into a clean baking dish in a single layer. Bake for 6-7 minutes per side (you want it flaky).

As any taco eater knows, you have a variety of options. If you're eating at my house, you'll get your taco constructed thusly: start with a warm flour tortilla, followed by the fish, a dab of "*Spicy Paprika Mayo*" (page 147) or sour cream, followed by "*Mango Salsa*", cilantro and a squeeze of lime. I'll also have some diced avocados standing by for my more discriminating guests.

GRILLED HALIBUT WITH HONEYDEW SALSA

This is a terrific grilled fish option during the summer, since honeydews are in season and this salsa is the perfect warm weather condiment. You can also do this with swordfish. Simple, refreshing and impressive. I give it an 8 on the company worthy scale (even the Russian judge gives it a 7.5).

Note: the fish needs 30 minutes marinating time

*4 halibut fillets
2 tablespoons ground black pepper
¼ cup olive oil
2 cloves garlic – minced
2 tablespoons fresh basil – chopped*

The Salsa

*1 healthy sized peach – peeled and diced
1 cup ripe honeydew melon – diced
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice (about 2 limes)
1 tablespoon fresh mint – minced
½ tablespoon fresh ginger – grated
½ teaspoon sea salt*

1. Start with the salsa: combine all ingredients and put in the fridge.
2. Onto the fish: sprinkle both sides of the halibut with salt and pepper and place in glass dish.
3. Prepare a marinade by putting the oil, garlic and basil in a blender and cranking it to high speed for 2 to 3 minutes. Pour this over the fish and refrigerate for 30 minutes (can go up to an hour). Gently turn the fish a few times.
4. Place the halibut on an oiled grill and BBQ over medium to high heat for 5 to 8 minutes per side, or until the fish just begins to flake.

Note: grilling fish can sometimes be tricky if your fish refuses to hold its shape. My advice is to get a flat, perforated grilling tray that sits atop your grate. Great for fish and chopped vegetables.

Carefully slide the fish onto a plate and serve the salsa on top or on the side. Add a little rice and enjoy your dinner.

By the way, the honeydew salsa rocks with other grilled fish, so give it a try.

HALIBUT IN PAPILLOTE

☆☆☆

This is fish cooked in parchment paper, but it sounds so much better in French (actually it doesn't, since the French term for halibut is "fletan" and if I called it "Fletan in Papillote" you'd skip right past this recipe). If you like halibut (or fletan), you should give this simple and healthy dish a shot.

parchment paper (you'll need a few feet of it)

4 halibut fillets – about 1" thick

4 + 2 tablespoons olive oil (use regular or light)

4 tablespoons dry white wine

2 carrots – peeled and julienned (cut into long, thin strips)

1 red pepper – seeded and julienned

1 yellow pepper – ditto

1 bundle thin asparagus spears (optional but dark green vegetables are good for you and I'm here to look out for your long-range health)

2 tablespoons lime juice

AND...have a stapler standing by...(a red Swingline™ is preferable, but any stapler will do)

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Let's start with the fish and the parchment paper. For each piece of fish, tear off about 12" of paper and crease it in the middle. Lay a piece of fish near the fold and sprinkle with about a tablespoon of oil and a tablespoon of wine, then a little S&P.
3. Fold the paper over the top and then fold up the edges, making a neat packet. Grab that stapler and staple up the packet. I realize this method is more Office Depot than *Cordon Bleu*, but just roll with it.
4. In a medium sized bowl, combine carrots and peppers with 2 tablespoons oil and lime juice. Hit with some S&P, toss, and then bundle them up repeating the same cutting/folding/stapling steps with the vegetables. You'll end up making two packets.
5. If you're adding asparagus, which works well with this dish, toss the spears with a little oil and some S&P and wrap 'em up the same way.
6. Put all the packets onto a large baking sheet and slide into the oven. Bake until the paper is puffed up and starting to brown, about 16 minutes. Remove from oven and carefully cut open the packets with scissors. **Note: only cook the asparagus for 13 minutes or it'll get mushy.**

The fish and vegetables are a complete meal, but you can add some steamed rice on the side if that's your thing. Don't you feel healthier already?

PAN-SEARED HALIBUT CHEEKS

☆☆☆

Still one of my favorite dishes, but I've sadly come to realize that cheeks are very difficult to acquire outside of Vancouver, which is a culinary travesty. And yes, we're talking about actual cheeks from halibut, but don't be fooled. An average halibut is between 50 and 100 pounds, so their cheeks are about the size of your palm. Great flavor and amazing texture...if you come across any cheeks at your local fishmonger, go for it.

The Cheeks

4 large halibut cheeks (about 8 oz each)

½ cup flour

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons olive oil

Lemon Sauce (this is a federally mandated requirement in Canada)

½ cup dry white wine

1 shallot – minced

1 cup unsalted butter – chilled and cut into small pieces

1 lemon – zested then juiced

STARTING WITH THE SAUCE:

1. Combine wine and shallots in saucepan. Bring to boil and keep it going until reduced by about half (3 to 4 minutes).
2. Remove from heat and whisk in cold butter, a piece at a time, until all the butter is used, and the sauce has a creamy consistency.
3. Stir in lemon zest, lemon juice and S&P to taste.
4. Set aside in warm spot, or over a pan of barely simmering water, until ready to use. Do Not Let The Sauce Boil Again (or it will separate). The trick is to make the sauce just before you're ready to use it.

NOW FOR THOSE CHEEKS:

1. Season the halibut with S&P. Lightly coat with flour.
2. Heat butter and oil together in large skillet (med-high heat).
3. Add the cheeks and cook until nicely browned (3 to 5 minutes per side).

Put your cheeks on plates and ladle the sauce over the top.

PANKO CRUSTED HALIBUT

☆☆☆

This is my healthier version of the fish in "fish & chips" which requires no deep fryer. This recipe has become one of my favorites and it never fails to delight the taste buds of all those who try it. Best of all...it's 97% foolproof. If you like halibut, you need to try this sometime soon. Feeds four.

2 lbs halibut

1½ cups panko (Japanese breadcrumbs)

1 tablespoon Old Bay (or similar seasoning)

2 teaspoons kosher salt

2 teaspoons lemon zest

3 large egg whites

¼ cup beer (any ale or lager is fine)

3 tablespoons olive oil

1. Cut the fish into 4"x1" rectangular sticks (don't be one of those people who runs for their ruler...anything in the rough neighborhood of 4x1 is going to be just fine).
2. Sprinkle the fish sticks with S&P and hold.
3. Combine panko, Old Bay, salt, lemon zest and cayenne in a large bowl.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk together the egg whites and beer. Add the fish to the eggy brew, shake off the excess, then turn the fish in the spicy panko mixture and coat all sides.
5. Heat the oil in a large skillet at medium-high heat. Add half of the fish and cook until golden and opaque in the center. About 3-4 minutes per side. Transfer fish to paper towels to absorb any excess oil, then put them on a lined baking sheet in a 250° oven.
6. Repeat with remaining fish (adding more oil if necessary).

For the "chips" I go with "Creamy Yukon Golds" (see recipe) and serve with a side of coleslaw. And, of course, a couple more of those beers.

POISSONS PROVENÇALE

☆☆☆

Fish from the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region of France. Their cooking style has strong Mediterranean overtones: lots of olive oil, tomatoes and garlic. This dish has a very rich tomato base (almost like pasta sauce), but the flavor doesn't overpower the fish.

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 cup yellow onion – minced

2 cloves garlic – minced

28 oz can chopped Roma tomatoes

¾ cup dry white wine

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

4 pieces halibut (or swordfish)

12 basil leaves – chopped or cut into ribbons (aka "chiffonade")

12 black olives (Niçoise or Kalamata) – sliced

1 tablespoon lemon zest

1. In a large sauté pan, heat 1 tablespoon oil over medium heat. Add onion and garlic and sauté for about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes (with juices) wine, vinegar and S&P to taste. Stir frequently until thickened; about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and keep warm and nearby.
2. In a different pan, heat the other tablespoon oil over med-high heat and lay in the fish. Let it cook for a few minutes and turn once. Total cooking time varies depending upon thickness of fish (and which kind you use), but as a rule of thumb, 1" halibut would be about 6 minutes per side. You want it lightly browned on both sides.
3. While the fish is cooking, turn your attention back to the tomato mixture ...reheat it on low, and stir in the basil, olives and lemon zest. Let it all marry for a minute or two.
4. Once the fish is just shy of being done, pour the tomato mixture over it, reduce the heat to med-low and continue cooking for another five minutes.

Serve over a bed of rice.

PETE'S CEDAR PLANK SALMON

☆☆☆

Perhaps you're faced with a conundrum similar to mine; you don't like grilled salmon, but your significant other has it right there on the very top of his or her hit parade. You're left with three basic options: 1) make two different meals; 2) wean him/her off salmon; or, 3) learn to like it yourself. We've always opted for #1...until my bon vivant son-in-law introduced me to his recipe for cedar plank salmon. It's one of the best grilled salmon experiences I've had.

1 cedar plank (available at all markets – will hold up to a 2 lb slab)

2 cups chicken broth

1 cup white wine

1 lemon – juiced

1 yellow onion – minced

2 tablespoons honey

salmon – 1 to 2 lbs – you can leave the skin on, but be a considerate host and remove the bones

few shakes Old Bay

1 red onion – thinly sliced

1. While you're firing up the coals, soak the plank in water for 15 minutes.
2. In the meantime, make the basting sauce. Grab a pot and combine the chicken broth, wine, lemon, onion and honey. Let this simmer for about 20 minutes.
3. Once your plank is sufficiently soaked, shake it dry and cover both sides with olive oil.
4. Dry rub the fish with Old Bay and S&P. Place it on the plank (skin side down) and then layer the top of the fish with your red onion slices.
5. Place the plank on top of the grill – direct heat. Drizzle some of the basting sauce over the salmon. **Note: because you put oil on the bottom of the plank, it will flare up---don't be concerned. Also, you're cooking on a piece of wood, which will smoke and burn. That's what gives the fish its flavor. Do not douse this with an extinguisher...**
6. Baste liberally throughout the process. It'll cook anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes depending on the size and thickness of the fish. You can check it with a knife...once it starts to flake, it's ready.

Thanks, Pete!

POACHED SALMON

Easy, quick, and can eaten either warm or chilled. This makes a great light dinner (or fancy brunch, for those of you who do fancy brunches). It's the kind of thing you find on a long buffet table at the wildly overpriced Sunday brunch at the Santa Barbara Biltmore. Is it just me or is \$85 a little steep for a mid-morning meal?

fillet of salmon (about ½ lb per person...depending upon the girth of your guests) – deboned and skinned

1½ cups chicken broth

1 red onion – minced

capers

*dill sauce **and/or** tartar sauce*

French or sourdough bread

1. Place fish in a Pyrex (or any microwave friendly) dish.
2. Add the chicken broth.
3. Pop in microwave for about 8 minutes. Longer if the fillet is really thick, shorter if not. Bottom line...the fish should be uniformly pink.
4. Remove the salmon from the broth and either serve it up or put the fish into the fridge to cool.

Serve with onions, capers, tartar sauce and/or dill sauce, and sliced bread if you so desire.

Added bonus...**here's a quick and easy dill sauce** – a couple tablespoons of mayo, about one quarter as much Dijon and a healthy teaspoon of dried dill. Mix it up and you're good to go.

GRILLED SEA BASS WITH MINT IN FOIL

☆☆☆

This is fairly effortless and clean (and it's a BBQ dish, meaning no fishy smelling kitchen). The delicious blend of spices gives it a slight Middle Eastern flavor. The end result tastes remarkable, and your guests will be impressed by your culinary prowess.

4 - 6 oz sea bass fillets (you can buy larger pieces, but it's very rich)

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 cup mint leaves – washed and stemmed

1 tomato – sliced

1 sweet onion – thinly sliced (make sure you get a sweet onion if you can)

pinch of each of the four "C"s:

cumin

coriander

cayenne

cinnamon

1. Fire up the grill.
2. Lay out a piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil (NOT on the grill) and brush it with oil. Place one slab of bass on the foil and then layer on top some mint leaves, tomato, onion and spices. A sprinkle is all you need...fight your desire to over-season.
3. Wrap up the foil. You want it secure, but with a little room to allow for some steaming action to take place. Don't worry...you can't screw this up. Repeat this for the remaining three pieces.
4. Place the packets on the grill. Because I don't like my fish too "watery" I generally cook this for about 30 minutes...10 minutes on side one, flip and do 10 minutes on side two, and back to side one for another 8-10 minutes or so. You can always go less and test it with a fork, but you probably figured that out on your own.

Great with a side of "Coconut Rice" or "Mint Couscous" and maybe some grilled asparagus.

ROASTED SEA BASS STUFFED WITH HERBS

The Naked Chef made this for former Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the thankfully clothed Chef Foley introduced it to me. It's a fantastic, flavorful, semi-rustic dish. The salsa has a lot of fussy ingredients, so read this all the way through before committing to putting it on the menu.

4 - 8 oz fillets of sea bass

1 handful of mixed herbs (e.g. basil, parsley, oregano) – roughly chopped

½ tablespoon butter

1 clove garlic – minced

1¼ lbs wild mushrooms – sliced

1 tablespoon olive oil

4 lemons – cut in half

...AND...1 recipe for Salsa Verde, which follows...

1. Preheat the oven to 475°.
2. Cut open a pocket in the side of the fillets and stuff with the herb mixture.
3. Heat a pan to medium, melt butter and toss in the garlic and the mushrooms, which you'll want to sauté for a few minutes until soft.
4. Drizzle a little oil in a roasting pan and lay the fish in.
5. Scatter the cooked 'shrooms over the sea bass and arrange the lemon halves around the fish.
6. Pop into the oven for 15 minutes or so (depending upon the thickness of the fish). You want the fillets to be firm, flaky and moist.

Salsa Verde

Mince all of the following:

2 cloves garlic

¼ cup capers

¼ cup sweet gherkins

6 anchovy fillets

2 cups parsley

1 bunch fresh basil

Do not mince the following:

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar

6 tablespoons virgin olive oil

sea salt and black pepper

1. Put all the minced ingredients into a bowl and stir 'em up.
2. Add the mustard and vinegar, then slowly whisk in the oil.
3. Balance flavors with pepper and sea salt and, if necessary, a little more vinegar.

Serve the salsa verde on the side, butted up next to, or on top of the fish. Complement the meal with a crisp white wine. The former Prime Minister of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has nothing on you...

SEA BASS WITH CHILI AND SAFFRON

Don't let the long list of ingredients scare you off. This is moderately easy and more than moderately flavorful. An excellent dish for company: it consistently turns out great and let's face it, it sounds straight off a menu in a 4 star restaurant.

handful of cilantro – minced

2 cloves garlic – minced

½ teaspoon ground cumin

½ teaspoon chili powder

½ teaspoon saffron threads

1 teaspoon paprika

pinch salt

pinch black pepper

pinch cayenne

¼ cup olive oil

4 - 6 oz sea bass fillets

½ cup fish stock (but no more, otherwise this can get watery)

8 plum tomatoes – blanched, peeled and halved - discard the seeds and use only the flesh

2 red bell peppers – roasted. You can either roast them yourself (which is very commendable, but unnecessary), or buy them at most good markets

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. In a small bowl combine 2 tablespoons of cilantro along with the garlic, cumin, chili powder, saffron, paprika, salt, pepper, cayenne and olive oil. Rub each fillet with this mixture (about 1 teaspoon per piece of fish) and add remainder of mixture to the fish stock.
3. Warm the stock in small saucepan.
4. Place fish in baking dish. Pack `em in tightly. Spread tomatoes and peppers evenly over the top of the fish. Pour the stock over and cover with foil. Bake 15 minutes, remove foil and put back in the oven for another 6-8 minutes. You want the fish to be moist but flaky, so gently stab a piece with a knife and give it a test.
5. When serving, sprinkle with the remaining cilantro.

Serve with "Coconut Rice," "Mint Couscous," or a light potato dish.

TANDOORI SEA BASS

☆☆☆

Here's the breakdown on this one; first off, it's very rich. Secondly, it looks pretty cool on the plate, which is always a plus. Thirdly, it comes from the "Cancer Prevention Center Cookbook." What more could you ask for? Best partnered with "Mint Couscous." Serves four.

Note: two hours of marinating time required

*1 lb sea bass fillets (approx. ¼ lb per person – cut about 1" thick)
1 medium shallot – chopped
½ bunch cilantro – chopped
1 tablespoon fresh ginger – minced
2 teaspoons cumin
1 tablespoon paprika
splash or two dry white wine
¾ cup low-fat (or fat-free) sour cream
2 teaspoons unsalted butter*

1. Start by making the marinade for the fish. Place the following into a blender: shallot, cilantro, ginger, cumin, paprika and the wine. Puree all this together then scoop it into a mixing bowl.
2. Fold in the sour cream.
3. Place the bass into a glass dish or a Tupperware container and spread the marinade over the fish. Seal this up and stick it into the fridge for at least 2 hours. It can go longer if you want.
4. When it comes time to cook the fish, preheat the oven to 400°. Wipe the excess marinade off the fillets, leaving a thin coat on the top and sides, and place them into a baking pan. Dot these with pieces of butter and season with S&P.
5. Bake (uncovered) until a golden crust forms (didn't I say it looked cool?). This will take anywhere from 12 to 15 minutes (depending on too many factors to bother with here). Best to keep an eye on it.
6. In the meantime, make your "Mint Couscous" (*see recipe*).

The tasty way to better health. Serve with chutney and enjoy!

PAN-SEARED TUNA WITH CILANTRO AND BASIL

The name says it all. I could fill this space with a lot of clever gibberish about tuna or cilantro or even basil, but let's just cut to the chase...

4 tuna steaks

1 teaspoon chili powder

1 tablespoon coriander powder

1 cup basil – finely chopped

1 cup cilantro – finely chopped

1 lemon – juiced

some olive or grapeseed oil

1. Mix together chili powder, coriander, basil, cilantro and lemon juice (basically everything you got).
2. Lay out the tuna and rub this mixture on one side only.
3. Cook in a ridged grill pan, a heavy frying pan, or on the grill. If using a pan, put in a tiny amount of oil then get that pan HOT.
4. Start with the seasoned side down. For cooking times, take the square root of the thickness of the tuna steak, multiply it by the BTUs being thrown off by your stove and then divide that by your personal "doneness preference" (using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "rare" and 10 being "burnt beyond recognition.") Convert the resultant into minutes, and you'll come up with the ideal cooking time down the millisecond **-OR-** you can just do each side for 3-4 minutes...your choice.

That's it. Since these are hearty, you can choose from a wide variety of side dishes.

PAN-SEARED TUNA WITH SESAME SEEDS

Really simple, really quick, really healthy (high in protein and omega 3 fatty acids). Do yourself, your loved ones, and your guests a favor and get the highest quality, freshest tuna you can find...dark red, tight grained and evenly colored. And while you're being such a wonderful host, go the distance and make the sauce as well...it's definitely worth it.

4 tuna steaks (about 1" thick)

¾ cup sesame seeds

2 tablespoons vegetable (or grapeseed) oil

1. Spread sesame seeds on a dinner plate. Rub the tuna with some oil and sprinkle with S&P, and then press into the seeds (you only do one side).
2. Heat a tablespoon of oil over high heat and add tuna steaks. Cook the seeded side first for about 60 seconds, then reduce heat to med-high, continue to cook until the seeds are golden brown (about another 1½ minutes).
3. Carefully flip tuna, cook on second side for about 3 minutes. **THE MOST OBVIOUS NOTE (and yet, still worth making): Cooking tuna is totally subjective.** Most restaurants will serve it rare, I personally like it pinkish. Searing times will vary depending upon the thickness of the steak and how you like your fish.

To serve, slice thin (¼") and adorn with sauce, the recipe for which is conveniently found here...

Ginger-Soy Sauce With Scallions

¼ cup soy

¼ cup rice vinegar

¼ cup water

2½ teaspoons sugar

1 medium scallion – sliced thin

2 teaspoons ginger – minced

1½ teaspoons sesame oil

Whisk this all together and voila – a sauce is born!

ORANGE ROUGHY WITH MANGO AND PEPPERS

Orange roughy, also called deep sea perch, is a firm fleshed, mild tasting fish that belongs to the "slimehead" family. They are the old men of the sea, living up to 200 years, so, as you toss one into your pan, keep in mind there's a chance it was swimming off the coast of Alaska when the US bought Alaska from Russia for 2 cents an acre and inadvertently gave rise to Sarah Palin. This is a fun dish for a casual get-together.

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ red onion – minced

14 ounce can chopped tomatoes – drained

splash white wine

2 teaspoons oregano

½ cup roasted red peppers – chopped (the ones in the jar work fine)

1 mango – peeled and chopped

1 lime – juiced

½ pound of roughy per person (less if you're a light eater)

1. Heat oil in a large pan and sauté the onion over med-low heat until limp, about 5 minutes.
2. Add the drained tomatoes, a splash of wine and the oregano. Let this go for a few minutes, then toss in the roasted peppers. Let all this work together for about 5 minutes.
3. Time to add the mango and lime juice. Give this a few minutes to blend so everyone can get acquainted, then set aside to cool.
4. Get out your blender and puree this concoction. Remember that this stuff is still hot, which creates steam, so before you hit that "puree" button, hold on to the top of the blender with a dish towel...otherwise, your kitchen will look like the set of a Rob Zombie film.
5. Time for the fish. Season with S&P, heat up a fresh pan over med-high heat, dump in a little oil, and sauté the fish for about 5 minutes per side.
6. Now pour the puree over the top of the fish and let this simmer for about 5 minutes (longer if your fish is thick).

That's it. Serve with rice or mashed potatoes, adorned with the sauce from the pan.

MISO-MARINATED BLACK COD

From Nobuyuki Matsuhisa (aka Nobu), a celebrity chef with a string of expensive restaurants from Vegas to London. Plus, he goes by one name, so you know he's big time. This was introduced to me by celebrity vintners Margaret and Jim Foley of Petrichor Vineyards (check out their delicious Rose, Syrah and Grenache). This is an extremely tasty and elegant dish, and easy to prepare. If you can't find black cod, you can use halibut or other firm white fish. The recipe calls for a 2-3 day marinade, but you can marinate the fish the morning of your meal and it's still gonna be fab.

¼ cup sake

¼ cup mirin

2 tablespoons white miso paste

1½ tablespoons sugar

4 (½ pound) black cod (or halibut) fillets

1. Start with the marinade. Bring the sake and mirin to a boil over high heat. Boil for 20 seconds to burn off the alcohol. Turn down heat to low and whisk in the miso paste.
2. Once the miso is dissolved, turn the heat back up to high and whisk in the sugar. When the sugar is dissolved, remove the pot from the heat and let this cool to room temp.
3. Pat the fish dry with paper towels and cover with the marinade. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and slide into the fridge for up to 3 days (but a few hours will still give you a kickass meal).
4. Preheat oven to 400°.
5. Get out your fish and lightly wipe off excess marinade, but DO NOT rinse it off.
6. Put some oil in an oven-proof skillet and fire it up to high. Place the fish skin-side up and cook for about 3 minutes. Flip and cook the other side for another 3 minutes.
7. Transfer the skillet to the oven and bake for 5 to 10 minutes, until the fish is opaque and flaky.

I serve this with bok choy, "Coconut Rice" and sautéed mitake mushrooms (because I'm fancy like that).

RED SNAPPER VERACRUZ

☆☆☆

Red snapper is indigenous to the Gulf Of Mexico and Latin America, but here on the West Coast, it's legal to refer to rockfish as "red snapper." Yes, they actually passed a law that in Washington, Oregon and California, this aquatic masquerade can occur. The good news is, both the real-deal snapper and rockfish work just fine in this dish.

*28 oz can diced tomatoes in juice – drained (**but reserve that juice**)*

2 tablespoons olive oil

½ cup white onion – minced

2 bay leaves

1 tablespoon dried oregano

¼ cup green olives – pitted and chopped

2 tablespoons capers – drained

2 teaspoons lemon zest

½ cup white wine

4 - 6 oz red snapper (or snapper-esque) fillets

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Put drained tomatoes in a bowl and using potato masher (or whatever you've got that's similar), crush the helpless fruit into coarse puree. Drain again, and save this juice.
3. Heat oil in a heavy skillet on med-high heat. Add onion and stir for about 3 minutes.
4. Add tomato puree and cook for another minute.
5. Now add bay leaves, oregano, olives, capers, lemon zest, wine and all the tomato juice you caught. Simmer until the sauce thickens, stirring occasionally (about 10 minutes). Season to taste with S&P.
6. Spread about half the sauce in the bottom of a glass or ceramic baking dish and arrange the fish atop the sauce.
7. Sprinkle the fish with S&P and then spoon remaining sauce over the top.
8. Bake uncovered until fish is opaque in center (about 20 minutes). You want it moist and flaky.

Transfer fish to plates. This is very rich and hearty, so you can serve it with either rice or potatoes. Mashed potatoes are good because there's a lot of delicious sauce/juice to sop up. Personally, I like to serve it with "*Scallion Griddle Cakes*."

THE BIRDS AND THE BEASTS

Chicken

Asian Chicken Salad
Asian Coq Au Vin
Baked Chicken and Vegetables
BBQ Chicken With Red Currants And Shallot Sauce
BBQ Chicken With Rosemary And Lime
BBQ Orange Chicken
Chicken And Broccoli Casserole
Chicken And Rice With Chilies And Lime
Chicken And Rice With Tomatoes And Wine
Chicken Curry With Asian Pears
Green Curry Chicken
Pollo Alla Cacciatora
Roasted Chicken
Zeke's Chicken

Turkey

Braised Savory Turkey
Curry Turkey Salad
Dry Brined Turkey
Sloppy Toms
Turkey and Apple Sliders*
Turkey Jambalaya
Turkey Manicotti
Turkey Stew
Uncle Schmecter's Turkey Chili

Game Hens

Cornish Game Hens Grilled With Lemon and Herbs
Cornish Game Hens With Mustard And Rosemary

Beef

Beef Brisket
Braised Beef Ribs
Carne Asada
Joe's Special
Jet's Mongolian Beef*
Ina's Pot Roast*
Renita's Beef Stir Fry
Roasted Beef Tenderloin
Santa Maria Tri Tip

Pork

Honey Grilled Pork Loin
Notorious P.I.G. (aka Pulled Pork)
Red Beans And Rice (With Smoked Pork Shanks)
Tacos Al Pastor*
Trader Vic's Spareribs

Lamb

Lamb Burgers Stuffed With Goat Cheese
Lamb Stew
Lamb Tagine With Caramelized Onions
Moroccan Braised Lamb With White Beans

Woodland Creatures

Rabbit Ragu (aka Elmer's Revenge)

POULTRY LOVERS...PUMP THE BRAKES

If you eat poultry and you aren't brining your bird, you're missing one of the easiest ways to make chicken and turkey tender and juicy...ergo, better tasting. You can use this method whether frying, roasting or grilling.

Basically, it's a ridiculously simple process wherein you soak your raw poultry in a water/salt/sugar solution to give the meat a firmer consistency and season everything down to the center of the cut.

Now you're probably wondering, "Is the chicken going to taste sweet or salty?" Negative. Next you'll be wanting to know, "How's that possible?" Beats the hell out of me, but it works, and that's all you need to know (at least, that's all I needed to know).

Here's the basic brining solution

¾ cup kosher salt

½ cup sugar

1 quart cold water (you want the bird covered)

Dissolve the salt and sugar in the water and add the chicken, cover with a plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator for about 1½ hours for bone-in, skin-on breasts...60 minutes for boneless, skinless breasts. You can also do a whole bird, or a large turkey breast before you roast it, in which case, make more brine and let it soak overnight.

If you're just doing pieces, you can put the chicken into a Ziplock plastic bag, add the brine, squeeze out any excess air, and place the bag in the fridge.

When you remove the poultry from the brine, pat it dry with paper towels.

Brining is easy and the results are definitely worth the extra few minutes prep.

ASIAN CHICKEN SALAD

A light, bright salad for lunch or summer dinner. You can make this from scratch, or use leftover roasted or grilled chicken as a base. This will serve four.

Note: you can substitute with turkey or pork. Plus, you can leave out animal flesh altogether and this makes a delicious and filling salad suitable for vegetarians

*4 cups of cooked chicken – shredded
1 head of either Napa cabbage **-OR-** iceberg lettuce – shredded
½ cucumber – peeled, seeded and diced
3 scallions – thinly sliced
1 cup cilantro – chopped
½ cup slivered almonds – toasted
1 small red bell pepper – seeded, thinly sliced
crispy wonton strips*

For The Vinaigrette

*¼ cup soy sauce
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon sesame oil
1 tablespoon Dijon
1 teaspoon grated ginger
pinch of salt*

The assembly directions should be rather obvious. Whisk together the vinaigrette and pour over the salad.

Restaurants have this uncontrollable urge to add mandarin orange slices, which I've never understood, and I always pick them out. I've saved you that step by eliminating them altogether.

ASIAN COQ AU VIN

Modified from an original recipe by Ming Tsai of the Blue Ginger restaurant. Excellent for family dining and classy enough for company. Be warned that while the wine flavor isn't overwhelming, it's fairly pervasive, so if your friends are devout non-drinkers you might want to find an alternative (an alternative recipe, not alternative friends...but then again...). Serves four.

2 lbs cut up chicken – use whatever pieces are your favorites (for larger groups you can increase the amount of chicken without altering the rest of the recipe)

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 tablespoon ginger – grated

1 tablespoon red chili pepper – minced

2 cloves garlic – chopped

1 red onion – sliced

3 large carrots – cut into sticks

3 stalks celery – ditto

1 cup sherry

1 bottle red wine (use decent stuff, because it's going to be the dominant flavor of the dish. I recommend a red blend, a Merlot or a light Cab)

2 bay leaves

½ cup dark soy sauce

4 baby bok choy – split

4 scallions – sliced

1. Put some oil into a large stew pot (this is the pot that's going to hold everything, so make sure it's big enough) and brown the chicken in shifts (five minutes per side) over medium heat. Set the browned bird aside. You could also brown the chicken in a separate skillet if you choose.
2. Wipe out the pot, leaving just a little fat/oil in the bottom. Use that to sauté the ginger, chilies and garlic for 5 minutes.
3. Add onion, carrots and celery. Season w/S&P.
4. Deglaze with sherry and wine (meaning, pour in the booze and scrape the pot) then add back in the chicken.
5. Add the bay leaves and soy sauce and, if necessary, add water to cover all the chicken and bring to a slow boil. Don't worry that adding water is going to dilute this. There's plenty of flavor to go around.
7. Simmer for 2 hours. The chicken will practically fall off the bone.
8. For the last 10 minutes of cooking, add the bok choy.

Carefully transfer the chicken, et al, to a serving dish and garnish with the sliced scallions. Personally, I think this dish is best with "*Wasabi Mashed Potatoes*," which is a wonderful bed to soak up all that sauce you've got.

BAKED CHICKEN AND VEGETABLES

A very simple and healthy recipe that I've made dozens of times. As an added clean-up bonus, it's all done in one large roasting pan. One of the nice things about this recipe is you can add your favorites and/or leave out whatever you don't like. You can also omit the potatoes altogether if you want to avoid the starch. Feeds 2 to 4 (or one lonely person for a few days).

*2 zucchinis – quartered lengthwise and chopped (not too small)
1 white onion (or ½ large, sweet onion) – minced
1 yellow bell pepper – seeded and diced
1 red bell pepper – seeded and diced
3 ripe tomatoes – chopped
2 celery stalks – chopped
3 tablespoons olive oil
2 boneless (skin on) full chicken breasts – brined (I would strongly recommend brining here since the breasts can otherwise get a little dry)
2 teaspoons Dijon
1 teaspoon cumin powder
2 tablespoons oregano – chopped
1 tablespoon lemon juice
8 white potatoes – peeled and quartered*

1. Preheat oven to 375°.
2. Place all vegetables (except for potatoes), in a heavy roasting pan. Season with S&P, add 1 tablespoon oil and toss.
3. Place brined chicken on top of this, skin side up. Brush skin with mixture of Dijon, 2 tablespoons oil and cumin. Season with S&P, then sprinkle with oregano and lemon juice and slide this into the oven.
4. Total baking time is one hour. When you're about 30 minutes in, put the potatoes in a pot of boiling water and let them soften up for about 8 minutes. Drain them and keep 'em nearby.
5. At the 45 minute mark, pull the pan from the oven, remove and set aside the chicken and toss the potatoes in with the vegetables. Now, put the chicken back on top and bake for the final 15 minutes (again, for a total time of about 60 minutes). **If you want to delete the potatoes,** just leave the chicken and vegetables alone in the oven for the full hour (don't overcook, or the vegetables get mushy).

That's it.

BBQ CHICKEN WITH RED CURRANTS AND WINE SHALLOT SAUCE

This is an amazing dish. Red currants are not something I often use (as a matter of fact, this is the only time I use them), but they taste great on this partially cremated fowl. And you finish this off by covering the whole thing with a wine shallot sauce. What more could you want?

1½ cups red currant jelly

1 cup Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons black pepper

*1 batch chicken parts (the original recipe suggests 8 thighs and 3 whole breasts, which is a couple of birds after they've passed through an industrial fan)
– you can cook whatever parts of the bird you like best*

1. Prepare currant sauce by blending jelly, mustard and black pepper. Don't bother with a blender...just use a bowl and a fork.
2. Grill chicken over medium heat. Turn and baste often with this sauce. About 15 to 20 minutes per side. This stuff will burn, so keep turning.
3. Serve with the shallot sauce. (See below)

The Wine Shallot Sauce

4 shallots – minced

¾ cup white wine

¾ cup white wine vinegar

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup unsalted butter

1 additional glass of quality white wine (to drink while making this)

1. Bring shallots, wine, vinegars, S&P to a boil, reducing until there is only enough liquid left to keep the shallots moist.
2. Whisk in all that butter, creating a creamy consistency.
3. Spoon it over the chicken and gobble it down.

Now, set aside some intense exercise time tomorrow to work off some of that butter...and that wine. Why'd you drink that wine?

BBQ CHICKEN WITH ROSEMARY AND LIME

This is a Croatian dish. As you may know, much of Game Of Thrones was filmed in Croatia. As you may not know, Croatia is home to the world's largest truffle and has the richest collection of Neanderthal remains. Neither truffles nor Neanderthal bone marrow go into this dish.

Note: needs to be started early in the morning or the day before. 8-24 hours of marinating time. Sorry, but you've gotta plan ahead for this one.

*2 chicken breasts
8 chicken thighs
8 chicken legs
(in other words, whatever chicken you like: white or dark – your call)
2 cups olive oil
4 tablespoons lime juice
2 tablespoons dried rosemary
8 cloves of garlic – minced
3 bay leaves
4 medium tomatoes – cut into wedges
2 large limes – cut into wedges*

1. Arrange the chicken in a glass dish.
2. Prepare a marinade by blending oil, lime juice, rosemary, garlic, bay leaves, and some S&P. Pour over the chicken and wrap, then refrigerate for 8-24 hours. Turn the chicken several times during this period.
3. Once the marinating is complete, pat the chicken dry and slap it on the BBQ. Grill over medium to high heat for 30 to 45 minutes. Turn and baste with marinade several times (keep it moist and try not to burn it).
4. Take off the grill, put on platter and arrange with the tomatoes and lime wedges.

You can sleep with your windows open tonight. No vampires will get within a mile of your house.

BBQ ORANGE CHICKEN

This one's easy, because there are no fancy sauces, and you don't have to plan ahead. Excellent cold the next day, so make enough for leftovers.

*1 teaspoon orange zest
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon dried or fresh rosemary
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 or 2 whole chickens – halved
½ cup undiluted frozen OJ
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce*

1. Combine orange zest, salt, rosemary and pepper in a bowl.
2. Don't cut off the chicken skin, but "release" it (lift it a little off the meat) so you can cram this mixture in there...start cramming.
3. Prepare a basting sauce by blending OJ, vinegar and Worcestershire in a glass bowl.
4. BBQ the bird over medium heat (approximately one hour). Turn and baste often.

This is a hearty dish, so you might want to try one of the potato recipes to go with this. Can also serve with rice, but that seems a little precious for this flavorful bird.

CHICKEN AND BROCCOLI CASSEROLE

Chicken + broccoli + casserole. Sounds like something a spinster schoolteacher in Des Moines would take to a church social. If she did, she'd be the hit of the dinner circuit, because this is not only simple, but it tastes surprisingly great. Plus, you get your weekly fill of broccoli, which is a vitamin extravaganza.

*4 boneless chicken breasts (about 1¼ lbs) – boiled and shredded
1 pkg chopped, frozen broccoli (usually 12 oz) – thawed and drained
1 can cream of chicken soup
⅓ cup mayo
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 cups cheddar cheese – grated
1 cup breadcrumbs*

1. Combine the cooked chicken and broccoli.
2. Combine soup, mayo, lemon juice and cheese.
3. Mix this all together in a covered casserole dish, and layer the top with the breadcrumbs...not too thick...
4. Put the lid on that casserole dish and bake for one hour at 350°.

When you read the ingredients (frozen broccoli, cream of chicken soup, etc) you must imagine this recipe came from a Betty Crocker cookbook circa 1957. It may have, but then again, that Betty knew her way around the kitchen, so who are we to judge?

I spice this up and serve it with salsa and/or with a couple dashes of Cholula which can go right into the mayo-goop mix. Of course, it's safer to add it later and not over-spice the dish for everyone (unless you are eating alone, in which case go for it).

Whip up one of these the next time you're invited to a church social (also welcome at barn raisings, knitting bees and cozy mystery book clubs).

CHICKEN AND RICE WITH CHILIES AND LIME

☆☆☆

One of my favorites. It's perfect for a filling, flavorful, one-pot meal. Good for the whole family (if they like their food a little on the spicy side), or for a few nights of solo dining (it reheats well).

4-6 chicken thighs (bone-in, skin on)

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 medium onion – minced

2 jalapeno chilies – seeded and minced (can sub with 2 oz of canned jalapenos or if you prefer less heat, you can use green chilies)

1 teaspoon cumin

2 teaspoons coriander

1 teaspoon chili powder

1½ cups white rice

14 oz can diced tomatoes (with the liquid)

¼ cup white wine

1 teaspoon salt

1½ cups of water

¾ cup cilantro – chopped

1 lime – juiced

1. Sprinkle chicken with S&P. Heat a tablespoon of oil in a large frying pan over medium heat. Brown the chicken for 5 minutes a side then move it to a platter so it can rest comfortably.
2. In the meantime (you can multi-task, yes?) pour remaining tablespoon of oil into a Dutch oven. Add onion and chilies and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes.
3. Add cumin, coriander, and chili powder and sauté about a minute longer.
4. Stir in rice until coated then add tomatoes (with liquid), wine, salt and water.
5. Remove skin from chicken thighs and return chicken to pot. Bring to a boil.
6. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 30 minutes.
7. Stir in cilantro and lime juice, turn off the heat, cover the pot and allow everything to rest for 5 minutes.
8. The rice is extremely flavorful, but wet, so before I serve the rice, I fry it in a hot cast iron skillet with a little oil to give it some crust.

CHICKEN AND RICE WITH TOMATOES AND WINE

The somewhat less adventurous cousin of "Chicken And Rice With Chilies And Lime." While it lacks the heat and citrus punch, it has a more refined, subtle flavor of its own. Another very tasty one pot meal.

4-6 chicken thighs (bone-in, skin on)

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 medium onion – minced

1 red bell pepper – diced

1½ cups rice

14 oz can diced tomatoes

¼ cup white wine

½ teaspoon salt

½ tablespoon red pepper flakes

1¾ cups water

2 teaspoons hot sauce (optional)

1. Sprinkle chicken with S&P. Heat a tablespoon of oil over medium heat in a large frying pan. Put in chicken, starting with the skin side down. Brown 5 minutes a side. Remove from the pan and set aside.
2. In the meantime pour another tablespoon of oil into a Dutch oven. Add onion and red bell and sauté 3 to 4 minutes.
3. Stir in rice until coated, then add tomatoes (with liquid), wine, red pepper flakes, salt and water.
4. Remove skin from chicken thighs and return chicken to pot. Bring to boil.
5. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer for 30 minutes.
6. Turn off the heat and let this dish rest for 5 minutes before serving. If the rice is too wet for your liking, toss a portion into a hot skillet and give it some crust.

CHICKEN CURRY WITH ASIAN PEARS

☆☆☆

This recipe is a home run. If the idea of trying to find (or eat) Asian pears puts you off (although I don't know why it should), you can substitute Golden Delicious apples and not sacrifice the flavor integrity of this dish. The end result is a creamy and soul satisfying curry that's guaranteed to please.

4 chicken breasts (boneless, skin-on)

1 tablespoon olive oil

½ cup yellow onion – chopped

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

2 Asian pears (or Golden Delicious apples) – cored, peeled and sliced

8 oz shiitake mushrooms – sliced

2 tablespoons curry powder

2 tablespoons flour

1 cup chicken stock

1 tablespoon chutney

¼ cup heavy cream

1. Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper.
2. Heat oil in large skillet and brown chicken over medium flame (about 5 minutes per side). Add onion, decrease heat to med-low, cover and cook for 25-30 minutes, turning occasionally.
3. While the chicken is cooking, melt butter in another skillet and add the pears. Sauté on low heat for 3 minutes. Remove pears and set aside. Add mushrooms and sauté on low for 10 minutes. Set this aside.
4. After the chicken has done its 30 minute stint in the pan, remove it and set it aside. Add curry powder to the chicken pan (don't pour out the oil and fat that's there) and cook on low heat for about 8 minutes, then add flour and cook for additional 3 minutes. You should have a lovely roux going from the combination of the flour and the fat of the chicken. If your pan is too dry, you can always add a shot of oil.
5. Add chicken stock, chutney and cream. Cook until sauce is thickened, stirring constantly. Return chicken to skillet, along with pears and mushrooms. Heat for about 3 minutes.

Put it over rice, grab some chutney and enjoy.

GREEN CURRY CHICKEN

From Jamie Oliver, who has gotten more adventurous since he started cooking with his clothes on. By the way, you can substitute shrimp for the chicken if you're so inclined.

*4 boneless chicken breasts – cut into strips
14 oz can coconut milk
1 batch green curry paste (recipe follows...)*

The Green Curry Paste

*6 scallions – chopped
4 Anaheim peppers – washed and seeded and chopped (these are low on the heat scale – it's about the flavor, not the burn)
2 cloves garlic – chopped
1 tablespoon ginger
1 tablespoon coriander
2 handfuls basil
3 handfuls cilantro
3 tablespoons olive oil
4 limes – zested and juiced*

1. Put the green curry paste ingredients into a processor and blend until it becomes, well, paste. Be careful. I once pushed the leafy ingredients down with a slotted wooden spoon and got it a little too close to the blades...okay, WAY too close. The result was green curry paste all over the kitchen and a little extra fiber in the meal.
2. Marinate the chicken in half of the paste for 30 minutes.
3. Remove the chicken from the marinade, scraping off the excess, and cook it in a hot wok with a little oil for about 4 minutes. Add remainder of marinade (the unused half you set aside) and stir in coconut milk. Bring to boil and simmer for about 8 minutes.

That's it. Best over rice. Serve with chutney and some Thai beer.

POLLO ALLA CACCIATORA

"Cacciatore" means hunter in Italian, so in this dish the chicken is prepared "hunter style" which is with onions, herbs and tomatoes. Personally, I don't know how much hunting it takes to go outside and slaughter a chicken, but then again, I'm not Italian, or a hunter. This is essentially a comfort stew. Great for fall or winter dinners.

1 cup dried porcini mushrooms

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon butter

1 whole chicken – cut up, on the bone (use whatever pieces suit your palate. I prefer a mix of dark and white meat)

1 large onion – chopped

14 oz can chopped tomatoes

¾ cup red wine

1 clove garlic – crushed

1 ¼ cup fresh mushrooms (white buttons) – thinly sliced

1. Put porcinis in a bowl; add a warm cup of water and soak for 30 minutes. Remove the mushrooms from the liquid and mince, AND keep that murky mushroom water because you're going to use it later.
2. Heat oil and butter in large Dutch oven until foaming. Add the chicken. Brown over medium heat for 5 minutes per side. Remove bird and drain on paper towels.
3. Add onion and chopped porcinis to that same pot. Cook on med-low, stirring frequently, for about 5 minutes (until onion is soft but not brown). Stir in chopped tomatoes, wine and porcini liquid, then add garlic, salt and pepper. Bring to boil, stirring all the while.
4. Return the chicken to the pot and submerge in sauce. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes.
5. After 30 minutes has elapsed, add the fresh mushrooms and stir into mix. Continue simmering gently for another 10 minutes or so.

Mashed potatoes are the perfect complement, since you'll end up with a lot of delicious, savory sauce that'll otherwise go to waste. You'll also want a loaf of sourdough and a few bottles of a hearty Italian red.

ROASTED CHICKEN

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Everyone loves roasted chicken. Seriously, just ask around and you'll see. You can scatter baby white potatoes (or quartered adult white potatoes) around the bottom of the roasting pan, and they'll brown up nicely from the drippings.

1 chicken – 2½ to 3 lbs

2 cups fresh herbs (basil, parsley or rosemary) – finely chopped

4 tablespoons unsalted butter – melted

1 tablespoon olive oil

1. Preheat oven to 375°.
2. Wash up your bird (inside and out) and pat dry. Rub cavity with salt.
3. Lift up skin (don't rip it) above the breast, gently separating it from the body. Carefully stuff as much of the chopped herbs as you can underneath the skin, then drizzle a little olive oil down there for good measure.
4. Now the fun part...truss up the bird with twine (making sure you pull the skin back down and cover up the naked little critter).
5. Almost done...brush the outside of the bird with the butter and season with S&P, then slide the chicken into the oven and let it cook for 45-60 minutes. Baste with melted butter whenever the urge strikes you.
6. At this point, crank up the oven to 425° and let it go for about another 15-30 minutes to achieve golden crispiness (a technical cooking term).
Note: Throughout Step Six, test the bird in its thickest part with a meat thermometer. You want it to hit 160°. Different birds, different ovens = equal different cooking times.
7. Take it out, transfer to a tray, loosely tent it with foil and let it rest for 10 minutes (which will bring up the internal temp about 5 more degrees, which is a good thing).

You're done! Carve it up and scarf it down.

ZEKE'S CHICKEN

Like "Chicken and Broccoli Casserole," this is an easy and excellent dish for any family or social gathering. It's a little spicier, tastier and sexier than a regular chicken casserole. I mean, is there anything sexier than cooking with canned cream of mushroom soup? I got this recipe from a guy in college named Zeke who probably got it from his mother who probably got it from inside the label of a Campbell's soup can in 1966. Regardless of its provenance, it's surprisingly good.

*2 boneless chicken breasts (about 4 cups) – cooked
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 can cream of mushroom soup
4 oz can diced green chilies – drained
1 cup yellow onion – minced
8 corn tortillas – torn
2 cups grated cheese – cheddar or Jack (or if you're feeling festive, a combo of the two)*

1. Sauté the onions in a tablespoon of oil on low-med for five minutes to soften (not brown).
2. Mix together the soups, chilies, onions and chicken. At this point you can add some of your favorite spices. I lean toward adobo or a little chipotle powder.
3. Grab a 13x9 Pyrex dish (no need to oil it...you've got enough emollients in here to do the job) – start with a layer of torn up tortillas, then a layer of the chicken/soup mixture and a handful of cheese. Repeat. **A small note... corn tortillas are the ticket here. I've tried using flour tortillas and they tasted muy malo.**
4. Bake uncovered for one hour at 350°.

This'll feed four, unless you have two big eaters. Serve with salsa and maybe a green salad...and cervezas.

BRAISED SAVORY TURKEY

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The title doesn't do it justice. Yes...it's turkey, it's savory and it's braised... it's also the best turkey recipe I've ever come across. The meat is moist and juicy and the flavor is fantastic. An excellent robust meal that's equally good for a casual get together or a formal dinner party. I rave because I want you to make this.

Note: all in this takes about 2½ hours of combined prep and cooking time

½ turkey breast – cut into two or three chunks – brined

2 turkey thighs – brined

(Quick note here – you can use whatever combo of turkey parts you'd like)

1 cup flour

olive oil (as needed to brown the bird)

1 onion – diced

8 carrots – 2 diced + 6 cut into 1" pieces

2 stalks celery – diced

1 tablespoon concentrated tomato paste (the stuff in the tube is perfect)

1 cup white wine

4 cups chicken broth

4 sprigs fresh thyme

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon allspice

1. Preheat the oven to 325°.
2. Pat the turkey dry, season with S&P and dredge in flour to coat.
3. Heat the olive oil over medium heat and brown the turkey for about 6 minutes per side. I use a heavy cast iron number and it works great. If you don't have a mongo-sized frying pan, do the bird in two batches. Don't crowd the pan, or the bird won't properly brown. When finished, transfer the turkey to a large Dutch oven (this is the eventual home for everything, so make sure it's big enough).
4. **In the meantime...**grab a stew pot and dump in the onion, the diced carrots and celery (aka mirepoix). Add some oil and season with a little salt. Sauté on med-low heat for about 6 minutes.
5. Mix in the tomato paste and let it go for another minute or so.
6. Add the wine and simmer for about three minutes. Your kitchen will be filled with amazing aromas.

7. Now it's time to add the chicken broth, thyme, bay and allspice. Bring this all to a boil then pour it over your turkey. Cover tightly with foil (or a lid) and carefully insert into the oven.

8. This turkey is going to cook for 2 hours. After the first hour, add the 1" carrot chunks.

This is best served with mashed potatoes, which is a perfect bed for all that juice. Incredibly delicious and reheats for another great meal on day two (if it makes it that far).

CURRY TURKEY SALAD

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Wondering what to do with that leftover turkey? You can go with a rich and savory turkey chili, a belly-warming turkey soup or, if you want something lighter, you can whip up a basic turkey salad (chopped turkey, diced celery, mayo and a dash of paprika). However, if you have the urge to dress your salad up a little, try this. It doesn't get much easier and the results are impressive, even for the most discriminating palates.

Note: can use this same recipe with chicken.

2–3 cups turkey – cooked and chopped or shredded (okay to use more if you've got it)

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 cup yellow onion – minced

1 tablespoon curry powder

¾ cup mayo

1 lime – juiced

1 green apple – peeled and diced quite small

1½ tablespoons chutney (don't use more or it will be too sweet)

1. Heat the oil in a skillet and toss in the onions. Sauté over med-low heat until soft (about 5 minutes). Add the curry powder (things will get dry, but that's okay) and stir for about 2 minutes. Set aside and allow this to cool.
2. Blend the mayo, lime juice, apple chunks and chutney. Once the curried onions have cooled, fold them into this mixture.
3. Now pour this over the turkey and fold everything together. **Note: depending upon how much turkey you used, you might have too much mayo mixture. Use just enough to cover the turkey, but not drown it.** Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Excellent on a bed of greens with a toasted baguette on the side.

DRY BRINED TURKEY

I'm a big believer in brining poultry. I never roast, sauté or grill a piece of chicken or turkey without letting it soak in a salty/sugary solution for at least a couple of hours. However, I found this recipe in Food And Wine and tried it at Christmas. I wouldn't say that I'm a devout convert, but the bird came out great. Definitely a worthy recipe to have in your quiver.

Note: this requires an overnight chill

1 turkey. How's that for starters? The recipe calls for 12-14 lbs, but you can essentially use any size you want (within reason) – cut into pieces

2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns

2 tablespoons whole pink peppercorns

¼ cup + 1½ teaspoons kosher salt

2 tablespoons onion powder

2 tablespoons garlic powder

1 tablespoon smoked paprika

1 tablespoon brown sugar

1. If your turkey came pre-butchered, you're in great shape. If not, give it a go. You want to end up with a whole breast, two wings, and two leg/thigh pieces. The rest of the carcass, the neck, and the innards don't come into play here.
2. Grind the peppercorns in a spice mill or mortar/pestle and dump the finely ground pepper into a bowl. Add the salt, onion, garlic, paprika and brown sugar and mix to combine everything.
3. Place the turkey pieces, skin side up, on a wire rack set inside a foil lined baking sheet and liberally sprinkle/rub on the spice mixture.
4. Slide the disassembled bird, uncovered, into the fridge for at least 24 hours and up to 2 days. This process will help dry out the skin, allowing it to be deliciously crisp when cooked.
5. **It's now the day of turkey consumption.** Pull your poultry out of the chiller and let it sit at room temp for 2-3 hours. Preheat your oven to 425°.
6. Rub the turkey with olive oil and pour 1 cup of water into the baking sheet. Slide it into the oven for 20-25 minutes (until the skin is golden).
7. Reduce the temp to 300° and continue to roast. Add more water to the pan if needed. You'll want to cook this for somewhere between 50-60 more minutes (times vary due to ovens and bird sizes). The breast is done when it hits 150° on an instant read thermometer. The leg/thigh needs to get up to 170°.
8. Transfer the cooked turkey to a cutting board and loosely tent with foil for 30-60 minutes before serving.

If you seriously want to dazzle the taste buds of your guests, serve this along with the "Turkey Gravy."

SLOPPY TOMS

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Do-it-from-scratch "Sloppy Joes" made with turkey. I know you were wondering where Sloppy Toms originated, so I did a little research on your behalf. In the 1930s there was a café in Sioux City called Floyd Angell's. Floyd employed a rebellious short order cook named Joe (stick with me) who one day added tomato sauce to hamburger meat and served up a "loose meat sandwich." Thanks to his culinary foresight, or perhaps his kitchen accident, the Sloppy Joe was born.

*1 lb ground turkey
olive oil (as needed)
1 yellow onion – minced
15 oz can tomato sauce
6 oz can tomato paste
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon chili powder
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
few shakes Worcestershire sauce
hamburger buns*

1. Using a large skillet, brown the turkey and transfer to a bowl.
2. In that same skillet, brown the onion in a little olive oil over medium-low heat. You just want to sweat it (soften it up). About 5 minutes should be fine.
3. Add the rest of the ingredients (except for the turkey meat) in with the onion and let it all simmer together for about 5 minutes.
4. Now add the cooked turkey and blend everything together for about 10 minutes. If it gets too thick, add a little water (maybe ¼ cup).
5. Ladle over toasted buns.

For a side dish, I recommend that old cafeteria standby...tater tots. Seriously. Available in the freezer section of your finer grocery establishments.

TURKEY AND APPLE SLIDERS

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From the Cancer Fighting Kitchen cookbook. Great for dinner, lunch or even breakfast (a healthy substitute for sausage patties). This recipe will yield about 12 small slider sized patties.

¼ cup red onion – minced

1½ pounds ground turkey – can use either white or dark meat

1 cup spinach leaves – chopped fine

1 apple – peeled and diced small

a squeeze of lemon juice

S&P

1. I'm not keen on raw onions, so after I mince the red onion, I soak it in ice water for 15 minutes. It removes the harsh bite but retains the crunch and flavor. Drain before using (obviously).
2. Combine all your ingredients in a large bowl and mix well.
3. Since turkey meat is sticky, I have a small bowl of water nearby and keep my fingers moist when forming the patties.
4. Grab a medium sized sauté pan, drizzle in some olive oil, and fry your sliders over medium heat. About 4 minutes per side. Then, add a tablespoon of water and cover to steam these all the way through. This only takes about two minutes.
5. Once the patties are cooked, you can keep them warm in a low temp oven until you've completed the entire batch.
6. Finally, if you want to top these with cheese, put them back into that oily pan on med-low, add a few more drops of water and steam them for a minute to melt the cheese.

TURKEY JAMBALAYA

A great dish for those long, cold winters (in other words, a perfect recipe if you live someplace like Edmonton). Serves 4 to 6, depending upon the size of the bellies at the table.

*4 tablespoons olive oil
1 lb turkey breast – cut into 1" cubes
1 onion – minced
3 stalks celery – minced
1 large leek – (light green and white parts only) minced
1 red bell pepper – diced
1 lb chorizo sausage – sliced 1/8" thick
2 cloves garlic – minced
1/2 cup parsley – chopped
2 tablespoons ground black pepper
1 tablespoon dried red chilies
1 1/2 cups chicken broth
1 cup white wine
1 tablespoon Chicken Flavored Better Than Bouillon
2 cups basmati rice*

1. Heat oil in large stew pot.
2. Sauté turkey until brown, then remove and set aside.
3. Sauté onion, celery, leeks and bell pepper in pot until tender.
4. Stir in sausage, garlic and parsley. Sauté for 8 more minutes.
5. Toss turkey back into pot and gently stir in pepper and red chilies. Add broth and wine. Simmer for 5 minutes.
6. While simmering, add the Better Than Bouillon.
7. Get the sucker up to a good boil, then stir in the rice, cover and simmer for 20 minutes (or until the rice is done). Stir as you see fit.

Finito. Serve with a fork...

TURKEY MANICOTTI

Manicotti, as you probably know, is a cylindrical ribbed pasta tube designed to be crammed full of great tasting stuff. This recipe calls for turkey and spinach (plus a bunch of other flavorful things). The end result is a very rich and stomach filling entrée.

*1 package manicotti noodles
3 lbs spinach – stemmed and cleaned
½ yellow onion – minced
¾ lb ground turkey
1 cup mozzarella cheese – grated
½ cup parmesan cheese – grated*

*You can use pre-made pasta sauce, but if you want to make it from scratch:
2 - 28 oz cans crushed roma tomatoes
½ yellow onion – minced
1 tablespoon oregano
1 tablespoon sugar
small handful basil – chopped or torn
¼ cup white wine*

1. Preheat the oven to 350°.
2. Cook the noodles per the instructions on the box. When you drain them, do it carefully because you want to avoid tearing them. Also, it's important to keep them separated so they don't stick together.
3. While the pasta cooks, you can start in on the stuffing. First off, steam the spinach until it wilts. Once it cools, drain, chop and hold.
4. Using a large pan, sauté the onion in a little olive oil until soft, about 5 minutes. Now add the ground turkey and sauté until browned.
5. Dump the spinach into your pan, combining it with the onion and turkey. Heat this up for a minute or two, then add in the cheeses until they melt...this won't take long.
6. Remove mixture from the pan and plop it all into a bowl to cool down a bit.
7. If you're making the sauce, start by sautéing the onion, then add all the other ingredients. Let everything simmer together for about 15 minutes.
8. Once the spinach/turkey stuffing is cool enough to handle, grab a small handful and carefully stuff the noodles. Again, try to avoid tearing the manicotti. When you finish with a tube, lay it gently into a baking dish. Repeat until all the noodles are engorged with goodness.
9. Ladle sauce over everything, top with some added parmesan if you want it extra cheesy, cover with foil and slip it into the oven for about 45 minutes.

Serve with a big old loaf of crusty French bread and a full-bodied Barolo

TURKEY STEW

☆☆☆

A thick stew loaded with poultry and vegetables. Essentially, this is turkey pot pie without the pie crust and peas. You can substitute chicken for turkey, and you can add whatever else suits your taste. If I liked peas, I'd add them...but I don't so I didn't.

NOTE: takes about 90 minutes all in.

*3 carrots – diced
3 stalks celery – diced
1 yellow onion – diced
2 tablespoons olive oil
3 tablespoons butter
¼ cup flour
4 cups chicken stock
1 tablespoon chicken flavored Better Than Bouillon
3 Yukon potatoes – peeled and diced
2 bay leaves
a few stalks of thyme (or a tablespoon dried thyme)
4 cups cooked turkey breast – cubed or torn*

1. Grab a large stew pot and sauté the carrots, celery and onion in the oil over med-low heat. Crank in a little S&P and let this go for 6 minutes, until the vegetables are soft.
2. Meanwhile, you're gonna make some roux. Warm up one cup of the chicken stock and have it standing by. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a skillet on low-med heat and whisk in the flour (in lieu of a whisk, you can also use a rubber spatula). Once the butter and flour form a paste, add the final tablespoon of butter. Keep whisking (or spatulating) until the roux turns a nice blondish color (about ten minutes). Now whisk in the heated stock one ladle at a time.
3. Once your vegetables are limp, add in the potatoes, the remaining three cups of stock, the roux and the Better Than Bouillon.
4. Tie up the bay leaf and thyme in some cheese cloth (so the thyme leaves don't spread into the broth) and dump this little flavor pack into the stew.
5. Bring to a boil, then reduce and simmer (partially covered) for 30 minutes.
6. After the appropriate time has elapsed, add the turkey. This concoction will now simmer again for another 30 minutes.

Serve with some crusty sourdough bread.

UNCLE SCHMECTER'S TURKEY CHILI

☆☆☆

Lemuel Schmecter (a distant uncle on my father's side), worked his magic behind the counter at "Schmecter's Chili Palace" in Ukiah. One glorious day he came up with the following recipe, which he somewhat reluctantly passed on to me (Uncle Lemuel wasn't the most generous fellow), and I now enthusiastically pass along to you. This is a great option for what to do with that leftover turkey after you roast a bird.

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 large onion – diced

1 red bell pepper – diced

1 yellow bell pepper – diced

2 celery stalks – diced

28 oz can dark red kidney beans – drained and rinsed

28 oz can crushed tomatoes

2 cups chicken stock

½ cup red or white wine

3 cups turkey, light meat (skinless) – cooked and torn

2 tablespoons chili powder

½ teaspoon cumin

1 teaspoon coriander

1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1 teaspoon salt

few dashes Cholula

1 cup cheddar cheese – grated

sour cream

cornbread with honey-butter to serve alongside – optional, but fantastic! Marie Callender's instant mix is great. For the honey-butter, simply soften some butter in the microwave (10-15 seconds...you want it soft, not melted into a puddle), and splooge in some honey

1. In a good sized pot, heat oil over a medium flame, and add onions, peppers and celery. Cook til tender (about 8 minutes).
2. Now add everything else (except the cheese). Lem was all about simplicity.
3. Simmer partially covered for about 40 to 45 minutes.

Serve, topped with cheese and sour cream and accompanied by the cornbread and plenty of cold beer. Uncle Lemuel favored Brown Derby because it was 99 cents for a six pack. You can do better.

CORNISH GAME HENS GRILLED WITH LEMON AND HERBS

This combination of herbs, spices, lemon and wine really infuses the little hen with amazing flavor. In case you're wondering what a Cornish game hen is, wonder no more: it's a cross-breed between a Cornish game cock, a White Plymouth Rock Hen and a Malayan fighting cock. In case you're wondering, "But why?" The answer: to develop a succulent bird with all white meat suitable for a single serving. Those Cornishians were darn clever. This will serve 4.

Note: you've got brining time and resting time going on here...plan your prep

*4 game hens – brined
½ cup tarragon – minced
¼ cup chives – minced
3 lemons – one of which will donate its zest for the cause
the zest from that forementioned lemon
1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon oregano
2 tablespoons olive oil
splash white wine
1 tablespoon honey*

1. What you want to do first is brine the birds. Make the solution in two batches, and put two birds into a large Ziplock bag, then fill it with brine. Repeat. Place bags into fridge for a few hours (at least 2 – less than 8).
2. In the meantime, combine herbs and spices, oil, wine, honey and zest and juice from one lemon.
3. When the appropriate time has passed, yank the soaking birds from the fridge and pat dry.
4. Put the birds into a glass baking dish (or whatever you've got handy) and rub them inside and out with the herbal glop.
5. Quarter the remaining two lemons and insert into the hens (½ lemon, i.e., 2 quarters, per bird).
6. Pour any remaining herbal goo over the poultry, cover with plastic wrap, and let sit on the counter for an hour.
7. When the timer goes off an hour later, dig out the lemons and slit the birds up the middle to spatchcock (butterfly).
8. Grill over indirect heat...about 15 to 20 minutes per side, turning frequently since the oil-based mixture will cause the skin to crisp up quickly.

Traditional side is wild rice, but you can always go with roasted potatoes.

CORNISH GAME HENS WITH MUSTARD AND ROSEMARY

This game hen has bolder flavors than the "Hens With Lemon and Herbs" and as a result, is more suited to heartier side dishes and a more robust wine. Also, this is baked instead of grilled, so it's more appropriate for inclement weather (unless you're one of those people who BBQ in the garage...and if you are, you might want to rethink that). Serves 2 (one hen per person). If you can fit 4 hens in your oven, double up the recipe.

2 game hens – brined

¼ cup whole-grain mustard

2 tablespoons Dijon

2 cloves garlic – pressed (smash with the flat side of a knife blade)

1 tablespoon rosemary – minced

¼ cup olive oil

1. Preheat oven to 375°.
2. Combine the two mustards, garlic and rosemary in a bowl.
3. Whisk in the oil (gradually...what's your hurry?)
4. Rub the cavities and outside of the birds with the mixture. Season with salt and pepper.
5. Place the hens into shallow roasting pans and bake for about an hour. Check with a thermometer at 60 minutes (you want the end product to be around 165° - 170°) and be prepared to let it cook for another 10 to 15 minutes if necessary. If the critters are browning too quickly, you can cover them with foil for the last 15 minutes.
6. Remove from the oven and let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

Good plate companions would be rice or roasted potatoes and a dark green vegetable.

BEEF BRISKET

The brisket (which comes from the cow's chest) is one of the nine "primal cuts" of beef. They cherish it in Texas and Kansas City BBQs, where it's traditionally smoked, slathered in sauce and then served alongside slaw, beer and people wearing Tony Lama boots. And need I remind you that the brisket is also the source of pastrami and corned beef? It's truly magical.

Note: allow four hours from start to finish

3-4 lb brisket (trimmed of fat)

1 onion – sliced

2-3 carrots – sliced

12 ounces beer – darker lager works well here

12 ounces chili sauce (tomato based)

½ cup brown sugar

S&P

1. Preheat oven to 300°.
2. Season the brisket with S&P and place it in a baking dish, then cover with a layer of onions (scatter any remaining onions around the sides).
3. Nestle the carrots around the beef, right there with the spillover onions.
4. Mix together the beer, chili sauce and brown sugar and pour this over the top of everything. **Note: experiment with different chili sauces to find one that helps balance the sweetness of the sugar.**
5. Cover with foil and slide this into the oven for 3 hours. Remove the foil and then let it go for another 30 minutes.
6. Let the meat cool a bit before slicing.

Excellent with mashed potatoes (especially with all that delicious, sweet gravy). You could also toss a bunch of small potatoes into the mix along with the carrots and onions from the get-go.

BRAISED BEEF

☆☆☆

*My very favorite beef dish. It can be made with bone-in short ribs **OR** you can go boneless, in which case you'll want to use flatiron steak. If you're doing ribs, figure 4 ribs per pound – and 2-3 ribs per person. If you're going boneless, figure about ½ pound per person (there is some shrinkage). The recipe below will serve 6 people (with maybe a little left over for the next day).*

Note: 30-45 minutes prep + 4 hours cooking

*3-4 lbs short ribs **-OR-** 3-4 lbs flatiron steak (cut into ½ pound pieces)*

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 yellow onion – diced

2 stalks celery – diced

6 carrots – 2 diced & 4 chopped into 1" pieces

1 cup flour

6 ounces tomato paste

*2 tablespoons demi glace **-OR-** beef flavored Better Than Bouillon*

2 cups red wine (Cabernet, Merlot or a red blend work well)

3 cups chicken broth

⅓ cup balsamic vinegar

8 sprigs thyme

1 tablespoon oregano

3 bay leaves

1. Preheat the oven to 275°. Braising is low and slow.
2. Start by browning the meat. Hit the beef with a little salt and pepper, then lightly dredge in flour, and brown in oil at medium temp. Don't crowd your pan - just do 3 or 4 pieces at a time.
3. After the meat is browned, transfer to a plate and have it standing by.
4. In the meantime, grab a Dutch oven that's large enough to hold everything. Put a tablespoon of olive oil into your pot and sauté the onion, celery and diced carrots on med-low for about 8 minutes.
5. Once they're soft, stir in the tomato paste, and then add the wine. Simmer until the wine is reduced by half (about 10 minutes).
6. Pour in the broth, vinegar and the demi glace. Bring this to a boil.
7. Add the herbs. **Note: Tie the thyme in some cheese cloth so you can remove it before you serve this dish.** Lay the meat into your broth. Put the lid on the pot and slide it into the oven for 4 hours.
8. When you have an hour left to go, add the chopped carrots to the pot as well.

Serve in shallow bowls over mashed potatoes and topped with the savory gravy.

CARNE ASADA

☆☆☆

Carne asada is a summertime staple and there are endless ways to prepare it. What I like about this one is it's got a lot of flavor, and doesn't hit you in the mouth with too much heat.

Note: best to let this marinate for 12-24 hours...but if you don't have the time, do the best you can with what you've got

3 pounds of skirt steak

5 limes – juiced

2 jalapenos – chopped -OR- 2 green chilies (if you want less heat)

½ red onion – sliced

1 bunch cilantro – chopped

2 tablespoons cumin

½ tablespoon chili powder

½ cup of orange juice

1. Combine all ingredients to make the marinade.
2. Put skirt steak into a big ziplock bag and pour in the marinade – **see note above for marinade times.**
3. Post marination, remove the meat from the bag and blot it dry. Let it come to room temp before you slap it on the grill.
4. Crank up the heat on your BBQ and grill the meat for a just a few minutes per side. You want it charred and still pink inside. Take it off the grill and let it rest for a few minutes, then either slice it thin against the grain or chop it up for that authentic street food look.

Can be served in a multitude of ways. I like this in soft tacos with a side of guacamole and my favorite salsas. Beer is optional, but strongly recommended.

JOE'S SPECIAL

When I was a kid, my parents used to take me and my brother to a place in San Francisco called New Joe's, where we'd always order the Joe's Special. It was one of the very rare occasions we enjoyed eating spinach (which was quite a culinary leap for 7 and 10 year olds). A healthy, easy meal to whip up...and maybe, just maybe, you can get your kids to eat spinach.

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 onion – minced

1 teaspoon dried oregano

½ lb mushrooms – sliced

*1 lb ground beef **-OR-** turkey*

2 lbs fresh spinach – stemmed, cooked and chopped

4 eggs (2 whole + 2 whites) – beaten

¼ cup fresh grated parmesan

1. Grab a large skillet that can hold all the above. Fire up the burner to med-low heat and sauté onions in 2 tablespoons olive oil for about 6 minutes until slightly browned. Set the onions aside in a bowl.
2. Add a little more oil if needed and toss in the mushrooms. Sauté for about 5 minutes. When done, drain the mushrooms of excess oil and liquid and add the 'shrooms in with the patiently waiting onions.
3. In the meantime, in another vessel, steam the spinach. Once it's steamed, drain it and chop it up.
4. Wipe out the oily mushroom pan and add the meat. As it's browning, add the oregano. Once the meat is cooked, add in the onions, mushrooms and spinach. Let this all combine on low heat for a few minutes.
5. Now pour the beaten eggs into the skillet, stirring until set (three or four minutes). Finally, top with your parmesan.

We used to add several shakes of Worcestershire sauce to the finished product. It's also delicious with salsa. Side dishes are superfluous because this has got it all.

JET'S MONGOLIAN BEEF

From Jet Tila's 101 Asian Dishes, this is tangy and savory. It truly tastes just like something right out of a Chinese restaurant kitchen. This will serve two, but easy to stretch it to serve more.

The Beef

*1½ pounds skirt steak – sliced thin
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons cornstarch
2 tablespoons water
2 tablespoons vegetable oil*

The Sauce

*1 teaspoon ginger – minced
2 tablespoons oyster sauce
2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
3 tablespoons soy sauce
3 teaspoons white vinegar
½ tablespoon cornstarch*

The Rest

*3 tablespoons vegetable oil
4-6 dried chilies
½ red bell pepper – chopped
½ onion – chopped
2 scallions – sliced*

1. Starting with the beef, mix together all ingredients and add the skirt steak. Set this aside until ready to use (you can prepare this the day before and store it in the fridge.)
2. Onto the sauce. Combine everything and hold. Got it? Good.
3. Time to fry this up. Heat the oil in a wok or sauté pan and add the beef. Cook for only a minute. **Note: this meat will continue to cook when you add the rest of the ingredients.**
4. Add the chilies, red bell, onion and scallions and let them cook for another 5 or 6 minutes (you want the onion translucent).
5. Finally, pour in the sauce and stir constantly for another 2 minutes, until the sauce thickens up.

Serve over a bed of rice.

INA'S POT ROAST

This is slight riff on a recipe from Contessa Ina Garten. I like the occasional pot roast in the fall or winter, and I especially like the leftovers in a sandwich the next day.

3–4 lb boneless chuck roast

1 cup flour

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 yellow onion – diced

2 stalks celery – diced

8 carrots – peeled; 2 diced and 6 chopped into 2" chunks

1 cup red wine

2 cups beef stock

1 tablespoon beef flavored Better Than Bouillon

14 ounces whole plum tomatoes in puree

2 stalks thyme

1 bay leaf

1. Preheat the oven to 275°.
2. Season the meat with salt and pepper, then lightly dredge in flour.
3. Heat the oil in a Dutch oven over med-high heat and brown the meat on all sides. Remove the meat and set aside.
4. Into that oily pot toss the onion, celery and diced carrots (hold back the carrot chunks for now). Reduce the heat to medium and soften up the vegetables for 5 to 6 minutes.
5. Pour in the wine and simmer for five minutes, allowing it to slightly reduce.
6. Add the beef stock and tomatoes and bring to a boil. Now spoon in the bouillon (which will dissolve in the hot liquid).
7. Place the meat on top of the vegetables, add the thyme and bay leaf and slide the covered pot into the oven for 3½ hours.

You can serve this over mashed potatoes, or if you want an authentic Jewish experience, go with a side of "*Potato Pancakes*," along with sour cream and apple sauce. Welcome to the tribe.

RENITA'S BEEF STIR FRY

My sister-in-law, Dr. Renita Danabalan, makes a terrific stir fry that's easy, quick, healthy and flavorful. Like most stir fries, you can use this as a base recipe and ad lib your way into a concoction of your own (just don't tell her).

*vegetable (or grapeseed) oil
1 lb lean beef (e.g. flank steak) – cut into thin, bite-sized strips
1 tablespoon fresh ginger – sliced
1-2 cups broccoli – chopped
1 cup carrots – sliced thin on the bias
1-2 cups mushrooms – sliced
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon oyster sauce
1 red bell pepper – seeded and sliced into thin strips*

1. Heat oil in a hot wok and cook the beef just until it turns pink. Once your protein is cooked, scoop it out and hold it in a bowl.
2. Heat up a little more oil and add the ginger. Wait for the oil to aromatize, then dump in the broccoli and carrots. Stir these around a bit to give the hard vegetables a head start, and after a couple of minutes, add the mushrooms.
3. Pour in a couple tablespoons of water and cover for a few minutes. The steam will cook all the vegetables to vibrant perfection.
4. Add the soy sauce and oyster sauce. Give it all a stir, then toss back in your beef, along with bell pepper strips. Allow everything to blend for a minute or two.

Serve over a bed of rice.

ROASTED BEEF TENDERLOIN

★★★

This is an amazing cut of beef and incredibly easy to prepare. The tenderloin sits beneath the ribs next to the backbone and since this muscle does very little work, it's the most tender part of the cow. It's pricey but it's something to consider next time you're cooking to impress.

Note: needs 45 minutes of resting time throughout the process

Note 1A: You can follow the directions below and end up with a delicious meal. Alternatively, you could season the meat and use the Sous Vide method, finishing it on the grill, which has become my preferred method

½ pound of beef per person – Go with USDA "choice" instead of "prime" and save some cash. There's really no quality difference with this cut of meat
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1 tablespoon freshly ground pepper
1 tablespoon oregano
½ tablespoon cumin
olive oil (enough for browning)

1. Preheat oven to 300°.
2. Trim the "silver" fat off the meat, but don't worry about any of the usual marbled fat.
3. Combine salt, pepper, oregano and cumin and rub this mixture into the roast, coating it completely. **Note: you can use different spices, but nothing too overpowering that will take away from the inherent flavor of the beef.**
4. Heat up a cast iron skillet on high, drizzle in some oil (a couple of tablespoons) then sear the roast on all sides.
5. Remove the meat from the pan, cover it with foil and allow it to rest for 10 to 15 minutes.
6. Place the rested roast back into that oily skillet and slide it into the oven until it reaches an internal temp between 130° and 135°. This should take about 12-15 minutes per pound, but safest to check it often with a meat thermometer. While this may seem on the rare side, the meat will continue to cook while it rests again.
7. Take out the meat, set it on a board and tent it with foil (if you tuck it up nice and tight with foil, the meat will overcook). You'll want to let this rest for another 15-20 minutes. The beef will cool down while it's resting, and that's okay. It's still delicious.

8. If you have guests who like their beef at different degrees of doneness, just cut the log into two and give one section a little more oven love.

I generally serve this with horseradish sauce and a side of "*Mushroom Risotto*."

The Horseradish Sauce:

1 ½ cups sour cream

¼ cup prepared horseradish – drained

1 tablespoon chives – minced

1 teaspoon white vinegar

1 ½ teaspoons salt

Combine all the ingredients and blend well. Adjust the seasoning to taste, then pop into the fridge until you're ready to serve.

SANTA MARIA TRI TIP

Santa Maria, California is an hour north of Santa Barbara and is primarily known for its agriculture, wineries and BBQ. In fact, the city gave rise to the cut of beef known as a "tri tip," and their distinctive spice rub has become universally popular.

*1 tri-tip roast – from 2½ to 4 pounds
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1 tablespoon ground black pepper
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon onion powder
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon cayenne
1 teaspoon dried rosemary
1 teaspoon dry sage*

1. Combine all ingredients and work the rub into the meat. Cover and let the meat sit at room temp for an hour.
2. Get your grill smoking hot and sear the roast for 4 minutes/side.
3. Move it away from direct heat and place it fat side up. You want to maintain a grill temp between 250°-300°.
4. Depending upon how you like your meat (and the size of the cut), it can cook anywhere from 20-40 minutes. I like it med/rare, so I pull it off the grill when the internal temp hits 130°.
5. Let the meat rest for about ten minutes. Loosely tent it with foil (you want to keep it warm, but not continue to cook).

Slice it against the grain and you're good to go.

HONEY GRILLED PORK LOIN

Pork loin used to be a semi-regular part of my diet, and for some reason about 20 years ago, I simply quit eating it. Recently I spied some nice looking loins in the meat case and for some cosmic reason I decided to give them a try. I was glad I did. Juicy, tender and a lovely alternate to beef and poultry. As noted below, you can either grill or roast. The key is to not overcook the meat.

Note: give yourself a good four hours to let the meat marinate and rest prior to cooking

3 lb boneless pork loin

2/3 cup soy sauce

1 tablespoon fresh ginger – grated

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1 tablespoon + 1/4 cup brown sugar

1/3 cup honey

a few tablespoons of white wine or mirin

1. Combine soy, ginger, sesame oil and 1 tablespoon of brown sugar for your marinade. Slather over the top of the loin and slide into fridge for 3+ hours.
2. When it's time to grill, place the meat on the counter and let it come to room temp (about 20 minutes should be fine).
3. In the meantime, make the glaze by dumping the 1/4 cup brown sugar, honey and wine into a small pot and heat up until the sugar is dissolved. Pour this over the loin and it's time to grill.
4. Cook over medium heat (you can start with the flames high for some nice grill marks, then back them down). When the pork hits an internal heat of about 135°, take it off the grill, wrap it in foil and let it rest for 15-20 minutes. It will be medium to med/rare and pink inside, but don't worry about it being undercooked. It's exceptionally difficult to screw this up.
5. **Note: If you don't feel like firing up the BBQ, you can also roast this in the oven at 350°.** A 3 pounder should take between 45-60 minutes, but I'd check it after 30 minutes. If you overcook it, the loin will be dry and tough.

NOTORIOUS P.I.G. (aka PULLED PORK)

★★★

Everyone's favorite pig dish (putting aside bacon, which is in a category of its own). The basic concept of cooking this pork "low and slow" is the underlying theme to all pulled pork recipes. This particular preparation comes from Pete Hartung who grew up in the meat business...so who are we to argue? By the way, the cut of meat known as the pork "butt" is actually the pig's shoulder, so don't be put off by the thought you're eating swine cheeks.

3 pounds of pork butt/shoulder (will serve about 6 people)

few tablespoons of Old Bay

few tablespoons of cumin

BBQ sauce (my favorite is Rufus Teague Honey Sweet)

buns – toasted

dill pickles – sliced

slaw (see "Corky's Slaw" and "Sunstone Slaw" recipes)

1. Generously season the pork with Old Bay, cumin and S&P. You can also use a premixed meat rub if you'd rather. Wrap it tight in plastic wrap and store it in the fridge for a few hours. If you don't have the time for this, don't sweat it. Just season the meat and go onto the next step.
2. Remove the plastic wrap (you knew that) and place the meat into a roasting pan, then cover tightly with foil making sure to batten down all the hatches.
3. Slide it into an oven at 250° for 5 to 6 hours. Resist the urge to lift the foil and peek – trust me that the meat's doing just fine without your meddling. If your company is late and you need to keep the pig in the heat longer, it's okay to leave it in the oven and notch it down to 200° or so. You really have to work hard to mess this up.
4. When it's time, slide out the pork and pull it apart with forks (or tongs). Put the meat into a bowl then add the BBQ sauce. Go sparingly and just use enough sauce to cover the meat, not drown it. Your guests can always add more.
5. Building your sandwich – on a toasted bun*, pile the pork, the slaw and a few pickle slices and you're good to go.

****a note on the buns*** – I generally use La Brea Bakery Torta Take-And-Bake, which are delicious right out of your oven and give you some heft. If you want to go more traditional, you can use brioche or standard burger buns.

Too easy to be this damn tasty.

RED BEANS AND RICE WITH SMOKED PORK SHANKS

Quintessential Louisiana Creole cuisine. Since this is essentially a stew, there are unlimited ways to tweak it. Be creative and adjust it to your taste. Easily feeds four.

Note: this takes about 2 hours all in

*2 tablespoons oil
2 lbs smoked pork shanks
1 yellow onion – diced
2 celery stalks – diced
1 red bell pepper – seeded and diced
6–8 ounces of andouille sausage – sliced
3 cups chicken stock
1 teaspoon Cajun spice mix
4 oz tomato paste (or 2 tablespoons concentrated tomato paste)
4 - 16oz cans kidney beans – drained
2 bay leaves
rice (I use basmati)*

1. Start with a large soup pot or Dutch oven. Heat up the oil over a medium flame and sear the pork shanks. You're not browning the meat; just giving the shanks a little crust and rendering out some of the fat.
2. Remove the shanks (but keep them handy) and dump in the diced onion, celery and pepper. Sauté on med-low heat for about five minutes until the vegetables are limp.
3. Add back in the shanks along with the sausage, stock, bay leaves and the Cajun spice (there are many blended Cajun spice options on the market, and they're about the same, so don't sweat this too much).
4. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. Cover and let this go for an hour, stirring occasionally.
5. After an hour, remove the shanks to a cutting board to cool off. Meanwhile, stir in the tomato paste and beans. You're going to be simmering this for 20-30 minutes (you basically want everything to thicken up to the consistency of chili).
6. Back to those shanks. As soon as you can handle them without burning yourself, cut off as much meat as possible and add that to the pot.
7. And by way, now is a good time to START YOUR RICE.

Serve the porkified beans over the rice, with some hot sauce on the side.

TACOS AL PASTOR

Some of you might be wondering, "Who is Al Pastor, and why does he have his own taco recipe?" If you fall into that category, you've clearly: a) never eaten off a taco truck; b) never been to Mexico or, c) don't watch cooking shows. "al pastor" means "shepherd style," which refers to the cooking method employed in making this dish. At last count, there were 5,782 different variations of tacos al pastor, and all have two things in common...pork and pineapple. My variation came about when I was trying to figure out what to do with some leftover grilled pork tenderloin.

I'm not specifying any amounts below because you can make as many tacos as you like, depending upon how much pork (and other stuff) you've got on hand.

*6" flour tortillas (sometimes referred to as fajita size)
leftover grilled pork tenderloin – sliced really thin
spicy paprika mayo (see the recipe on page 147)
cheese of your choice – shredded
pico de gallo (that recipe's in here, too)
pineapple – diced small
cilantro – chopped
lime*

1. Heat the tortillas in a 250° oven just until they warm up and get pliable.
2. Load them up with the above ingredients. I proceed in the order listed, finishing with a squeeze of lime. You're by no means beholden to follow my lead in how you'd like to assemble your tacos.

TRADER VIC'S SPARERIBS

★★★

In 1934, Vic Bergeron opened a bar in Oakland called "Hinky Dinks" which gave birth to "Trader Vic's". The concept was a huge success, with 25 restaurants around the world. Sadly, today there's only one left in the US, but if you happen to live near Emeryville, California and you like Asian food, you've gotta check it out. These spareribs are one of their signature dishes (part of their famous "Cosmo Tidbits" platter) and this recipe captures the flavor perfectly.

Note: this takes at least two hours in the fridge and about 2½ hours to cook

*¾ cup + 2 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons salt
2 racks (about 4 lbs total) pork baby-back ribs
½ cup hoisin sauce
¼ cup soy sauce
¼ cup Thai sweet chili sauce
2 cloves garlic – minced
2 tablespoons fresh ginger – minced
1 teaspoon sesame oil
½ teaspoon ground pepper
¼ cup sesame seeds – toasted*

1. Grab a large Ziplock bag and pour in ¾ cup of sugar and two tablespoons of salt. Shake it up to mix it well. Cut the ribs into halves or thirds so they'll fit into the bag and slide them in with the sugar/salt blend. Make sure the ribs are coated evenly, seal the bag and pop into the fridge for 2 to 4 hours.

2. In the meantime make the glaze. Combine the hoisin, soy, sweet chili sauce, garlic, ginger, 2 remaining tablespoons of sugar, sesame oil and pepper in a bowl and whisk it all until smooth. Cover this and slide it into the fridge as well.

3. Once the ribs have done their allotted time in the cooler, remove them from the sugar/salt and pat with paper towels. Arrange the ribs on a foil-lined baking sheet and brush both sides with the glaze then top with the sesame seeds.

Note: only use about ¾ cup of the glaze; you'll need the rest of it later. Loosely cover the sticky ribs with plastic wrap and let them sit at room temp for 20 minutes. Now's time to crank the oven to 300°.

4. 20 minutes later has arrived. Remove the plastic wrap and slide the ribs into the oven on that baking sheet. These are gonna cook for 2 hours and you need to baste them with the pan juices every 30 minutes to keep them from getting too dry. If the pan gets dry, add some water to the baking sheet, and scrape and stir to dissolve the caramelized juices.

5. After 2 hours, remove the ribs from the oven and baste them with the remaining glaze, then slide them under the broiler for about 5 minutes, until you get a dark, golden brown.

LAMB BURGERS STUFFED WITH GOAT CHEESE

☆☆☆

We enjoy eating lamb, and during the grilling months these burgers are an excellent and tasty way to get our quota. A classy change-up over the usual beef or turkey burgers.

1-1½ pounds ground lamb (you're making four burgers – so increase or decrease as desired)

½ cup onion – minced

1 egg – beaten

½ cup breadcrumbs

3 ounces goat cheese – softened

1 tablespoon basil – minced

1 tablespoon dried oregano

tzatziki (see recipe herein)

1. Sauté onions on med-low in a little olive oil for about 6 minutes (until soft).
2. Mix those onions with the lamb, egg, breadcrumbs and some S&P. Knead all this together, then divide the mixture into four balls, cover and slide into the fridge.
3. Mix together softened goat cheese, a tablespoon of olive oil, basil and oregano then chill this for about 5 minutes.
4. Grab one of those lamb balls and shove your thumb into it until it reaches the center of the ball. Now fill that indentation with a tablespoon of the goat cheese mixture, then gently re-form the ball to cover the hole, while simultaneously flattening it out to make a slightly bulbous burger-shaped patty. Repeat with the remaining lamb and cheese.
5. Slap these onto the grill and cook until no longer pink inside. Times can vary depending on the heat of your BBQ, but figure about 5 minutes per side.

A side of tzatziki sauce is a must. I mean it.

LAMB STEW

Time for a short lesson in animal nomenclature. Lamb, hogget, and mutton are all terms for sheep, as well as for their meat. A sheep in its first year is a lamb and its tender meat is also lamb. A sheep in its second year is called a hogget. Never seen that on a menu. Older sheep meat is mutton. You'd be advised to stay away from tough, gristly, mutton (unless you find yourself stranded somewhere and the only food source is old Dolly who's pulled up lame).

Note: allow for about two hours all in

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 onion – chopped

4 carrots – chopped

3 tablespoons flour

1 cup red wine

2 cups beef broth

2 lbs of lamb – cubed – at least 3 or 4 cups

Note: you can use raw lamb, or leftover lamb from last night's grilled leg. Either works equally well

4 red potatoes – cubed

2 bay leaves

3 springs thyme

a few liberal cranks of S&P

1. Preheat your oven to 275°.
2. Get out your Dutch oven and sauté the onions and two of the carrots over medium heat until soft (about 7 minutes).
3. Stir in the flour (cook for two minutes) and then add the wine and broth. Give it all a good stir to make sure the flour is combined with the liquids.
4. Add the remaining carrots, lamb, potatoes, bay leaves, thyme, salt and pepper.
5. Slide your pot into the oven for 90 minutes. The lamb, carrots and potatoes should be tender and succulent.

Serve with a loaf of sourdough and a Guinness (or Harp).

LAMB TAGINE WITH CARAMELIZED ONIONS

☆☆☆

A delicious lamb stew with Moroccan flavors. A "tagine" is a dish of braised meat that's named after the unusual looking pot in which it's cooked. Ironically, you don't need a tagine to make a tagine...an old-fashioned stew pot will work just fine. This'll serve 4 people (with maybe a little left over).

2½ pounds lamb meat – chopped into 1" pieces. VERY IMPORTANT to get a good cut of lamb. I use a butterflied leg, and trim away all the fat. If you use lamb stew meat, this will end up tough and chewy and you're gonna hate yourself. Either spend the extra money and do it right or move on to something else.

6 cups sweet onions (about 2 pounds) – chopped. I know this sounds like a hell of a lot of onions, but they cook down. If you're not a big fan of onions, you might want to turn the page now – think of the money you'll save!

1½ cups water

1 tablespoon ground cinnamon

1 tablespoon ginger – grated

¼ teaspoon saffron threads

3 cups plum tomatoes (about 1½ pounds) – chopped

2 tablespoons butter

1 teaspoon salt

pinch or two of sugar

1. Grab a large, heavy pot. Dump in the following: lamb, 2 cups onions, water, cinnamon, ginger, saffron and some S&P. Bring to a boil over med-high heat. Once it gets a nice burble going, reduce to med-low, partially cover with a lid, and gently simmer for 90 minutes. **Note: total cooking time is 2 hours.**

2. After about 90 minutes, you're going to do two things. The first is to add in the tomatoes and continue to simmer for another 30 minutes (the intent here is two-fold – to make the meat more tender and to thicken the juices).

3. Your other task is to caramelize the remaining 4 cups of onions. Melt the butter in a large skillet over med-low heat and toss in the chopped onions and salt. Sauté these covered for about 10 minutes, then remove the lid, increase the heat to medium, add a pinch or two of sugar and continue sautéing until the onions are deep brown (stirring often); this oughta take another 15 minutes.

4. That's it. Season the lamb to taste with S&P. When you serve it, scatter the caramelized onions over the top.

I serve this over "Coconut Rice" and pair it with the "Roasted Pepper, Cuke and Tomato Salad." And of course, a side of chutney.

MOROCCAN BRAISED LAMB WITH WHITE BEANS

★ ★ ★

Our new favorite way to do lamb during the chilly, Central Oregon winters. It's extremely savory and filling, but not your run-of-the-mill lamb fare, which makes it both unique and a little risky for a dinner party. If you have adventurous eaters, go for it.

Note: takes about 2 hours all in

*1 tablespoon olive oil
2 pounds lamb (I use a butterflied leg) – cut into bite-sized chunks
1 onion – chopped
1 red bell pepper – seeded and diced
2 tablespoons tomato paste (you can also use the concentrate in the tube)
2 teaspoons paprika
2 teaspoons ground cumin
½ teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon harissa (optional)
1 teaspoon turmeric (optional)
1 tablespoon ginger – grated
½ cup white wine
2 cups chicken broth
2 – 8oz cans Great Northern beans (can substitute with Cannellini) - drained*

1. Preheat oven to 250°.
2. Preparing the lamb – cut off most of the fat cap but you can keep a few healthy fat chunks to toss into the pot to give everything a richer flavor.
3. Heat oil in a Dutch oven over med-high heat and lightly brown the lamb, stirring so it doesn't stick. This only takes a few minutes. Transfer the lamb to another vessel and hold.
4. Wipe out the pot, add more oil, then toss in the onion and bell pepper. Cook over medium heat to soften – about 6 minutes.
5. Stir in the tomato paste, paprika, cumin, harissa, turmeric and ginger. Cook until fragrant, just another minute. Revel in the warm, African aromas.
6. Stir in the wine then add the broth and beans and bring to a boil.
7. Add the lamb back to the pot, then cover and transfer to the waiting oven. Let this go for 1½ hours.

Serve with French or Sourdough bread.

RABBIT RAGU (aka ELMER'S REVENGE)

Ever wonder what would happen if Elmer caught Bugs? Wonder no more. Rabbit is a lean meat that's higher in protein and lower in calories, fat and cholesterol than many other meats, including chicken, beef and pork. Plus, there are a lot of 'em (like 700 million in the world), so there's no threat of eating them into extinction. I was treated to this at the Petrichor Vineyards Kitchen, a wonderful California-Irish fusion eatery in the heart of the wine country and was blown away by the rich flavor.

*3 lb rabbit – boned and cut into 1" pieces – will yield about 1½ pounds of meat
¼ cup olive oil
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ pound pancetta – diced into ¼" pieces
1 tablespoon sage – minced
1 tablespoon rosemary – minced
1 onion – diced
1 carrot – diced
1 celery stalk – diced
1 cup light red wine (e.g. Petrichor Grenache)
14 ounce can plum tomatoes in juice – drained and chopped*

1. First and foremost, unless you are a hunter/gatherer or a survivalist, have the butcher bone the rabbit for you.
2. Heat oil and butter together in a heavy skillet over moderate heat. Add pancetta, stirring for about two minutes. Toss in the sage and rosemary. Keep stirring for another 30 seconds or so.
3. Dump in the bunny bits and cook until the meat is no longer pink on the outside, about 3 minutes (you won't be feasting on rare rabbit...this meat is going to be cooked a lot more).
4. Add the onion, carrot, celery and let this go for another 5 minutes.
5. Add the wine and simmer uncovered for about 12 minutes. Your goal is to reduce the liquid and intensify the flavor.
6. Add the drained tomatoes, a teaspoon of sea salt, some pepper and continue to simmer, stirring every so often. You want the sauce to get thicken up, which'll take another 8-10 minutes.

And that's it. Rich and delicious. I serve it in the authentic Petrichor fashion over egg noodles.

AND IN CONCLUSION...

Cookies

Anytime Bars*
Blondies
Coconut Macaroons
Mini Maple Macaroons*
Meyer Lemon Bars*
Double Chocolate Cookies
Neiman-Marcus Chocolate Chip Cookies
Pains Au Chocolat
Pine Nut And Almond Cookies
Renita's Chocolate Chip Cookies
Spoon Cookies

Cakes

Blueberry Pudding Cake
Carrot Cupcakes
Charlee's Chocolate Lava Cake
Flourless Chocolate Cake
Laura-Lee's \$10,000 Cake
Lemon Pudding Cakes
Mini Black Bottom Cheesecakes*

But Wait... There's More...

Almond Muffins*
Apple Cinnamon Crepes
Apple Tarts
Apple Turnovers
Banana Bread/Muffins With Pecans And Chocolate
Cherry Lemon Crumbles
Chocolate Bread Pudding

ANYTIME BARS

This uber-healthy treat is from the Cancer Fighting Kitchen cookbook and can be eaten any time of day or night (hence the name). No processed flour, no sugar, no lard, and yet these are very tasty.

*1 cup raw pecans
1 cup whole raw almonds
4 tablespoons brown rice flour **-OR-** coconut flour
2 tablespoons flaxseeds (finely ground)
¼ teaspoon sea salt
pinch of baking powder
pinch of baking soda
¼ cup old-fashioned rolled oats
1 cup pitted dates – quartered (we use Medjool dates)
1 egg
5 tablespoons maple syrup
1 teaspoon vanilla extract*

1. Preheat the oven to 350° and line a baking sheet with parchment. Plus, oil up a 9-inch square pan.
2. Spread the pecans on a single layer on the baking sheet and toast for 4-5 minutes. You want them lightly browned, so keep watching them. They'll burn easily.
3. Next up, the almonds. Same deal. When they're lightly tanned, pull them out and turn the oven down to 325°.
4. Grab your food processor and combine the flour, flaxseeds, salt, baking powder and soda and process for a few seconds to blend. Now add in the nuts and pulse a few times to coarsely chop (not blitz). Finally, add in the oats and dates and pulse some more (maybe 10-15 times). The desired result is well chopped but still coarse.
5. In a large bowl, whisk together the egg, syrup and vanilla. Add in the stuff from the processor and use your hands to thoroughly mix everything together. Be sure to separate any clumps of fruit.
6. Spread this mixture into the oiled pan and bake for 25-30 minutes until it's set and golden brown. Don't overbake.
7. Let this cool on a wire rack, and while the bars are still in the pan, cut then into squares.

You'll to end up with 20-25 completely guilt free treats. I actually feel healthier just sharing this recipe. Pass it along, because sharing is caring.

BLONDIES

Blondies, named for their color, are the bastard cousins of brownies, just as "white chocolate" is the bastard second cousin of real chocolate. Putting aside those awkward relationships (which can get ugly around the holidays), these are delicious and a nice alternative to traditional chocolate-based desserts.

1½ sticks butter – melted (yep...that's a lotta butter)

1¼ cups light brown sugar

4 teaspoons vanilla extract

2 teaspoons kosher salt

1 teaspoon baking powder

2 eggs at room temp – lightly beaten

1¼ cups flour

1 cup pecans – toasted and chopped

1 cup white chocolate chips

1. Heat the oven to 350° and arrange a rack in the middle. Coat a 13-by-9-inch baking dish with butter and flour; set aside.
2. Combine butter and brown sugar in a large bowl and stir until evenly incorporated. Add vanilla, salt, and baking powder, and stir until thoroughly combined.
3. Stir in the eggs, then add the flour and blend in until it's just incorporated (no white streaks should remain). Fold in the nuts and chips.
4. Transfer the batter to the baking dish, and bake until set, about 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and place on a wire rack to cool completely before cutting.

COCONUT MACAROONS

You could buy these cookies at the store, but they're a no-brainer to make at home and this way you get to eat them warm. I feel much less guilt eating cookies when I go to the trouble of making them myself. Please join me in guilt-free dessert consumption.

*14 ounces sweetened shredded coconut
14 ounces sweetened condensed milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 egg whites (at room temp)
¼ teaspoon kosher salt*

1. Preheat the oven to 325°.
2. Combine coconut, milk and vanilla in a large bowl.
3. Whip the egg whites and salt with an electric hand mixer or a standing mixer. Crank it up to high. You want to end up with semi-firm peaks.
4. Carefully fold the beaten whites into the coconut mixture until just blended (you don't want to break the eggs back down to mushy glop).
5. Drop the batter onto a parchment lined baking sheet. Use one heaping tablespoon per cookie. Your lizard brain will encourage you to make them larger, but don't. Smaller and flatter is better at this stage; the macs will take care of themselves as they cook.
6. Bake 25 to 30 minutes until golden brown.

Cool (at least a little) and enjoy them without a shred of self-condemnation.

MINI MAPLE MACAROONS

Another healthy dessert option from the Cancer Fighting Kitchen cookbook. These are very similar to the cookies from in the previous recipe but substitute maple syrup for condensed milk. It's kind of like opting for a vegetarian restaurant instead of driving through McDonald's.

2 cups unsweetened, shredded coconut

¼ cup maple syrup

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

2 eggs – whites only

pinch of sea salt

1. Preheat oven to 350° and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Mix together the coconut, maple syrup and vanilla.
3. In another bowl, whisk egg whites and salt until you achieve stiff peaks. *Gently* fold the coconut mixture into the eggy peaks and refrigerate for 20 minutes.
4. Use a teaspoon and *clean* fingers to form the dough into 24 small mounds on your parchment covered pan. Bake for 12-15 minutes, until golden brown.
5. Let them cool completely and go for it.

A bonus idea...melt some chocolate and dip the tops of the cookies in the cacao pool. So, you had a vegan meal and then got dessert at McDonald's...

MEYER LEMON BARS

☆☆☆

Meyer lemons are sweeter than regular lemons and give this cookie a wonderful tart/sweet punch. They're in season from November to March, which makes these treats a nice addition to your holiday cookie menu. Generally, the only time I use Meyer lemons is at Thanksgiving and Christmas to make "Meyer Lemon Cranberry Sauce" (check it out), and since the lemons generally come in bags of 6, I have a bunch left over. A quick search landed me on a website called Love and Olive Oil, which is where I found this shortbread/custard gem.

The Shortbread:

¼ cup powdered sugar

½ cup butter (room temp)

1 cup flour

pinch of kosher salt

The Lemon Custard:

2 eggs + 1 additional egg yolk (room temp)

1 cup granulated sugar

⅓ cup Meyer lemon juice

2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest

¼ teaspoon vanilla

¼ teaspoon baking powder

2 tablespoons flour

powdered sugar for the topping

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Butter up a 8x8 baking pan AND line it with parchment paper.
3. You're doing the shortbread first. Beat together the powdered sugar and butter until fluffy. Add the flour and salt and mix until everything marries together. Break this into pieces and press evenly into the bottom of your parchment lined pan.
4. Bake for 20 minutes. The top will puff up and start to brown.
5. In the meantime, get to work on the custard. Combine the whole eggs (plus that random yolk), and the sugar and beat on medium speed for 2-3 minutes. Add in the lemon juice, zest and vanilla, then sift the flour and baking powder over the top, mixing until just incorporated.
6. Pour the lemon mixture over the hot shortbread, then return to the oven for an additional 18-20 minutes (until the top is crackly and set). Remove from the oven and set the pan on a wire rack to cool completely.
7. Slide this into the fridge **for at least 2 hours**. Just before serving, dust with some powdered sugar.

DOUBLE CHOCOLATE COOKIES

Double chocolate? Overkill, you say? Well, yeah. This combines dark chocolate and semi-sweet chocolate and is insanely rich. These cookies are best made to take to someone else's house so they aren't lying around your kitchen beckoning to you every time you pass by. Makes 2 dozen chocolaty bombs.

Note: these need to spend an hour chilling before baking

12 ounces 60% bittersweet chocolate chips

6 tablespoons unsalted butter

3 eggs

1 cup sugar

1/3 cup flour

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

12 ounces semi-sweet chocolate chips

1. Melt the bittersweet chips and butter in a double boiler (you can use a stainless steel mixing bowl nestled atop a pot of boiling water).
2. In a large bowl, use your electric mixer to beat eggs and sugar until thick, then stir in that chocolate/butter ooze.
3. In a smaller bowl, stir together the flour and baking powder, then blend this into the waiting chocolate mélange.
4. Finally, stir in the semi-sweet chips.
5. This is where it gets a little weird – you're going to use some plastic wrap to form the dough into two logs – each about 8" long and 2" in diameter. You're correct in assuming that the dough's going to be soft; you'll be using the plastic wrap to hold it in shape. Wrap it up tight then pop it into the fridge for at least an hour to firm up. This step is messy.
6. Preheat the oven to 375°. Unwrap your chocolate logs and cut them into 3/4 inch slices, then place them on a parchment lined baking sheet (they're going to spread so leave a little room). By the way, this step is messy as well. A small price to pay for the end result.
7. Bake 12–14 minutes.

Let them cool and then eat yourself into a chocolate coma...I mean, take them to that dinner party at someone else's house.

AND, if you want to completely shatter any thought of a diet, put a healthy spoonful of vanilla ice cream between two of these (preferably while they're still warm) and make your own **ice cream sandwich**. You're welcome.

NEIMAN-MARCUS CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

The urban myth goes something like this: a woman took her daughter to lunch at NM and they had this incredible cookie for dessert. The woman had to have the recipe, so after much pleading, the waitress said she could purchase it for "two fifty." The woman, knowing a deal when she heard one, said, "Just add it to my bill." (You already know where this is going, right?) Anyway, the "two fifty" turned out to \$250. The woman argued, ranted, threw china (or whatever) but she'd made a binding verbal contract (a fairly loose interpretation of the law, but this was in Texas). So, she figured if she was gonna pay \$250 for the recipe, she'd send it out to ALL of her friends for FREE! What a devious and diabolical way to get back at a billion dollar corporation, huh? Yeah...it's all a crock, BUT, the cookies are damn good, so here, for absolute gratis, is the famous recipe.

½ cup unsalted butter – softened (microwave for 15 seconds or so)

1 cup brown sugar

3 tablespoons sugar (the regular granulated stuff)

1 egg

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1¾ cups flour

1½ teaspoons instant espresso powder

8 ounces semisweet chocolate chips

1. Beat the butter with the sugars until it gets kind of fluffy.
2. Beat in the egg and the vanilla extract.
3. Combine the dry ingredients (except the chips) and beat into the butter mixture. When this is done, stir in the chocolate chips. It will look like A LOT of chips, and in fact it is. Live with it. Embrace it.
4. Drop large spoonful (about the size of a golf ball works well) of this batter onto a greased baking sheet. By the way...they will not spread a lot when cooking. You'll get 15-20 cookies out of this recipe.
5. Bake at 375° for about 10-12 minutes. They might need a few more minutes, depending upon your oven.

End result is a thick, rich cookie. If you like choc-chip cookies, and who among us doesn't, you'll like these. Don't know if they're worth \$250, but luckily, we're not paying.

RENITA'S CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

☆☆☆

These confections are slightly denser and richer than regular chocolate chip cookies due to the addition of brown sugar. Kind of a cross between a cookie and a scone, and what's wrong with that? The answer – nothing at all. These are amazing right out of the oven and just as good the next day. This recipe makes about 2 dozen scookies.

2½ cups flour

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup unsalted butter (at room temp)

¾ cup light brown sugar

½ cup granulated sugar

2 eggs

1½ teaspoon vanilla

2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips (Ghiardelli's are my go-to)

1. You'll be baking these at 350°, but don't turn the oven on just yet (see #5).
2. Mix the flour, baking soda and salt in a bowl. Set aside.
3. Grab your mixer and combine butter, brown sugar and granulated sugar. Add the eggs (one at a time) and then the vanilla. Mix all of this until nice and smooth.
4. Add the flour mixture directly into the butter/sugar/egg blend and lightly fold the dry with the gooey, then add the chips. The dough will be shaggy.
5. Cover the batter and pop it into the refrigerator for about 30 minutes. Now's the time to preheat your oven.
6. Spoon out ping-pong ball sized dabs of batter onto a parchment lined baking sheet then smoosh them down a bit to give you flatter results. These don't spread too much so you can position the dough balls slightly closer than you normally would when making cookies.
7. Bake for 15 minutes, or until brown on the bottom and around the edges.

Warning: *DO NOT allow children to consume these within two hours of their appointed bedtime, unless for some bizarre reason you want them to stay up all night...*

PAINS AU CHOCOLAT

☆☆☆

These tasty little French pastries are simple to make and are best served warm. They also happen to be excellent with coffee the next morning (reheat them in the oven – the microwave makes the pastry soggy).

17.3 oz package of frozen puff pastry (2 sheets) – partially thawed

1 egg

2 - 4 oz chocolate bars (either bittersweet or milk chocolate) – cut into 1" x 2" pieces

1 tablespoon sugar

1. Partially thaw the pastry and cut each sheet into 3 strips (along the folds) and then cut each strip into thirds. You'll end up with a total of 18 pieces of pastry about 2" x 3". I emphasize "partially" thawed because it's much easier to work with the dough when it's still a little cold. Once it thaws completely it's a total glop.
2. Line a baking sheet with some parchment paper and preheat the oven to 400°.
3. Beat the egg with a tablespoon of water and brush the top of the pastry squares with this glaze.
4. Place one piece of chocolate on the edge of a pastry square and roll it up tight, enclosing the chocolate. I've made these dozens of times and found that chocolate bars DO NOT cut into neat little rectangles. Instead, they tend to shatter. No worries. Just load each little hunk of pastry with the appropriate amount of chocolate, whole or fragmented, and it'll be fine.
5. Arrange the now-stuffed pastries on the baking sheet, seam side down.
6. Brush the tops of the pastries with the remaining egg wash and lightly sprinkle sugar over them. Use regular sugar, not the fancy confectioner's stuff.
7. Pop in the oven and bake until they're brown, about 15 minutes.

PINE NUT AND ALMOND COOKIES

I got this from the LA Times food section many years ago when people still actually read newspapers. Every once in a while you could stumble across some decent recipes wedged in between the ads. This one's pretty straightforward...a nice alternative to pastries crammed with chocolate or fruit.

*2½ cups pine nuts
7 oz package of almond paste
¾ cup sugar
2 egg whites
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
¼ cup flour
¼ teaspoon
a couple shakes of powdered sugar*

1. Set the oven to 325°.
2. Put ¼ cup of the nuts into a food processor and pulse until they are coarsely ground.
3. Break up the almond paste and add it to the processor. Pulse just until everything's mixed...you don't want to pulverize the poor nuts, at least, not just yet.
4. Add the sugar through the cool little processor tube while the machine is running, and churn this up until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
5. With the processor still processing, add the egg whites and the vanilla through the tube. Continue blending until everything is smooth. Plop what you've got into a large bowl and carry on.
6. Add the flour and salt to the bowl and mix it by hand until just blended. Don't get carried away and over-process.
7. Place the remaining nuts in a small bowl. Using a teaspoon and "lightly moistened hands" (that's what it says), drop rounded teaspoon-sized balls into your reserve pine nut cache. Roll those cookies around and get 'em coated with nuts.
8. Now place the nutty dough balls on a parchment lined baking sheet, about 2 inches apart. Bake these until lightly browned. Should take about 20 minutes or so.
9. Let the cookies cool a little and dust them with powdered sugar.

I've done these a few times and as you can see, they're basically almond paste and pine nuts, so they tend to be a little dense, which isn't a bad thing. I just don't want you to be expecting a heavenly light morsel. If you like almonds and pine nuts, these are pretty addictive.

SPOON COOKIES

Here's the deal on these. Making them is an adventure – more like a trek – but the prize at the end is worth it. Read the whole recipe and see if you're up to the challenge. If so, you'll thank me. If not, your secret's safe with me.

Note: need to be made 2 days (you read that right) before eating

2 cups flour

1 teaspoon baking soda

1/8 teaspoon salt

1 cup (2 sticks) of unsalted butter – cut into pieces

3/4 cup sugar

2 teaspoons vanilla

1/3 cup fruit preserves (strawberry, raspberry, marionberry...whatever)

MAKE THE DOUGH

1. Whisk together the flour, baking soda and salt. Put this aside for the time being. So far, so good.
2. Fill the sink with 2" of cold water. This is easy, right?
3. Melt all that butter in a heavy saucepan (medium heat) and stir occasionally until the butter turns golden with a nutlike fragrance and the flecks on the bottom of the pot turn caramel brown (10–12 minutes). The butter will foam, which is okay. Keep stirring.
4. Place the hot pot into the watery sink to stop the butter from cooking any further. Stir until the butter starts to look opaque (4–5 minutes). Remove the pot from the water bath and stir in the sugar and vanilla. I realize it's getting slightly more technical, but only slightly. Just keeping putting one foot in front of the other.
5. Grab that flour mixture from step #1 and stir it into the butter mixture. Keep stirring until the dough forms.
6. Shape this into a ball, wrap it with plastic and let stand at room temp for 1 to 2 hours. Whew.

FORM AND BAKE THE COOKIES

1. Put oven rack in middle position and fire the oven up to 325°.
2. Press a piece of dough into the bowl of a teaspoon (hence the name), flatten the top and then slide this out and place it (flat side down) on an ungreased baking sheet. **NOTE: the dough will feel crumbly but will stick together when you press it**
3. Keep this up until you run out of dough, then slide the cookies into the oven and cook until just pale golden (8-12 minutes).
4. Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for about 5 minutes, then transfer them to a rack and let them continue to cool (about 30 minutes).

5. While the little spoony delights are cooling off, heat up the preserves in a saucepan (low heat) until they turn runny, then pour through a sieve into a small bowl (I'm sure you figured this out, but you want to keep the liquid, not the solids). You could skip the sieve, but you really don't want the irritating fruit seeds in the cookies, so take a deep breath and just do it. Let this cool completely.

6. We're very close now. Grab up a naked cookie and spread the flat side with a thin layer of the preserve. Sandwich this with another little naked cookie and tada! Keep on going until you use up everything in sight (should make about 30 cookies).

Here's the bad news...you have to let these sit for about 45 minutes, then transfer them to an airtight container and then forget about them for **TWO DAYS**. I'm not kidding. Put a Post-it someplace in your kitchen so you remember to retrieve these gems from hiding 48 hours later (as if after all that work, you'd forget.) And by the way, if you have kids, teens or hungry adults who have a tendency to forage in the kitchen, you should hide these until the appointed time, or they will mysteriously disappear.

I realize this is a hell of a commitment, and 99% of you will just say "screw it," but you one-percenters will go down in the **44 Degrees** Hall of Fame...and get a guest shot on a Food Network special called "The World's Most Determined Pastry Chefs."

BLUEBERRY PUDDING CAKE

☆☆☆

I found this in Gourmet Magazine and it's truly a gourmet dessert. It comes out of the oven bubbling hot, smelling like the blueberries have transcended into some volcanically delicious fruit, which in fact they have.

*1/3 cup + 1/2 cup sugar
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon cornstarch
2 cups blueberries
1 cup flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 egg
1/2 cup milk
1 stick butter – melted and slightly cooled
1 teaspoon vanilla*

1. Set your oven to 375° and butter up a 9" square baking pan.
2. In a small pot, stir together 1/3 cup sugar with 1/4 cup water, lemon juice and cornstarch, then stir in the blueberries. Bring to a simmer and stir for another 3 minutes, then remove from heat.
3. Grab a bowl and whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt and that other 1/2 cup of sugar.
4. In a larger bowl, whisk together the wet ingredients, which would be the egg, milk, butter and vanilla. Now add the dry ingredients from step #3 into this mixture and whisk it all together until just combined. Resist the natural tendency to keep whisking. If that urge hits, drop the whisk and back away.
5. Spoon the batter into the baking pan, then pour the blueberry mixture over the top. The berries are supposed to sink into the batter, so don't fret when you see them dive southward.
6. Bake this for 25-30 minutes then cool in the pan for 5 minutes before serving.

Great on its own. Even better with some vanilla ice cream on the side.

CARROT CUPCAKES

☆☆☆

These highly addictive cupcakes are the absolute terror of any diet. Just when you think you've kicked the habit, you suddenly get the craving, followed by the shakes and uncontrollable mouthwatering. My advice...don't fight it. Give into the pull and let your tastebuds have a little fiesta. You can always resume your diet tomorrow. This recipe will yield 12 cupcakes.

The Cupcakes

1 cup flour

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

2 eggs

¾ cup canola oil

¾ cup sugar (a healthier substitute is organic maple syrup)

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1½ cups shredded carrots (about 2 carrots)

The Frosting

4 tablespoons unsalted butter – softened

4 ounces cream cheese – softened

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

1 cup confectioners' sugar

1. Grab a muffin pan and either use foil liners or spray the cavities with oil (e.g. Pam).
2. Preheat the oven to 350°.
3. Dump the following into a bowl: flour, cinnamon, baking soda and salt. Whisk 'em together and set aside.
4. In a large bowl, beat the eggs senseless with an electric hand mixer (you can also use a standing mixer) and slowly add the canola oil as you go. Now, just as slowly, add the sugar (or maple syrup) and whirl the egg/oil/sugar concoction for about three minutes. Finally add in the vanilla. You're done with that mixer for the time being, but don't put it away yet.
5. Fold in the dry ingredients (#3) and then fold in the carrots. Don't over-mix – just be sure you've got everything blended.
6. Spoon the batter into muffin cups and bake for 22 minutes.
7. When done, let these cool slightly then remove from the muffin pan and transfer to the **freezer** to chill for about 15 minutes or so. Yes...these are eaten chilled or at room temp. **Note: if you're just doing carrot cupcakes without the icing, no refrigeration is necessary.**

THE FROSTING

Retrieve that mixer and beat the butter with the cream cheese until smooth, then fold in the vanilla and the sugar. Crank it up to high and keep going until the frosting is fluffy.

You can either transfer the icing to a Ziplock, clip off a little corner and use that as makeshift pastry bag, or you can artfully slather the frosting over the cupcakes with a knife.

If you've got any kind of a sweet tooth, you're going get hooked on these, so learn to accept it. It's much healthier living with calories than with constant temptation.

CHARLEE'S CHOCOLATE LAVA CAKE

This came from my granddaughter's "kidstir" cookbook (I kid you not). It was her go-to dessert when she was 4½, which is pretty impressive. Once you try it, it could become your go-to as well. This recipe makes 4 individual sized cakes that are baked in 6-ounce ramekins (which are essential for this dish).

*½ cup butter (1 stick)
4 ounces semisweet chocolate – broken up into squares
1 cup confectioner's sugar (NOT regular granulated sugar)
2 eggs + 3 egg yolks (that's 5 eggs total)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ cup flour
handful of strawberries or raspberries (optional)*

1. Heat up the oven to 425°.
2. Grease up ramekins with butter.
3. Put the butter and chocolate in a bowl and nuke in the microwave for 60-90 seconds. Take this out and whisk until everything is smooth.
4. Now whisk the following into the butter/chocolate blend: the sugar, followed by the two whole eggs and then the 3 yolks.
5. Finally whisk in the vanilla, followed by the flour. You are indeed done whisking.
6. Divide the batter between the four ramekins, then place the ramekins on a baking sheet and slide them into that hot oven for 13 minutes.
7. Let the cakes cool a bit (they're really hot inside), then sprinkle some more confectioner's sugar on top, followed by a berry or two. You can artistically scatter the remaining berries around the ramekin and hit those with a dusting of sugar as well - OR - you could go with a dollop of whipped cream, but this is so rich I personally think that's overkill.

When you cut into these, the center will be oozy (that's the lava part). Just so you know, it's not undercooked, just magical. Once you eat these, you'll want to know what other tantalizing recipes are geared to 4 year old Chefs.

By the way... If you're wondering what else you can do with your newly acquired ramekins, see the recipe for "*Lemon Pudding Cakes*."

FLOURLESS CHOCOLATE CAKE

Another recipe from Sue Edwards. We recently had this at her home in Boulder and I was bowled over. It's got a bunch of butter and chocolate, so you'd expect it to have a wow factor, and it definitely delivered.

*16 ounces of milk chocolate baking chips
10 tablespoons of unsalted butter (that's 1 stick + two tablespoons)
5 eggs – brought to room temp
a few tablespoons of confectioner's sugar*

1. Preheat the oven to 375°.
2. Grab a 9" springform pan and butter the bottom, then line it with wax paper, which you'll also want to butter.
3. Melt the butter and chocolate together (in a double boiler) over low heat. By the way, you probably don't have a double boiler. I don't. I use a stainless steel bowl placed over a pot of boiling water. Works like a charm.
4. Beat the eggs (with a pinch of salt) for about 6 minutes.
5. Fold the choc/butter mixture into the eggs with a rubber spatula.
6. Pour this velvety concoction into the spring pan and slide it into the oven for 25 minutes.
7. Let this cool for 30 minutes before attempting the next steps. Release the side spring, dust the top with the sugar and cover it with a new sheet of wax paper. Now invert this onto a plate, remove the wax paper, and then reinvert it onto the serving plate. This sounds complicated, but it's not. Read the instructions again if necessary.

Serve this warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or some whipping cream.

LAURA-LEE'S \$10,000 CAKE

When I was a young boy growing up in San Francisco, my mother used to make this cake for my birthday. The recipe came from a Betty Crocker cooking contest (circa late 1950s) where the sweet old lady who created this concoction pocketed ten grand (allegedly), which back then would buy a two bedroom house in the outskirts of the City. Today that same house goes for about \$1.8 million. So, in today's money, it stands to reason that this cake is worth a hell of a lot more than 10 Gs. Buckle up because this is a complicated one...

The Dry Stuff

*1¾ cups of flour
1½ cups sugar
2 teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda*

The Wet Stuff

*½ cup butter – melted
1¼ cup unsweetened condensed milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 eggs – lightly beaten
2 squares of Bakers chocolate – melted + 3 more squares of Bakers chocolate - melted (you'll be adding these separately, so don't melt them all together)*

The Fluffy Stuff

*1 more square Baker's chocolate – melted
⅔ cup butter
½ cup powder sugar
⅓ cup milk
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla*

1. Let's begin with the dry stuff. Whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder and baking soda.
2. Into this add the wet stuff (the butter, milk, vanilla and eggs) whisking all the while. When this is a smooth blend, add in 2 squares of melted chocolate.
3. Divide this batter into two greased 9-inch round springform cake pans.
4. Now's time to kick this party into a higher gear. Melt those 3 additional squares of chocolate and drizzle half into each of the pans... slowly dribbling a chocolate circle a couple of inches in from the edge and then swirling said chocolate with a teaspoon in a circular motion. You can swirl either clockwise or counterclockwise, depending upon which hemisphere you're in.
5. Slide these into a 350° oven and bake for 30 minutes.

6. While the cakes are baking, it's time to make the fluffy stuff by combining all the ingredients and beating with a mixer until everything gets...wait for it...fluffy!
7. You're almost at the end, so stick with me. Cool each of these cakes, disgorge them from their respective pans and carefully slice them in half horizontally with a very sharp knife so you'll end up with four round layers. Hey, for ten grand you didn't think this was going to be easy, did you?
8. Finally it's time to build this damn award-winning pastry. Start with a layer of cake, then a layer of fluff, cake, fluff, cake, fluff and cake.

That's it! No frosting required. Happy Birthday to one and all!

LEMON PUDDING CAKES

This dessert is from my daughter Elizabeth. She generally eats healthy low-cal food, but when she comes over for dinner, she tends to bring rich desserts that are delicious and cookbook-worthy. This'll serve 8.

2 tablespoons butter – softened to lube up the ramekins

1/3 cup all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

3 large eggs – separated

3/4 cup granulated sugar

2 tablespoons unsalted butter – melted

1/3 cup lemon juice (about 2 lemons)

1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest

1 1/4 cups whole milk

confectioners' sugar for serving

1. Preheat oven to 325°.
2. Butter eight 6-ounce ramekins and set in a shallow roasting pan.
3. In a medium bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt. Hold.
4. In a large bowl, whisk together egg yolks with 1/2 cup granulated sugar until pale and smooth. Whisk in butter, lemon zest and juice, milk and flour mixture from #3.
5. In yet another large bowl, using an electric mixer, beat egg whites with the remaining 1/4 cup granulated sugar until stiff peaks form, about 5 minutes. Fold this into the batter. With a ladle, divide the batter among the ramekins (keeping the ramekin sides clean).
6. Pour enough hot water into the pan to come halfway up the sides of ramekins.
7. Carefully slide this into the oven and bake until the cakes are puffed and slightly golden on top, about 30 minutes.

Dust with confectioners' sugar and serve immediately.

MINI BLACK BOTTOM CHEESECAKES

☆☆☆

From Food and Wine Magazine, these are my new favorite go-to for company, or whenever I'm feeling like I want to splurge and add a few pounds. If you like cheesecake, make these tonight.

24 plain chocolate wafer cookies (Nabisco's Famous Chocolate Wafers are still around)

3 tablespoons unsalted butter – melted

8 ounces cream cheese – room temp

¼ cup sugar

6 ounces goat cheese – room temp

2 eggs

2 teaspoons vanilla

½ cup seedless preserves – warmed

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Prep your 12-cup muffin pan with foil cupcake liners and hit them with a touch of vegetable oil spray (aka Pam).
2. Grab your food processor and grind up your wafers, then add in the melted butter. Keep processing until the mixture starts to clump up.
3. Spoon the buttery chocolate crumbs into the cupcake liners and press with the bottom of a small glass (or whatever) to compact. **Note: press just hard enough to make the crumbs stick together. You don't want to smash them down.**
4. Slide your pan into the waiting oven and bake for five minutes to set your base.
5. While the wafers are baking, beat the cream cheese on medium speed and slowly fold in the sugar. Beat until smooth. Now add the goat cheese, followed by the eggs and vanilla. Continue beating until the mixture is nice and smooth.
6. Pour the cheesecake batter into the wafer cups, filling ONLY ¾ full. They're going to puff up and you need to leave a little room at the top.
7. Bake this for 15 minutes. In the meantime, heat up your preserves. You just want it warm and kind of liquidy, not hot.
8. Pull out the cheesecakes, then spoon your warm jam over the top of each.
9. Transfer the muffin tin to the freezer for about 15 minutes.

Pop 'em out and enjoy.

ALMOND MUFFINS

From the Cancer Fighting Kitchen cookbook. Put away the processed white flour and white sugar. These are small, healthy and flavorful. Little bites of joy.

*1½ cups of almond meal
½ cup spelt flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 tablespoon cocoa powder
¼ teaspoon sea salt
⅓ cup maple syrup
½ cup banana – mashed
¼ cup milk **-OR-** almond milk **-OR-** rice milk
2 eggs
¼ cup olive oil
1½ teaspoons almond extract
½ teaspoon vanilla extract*

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Oil up a mini-muffin tin.
2. Whisk together almond meal, spelt flour, baking powder, cocoa powder and salt.
3. In a different bowl, combine syrup, banana, milk, eggs, oil, almond and vanilla extracts and whisk until smooth.
4. Add the wet mixture to the dry and mix well.
5. Spoon batter into muffin cups (about $\frac{3}{4}$ full) and slide into the oven for 11 minutes. You want the muffins to spring back when you poke 'em.
6. Cool for 15 minutes before jacking these out.

APPLE CINNAMON CREPES

There I was, basking in the afterglow of a batch of incredible "Seafood Crepes" (see recipe) wondering what to do with four leftover naked crepes. I happened to have a few green apples lying around and inspiration hit. A short time later dessert was on the table. You can do this simple dessert even if you aren't having seafood crepes as your entrée.

2 Granny Smith apples – peeled, cored and sliced thin (1 apple = 2 crepes = 1 person)

1 tablespoon sugar

1½ teaspoons cinnamon

2 tablespoons butter

1 teaspoon vanilla

4 premade/store bought crepes

caramel sauce

1. Toss the apple slices with sugar and cinnamon.
2. Slap a pan on the stove, fire up the burner to medium heat and melt the butter. Introduce the seasoned apples to the pan and sauté for a few minutes until they are limp.
3. Stir in the vanilla and let this go for another minute to two. Remove these from the heat and hold.
4. In the meantime, warm up the caramel sauce by placing the open jar in a small pot of burbling water. You want it warm, not lethal.
5. Microwave a crepe for just a few seconds, then trowel in some apple filling and g-e-n-t-l-y close the crepe (they're fragile and will tear if you manhandle them).

Drizzle some caramel sauce over the top and present to your drooling guests.

APPLE TARTS

The best apple tart I ever ate was at Auberge Du Soleil in Napa. Sadly, this recipe is not from there...but the lingering memory of that dessert inspired me to try to duplicate it. It's not quite the same, but this recipe is on the road and headed in the right direction. This'll make four tarts.

Note: read the entire recipe. There's some prep time, some fridge time, and a whole lot of butter

2 cups flour

¼ cup sugar + 4 tablespoons sugar

½ teaspoon kosher salt

2 sticks of cold, unsalted butter – cut into ½ inch cubes (you're thinking, "Two sticks of butter!? No wonder it tastes so good." To which I'd reply, "Relax. Count calories tomorrow.")

¼ cup ice water

2 teaspoons fresh ginger – grated

2 Golden Delicious apples – peeled and cored

1 more tablespoon of unsalted butter ("How do we stop this madness?")

caramel sauce and/or vanilla ice cream

1. Get out the Cuisinart and pop in that deadly metal blade. Toss in the flour, ¼ cup of sugar and the salt. Pulse to blend.
2. Add the butter cubes (just the 2 sticks for now) and pulse until the mixture looks like coarse cornmeal. You don't want any pieces bigger than an undersized pea. This should take about 14 one-second pulses (I am anal).
3. With the motor running, add the ice water through the feeder tube. Keep processing for about 10 seconds, being sure to stop before the dough becomes a solid mass (how's that for good advice?).
4. Turn the contents of the bowl onto a work surface and divide this chilled doughy mass into four equal sized hunks. Roll 'em into balls, then tightly wrap each piece in plastic and fling into the Frigidaire for at least an hour.
5. Get the oven going at 450°. In the meantime, combine 2 tablespoons of sugar with the 2 teaspoons of grated ginger. Set aside and turn your attention to the apples.
6. Once the apples are peeled and cored, cut them into quarters and then carefully slice them paper thin. Well, they're not going to actually be "paper thin" per se, but as thin as you can get them. Key here is to make them all the same width. If you own a mandolin, and you're not afraid to use it, this would be a good time to break it out.
7. One hour later...grab the dough out of the fridge and move it to a lightly floured work surface. Flatten the dough balls into something approximating a 7" circle, and transfer to a parchment lined baking sheet.

8. Spread one quarter of the sugar/ginger blend on each disc, then arrange one quarter of the apple slices in an overlapping circular pattern on top. It'll look like a pinwheel, with the apple slices all radiating from the center. You'll want to leave about an inch border of dough on the outer edge.
9. Use your remaining 2 tablespoons of sugar to spread equally over the top of the four pastries, and then fold the 1" pastry border over so you have what looks like a little apple pizza. An inch of the apple will be covered. Press down the dough to secure the edges...this'll stop the apples from escaping when they're cooked.
10. Remember that final tablespoon of butter? Cut it into quarters and use them to dot each tart in the middle.
11. Bake for 20 minutes, or until the crusts are golden and the apples begin to brown. Cool on a wire rack for about 10 minutes.

You can serve with ice cream. Personally, I use warmed caramel sauce, just like they do at Auberge Du Soleil...

APPLE TURNOVERS

☆☆☆

Homemade turnovers, hot out of the oven. Sure, you could go all Pepperidge Farms and get the frozen ones, but what's the fun in that? This makes 9 turnovers...enough for tonight's dessert and tomorrow's breakfast.

*2 Granny Smith apples – peeled, cored and cut into ½" pieces
1 Golden Delicious apple – peeled, cored and cut into ½" pieces
3 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
16 oz package frozen puff pastry – partially thawed
1 egg – beaten
superfine sugar*

1. Put apples in saucepan, add ½ cup of water along with the sugar, lemon juice, cinnamon and vanilla. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally for about two minutes, then reduce the heat and simmer for about 8 minutes. Stir frequently.
2. When done, remove apples from the heat and gently mash with a fork. You want this soft and still a little chunky (if it gets mushy like applesauce, that's okay too). Let this cool completely.
3. Pastry time. Stack the two partially thawed pastry sheets on top of each other on a floured surface and roll them out to a 15" by 15" square.
4. Cut the pastry into nine 5" squares.
5. Place a tablespoon of apple filling in the center of a pastry square, lightly brush two edges of the square with the egg, and fold over the pastry to form a triangular turnover. Press the edges together with a fork to seal tightly. Repeat until all the pastries are filled.
6. Brush the tops of the turnovers with the egg, then use a dangerously sharp knife to make three little slits on top of each pastry (this will allow the steam to escape). Sprinkle the tops with the superfine sugar.
7. Place all of these on a platter and put them in the fridge for 15 minutes to firm up. In the meantime...
8. ...fire up your oven to 400°. You'll want one rack in the upper third of the oven and one in the lower third.
9. When the pastries are ready, place them on a parchment lined baking sheet and slide onto the upper rack. Cook for 15 minutes. Then, reduce the heat to 350°, slide the baking sheet to the lower rack, and let these go for another 10 minutes.

Hit these with another dusting of the superfine sugar before serving.

BANANA BREAD/MUFFINS WITH PECANS AND CHOCOLATE

☆☆☆

Bananas, pecans and chocolate are combined with sugar, flour, eggs and butter. You can't go wrong here. Make this for breakfast or dessert. Serve it alone or with vanilla ice cream. Eat it alone or with a crowd. Regular banana bread is a crowd fave, but the addition of chocolate makes this borderline decadent, and surely, we can all agree that decadence in small doses is the path to heaven.

2 cups flour

¾ cup sugar

¾ teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon cinnamon

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup pecans – chopped small and toasted (in a dry frying pan)

½ cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

3 large, ripe bananas – mashed

¼ cup plain yogurt

2 large eggs – lightly beaten

6 tablespoons butter – melted and cooled

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1 teaspoon almond extract

1. Put the oven rack to lower-middle position and preheat it to 350°.
2. Grease and flour-dust a loaf pan **(or prepare a muffin pan)**. Set aside, but at the ready.
3. Whisk together the flour, sugar, baking soda, cinnamon and salt, then add in the toasted nuts and chocolate chips.
4. Now turn your attention to the messier ingredients: grab a medium sized bowl and mix together the 'nanners, yogurt, eggs, butter, vanilla and almond extracts.
5. Lightly fold the banana mixture glop into the dry ingredients just until everything is combined. Don't overwork the batter or it'll get dense. The batter will be thick and chunky, which is a good thing.
6. Scrape the batter into the loaf pan **(or muffin cups)** and slide it into the oven. Bake for about 55 minutes, or until the loaf is golden brown. Test it by inserting a wooden toothpick into the middle. If it comes out clean, you're good to go. **Note: if you're making muffins – they only cook for 33 minutes.**
7. Cool the bread/muffins in the pan for about 5 minutes, then gently tip it out into your hand and transfer it to a wire rack to cool.

Serve warm or at room temp.

CHERRY LEMON CRUMBLES

☆☆☆

These small, tasty muffins are amazing. Perfect for dessert and excellent for breakfast. The recipe has a bunch of steps, but they're all easy, so don't use that as an excuse to not give these a shot. Another bonus is the ingredients are always in season. If cherry isn't your fruit of choice, you can replace with blueberry or strawberry or whatever makes you smile.

First off, it's best to use silicone muffin pans, which come in traditional size and mini-muffin size. I use both sizes and end up with 12 minis and four cupcake sized pastries.

2.5 oz package sliced almonds

1¾ cups flour

½ cup sugar

½ cup light brown sugar

2 teaspoons lemon zest

½ teaspoon cinnamon

¼ teaspoon salt

1½ sticks unsalted butter – softened (30 seconds in the microwave)

2 large egg yolks (the whites don't come into play)

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 teaspoon almond extract

2 teaspoons lemon juice

¾ cup dried cherries – minced

¾ cup fruit preserves (can use any fruit preserves – I use Bonne Maman mixed berry preserves, but use whatever looks good to you)

1. Brown the almond slices in a dry frying pan over low heat. Keep an eye on them to make sure they don't burn, because they will. Cool completely.
2. Bring your food processor to the party and dump in the flour and the sugars, along with one teaspoon of lemon zest, the cinnamon and the salt. Pulse this until combined, then add the butter. Continue to pulse until the mixture ends up looking like coarse meal.
3. Add the egg yolks, vanilla and almond extract and process until the mixture begins to clump together.
4. Transfer about ¾ cup of this dough to a separate bowl and stir in the sliced almonds. This is your almond crumble topping. Gather the remaining dough.
5. Butter up the muffin pan...each little cup needs to be nice and slick (if you're using silicone pans, you can refrain from using butter) then press just enough dough into each cup to thinly coat the bottom and up the sides. Pop this into the fridge and chill for about 15 minutes.
6. Put the oven rack in the middle position and preheat to 375°.

7. While you're waiting, grab a small bowl and combine the remaining teaspoon of zest with the lemon juice, the dried fruit and the preserves.
8. Retrieve your chilled muffin pan from the fridge and spoon one scant tablespoon of the fruit mixture into each cup. Now carefully adorn each cup with a teaspoon or so of the almond crumble topping.
9. Shovel the pan into the oven and bake until the topping is a deep golden brown and bubbling, which'll take about 15-16 minutes (check 'em around 13 minutes).
10. Resist the temptation to jack these out and chow them down while hot. That bubbling fruit filling can turn a lovely evening into a trip to the emergency room. Let your muffins cool completely in the pan, then carefully loosen the edges with a sharp knife and remove them from the pan.

These will theoretically last for three days in an airtight container, but I can't attest to that because they have never lasted more than 24 hours in our house.

CHOCOLATE BREAD PUDDING

My daughter Elizabeth unearthed this recipe and tweaked it to perfection. One of the great things about this is, despite the plethora of chocolate it's not overly sweet. The ingredients sound a bit wonky (chocolate milk?), but they come together in wondrous harmony.

3 large eggs – lightly beaten

3 cups chocolate milk

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar

3 tablespoons butter – melted

1 tablespoon cocoa powder

6 cups French bread – cubed

6 ounces chocolate chips

whipped cream (optional...but if you're going to go to all this trouble, why the hell not?)

1. Preheat the oven to 350°.
2. Combine eggs, milk, sugar, butter and cocoa in a large bowl, stirring well.
3. Toss in the bread cubes and let this sit for about 15 minutes, occasionally agitating.
4. Stir in the chocolate chips and then ease this mixture into greased 9-inch square baking dish.
5. Slide it uncovered into the oven for about 50 minutes (or until set).

You can serve this warm or at room temp. And don't be shy about adding the whipped cream...one tablespoon is only 8 calories (I didn't believe it either, but it's true).