

2000

y2k

the cooking channel strikes

Several days before [Y2K](#) failed to materialize, bob and ani turn on the [Bravo Channel](#) (basic cable TV channel with independent/foreign films etc) only to discover that it has been replaced by [the Food Network](#), a.k.a. the cooking channel, cooking all day every day. Incensed at losing Bravo, bob calls the cable company customer service line to find out what happened and receives the happy news that it only displaced (not replaced) Bravo to another channel. Finally we too have the cooking channel! (Cheering crowds heard in the background.)

We'd seen it at the brother-in-law's in the neighboring cable monopoly district but never imagined that one day we too would be able to tune in any time and see food in the making half hour after half hour until we couldn't take it any more. But ... how will we survive this constant temptation? Will we finally succumb to the boob tube after valiently resisting for so many years. (Well, not very effectively, but enough...)

bob and ani do lunch (well)

Several days after Y2K failed to materialize, ani has a rare Monday off from her wage slave job (since New Year's Day fell on Saturday) and ani and bob get to explore center city philly for lunch. After circling several times we go to our usual parking garage a bit farther from the target zone and start walking. Ani had only one place in mind and bob quickly got the message: [Brasserie Perrier](#), the less economically damaging partner of the infamously expensive [Le Bec Fin](#) where renowned chef-owner Georges Perrier is king. It was the perfect lunch. Although the finishing touch small warm chocolate tart was possibly just a bit too much for bob's lunch quota. How could anyone possibly survive the real thing, with an unlimited dessert cart at the end?

wine outlaws (again)

Being in center city on a weekday a perfect opportunity arose to consider embarking on an adventure to find the still young but already legendary [Moore Brothers Wine Store](#) bob had read so much about in various philly rags (started by the ex-Wine guy at Le Bec Fin) but which seemed impossible to reach since it required crossing the Delaware (River) into our neighboring state of New Jersey, where it requires careful directions from other wiser inhabitants to find the New Jersey Turnpike to get anywhere over there. Crossing any of those bridges requires real courage. We call our cell phone information number and connect to the store for directions. bob's short term memory not being perfect, we had to call again through information when we ended up at a dead end. Not to worry, just return to the beginning of the street and we are there. Luca gives us the intro tour, we are impressed and go for the wine sampler and a Madame de la Mas we recognized from his friend Laurant's store [The Princeton Corkscrew](#) up in Palmer Square, also in New Jersey, where for several years we had been getting an occasional case picked by either Laurant or the other guy. (Does this mean we are cheating on Laurant?) But this place is so much closer than the hour drive it takes us to get to Princeton, where we only go occasionally for other reasons.

E-Z Pass and higher bridge tolls to keep out New Jersey

To return to our western burb nest, we had to face day 2 of the increased [Benjamin Franklin Bridge](#) toll fee feeding (the infamous Philly state politico) Vince Fumo's [Delaware Port Authority](#)/politically questional slush fund operating already several years without the benefit of our departed Inquirer columnist [Steve Lopez](#)'s muckraking commentary or other adequate independent taxpayer oversight. Which kept us waiting a bit in bumper to bumper traffic to get through the insufficient number of open toll booth lanes, delaying the moment in which yet again we would become outlaws in the State of Pennsylvania, "[land of giants](#)" (Steve's ironic reference to our midget-minded jokester politicians) for illegally transporting alcohol across the border. Where the clear majority of the voting public would prefer some free market policy in the alcohol economy from which we are protected by the infamous State Store system and its lobby.

Well, there had been a lot of hype about this millennium crap and the Y2K Achilles heal of our technology driven civilization. But so far we have escaped relatively okay. Time will tell.

dr bob: ahead of his time?

Several days later the front page of the philly inky (our affectionate local nickname for the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) newspaper) had an article about the PA wine iron curtain focusing on a [recent raid](#) of the Le Bec Fin wine cellar by the [Liquor Control Board](#) (LCB) and armed state troopers (okay, they are always armed when on duty, but really...) and another somewhere that I lost track of on the midget-minded politics responsible for philly's poor highway system and the incredibly idiotic situation of not being able to easily go from center city to NYC through NJ ("you can't get there from here"). A search of the web for Steve Lopez shows that instead of keeping tabs on our politicos, he is out in California writing stuff like "[The death of the sitcom](#)". Who can blame him after some 10 years of fighting the system here.

ps

We were soon addicted to [Gordon Elliot's Doorknock Dinners](#) on the [Food Network](#), then [Mario Eats Italy](#), although it conflicted with [Ally McBeal](#) so we often had to tape it or wait for the rerun season, which seems to be most of the year as we start the third millennium. [And how about that funny food intellectual [Alton Brown](#) on [Good Eats!](#)?] And then there was [Rachel Ray](#), the darling of the Food Network. Who could not love her?

fresh pasta with aglio, olio e prezzemolo

Life on [the Main Line](#) had been steadily improving during the nineties. Following the explosion of coffee bars towards the end of the decade (after our two new book superstores pioneered the concept earlier in the decade) came a [supermarket chain](#) experiment in Bryn Mawr just in time to be in full operation before the turn of the century/millennium/whatever. Trendy upscale gourmet food in a giant shell of a building vacated by a local car dealership that had been a local institution, but which failed to reach the bridge to the 21st century. And a catchy internet age name to go with it: [The Food Source](#) (although they quickly abandoned their website for it).

While dr bob was at his mom's out of state, ms_ani stopped by for some Y2K eve supplies and got some quick advise about how to make a simple sauce for the fresh pasta she'd decided on for dinner. An oil and garlic sauce variation. So when bob finally returned that evening, everything was ready. Fresh fettuccine with the sauce, tuna steaks, candles, white wine, etc. Followed by another quiet New Year's eve at home in front of the TV, just the two of us. How nice.

Later we tried it with fresh tri-colored penne and it was equally delicious. And then again with fettuccine. And again with ... it looks like this recipe is becoming a regular thing.

ingredients

- 3 T olive oil [olio]
- about 6 cloves of garlic [aglio], pressed
- 1/4 c white wine
- 2 whole pepperoncini (unbroken)
- 1/4 c chopped parsley [prezzemolo]
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 lb fresh pasta (fettuccine or penne)
- freshly grated parmigiano and black pepper over individual servings

instructions

1. Get the pasta water cooking and when boiling throw in the salt (your guess is as good as mine) and pasta. Cook al dente.
2. Meanwhile heat the olive oil (in a large pan that will accommodate the pasta when it is ready, like the 4 qt [Calphalon](#) professional nonstick chef's pan, our favorite pan), then add the pepperoncini and pressed garlic.
3. Make sure that the garlic does not brown. Stop it from cooking by dowsing it with the wine and let the wine evaporate.
4. Then add the parsley. Let it cook for a few minutes and add the salt and pepper and turn off the heat.
5. After draining the cooked pasta, add it to the sauce in its pan.
6. Serve with freshly ground parmigiano and black pepper on each individual portion.

notes

1. Of course aglio, olio e peperoncino is one of the classic quick Italian pasta sauces, and this one also has peperoncino, but whole unbroken ones so you don't feel the heat. If you break them open, it becomes a hot sauce ("piccante") and you have to change the name. We're also breaking one of the traditional Italian rules by adding parmigiano to a sauce with peperoncino, but then we are saved by the fact that the peperoncino is under house arrest here so to speak. [We Americans are less bound by tradition.]

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kazan kebob (stuffed eggplant kebob)

Italian food is usually simple and easy—we fake it to our satisfaction all the time. But for good middle eastern grub, you need an authentic mother/mother-in-law from the old country. Isgouhi continues to deliver culinary delights for us. This one has a Turkish name coming from her own mom who grew up in [Musa Dagh](#) (Turkey) and moved to marry and raise a family in Aleppo, Syria where this recipe had its origins, maybe. (Aleppo was recently referred to by the [Philly Inky](#) as a culinary capital, a curious fact we'll have to pursue further elsewhere.)

The first rendition of this recipe was done with the long narrow Chinese eggplants only because there were a lot on hand at the time—but it was so delicious that bob requested a special workshop to check the recipe Isgouhi had dictated to him. No good Chinese eggplants were available at the last minute so the workshop reverted to the traditional recipe. For the first time some weak attempt at quantifying the measurements is made and bob is left speechless. A "pinch" of salt is actually 1/4 teaspoon. Her teaspoon is a really piled high heaping flatware spoon equivalent to at least 2 level measuring teaspoons. Her tablespoons are also piled high. Yikes! No wonder her recipes are never quite the same when we do them. Looks like we'll have to revise all the previously dictated recipes like we did here.

The traditional version was also good but the Chinese eggplants because of their small diameter cross-sections virtually guaranteed both kebob and eggplant in each forkful. In fact when she had done it with them, there was leftover kebob which she pressed around the eggplants as well. Either way, we're big eggplant fans and we'll be doing this ourselves soon.

ingredients

eggplant

2 lb eggplant: about 2 large eggplants or 4 to 6 Chinese eggplants (irregular size)

kebob filling

3/4 - 1 lb ground beef

1 medium onion, chopped

1 c fresh parsley, chopped

4 - 5 medium cloves garlic, pressed

1 large or 2 medium tomatoes, chopped

2 T Carolina long grain rice (to absorb oil/fat in meat)

2 t mint

1 t allspice

2 t paprika

1/8 t cayenne red pepper

1/4 t meat tenderizer

2 t salt

3/4 t black pepper

1 1/2 T tomato paste

1 lemon, juice of

sauce

5/8 c water

1 T tomato paste
1/4 - 1 t salt
1/4 t black pepper
1 lemon, juice of

instructions

1. Peel the eggplants lengthwise, leaving alternating strips of skin for presentation (optional). Cut them crosswise in 1/2 inch slices which stop short of cutting through the bottom, to hold them together.
2. Immerse the eggplants in salted water (put a plate over them to hold them under) and let sit 10 minutes for regular eggplants, 1/2 hour for chinese eggplants. Then squeeze out the water.
3. Meanwhile prepare the kebob ingredients and mix together well.
4. In a separate bowl, mix together the sauce ingredients.
5. Press the meat into a wedge between each pair of eggplant slices to a 1/2 inch separation at the top, causing the eggplant to curl around in an arc.
6. Arrange in a pressure cooker and pour the sauce evenly over the eggplants, most of which will end up at the bottom so that the pressure cooker can do its job.
7. Bring to a boil without locking the cover, then if you are able to test for spices, do it and adjust at this point. ani can do this. bob cannot.
8. Lock the cover and cook 10 minutes (quick release) or 7 minutes (slow release).

notes

1. bob forgot his camera so he had to borrow Isgouhi's (which bob and ani had picked up as a gift in a rare NYC weekend visit) for the [cooking school shots](#).

kazankbb.htm: 8-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

pizzoccheri mano a mano

Mano a mano. Hand to hand, as in combat. We admit it. If we can buy pasta in a box we'll do it. Or fresh pasta done by someone else's hand, that too. But when push comes to shove, and the market fails to supply our demand, we can rise to the task of—homemade pasta in our own kitchen, with handmade dough beaten into noodles by the infamous [lasagna noodle story](#) voltage transformer aided Italian electric motor powered pasta roller machine.

We surfed the net looking for pizzoccheri suppliers. We called the phone number of the NYC importers of our last US purchased box. We'd asked our local exceptional [Italian food store](#) for help. Zip.

Since our cooking library had two very different buckwheat pasta recipes, we tried to find more on the web for help in choosing. Only a single hit and it was way off base. Let's face it: pizzoccheri are still a low profile food item. Meanwhile our cooking library coughed up a third recipe averaging out the previous two on the day of the big test. Our first attempt at pizzoccheri done the way generations of Italian moms must have done them at one time.

The big question here is the ratio of buckwheat to ordinary flour in the dough. Buckwheat by itself doesn't have the gluten or something. So it has to be mixed. Our newcomer [Biba](#) gives us a democratic ratio: one to one, while [Marcella](#) gives the buckwheat a $7/3$ edge and [Julia](#) inverts the ratio. Hmm.

In the end we had to trust Marcella based on past experience. However, it was not a piece of cake.

ingredients

marcella	biba	julia	
1 1/4 c	1 c	3/5 c	(fine grained) buckwheat flour
1/2 c + 1 T	1 c	1 1/2 c	unbleached all purpose flour
1/2 t	1/2 t	1/4 t	salt
3	3	3	eggs
1 T	2 T	1 4/5	milk
1 T	0	0	water
0	0	0	olive oil
7/3	1	2/5	ratio buckwheat / white flour

instructions

1. You should first read the hand made pasta section of any good Italian cookbook. We just give the [Cliff Notes](#)-like version here.

2. Mix well the two flours and put the result in a mound on your working surface. Ours was the inside of a big mixing bowl, convenient since that is where we mixed the flours. Make a little well in the middle of the mound to put the remaining ingredients.
3. With a fork gradually incorporate those ingredients into the flour so that it eventually becomes a big mass of dough, at which point you really want to get your bare hands into it, squishing it smoother and working it a bit, adding some additional flour a tablespoon at a time if it is too sticky, or possibly additional water/milk if it is too dry. First we added a bit of water since it seemed too dry, but once that was really worked in, it was too wet and we had to add flour a bit at a time to compensate.
4. Soon this formally becomes the kneading process where the pasta dough is now a big blob and you repeat the process of folding it in half and pushing it down repeatedly (kneading) with the palms of your hands, then rotating it by 90 degrees, and repeating, for long enough that the dough seems to have a good consistency. This is all very vague. Practice makes perfect.
5. Now divide it into 2 blobs and set up your pasta roller machine. Ours was a gift from Italy, so we have this big old transformer to fix the incompatible voltage standards. It is essential to have the electric motor attachment to make this all work smoothly without too much pain.
6. Flatten one blob and press it into the widest setting for your roller separation, with the electric motor on the slow or fast speed. We always used the slow speed ignoring the instructions to use the fast speed for rolling and the slow one for cutting. It comes out long and rather flat. Fold it in thirds lengthwise and repeat a few times, more than 5, and when it seems right (?), lay out on a kitchen towel. You will need at least 2 towels for 8 pasta strips before this is over.
7. Then repeat for blob 2. I think we cut each of these in half lengthwise to be more manageable at the thinning stage.
8. Now for each one of the 4 pasta rectangles, run it through each of the increasingly thinner roller separation settings once, stopping at the next to the last. Halfway through the thinning process we again cut the pasta strips in half to manage them since they keep getting longer.
9. We also had some complications with some strips which were a bit too sticky still, so we dusted them with flour and worked them through a few times at an intermediate separation. Fake it.
10. Finally all the pasta strips are successfully thinned. Now you run them through the fettuccine cut, about 4 inches at a time. Namely, take a knife and cut them crosswise into 4 inch pieces on the towels. Then run each cut edge into the cutter rollers and pick up the output in a waiting hand and return to the towel.
11. Let them dry.

notes

1. You can use them soon after or save them at room temperature a few days or freeze them. Ours fit nicely into a large square Rubbermaid container. We waited two days to make our [latest pizzoccheri recipe](#).
2. [Illustrations](#) available. You can see how dark the noodles come out compared to the noodles from a box. Marcella's buckwheat to wheat flour ratio must not be the standard one, but they tasted real good.
3. Sometime during Y2K a woman with a food business in Manhattan (NYC), also an

expatriate Swede looking for pizzoccheri recipes on the web, somehow found us through a [Swedish search engine](#) (?), and casually mentioned she had seen pizzoccheri that very morning in a [gourmet food market](#) named Agata & Valentina on the Upper East Side, namely 1505 First Avenue at 79th Street, 212-452-0690 [open 8am - 8:30pm, 7 days a week]. When we were later contacted by another fellow American from nearby New Jersey who'd once tasted pizzoccheri while hiking in the mountains north of Milano (nothing like working up an appetite first), fond memories of which sent him hunting on the web tossing him straight to us again, it seemed time to plug the store, which is easily found on the web even if it doesn't have its own website yet. Apparently they ship! We'll keep that in mind. [A month later the NYC based [The Magazine of La Cucina Italiana](#) shared a tidbit of information with their readers about pizzoccheri, naming A&V as well as the [Todaro Brothers](#) as local suppliers: "Pass the buckwheat" (tidbits, p.14, Jan/Feb 2001).]

And webservers, if you find this page, don't miss our two pizzoccheri recipes: [traditional](#) and a [modern twist](#), or the food pilgrimage [on the road](#) tale to almost pizzoccheri country.

4. Every trip to Italy, we haul back a stash of this pasta.

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fettuccine al tartufo (with mushroom truffle sauce)

Our first time was a magical New Year's Eve in Naples, the city that really knows how to live this occasion. And of course the start of the affair was good food. Pasta with truffle sauce. We'd vaguely been aware of truffles before but they remained only an abstraction until that moment. Yes, the dish was good, but nothing to inspire spending exorbitant amounts of money for the stuff ourselves. Besides, how do rank amateurs figure out how to make a dish that measures up to the heavy reputation it carries. The caviar of the forest with matching price tag.

Then the Philly [Book and the Cook Fair](#) supplied us with a free sample of pasta with truffle sauce, yum! It worked—we bought some chopped black truffle concoction and a small jar of white truffle oil. They explained what they did to make the enticing samples that opened our wallet. It seemed simple enough, butter, cream, parmigiano, the black truffle jar, bingo! But when we did it, it just wasn't the same. A reasonably priced restaurant Ristorante Il Tartufo opened nearby in [Manayunk](#). We went a few times and loved the truffle dishes, especially the fettuccine. Bob bought a little 50 cent truffle recipe book *The 100 Best Truffle Recipes* in Rome. Useless.

Truffles made their way onto the best seller list with delightful passages from [Under the Tuscan Sun](#) and [The Hills of Tuscany](#), fairy tales for Americans dreaming of living as foreigners in rural Italy. We had our very own dream weekend with Valeria and Andrea in a barn summer apartment over livestock on a panoramic hill near Spoleto, another truffle center. They bought some ugly black truffles from their trusted supplier for pasta, but alas, there are no guarantees with these uncivilizable funghi, this batch was a dud. But we bought a few jars of mushroom-truffle spread that kept our truffle dreams alive back in philly, at least for a while.

And then Jamila went to an Italian wedding in Tuscany while vacationing at home in Belgium and brought us back a jar of Tartufitalia Salsa Tartufata (Mushroom and Truffle Sauce). And in our kitchen prepared the sauce for fresh fettuccine as explained to her. Mostly just adding cream to the jar in our favorite 4 qt chef's pan and then mixing with the pasta and parmigiano when ready. Yes! Finally a way to achieve that elusive taste in our own home, while doing it with diluted (i.e., cheaper) truffles.

So off to surf the net for a supplier of this product. By the year 2000 the web was mature enough to produce a quick solution. We called up the US importer for exactly what our empty jar of memories (and crucial search strings) used to hold. 15 bucks a pop, not cheap, but for truffles, reasonable for special occasions. A few days later the box of 4 7oz jars appeared at our door. Waiting for Jamila's advice by e-mail from Brussels for how to proceed.

ingredients

- 1 7oz jar Tartufitalia Salsa Tartufata (or other brand)
- 1 clove garlic, pressed
- 2 T olive oil

3/4 - 1 c cream
1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano
1 lb fettuccine, fresh or high quality from a box or package
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

instructions

1. Jamila? Help!
2. ROAST FEW MINUTES THE GARLIC IN OLIVE OIL.
3. ADD THE TARTUFATA. STIR FEW MINUTES.
4. ADD AROUND HALF CUP OF CREAM AND THE PARMIGIANO.
5. ADD SALT AND PEPPER.
6. VERY EASY AND DELICIOUS IF YOU REMEMBER!!!
7. Thanks, Jamila.

notes

1. Made in San Anatolia di Narco, Umbria, Italy, imported by [Urbani USA](#), relatives of the Italian company which bills itself as the world leader in truffle production, not yet on their web product list but available for immediate shipping. [We were sent their catalog and some truffle recipes. No Salsa Tartufata listed. No simple cream tartufo sauce for fettuccine found.]
2. Called tartufo in Italian, this is also the name for a delicious chocolate ice cream dessert best tasted in Bar Tre Scalini in Rome's most famous tourist square Piazza Navona, so named because it is a small pleasure treasure like the real thing.
3. By roast, Jamila means saute, but just a moment because garlic loses its potency very quickly when overdone. We waited to add the parmigiano just before combining with the al dente pasta in the chef's pan. Just fit snugly. Then extra freshly ground pepper and parmigiano at the table.
4. We tried this for Valentine's Day 2000, the date of Jamila's e-mail reply, but at the last minute had to go with the imported Italian dried fettuccine since our Monday fresh pasta source only had penne. And only quarts of heavy cream were on the shelf at our two Main Line food stops so we went with light cream (quarts?---this stuff is laden with fat!). Slender asparagus was on sale so we got 2 lbs and did it up with 3 pressed cloves of garlic and the juice of one lemon to go with the pasta. And chilled Gavi di Gavi white wine. And mom and pop Sark, with paul. Valentine's Day with the in-laws. bob brought some rosy pink roses for the ladies. Delicious meal.
5. Soon after, we returned to Il Tartufo, the restaurant, and tried their version of fettuccine al tartufo and vitello al tartufo. Both were very tasty, but the fettuccine clearly had too much cream—typical in American Italian restaurants. But our version in comparison really needs more, so our original guess at 1/2 c has been "[kicked up a notch](#)" to a range of 3/4 to 1 c, depending on ones fear of fat.
6. Piero's return trip through Baltimore after an observing run at [ESO](#) Chile combined with our get acquainted visit with Mauro and Daniela's 2 month old son Marco to offer our next test of the recipe. Loaded with fresh semolina bread and fettuccine from our trusted supplier [Carlino's](#), we were confronted by a temporary infant lactose intolerance preventing Daniela from touching milk products (no cream, no cheese), so we divided the

tartufo sauce into her portion and the rest, and used lactose reduced milk for hers. Meanwhile there was no pot large enough to do the whole 1.5 lbs of fettuccine at once, so bob got the brilliant idea of draining the boiling water into a smaller pot for the remnants and finishing them off in a second shot. We used a little over a cup of heavy cream for the pound plus pasta for the rest of us and combined our parmigiano after tossing our pasta and sauce. Daniela liked hers, we loved ours. It needs fresh fettuccine and just enough cream.

lightening up (the tartufo sauce)

The big box stores are typically reachable only by car, and this applies to Italy as well. Since bob is notoriously without wheels in Rome, it is a rare occasion that he finds himself at the [Metro](#) out in the burbs, their equivalent of Costco or B.J.'s, the big wholesaler shopper's clubs requiring an annual membership. The Italian version is a real trip, because even the cutrate food in Italy is of high quality. The best aged parmigiano reggiano at half the airport duty free prices, okay duty free is a rip-off even compared to the regular stores and supermarkets, but this was still a good deal at the Metro. Of course bob doesn't cook in Italy, so any food acquisitions must be hand carried back to the home kitchen, and glass containers merit carry-on treatment, so the choices must be careful and restrained. On the summer 2002 trip bob gets lucky after an afternoon beach visit with father and son friends who need to pick up dinner on the way home to mom. bob spots a plastic shrunk wrapped 6 pack of 130g "crema tartufata" jars, a bit smaller than the usual "salsa tartufata" (160g or 180g) jars, and made with mushrooms and white truffles instead of black. Looks like something new worth trying and worth transporting, and so cheap!

They sit around a while at home, but finally the need arises to feed the team with stuff on hand and ms_ani takes over and does the makeover. Same deal, saute a few pressed garlic cloves in olive oil, just a bit, then dumping in the light colored salsa tartufata, and maybe a half cup of lowfat milk—no light cream was in stock—and it turned out not to be necessary. The result was lighter colorwise and fatwise but no less flavorful. A pound of Carlino fresh fettuccine pop out of the freezer and into the pasta pot and suddenly dinner is ready. Some freshly ground parmigiano in the sauce, and then on each serving. We finish off the whole pound with only salad to break the intake. Yumm. Who said lowfat can't be tasty?

notes

1. [Elle Esse Truffle Cream](#). Produced in Umbria. Not yet available in the US.
2. [Illustrations available](#).

urbani update

Well, every family has its less talented (maybe unlucky?) members. Apparently the New York branch of the family business got so in debt to the mother company in Italy by 2002 that drastic action had to be taken. A new generation of unsuspecting Urbani brothers were plucked out of their ordinary lives and promoted to co-directors of the restructured business: [Urbani Truffles USA](#). A delightful truffle cooking demo by Peter and Christian were our pleasant surprise when we entered the Philly [GreatBigFoodShow.Com](#) sponsored by the [Food Network](#), only to find

nearly impassible isles filled with people and at least 100 of them in line at any free food sample spot worth sampling, and no Food Network celebrity show passes available for the next 6 hours. No Alton Brown or Giada de Laurentis for us, but in the other open demo areas program, the Urbani brothers were on only 30 minutes after we entered, so serendipity saved the day. Wondering why they both mispronounced tagliatelle (tag-li-a-te-lli instead of tal-ya-te-lli), the pasta they used for their truffle demo main course, bob asks Christian after the show about their connection with the Italian company and gets a short version story of their good fortune. They not only market the [salsa tartufata](#) on-line (still only 15 bucks a pop), but some interesting new products including tartufo butter, truffle puree and truffle fondue. Too bad our pasta diet is now rather limited due to the carb revolution. For the first time ever, we actually have some real Urbani bottled truffles given to us by a kind friend in Perugia. We'll have to figure out what to do with the stuff this time.

We checked back with Urbani USA in 2006. Its website had been down at least a year or more. Looks like another failure.

Meanwhile our favorite Roman food specialty store [Castroni cola di Rienzo](#) [[Chinese website?](#)] had a number of [Tentazioni](#) dell'Umbria tartufata products we grabbed up the day before our summer 2006 return flight through Heathrow London in turn only days before the liquid bomb terrorist plot threw a monkey wrench into airport security. Both white and black truffle tartufata sauces. Too bad self-importing is the still the only simple way for us to bring these products home.

tartufo.htm: 16-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

yogurt mint soup (with kibbeh)

This is a favorite and regular dish in the Sark household and always eaten with the bulgur wheat meat-filled kibbeh footballs. The soup is easy. The kibbeh, if done traditionally, require skills that dr bob could not pick up in one sitting, while ani refuses to get involved with it because of the labor intensive process of forming the little suckers, so we have to rely on Isgouhi for this treat. The combination of the yogurt mint flavor and the kibbeh is exceptional, so an alternative solution to this problem must be found.

soup ingredients

- 1)
 - 2 c water
 - 1/2 c Carolina extra long grain rice
 - pinch salt
- 2)
 - 16 oz (1 lb = 454g) yogurt
 - 1 egg
 - 1/2 lemon, juice of
 - 1/2 t salt
 - 2 - 3 c water (about equal to the amount of yogurt)
- 3)
 - 2 t dried mint
 - 1 t salt (or to taste)
 - 2 T butter (1/4 stick)
- 4)
 - kibbeh (separate recipe below [still to do] or purchase the little suckers at an Armenian food store, if you can find one)

instructions

1. Boil the rice in water with a pinch of salt until the rice is softened, about 15 minutes.
2. Wisk together the yogurt, egg, salt and juice of 1/2 lemon until smooth.
3. Stir the yogurt mixture into the rice with the additional water and stir over high heat until it boils (about 10 minutes).
4. Turn the heat down to medium and add the mint, butter and salt, and continue boiling another 5 minutes.
5. Taste. If the yogurt is not tart enough (storebought versus homemade), add the remaining juice of 1/2 lemon.
6. Add the kibbeh (whether raw or baked) to the yogurt soup, bring to a boil and continue boiling about 10 minutes.
7. Serve 2 or 3 kibbeh per bowl in the yogurt soup.

notes

1. Remove the uneaten kibbeh from the soup before storing leftovers in the refrigerator to prevent them from thickening the yogurt soup and absorbing too much of the yogurt soup in return. Return the kibbeh to the yogurt soup to reheat.
2. The grains of rice should lose their identity in the soup, so one needs a long grain rice which will do that.
3. Apparently kibbeh is one of the most typical Lebanese foods, so there is some hope of finding them made fresh in Middle Eastern or Armenian specialty food stores. One can find a few Lebanese cooking sites to read up on these little bulgur meat balls [[ArabNet Lebanese cooking](#)]
4. Here is a [sheet of them](#) just removed from the oven, and then [swimming in the yogurt soup](#), and a couple of serving shots: [[1](#)] [[2](#)].
5. The [flat sheet version](#) of kibbeh will ultimately prove to be our unskilled solution to this problem.
6. [All illustrations](#).

ygtmntsp.htm: 1-nov-2003 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

mango yoplait cheesecake

When dr bob makes cheesecake topping in Italy (does anyone else?), the absence of sour cream in the marketplace requires an imaginative substitution, which the dr bob team often accomplishes with fruit flavored yogurt and mascarpone or something similar that does not translate well into American food terminology. Here in the US, fruit flavored yogurt is an option, but one which had never been exercised until the new millennium.

Yogurt in Europe outclasses the American yogurt scene no hands down. Smooth and creamy, it just flows onto your tongue where your taste buds can appreciate their wider variety of interesting flavors. And none of this custard crap. Here there are too many companies producing the same short list of flavors to fill insufficient supermarket shelf space, and a buying public that doesn't seem to mind will continue to collude together to keep the situation looking bleak for the foreseeable future.

For a while bob was faithful to [Stonybrook Farms](#) for their concern not only for their customers by trying to deliver a nutritiously superior product but also for their efforts to raise consumer and ecological consciousness. But they discontinued his favorite breakfast yogurt flavor guava-papaya. Maybe it was the buying public's fault again. Caribbean fruit not mainstream enough perhaps.

But then [Yoplait](#) came along with [strawberry-mango](#) in their 1 percent smooth European consistency line of yogurts. Fearing it would not survive, bob converted exclusively to this flavor for months. In a way this was the (academic) year of the mango for bob. First encountering a knock your socks off almost liquid mango mousse at a short lived tapas joint in Bryn Mawr. And then just before losing our French speaking friends Pascale and Jamila to their European homelands, we did the annual [Big Apple](#) pre-Christmas season Saturday visit and chanced upon a mean mango lassi (yogurt drink) at a terrific Indian lunch buffet near Rockefeller Center. Rediscovered in our own backyard the night before Oscar Night 2000.

So mango was in the air when Paul was volunteered to be a dr bob cooking school student on Oscar afternoon. The usual [Mother Wonderful basic recipe](#) with a hand-blended fresh mango slices and rum puree for flavoring. Half recipe in an 8 in pan. (Whole cheesecakes seem so [overpowering](#) at 47). And the sweetened Yoplait strawberry-mango sour cream mixture on top. Only a few hours in the fridge and we popped it out for an Oscar evening treat. Good, but much better the next day.

ingredients

crust

- 3/4 c graham cracker crumbs
- 1/4 c hazelnut crumbs
- 5 T butter

base

- 2 8oz packages cream cheese (1/2 lb)
- 1 c sugar

pinch salt
1 t vanilla
2 eggs
1/3 c fresh mango pieces
2 T rum

topping

1 c sour cream
3/4 6oz container Yoplait strawberry-mango yogurt
2 T sugar

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Standard crust. Press about 7/8 inch up the sides of the 8 inch springform pan and around the bottom.
3. Puree the fresh mango pieces with rum in a handblender.
4. Beat the cream cheese, sugar and salt until smooth and creamy.
5. Beat in the vanilla and one egg at a time at low speed.
6. Pour batter in crust, pop into oven and bake 50 minutes or so until the center doesn't jiggle too much.
7. Remove for 10 minutes, while mixing the topping ingredients together and spreading evenly on the top at the end of this waiting period.
8. Return to the oven for another 10 minutes.
9. Then remove and cool. Refrigerate at least overnight.

notes

1. [Illustrations](#) available.
2. Thinking a smaller cake would cook a little faster, bob pulled it from the oven after 45 minutes, ignoring the jiggling center as advised by Mother Wonderful. But this time, the center really wasn't done, since it collapsed away from the rest of each slice when cut. This is a tough judgement call, but leaving it in a bit longer cannot hurt it so it's better to err on the side of caution.
3. This mango cheesecake business is tricky. Shortly afterward bob tries a ricotta based mango cheesecake recipe from [Taunton's fine cooking](#) magazine (June/July 1995) and decides to go lowfat. Using a nonfat 8oz cream cheese and 1 lb of nonfat ricotta cheese, the result [looked good](#) but turned out to be mush, even after an hour of baking and then cooling in the hot oven! What a disappointment.

mango (= aam) lassi

Somehow we got conned into a subscription to [Saveur](#) magazine by a free 6 month offer and it is hard to cure these addictions once they start. Automatic billing to the credit card unless you actively stop it. Jan/Feb 2001 had a full page (48) promoting Rata brand Alphonso Mango Pulp with a recipe adapted from Julie Sahni's *Classic Indian Vegetarian and Grain Cooking* (William and Morrow, 1985). Claiming that homemade Indian yogurt is thinner and tangier than our US

store products it suggests substituting American buttermilk. By coincidence later in the year [Gourmet](#) magazine (January, 2001) had an article on mango recipes and also pushed the Rata brand, which seemed like independent confirmation of the choice. A mango fool (pudding) recipe caught bob's eye there.

So it's simple: 1 1/4 c plain yogurt or buttermilk, 1 c sweetened alphonso mango pulp, 3 T sugar, 2 t fresh lime juice, 1 c water; puree in a blender until smooth and frothy and the sugar has dissolved, about 1 minute. Then pour into 4 tall ice-filled glasses. We'll have to try it once we locate the product.

chckmngo.htm: 20-jan-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

lemon asparagus pasta sauce (with optional bread crumbs and scallops)

bob is a pushover for trendy food mags. Spotting the latest Gourmet for the first time, he does a quick scan and spots this recipe but with good self-discipline, re-racks the issue and walks away. But ani picks up some bay scallops and was not immediately forthcoming with an idea for how to do them with pasta. bob's recent recipe find fresh in mind seems compatible with a bay scallop option. Ani also fails to find fresh bagged bread crumbs, but bob says no problem—we'll food process some leftover baguette. Which she has in mind to accompany the scallops. bob grabs another copy of the food mag at checkout.

Ani never wants to read recipes in the kitchen and bob didn't have time to read the recipe lead-in chatter. But afterwards, the author talks about how she first tried it when her friend was writing the cookbook from which this was taken. A cookbook residing in the dr bob cooking team library years already. But without Gourmet to help us select, we'd have never noticed this gem.

ingredients

pasta

penne or pasta of choice (butterflies or mafalde: ruffled narrow lasagna-like noodles)

sauce

1 lb fresh asparagus, tough ends trimmed

1 t finely grated fresh lemon zest

1/4 c extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano

salt and pepper to taste

optional bread crumbs and scallops

1.5 c bay (or sea) scallops

1/4 c bread crumbs

instructions

1. Cut asparagus into 1 inch pieces, keeping the tender tips separate.
2. Cook the cut stems in 5 to 6 quarts boiling water with 2 T salt until very tender, about 6 to 8 minutes.
3. Transfer with a slotted spoon to a colander, reserving cooking liquid in pot, and rinse under cold water. Drain well and put in a food processor.
4. Cook the asparagus tips in the same water about 3 to 5 minutes until just tender and transfer to colander to rinse under cold water and drain well.
5. Puree the asparagus stems with zest, oil and 1/2 c asparagus cooking water and then put in a 4 qt saucepan.
6. Then cook the pasta in the already boiling asparagus cooking water until it is still a bit before the al dente state (say 3/4 the recommended cooking time). Reserve 2 c cooking water and drain pasta.
7. Add the pasta, asparagus tips and 1/2 c cooking water to the asparagus sauce and cook

over high heat about 3 to 5 minutes while stirring until the pasta is almost al dente and the sauce coats it. Add more cooking water 1/4 c at a time until the sauce coats the pasta but is a little loose (the cheese will thicken it slightly at the next step).

8. Stir in the parmigiano, salt and pepper to taste and cook while stirring until the cheese is melted.
9. Serve immediately.
10. . If exercising the scallop option, brown the bread crumbs in a sauté pan, and separately sauté the scallops in a bit of olive oil until cooked, then combine with the pasta at the end of step 8. Or maybe we attempted bread-crumbing the scallops. Or maybe we should have attempted bread-crumbing the scallops. Maybe we should just forget the crumbs and toss in the scallops. You decide.

notes

1. [Gourmet](#), May 2000, p 247. Faith Heller Willinger: [Red, White and Greens: The Italian Way with Vegetables](#). Intro by the Executive Food Editor Zanne Stewart.
2. We used butterfly pasta.
3. We also never wrote down the details of our execution of the recipe, but the asparagus prep here seems way too sophisticated for the dr bob cooking team. Probably we did the usual asparagus prep routine boiling whole in a vertical asparagus pot, and when done, cut off the tips and put aside, while chopping up the stems and food processing them. Making sure we had at least 2 c of somewhat more intense asparagus water left to use in the recipe later. Yeah, that sounds right.

pstlmnas.htm: 16-aug-2006 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

lemon garlic cream sauced farro fettuccine

Farro (triticum di coccum) is an ancient grain already used by the Mesopotamians and had its highest point in nutritional importance during the Roman era when, according to the testimony of Old Plinius, for about 3 centuries it remained the only grain used by the ancient Romans. It was a precious food for the legions in war—every soldier had a right to 865g of farro per day, it had a "valenze propiziatone" in weddings and was even used as an exchange currency. It is not by chance that the word flour is derived from the Latin far- farris, namely farro. From the agricultural point of view, it allows a "natural" concimazione", which would be counter productive and a reason for "allettamento", nor of "diserbo" chemical because its "taglia" allows a natural control of "infestatiti".

Hmm. Reading the packages in Italian is not such an easy exercise for a lightweight Italian speaker like dr bob. Our local Italian food specialty store surprised us with this product line—farro pasta in various shapes, translated as stone-ground "emmer wheat" (plus water) on the box in the English part (and as "spelt" on another brand farro product). Priced even higher than the Puglia pasta bob refuses to buy until his hand imported supply gives out but the novelty of the item plus the whole grain impression of the packaging info overcomes his reluctance to pay the huge importing profit. bob grabs tagliatelle for a surprise visit to Mom's. Ani implements his lemon garlic cream sauce inspired by the packaging hype that this past is so good it only needs olive oil and parmigiano. The sauce works. Accompanied by a pound of haddock marinated in excessive garlic and half a lemon, baked for 15 minutes at 350° and leftover garlic packed asparagus (cold). 3 happy campers safe from vampires. Unfortunately we started the Ligurian olive bread too late for dinner so we had to taste it later. From the King Arthur Flour cookbook from the dr bob food supplier based in the Dartmouth neighbor town where bob's baby brother lives (now a full grown adult). We'll have to try that one again some day as well.

ingredients

- 1 lb farro fettuccine
- 8 garlic cloves, pressed
- 3 T olive oil
- 1 lemon, juice of
- 3/4 c light cream
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 c parmigiano, freshly grated

instructions

1. Cook the farro with the usual pasta routine.
2. Meanwhile sauté the garlic in olive oil without browning, then add the lemon juice. Turn off heat.
3. Just before combining with the pasta, add the cream to the garlic lemon mixture and heat a bit, then toss about with the pasta, salt and pepper and parmigiano.

notes

1. Was that too terse?

lmngfarro.htm: 4-nov-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

pasta and potatoes

When dr bob had this in the [CNR](#) applied mathematics institute cafeteria in Naples, he had to have the recipe. "Pasta e patate" is a traditional Napolitano recipe, and fortunately several traditional Napolitano moms were at the table assuring him that this was an easy one. Francesca later responded to the e-mail request for details but it took a while to give it a try. First came the search for mixed pasta (pasta mista), which bob found at a new Italian food store [Luigi and Giovanni's](#) which had recently opened up nearby. The find was a [Delverde](#) product curiously with no name other than "pasta made of semolina" on the package. But readily identifiable from the many irregularly shaped pieces of small dried pasta all mixed together. And designated by shape number 77 and name "mista" at their USA website. Two packages lingered in the closet for what seemed like years. The dr bob cooking team wins no prizes for speed.

Pasta and potatoes? A strange combination you might think at first, but we had already been initiated with pizzoccheri and potatoes years before, so it seemed perfectly natural when bob tasted his first hit of the stuff. Then having acquired an English language Naples [cookbook](#) (bought for a single really Napolitano recipe: Genovese pasta sauce, an onion to-the-max meat flavored sauce for supermacaroni: candeale = candles), there was confirmation of the authenticity of its version of this recipe from its close resemblance to francesca's recipe.

pasta e patate (quella si' che merita!)

- 1) Tagliare a cubetti le patate (circa 100g. a persona) e lasciarle un po' in acqua fredda.
- 2) far rosolare una cipolla tagliata sottile con poco olio (un cucchiaio a persona) e prosciutto cotto o pancetta a cubetti (io ne faccio a meno).
- 3) aggiungere poco pomodoro passato (1 dl. per 3-4 persone) e salare.
- 4) aggiungere le patate sgocciolate, poi acqua fino a coprire e far cuocere finche' le patate non si sfanno.
- 5) aggiungere la pasta (allungando con acqua calda se necessario) e farla cuocere il tempo necessario. Se la pasta ha una cottura lunga, qualcuno preferisce farla cuocere a parte, per scaricare l'amido, e mischiare con le patate negli ultimi minuti di cottura.
- 6) volendo si puo' aggiungere pepe o peperoncino.

Buon appetito!

Translation:

pasta and potatoes (this is really worth it!)

- 1) Cut up the potatoes (about 100g per person) into little cubes and let sit a bit in cold water.
- 2) Sauté some finely chopped onion in olive oil (a tablespoon per person) and ham or pancetta cut into little cubes (I do without this).
- 3) Add a little tomato sauce (about 1/10 liter for 3-4 persons) and salt to taste.
- 4) Add the peeled potatoes (should have been noted earlier, francesca!), then enough water to cover them and cook them until they...(?).
- 5) Add the pasta, with more water if necessary, and cook until done. If the pasta takes a while to cook, some people prefer to boil it separately, drain, and then mix into the potato mixture in the

last few minutes of cooking.

6) If you wish, you can add some pepper or pepperoncino.

okay, so we compromised between her recipe and the cookbook version here. And you can learn from our mistake of using the whole bag of pasta instead of half.

ingredients

3oz pancetta
2 T olive oil
1 onion
1 carrot
1 stalk celery
1 small can (15oz) pelati (peeled Italian plum tomatoes)
1/4 t red pepper flakes
about 2 large potatoes, cubed (small)
3/4 c water
1/2 lb pasta mista
salt and pepper to taste
parmigiano for serving

instructions

1. Food process the onion, carrot, and celery together and dump into a bowl.
2. Food process the pelati.
3. Peel and cube the potatoes.
4. Saute the onion etc in the olive oil until translucent.
5. Then add the tomato sauce and red pepper flakes and cook for about 4 minutes.
6. Then add the water and cubed potatoes and salt to taste and cook about 20 minutes.
7. Meanwhile bring pasta water to boil and cook the pasta in salted water until very al dente.
8. Drain and combine with the other stuff and continue cooking until potatoes are tender. Stir occasionally.
9. Serve with freshly ground parmigiano and black pepper to taste.

notes

1. We put the whole package in but it overwhelmed the tomato sauce already somewhat occupied with the potatoes. Half should be enough, unless you use a big can of tomatoes. Even so, bob had 3 servings. In addition to chickory and veal in a mushroom wine sauce. Maybe it was a bit too much pasta. But bob needs to gain some weight.
2. While having a dish of this stuff (for a buck 75!) at an incredibly cheap and typically characteristic small roman osteria "[da Giovanni](#)" near the Vatican (via della Lungara 41/a: 06-68.61.514, closed sundays), bob complains of his own pasta e patata failure and later receives:

e-mail from rome

Ti scrivo la ricetta di "Pasta e patate" come mi ha insegnato mia madre: questa ricetta è per 2 persone.

Ingredienti: 1 fetta di prosciutto, 2 pomodori senza semi, 2 patate, 1 pezzettino di cipolla, 1 rametto di sedano, 1 pezzetto di carota, 2 pentolini di acqua calda.

Soffriggere: olio, prosciutto e cipolla (tagliata a piccoli pezzi) -
 Aggiungere le due patate: una tagliata a piccoli pezzetti e l'altra tagliata in due pezzi, la carota tagliata a pezzetti piccoli, un pò di sale, i pomodori a pezzetti e il sedano intero.

Mescolare (altrimenti si attacca) e aggiungere l'acqua calda. Coprire con coperchio.

Quando la patata è cotta, tirare fuori i due pezzi grandi della patata e schiacciarli in un piatto con una forchetta e poi rimettere questa "pappetta" nella pentola.

Quando si serve, togliere il sedano e il prosciutto. Aggiungere il peperoncino

Bob, è una ricetta molto "semplice", ma quando d'inverno la faccio.....sono felice.

A presto.

Eliana

or in other words:

I write you the recipe of "Pasta and Potatoes" like my mom taught me. This recipe is for 2 people.

Ingredients: a slice of prosciutto, 2 tomatoes without seeds, 2 potatoes, 1 little piece of onion, 1 celery stalk, 1 small piece of carrot, 2 pots (?) of water.

Saute: oil, prosciutto, and onion (diced) -

Add the 2 potatoes: one cut into little pieces and the other in half, the diced carrot, a bit of salt, the chopped tomatoes and the whole celery stalk.

Stir (otherwise it sticks) and add the hot water. Cover the pot.

When the potato is cooked, pull out the two big pieces and mash it on a plate with a fork, and then put this "baby food" back in the pot.

When served, take out the celery and prosciutto. Add pepperoncino to taste.

Bob, it's a very simple recipe, but when I make it in the winter... I am happy.

Soon,

Eliana

pstpotato.htm: 8-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

parmesan crusted halibut on a bed of garlic sauteed spinach and goat cheese/sundried tomato mashed potatoes

Whoa, bob! how did the name get so long? Well...

Maurizio did the 24 hour cardiologist convention escape tour of philly. 30th St Station pickup from the Amtrak Washington line straight to [Jim's \[cheese\]Steaks](#) for the mandatory philly welcome lunch. Pizza steaks, cheese whiz, mushrooms, no onions. A successful first impression. The Liberty Bell had to be bypassed on this tour—too many May schoolkid trips feeding the waiting line. But we made the Independence Hall tour after only a 10 minute wait and the guide turned out to be a real live wire whose rapid fire info-tainment shtick kept bob amused if not Maurizio, whose command of English was set at much lower speed. Yada, yada, yada...

So where to do dinner? Maurizio is not fussy, but is also making familiar Italian chatter about big American meat—oversized overthick steak. We go for Toscana Cucina Rustica in Bryn Mawr, where Maurizio gets his 20 oz steak and bob gets the title of this recipe almost, shared with ani of course. Almost, because we went a bit further than Toscana with the garlic, and threw in the parmesan since we're addicts. Did I mention the touch of crushed red pepper?

The restaurant review from our Italian guest? "Not exactly Italian, but excellent food." [Freely translated.] Fair enough. You want authentic Italian, you go to Italy. But Americans aren't bound by Italian constraints (tradition) and can creatively extend Italian cuisine to places where we like it to go. And that warm chocolate pudding cake with vanilla ice cream on top at the end—chocolate ecstasy—you wouldn't find that in the old boot. American flexibility be praised. Maybe this is the price we have to pay for too much sauce on our pasta.

The next morning an early departure back to Washington. But ... bad news—a 10 alarm fire north of Philly threatens to shut down all trains and I-95 as well. The VIP Metroliner train for DC was boarding though. bob thinks maybe it would be worth it to board and pay the outrageous difference in fare, but does not verbalize this idea to Maurizio. Then it's gone. And the threat materializes. All other trains are suspended indefinitely. Hours of waiting time possible. And then the Amtrak miracle occurs. They announce that the Metroliner is backing up into the station to pick up the southbound passengers waiting for the not-so-cheap but much cheaper train caught by the fire. A miracle because some faceless bureaucrat actually made a common sense decision that helped relieve the suffering of quite a few regular folks in a jam.

That evening we had to do a dinner for five. Weakminded chef's that we are, we figured we'd do the tartufo fettuccini on them (all first timers) and try to recreate the halibut dish from the night before, while experimenting with a Key lime tart that has lingered on for years without finality in our cooking log. Either the event was a success or our guests were master diplomats. We won't worry about the fine distinction.

ingredients

goat cheese and sundried-tomato mashed potatoes

- 4 large Yukon gold potatoes
- 0.4 lb fresh goat cheese
- 13 sundried tomatoes, boiled in water 10 minutes
- 1 T butter
- 1 t tomato paste

garlic sauteed spinach

- 3 bunches fresh spinach
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1/8 t red pepper flakes

parmesan crusted halibut

- 2.2 lb fresh halibut filet, cut into 6 pieces
- 1/2 c bread crumbs
- 2 T chopped fresh dill
- 1/2 c parmigiano, freshly grated
- salt and pepper to taste

instructions

1. Wash the fish and pat it dry. Cut into 6 pieces.
2. Mix together the rest of the crust stuff and press it on the fish pieces. Put in a glass baking dish and stuff in the fridge for a few hours.
3. You can do the mashed potatoes and spinach prep ahead of time. Boil the potatoes in salted water about 15 minutes until tender.
4. Meanwhile boil up the sundried tomatoes to soften them up. Then puree them with a few tablespoons of the water to help the puree process in the hand blender container, and the dab of tomato paste (we squeeze some out of a tube) for more color.
5. Then mash the potatoes with an electric hand beater and mix in the room temperature cheese and tomato puree. Cover until later.
6. Clean the spinach, drain and boil in the water clinging to it until cooked.
7. Then drain it, press out the water and sauté it with the pressed garlic, olive oil and a touch of red pepper flakes. Cover for later.
8. When ready to proceed, bake the fish in a preheated oven about 20 minutes. Put the mashed potatoes in with them to reheat.
9. Meanwhile reheat the spinach.
10. Assemble each portion on the plate individually. First lay down the bed of spinach, then plop down some mashed potato, not too much, and then lay the baked fish piece on it. Serve.

notes

1. We could have halved the mashed potato recipe, but we like leftovers. It was good with our terrific [3-meat meatloaf](#) a few nights later.
2. The fish we could have reduced slightly since we were only 5, not 6, and the last smaller piece became a leftover.
3. We had to increase the sundried tomato from our initial estimate and throw in a bit of

tomato paste to get some color into the potatoes. They should clearly have a reddish color for presentation.

4. The [mashed potatoes](#) have nice color, but the presentation of the [finished dish](#) can't hope to match that of real food professionals.

pchetc.htm: 16-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

lamb stew (*keshkeg*) herriseh

Gruel. Slop. Porridge. Mush. Images from a Charles Dickens' novel where orphans survive on one pot meals that pour into their little eating bowl all too infrequently. Usually eaten with a spoon. Closer to home this dish reminds me of my dad's hot oatmeal that he ate every morning for breakfast. A thick grey amorphous mass, not very appealing, but tasty with milk and sugar and perhaps even nutritious (the oatmeal).

Herriseh is a traditional Armenian recipe that even finds its way into a famous historical phrase connected with their often precarious status in the north Middle East. The traditional production method is somewhat dependent on having a homebound cook, since it takes about 7 hours of stovetop attention to execute. Isgouhi, perhaps slightly influenced by American attitudes about really excessive time intensive home activities (but only slightly), cuts this time considerably using a pressure cooker. Though Paul's favorite, ms_ani has resisted the dish for years until bob got interested and repeatedly insisted that she have some. Now she almost likes it, a decided improvement. It is not the most attractive meal in the pot or on your plate, but it is pretty tasty nonetheless. And good for you.

Herriseh is made with another whole grain, shelled wheat, also called "skinless whole grain wheat", which is an uncooked hulled wheat (*dzedzadz*) that is available in Armenian food products stores, but which can be substituted by barley (pearl barley) in desperation. In contrast cracked wheat (bulgur = *tzavar*) is a cooked wheat which is dried and ground into four sizes (1: fine, 2: medium, 3: big, 4 or half-cut: bigger). All this useful information comes from a [pair](#) of really good Armenian cookbooks recently acquired in the herriseh research effort. For some time bob never realized this was almost his highly prized barley in disguise (that he rarely seems to eat in spite of his desire for it) since after the cooking treatment it gets, the individual grains disintegrate.

ingredients

- 1 lb lamb meat
- 5 c water (approximate)
- 2 bay leaves
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 small onion, chopped in 6 pieces
- 1 c shelled wheat
- 1 T butter

instructions

1. Start with de-scumming: boil the cutup lamb meat in water (just to cover) and remove the scum that forms on the surface of the water. Rinse well.
2. Put the meat into a pressure cooker and cover it with water. Add bay leaves, salt and pepper, and the onion pieces. Bring to a boil and again remove the foam at the top with a spoon.
3. Close the pressure cooker and bring to full steam. Cook 10-15 minutes at full steam.

4. Meanwhile rinse shelled wheat several times until the rinse water runs clear. Put into a pot with 2 inches more water than the wheat level. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer. Stir occasionally. Add water occasionally as it sucks it up, until all the kernels are open and puffed up, about 1 hour.
5. Add the wheat to the meat and stir. Add 1 cup (or more) water if too thick. Bring to a boil. Taste for salt. Then close the pressure cooker and cook 1 hour at low pressure.
6. Open and taste for spices and adjust. Add 3 c boiling water. Simmer 1 hour.
7. Melt butter in nonstick pan and mix into the stuff.
8. Simmer a bit longer until ready to serve.

notes

1. If you add up the cooking times, it seems like an almost manageable 3 hours plus spillover for prep. Still long but conceivable compared to over 7. I think we can sacrifice: it's this or nothing, unless Dzovig invites us over for dinner...
2. Ani's aunt Ani simplifies this further by combining steps 3 thru 5 into a single shot single pot "throw all the ingredients into the pressure cooker" approach and simmer 3 hours minimum under pressure. Somewhere along the way the bones get removed in both recipes, but this requires further clarification...
3. Some other spellings: herisah, hareesa, harrisah.
4. [Illustrations](#) available.

herriseh.htm: 16-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

salsa tartufata on the road

or Rome Fiumicino: the 7am departure story



[bob's carry-on glassware \[a full load\] plus a few checked-baggage import items](#)

Year 2000. [Air France](#) begins service from Philly. Having already accumulated nearly 90 thousand [USAir/ways](#) (name change midstream) miles since it began direct service to Rome in the 90s, bob decides to give Air France a trial run on their less convenient flight connecting through Paris and save 200 bucks for the Italian research funding agency ultimately paying the fare. bob is a notorious Eurotrash traveler, flying across the Atlantic with Euroclass frequency but financed by other people's money, which, if you think about it, also characterizes the Euroclass traveler. (bob leans left.) The downside of saving someone else's cash was the return trip. 7:05am departure from [Fiumicino](#). ([Rome](#).)

Ordinarily the vacant apartment address in EUR outside center city Rome where bob was staying would be ideal for a quick airport connection since it is maybe 15 minutes away from

International Departures without traffic. And at 5am there is no traffic. Vacant apartments, of which there are many in Rome due to the strong rent control laws, can play a key role in the Eurotrash experience since real accommodations are probably the largest potential expense in short term temporary residence. But there can also be drawbacks, besides the lack of furniture. Top floor location (penthouse!) with no one walking on your ceiling and extra large terraces, but without AC or any active ventilation, it could be (and often was) rather uncomfortably hot (July, right under the roof). Large windows and glass doors to open for air flow but ... mosquitoes. And no screens and no stops to prevent slamming in the wind. Okay, it was the last night. Damn the mosquitoes (the city had been conducting massive insecticide warfare against them according to the paper, so maybe it would not be so bad) and let in some air.

But (lots of buts here)... no phone in the apartment. To call a taxi with. No problem. Just call in advance and reserve one (said one friend). bob makes the first call. Sure we accept reservations. When? Where? Telephone number? Exactly why I am trying to reserve in advance! Cell phone? Not yet. Sorry. The second big radio taxi company repeats the scene. The strategy seems logical to abandon. So what. bob can get up a little earlier and walk down and across the street to the old fashioned phone booth and call a taxi at 4:45am. Screw plan A, bob knows when to move on.

Fortunately the phone booth phone was actually working, itself a small miracle not because it was the nearest public phone within a half mile. Miracle since one morning a few weeks earlier on the way out bob spots a telephone company employee with a little truck actually cleaning the phone booth, not realizing that the phone was out of order. (bob checks these things.) bob politely informs him of this fact and he says he'll have it taken care of. And he did. Imagine that. (This is Italy, remember.)

However, to increase chances of success for plan B, bob decides to try the phone returning from the last pizza social encounter at 10:45pm before packing up, to make sure it is still working. And calls the third and last radio taxi number stored in his limited memory banks. Same routine. Up to the cell phone. (Everybody has them here.) Then bob says—what cell phone?!—I'm an American in Rome for a few months trying to get back to America. Consultation with a manager perhaps. Then the green light! Never give up on a good plan. Even when the Italian way of life seems to stack all odds against it. These little miracles that save Italy from itself.

Speaking of little miracles Air France never asked bob his seat preference at departure from Philly. bob never thought twice because ani had been doing the USAir/ways travel arrangements for years. Isle seat assignment at purchase time. Freedom to move at will with one less body in the near zone in economy seating. bob learns the French way is not the American way. Stuck in a middle seat for a night flight to Paris. And then learns at Fiumicino that apparently they don't do advance seat assignment. Face to face engagement just before putting ani on her convenient USAirways direct flight home. Not one to give up bob asks ani to call from the US for an isle seat. Which she does. And gets a seat assignment. Not isle. So bob goes to the web and emails customer service very politely explaining how he cannot remember the last time (before Air France) that he had to endure a non-isle seat. And that he had tried in person weeks before departure at Fiumicino with no success. And the stuff about taking the less convenient indirect flight to try them out and then not even being asked at Philly (bob's slipup from overpampering by ani perhaps but no need to explain that). And the important line in all capital SHOUTING letters to get someone's attention: "WHY SHOULD I EVER FLY AIR FRANCE AGAIN?"

The answer: Business Class.

After a clockwork taxi connection to Fiumicino in the deserted darkness of night and a little waiting around for the check-in to open, bob says nothing about the in-between seat to Paris, hoping to win the bigger battle for the Atlantic crossing seat, already given some hope by a prompt response to his e-mail roughly translating into "We'll see what we can do..." So he makes his move—ignoring the seat reservation ani had extracted from them by phone—"can I have an isle seat on the Paris-Philly flight?" And the answer was ... yes. Another success to add to the taxi story.

At Charles DeGaulle (airport), bob struggles to make the terminal transit F to C loaded with bottled consumables doubled in weight by last minute gifts from well-intentioned friends. A half liter cream of limoncello bought by bob in the new 24(?)hour supermarket under the Rome Stazioni Termini (main train station) produced by the Jubilee Year renovation, and 7 jars of 5 brands of salsa tartufata (mushroom truffle sauce) to start. Our first limoncello cream had been a surprise gift from donato the previous summer, and a big hit with friends when we spotted a special buy at the local PA State Store ([state liquor monopoly](#)) and distributed bottles at Christmas. And with us too. The salsa tartufata had also been a gift from a dear Algerian-Belgian woman friend Jamila returning from a wedding in Tuscany, complete with an in-house cooking demo of how to convert the stuff to an actual [pasta sauce for fettuccine](#) that finally hit the mark in the bob and ani thus far not so successful quest for the secret. Later ordered over the internet but at 15 bucks a pop plus shipping. So bob had to stock up while relatively cheap access was available. One jar was left from the casual Urbani find at an [Autogrill](#) cafeteria/minimarket on the road to Torino with [Maurizio](#) (where one was left as a small gift). Autogrill apparently has the national contract monopoly for the state highway system rest stops (lesser competitors have been noticed since then), and tempts travelers with upscale traditional Italian culinary products among other things. And brought to Rome Stazione Termini by Jubilee 2000 in direct competition with the State Train Chef Express cafeteria, greatly improving bob's [late night solo dining experience](#). (And at that moment plotting with [BurgerKing](#) to flood the country with competition for the runaway growth of [MacDonald's-Italy](#)!)

While in the Torino suburbs, bob and ani do Valle d'Aosta, home of the famous stinky fontina valdaostana cheese. Rain and gloom dampen the spirits, and shut down the Mount Blanc (Monte Bianco) cable cars, but a terrific lunch is had in [Aosta](#) in a special restaurant ([Ristorante Vecchia Aosta](#)) with several melted fontina dishes. Followed by a dinner the next night of traditional [pizzoccheri](#) with some fresh fontina, and spinach and Swiss chard substituting the usual Savoi cabbage ([cavolo verza](#)). The way to Aosta (coincidentally the Pope's summer mountain retreat in exactly this period) takes us through the town of Ivrea, where bob spots a sign indicating it to be the home of the Savoi cabbage. Is this a food pilgrimage, or what?

Back in Rome, calling Milano for local [Urbani](#) truffle buying info then led to [Franchi](#) in Cola di Rienzo, a classy shopping street. And an easy subway ride from Termini to the Vatican stop at Via Ottaviano, no longer the Metro Line A end of the line thanks to Jubilee 2000 which pushed it on a few more stops. Where bob spots the Urbani target product in the window at [Castroni](#) along the way (via Ottaviano) before making it to Franchi. Noting the price, bob moves on to the original destination where he finds a fierce lunch crowd clustered in the corner where the Urbani products are inaccessible on a shelf behind the counter. Fortunately right next door is what seems to bob like the biggest Castroni in Rome, specializing in exotic food products from all over the

world. But no Urbani truffle line. bob picks up some competing products and heads back to the first Castroni. To add to the 3 jars already grabbed at the supermarket across the street from the EUR apartment. Let's just say bob's hand luggage was loaded. Not to mention the lemon grappa from donato, the homemade limoncello from Gianpaolo's Zia Irene (Aunt "ee-RAY-nay") in Puglia, and 2 (large) bottles of his homebrewed beer and a large jar of chestnut spread thrown in for good measure. And those daily back exercises bob does so religiously at home? Suspended on the road.

So this was the big test. Would the lower back hold up? Crowd backup at the inter-terminal bus. A few minutes of waiting, then the big boarding push. bob makes it into the first bus. Not too bad. Finds his way to the gate. A few people sitting around. Not much action. Not even a sign for Philly. bob asks. Right gate. The television screen only says "Boarding at 9:50." bob's watch seems past that but recent evidence leads him to suspect it might be off by a few minutes. But which way? bob waits patiently. 5 minutes later bob asks if they are boarding, thinking maybe he is late and missed it...? Yes, they are boarding, although no one seems to be. bob's isle seat boarding pass goes into the boarding pass card reader and ... a glitch. A switch seems to occur. Taking back that isle seat...? ... no ... yes.

Window seat. Business class.

I think Air France made their point. bob smiles, easily bought out by global capitalism. It was a good ride.

And when you need a radio taxi in Rome, call 88177 (Radiotaxi Cosmos). Tell them dr bob sent you.

Postscript

Around this same time bob was awarded Silver Preferred Frequent Flyer status from USAirways for having accidentally made too many trips to Rome in some undisclosed time period (probably somewhere in the fine print). And made the mistake of regarding the bundle of stuff sent with this news as just more junk mail. In spring 2001 they terminated his status (not enough new flights by then) until a bob-and-ani May Brussels trip to visit [Jamila](#) and Pascale put him back over the mileage-time minimum for another extended period. Another bundle of stuff arrives but this time bob looks at the contents a bit more carefully. Free upgrades! And 40 buck purchasable upgrades after the free ones are gone. The first packet of upgrades had expired by this time of course. Drat. And how much chance is there in finding a vacant upper class seat in peak travel time? But just to test out the situation, bob calls about the upgrade for the summer trip to Rome and gets put on a waiting list. Probably no chance of actually getting the upgrade, but the certificate goes along for the ride just in case. Departure time. Flight seems full. bob gets comfortable in his economy class isle seat. Then the upgrade dialog with a flight attendant comes out of the blue. Upgrade certificate? Sure. One seat left in Envoy Class. And a pleasant night flight with food "designed" by [Georges Perrier's Le Bec-Fin](#).

Ani brings the extra upgrade coupon for bob's return flight, now that it was a real possibility. Unfortunately bob did not read the coupon page carefully enough, and the second coupon that he

asked be brought is only for domestic flights! As the check-in person informs him politely. bob tries the "isn't there a solution to this problem?" approach, suggesting the possibility of buying an upgrade certificate, but this has to be done ahead of time is the response. And the US office that handles this stuff is fast asleep at this hour (9am Rome time = 3am EST). The manager suggests that maybe they can subtract mileage for the upgrade and goes over to the airline desk and talks for quite a while. Then returns saying she tried her best but there was nothing they could do... Famous last words. Awaiting boarding at the new island terminal C joined to the main terminals A and B by a little elevated rail shuttle, all very new and modern, bob hears his name called to report to the departure gate. Somehow the mileage-upgrade exchange went through anyway. Envoy class again!

Of course all this business class travel has its down side. The upgrade possibility is a Cinderella-goes-to-the-ball type gift that will expire sooner or later. And those electronically adjustable seats with the leg rests did not quite adjust to bob's legs for some reason, making the approximately 10 hour day flight still a bit tedious, relieved only by the abundant choice of movies and music and TV on the hand-remote-driven personal entertainment center that economy class does not get. And more good food. Although bob minimizes the wine-with-dinner option as a smart traveler choice and drinks mostly bottled water, no fizz. What a Puritan.

dr bob's luggage imports

In the early days arborio rice in heavy 1 kg boxes was a favorite import item due to the uncompetitive American market for this product. In fact bob overimported the stuff compared to his actual consumption rate, leading to repeating [massive outbreaks](#) of hatched starch bugs in the kitchen. Prized arborio rice was not infrequently panhandled grain by grain like the California gold rush prospectors used to do trying to root out the pesky little intruders. Puglia pasta was a later hot ticket item due to the price differential, but as bob's back aged and income inched forward, the added luggage weight seemed less and less attractive.

When pizzoccheri disappeared from the local suppliers, this became a checked baggage item out of necessity. These actually come from Valtellina, which is a region somewhat east of Vall d'Aosta on Italy's northern border where the terrific fontina is found. Every box seems to have a similar no frills version of the traditional recipe printed on it.

The US is still way behind on the limoncello front, so this is another favorite, but we tend not to be able to use up our supply, lacking the Italian habit of taking a shot after dinner as a digestive. The limoncello cream liqueur is especially hot with us these days. Except we never remember to take it out of the fridge.

In the [photo](#) one sees a couple round red tubes of [Bahlsen](#) HIT hazelnut cream filled cookies we discovered by chance in Rome and after hoarding them for part of a year, finally saw them in a household chain store [Bed Bath and Beyond](#) in its little gourmet treats section after a web search yielded the news that two local chains [ACME](#) and [Shoprite](#) carried the product (but apparently not the store bob looked for it in).

The Leprotto 4 packs of 12mg hits of saffron we buy in lots of 50 for our Iranian friends who kindly serve us up down home Persian cooking frequently during the year. The saffron is considerably cheaper in Italy where the demand is higher. Over the years the Leprotto (big rabbit) brand seems to have become the standard dr bob choice at the supermarket big acquisition run.

hamburger helper bulgur pilaf with cool cucumber sauce

Most of the bulgur pilaf recipes we have been enjoying are healthy vegetarian comfort food dishes, but as long as we admit to occasionally still eating dead animals, we cannot deny that once in a while a little [cooked cow](#) doesn't also find its way into our pilaf. This tasty version was a treat from sister-in-law nora (learned from her [mom](#)), which evoked bob's memories as a young adult, one who must confess to having used more than once an infamous American product "hamburger helper" in a box that you add to ground beef to make a quick hot meal, like its friend "[tuna helper](#)", which was even quicker since the tuna did not have to be cooked first. Unlike the animal parts helper product line, no shame need be felt in offering this one to guests.

The accompanying cool watery [yogurt-mint-cucumber sauce](#) is an excellent contrast to the hot pilaf. The in-laws and wife put it in a little dish and spoon it directly into the mouth at regular intervals while ingesting the pilaf, but bob pours it right onto the plate next to and even on top of the pilaf for maximum effect. While attracting strange looks around the table, this culture clash does not interfere with the enhanced eating experience.

ingredients

phase 1

- 1 lb ground beef
- 2 T butter
- 1 big onion, chopped

phase 2

- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped

phase 3

- 4 c water
- 1 T (heaping) tomato paste
- 1/2 t (heaping) red pepper paste (mildly hot, or add a touch of cayenne pepper if not)
- 1/4 t black pepper (or to taste)
- 1 t salt (or to taste)
- 1/2 t (heaping) allspice
- 2 c bulgur wheat, [number 4](#) (half-cut or "big bulgur")

side sauce

- yogurt
- water
- salt
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- mint
- 1 cucumber, diced

instructions

1. In a skillet with the melted butter, break apart the hamburger with a wooden spoon or whatever to mince it up and separate as it begins cooking.
2. Then add the chopped onion, stir around, and then cover and lower the heat until the liquid (butter, fat and onion sweat) are absorbed (about 30 minutes).
3. Add the phase 2 veggies and cook for a minute or two at medium heat.
4. Then add the phase 3 stuff (water, bulgur, spices), bring to a boil, and then lower the heat and cook until the water is absorbed (about 20 minutes).
5. Meanwhile, chop up a skinned cucumber into tiny pieces, or even grate it, and mix up some yogurt with a few cups of water to a still watery consistency and add the cucumber and spices and chill. Ice cubes can be added to ensure better chilling, although melting leads to a consistency change unless the guests wolf down their food quickly enough. We'll have to experiment to get the ingredient quantities right.

notes

1. Bulgur notes are available in a previous [recipe](#).

hhblgr.htm: 25-oct-2003 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

cumin mixed-meat miniburger/balls

American supermarkets usually carry shrinkwrapped ground veal/beef/pork packages, a convenient product which in one stroke not only manages to offend three major religions (Hinduism, Islam, Judaism) but the entire animal rights movement in general and the anti-veal crusaders in particular. I am not sure exactly what use this mixed meat combo is intended to serve, but we tend to replace ground beef with it in various dishes, like [meatloaf](#). The veal industry animal cruelty issue is one that we are still largely uninformed about, allowing us to blindly continue using veal occasionally without wrecking our conscience.

This particular recipe emerged after we had Sarkahian family meatballs one night, of either Armenian or Middle Eastern origin, soon after inspiring ani to browse through our favorite [cookbook](#) covering three key sources of such recipes—Armenian, Lebanese, Persian—for a similar one. Cumin meatballs (*cuminov kufta*) turned up, an Armenian recipe from some Turkish coastal city. Meatballs are usually round and smallish, but these came out flattened, looking something like miniburgers, probably the influence of family tradition since the instructions called for an egg-shaped meatball. We had some unfrozen mixed ground meat on hand originally intended for meatloaf that was detoured into this recipe, which already was a bit indecisive about the animal type: lamb or beef. With the mixed meat combo substitution, it turned out really tasty.

ingredients

meatballs

- 1 lb lean ground lamb or beef (substitute veal/beef/pork combo)
- 1 large egg
- 1/4 c dry bread crumbs
- 3 to 5 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1/2 t cumin
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 T vegetable oil

tomato sauce

- 3/4 c water
- 1 T tomato paste
- 2 T lemon juice
- 1/4 t garlic powder
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

instructions

1. Mix all the meatball ingredients except the oil and divide into 20 equal sized meatballs.
2. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat and brown the meatballs (entire surface) and set aside. Drain the skillet.
3. Add the tomato sauce ingredients, bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium and cook 5 minutes. Return the meatballs to the skillet and just cook until the meatballs are heated through.

notes

1. ani kept the meatballs separate and poured the sauce over the ones we actually ate the first night, leaving unstained meatballs for leftovers another night.
2. The recipe says serve this with [bulgur pilaf](#). We had it with [rice pilaf](#) once (plain yogurt on the side) and then as leftovers with some [wierd mashed potato](#) variation. Delightfully tasty both times.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.

mixmtbll.htm: 17-jan-2005 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

leftover armenian rice with fake meat stirfry

Real vegetarians invariably end up including wierd ingredients like miso, seitan, tempeh and tofu in their serious recipes, wierd to the rest of us that is. I am not even sure what the first three are, but tofu is pretty high profile by now, and even mainstream Americans probably have ingested it, if only in a Chinese restaurant where they disguise it by calling it bean curd. That's really tofu, right?

We've even bought tofu a few times with good intentions. Once we actually sautéed some up to add to some forgotten food experiment. But at least twice the stuff hung around the fridge until the expiration date was seriously exceeded. And it had to be trashed. There must be some kind of tofu threshold people who don't need it to survive must have to overcome to feel comfortable enough about using it that this doesn't happen. And it's obviously a much higher one for those other key vegetarian ingredients.

One of the two [Fresh Fields](#) supermarkets that we frequent still occasionally tempts us with little on-the-spot-cooked free samples. Must be the manager that makes the difference. We're easy targets for this market strategy. Gets you to try things you'd never think to pick up otherwise. This time it was [VEAT](#) soy protein product [Gourmet Bites](#), "the new alternative to meat." Looks like little pieces of chicken. Sautéed in olive oil and then doused with Bob Weir's [Otherworld Wok Sauce](#). [He's the remaining living Grateful Dead member with name recognition outside the world of Deadheads, looking to cash in on it outside the music business.] Pretty tasty combo. We bought one of each.

A few days later we'd managed to exhaust most of our oversupply of leftovers except for a generous remainder of Armenian rice and some frozen green soy beans we'd already heated up once before. A perfect match for the fake meat home trial. So we eagerly did them up and enjoyed the result. Of course not true Vegan fare since the rice had been originally done in butter, a well known animal product. For fencesitters like us, no problem.

ingredients

2-3 c leftover [Armenian rice](#)
1 200g package VEAT soy protein Gourmet Bites
2 T olive oil
a generous dousing of Bob Weir's Otherworld Wok sauce (from a .375 liter jar)
3/4 c leftover green soy beans (for color and contrasting texture) or peas or other veggies (optional)

instructions

1. Reheat the rice in a nonstick pan with the already cooked optional green soy beans or whatever.
2. Simultaneously, brown the VEAT meat in the olive oil in a larger nonstick pan.
3. When browned, douse liberally with Otherworld sauce and continue till heated through.
4. Toss in the rice and mix it up.

notes

1. This is a bit specific product oriented, but why not? It might encourage some of you out there to give them a try. And Weir sauce profits all go to some good causes.
2. Note that one can also cook up some fresh rice without having to wait for leftovers to do this. Just in case it wasn't clear. And if you do do this (do do?), remember the multiplication factor—to get 2 to 3 cups of cooked rice you have to start with something like 3/4 c uncooked rice. Check the usual references (back of the box/package).
3. Unfortunately the Otherworld Wok sauce got terminated from the product line at our local supplier for doing insufficient business, so we were forced to the website to get more of this item, even more expensive with shipping charges. We remind ourselves that it's for a good cause. You can probably use any decent soy sauce with similar effect.
4. We generally forget about vegetable add-ins and cut right to the chase. The only time involved is in the rice preparation, if there's none leftover.

veatmeat.htm: 16-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

butternut squash rutabaga puree

Rutabagas fall into the neglected veggie category with [turnips](#) and parsnips. They all seem to be in every supermarket in the produce section, but how many people actually pick them up? Ever seen one of them in the frozen veggies section, for example? That's the real test of wide acceptance. However, there must be a rutabaga-turnip-parsnip buying public out there somewhere or these guys would be history quick the way the market mechanism works. We occasionally grab them to add flavor to [mashed potatoes](#), based on suggestions planted by numerous cooking mags, but have not yet risen to the level of getting them as a primary ingredient. Only so much time in life for experimentation, which modern American society seems to minimize for these activities.

Rutabagas came up in a web recipe search for how to improve that bright orange squash puree that seems only to remain a distant memory from bob's childhood. For the first/last Thanksgiving of the new millennium, depending on whose millennium marker you choose. Butternut squash makes up the orange mash, but resists achieving that state by an armored protective covering. Having peeled one once, bob decided to go instead with the instructions on the little sticker glued to the skin: cut in half lengthwise and place cut side down on a sheet in the oven. However, cutting them in half is quite tricky if you don't want to risk losing any of your favorite fingers. Bob used his Magic Knife, basically just a bread knife with an optional attachment not needed for this purpose, but cutting down into the rock hard flesh was not an entirely comfortable little job. Be careful.

So looking for a little more flavor, another web hit suggested adding some onion, so why not throw in some garlic at the same time? Nutmeg seems to be the universal spice in these recipes, where the discriminating feature of our search was excluding brown sugar or other sweeteners—this stuff is already too sweet for us as it is. Experimenting with the "to taste" elasticity in the spice factors seemed to lead to a tasty combination, although bob did his usual nervous bystander act when ani started dumping in the salt with her usual enthusiasm.

Oh yeah... when bob got sold on a European super ironing board and iron at [Bloomies](#), he had to spend a couple extra bucks to qualify for the extra steep discount, and so picked up a nifty [Good Grips](#) potato hand masher. The dr bob kitchen had never had any hand potato masher, but the wimpy steel wired beaters of the electric beaters these days don't seem to efficiently mash root vegetables and after lamenting this fact for a decade, bob was glad to have the opportunity to remedy this omission. The old approach turns out to be the winner hands down. And although the Good Grips version is a short squatty looking thing with a top horizontal grip instead of a normal vertical utensil grip, it seems to work better than bob's memory of the traditional design. Of course bob's memory is not that reliable.

ingredients

- 3 medium actually a bit smallish butternut squash, sliced in half lengthwise
- 1 large rutabaga, peeled and chopped coarsely
- 1 onion, chopped finely
- 2 large garlic cloves, pressed

1 t nutmeg or more (or less) to taste
1 t salt or more (or less) to taste
freshly ground black pepper to taste

instructions

1. Preheat your oven to 400° F.
2. Like doing potatoes, peel the rutabaga and chop roughly to boil in salted water (to just cover) until tender, maybe 20 some minutes.
3. Meanwhile, cut the squash lengthwise and arrange on a baking sheet with an edge to catch the liquid that will escape. Put in the oven for about 45 minutes.
4. Then clean and chop up the onion finely and saute it until soft, adding in the pressed garlic at the end.
5. Remove and cool the squash a bit so you can handle them with your hands.
6. When cool enough, scoop out the flesh with a large spoon or [flatish ice cream scoop](#) and place in a large bowl. Mash them with a hand potato masher.
7. Drain the rutabagas and mash them with a potato masher.
8. Then incorporate the onions and rutabagas with the masher, mixing them up.
9. Then mash in the spices, tasting for effect.
10. When satisfied, place in a casserole dish where they may be served or saved for a later reheating, like when doing this the day before Thanksgiving.

notes

1. If you don't have a hand potato masher, go with whatever you have.

sqrtrgap.htm: 9-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

escarole with white beans and garlic

Name recognition. That's what gets politicians elected. Which is why TV advertising costs for political campaigns have been rising exponentially these days. And why a son of an ex-President can waltz right into the presidency without any real talent. In this case [Judith Barrett](#) rang a bell while bob was cookbook trawling in some local book superstore. (Everything is super-sized these days.) Coauthor of a couple of first rate risotto books in the cooking team library. Once hooked by the name, the winning title [Cooking Vegetables the Italian Way](#) punched two of bob's buttons—veggies and Italy—locking in the deal. Book number three. Acquired, browsed, post-it tagged and shelved in the library.

Escarole first impressed us at a local legendary [Philly food spot](#)—Dmitri's (the original) in South Philly. No reservations, average one hour waiting time, really small, open kitchen, fabulous simple food, Mediterranean—grilled octopus to die for. We got escarole as a side on our first visit and it permanently registered in our food radar log. Unfortunately our action threshold for lots of dishes exceeds our latent desires. Result—almost no home movement on the escarole front.

One supermarket impuse buying pre-dinner trip, after a bit of indecision at the plastic-wrapped dead animal parts cases, bob goes for yellow fin tuna, inspired perhaps by that only once used [George Foreman grill](#) Christmas present from the previous year, then moves on for side dishes. Some lingering recently acquired foodmag/cookbook memory links the tuna with escarole and white beans, so bob snags them both. Remembering post-it tagged escarole and bean recipes in the dr bob food archives, bob goes first to the veggie books and scores a convincing hit on the second try. [Judith](#), and coincidentally stuck in the same page is a cutout newspaper recipe for the same thing.

Shooting for a lemon caper wine demi-glace sauce approach to the tuna (not that we really know what that means), bob assigns the escarole to ani who does a bang up job, jacking up the garlic ([Bam!](#)) and ...

ingredients

1/2 c olive oil
2 large cloves garlic, minced or pressed
1 head escarole, coarsely chopped
4 c cooked white kidney beans (= 2 16-oz cans cannellini)
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
options: 1/2 to 2 t lemon juice, 1/8 t red pepper flakes, 1/4 c water plus 3 T olive oil substituting the 1/2 c olive oil (to lighten up the fat intake)

instructions

1. Sauté the garlic in the olive oil for a minute, then dump in the chopped escarole and cook for 5 minutes until the greens are wilted and tender.
2. Dump in the beans, mix it up, cook for another 5 minutes to heat the beans.

3. Season with salt and pepper and your choice of options.
4. Ready!

notes

1. After years of success and centuries of customer waiting hours, Dmitri clones a larger, more accessible [Dmitri's II](#) and bob and ani finally return. In and out, no waiting time. Still excellent grilled octopus.

escrlwhb.htm: 9-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bobenterprises](#)]

strawberry mango (dulce de leche, whatever) yogurt cheesecake

dr bob has a long tradition of baking for Christmas, although not practiced very much in recent years. As a kid he and his three brothers always made chocolate chip cookies and fudge for their elementary school teachers. And in those naive happy days of the fifties and early sixties, the teachers didn't have to worry about what was in the baked goods. Now we're protected from almost everything by tamperproof packaging. Which at times almost prevents access without resorting to the angry meat cleaver treatment.

But our neighbors trust us and we trust them. So homemade baked goods won't get tossed in the garbage after a face-saving warm reception. Deciding on the annual christmas gift has always been a chore, but currently we're comfortably settled into a cheesecake period. They like it. We like to make it. The only trouble is living up to expectations. The [guavaberry-lingonberry cheesecake](#) still rules, but repetition kills. So we were studying the issue for the true millennium change christmas, and did a test run of a white chocolate cheesecake overheard by bob's childhood baking supervisor (mom) in a physical therapy clinic, trying two crust variations with and without double chocolate chocolate chips as add-ins, test tasted by some unsuspecting friends on short notice. Good but not cutting edge was the first impression, though perhaps too early a judgment call on that one.

Out came the ten cheesecake books (agreeably too many), including several variations of the [Kraft Philadelphia Cream Cheese](#) cheesecake recipe collections. In the back of bob's mind was the new [Yoplait strawberry mango yogurt](#) flavor he's been obsessing about this past year. Maybe a little too far back since he'd completely forgotten the earlier [experiment](#) in which the yogurt found its way into a mango cheesecake sour cream topping. After browsing all the books, no other idea spoke to him loud enough, so he checked out cheesecake basics in the [Joy of Cheesecake](#) and discovered you can substitute sour cream in a cheesecake batter with yogurt (good news for cheesecake fans in Italy where sour cream doesn't exist). All that was needed was a good sour cream batter cheesecake recipe. Scanning again, the candidate became clear: the classic New York Cheesecake recipe from Kraft, simply replacing the sour cream by the equivalent quantity of yogurt. And after all the recipe searching, guess what recipe turns up inside the packages of Kraft Philadelphia cream cheese? The very same one. Because of the fear of a possibly less dense substitute (yogurt versus sour cream), the flour ingredient gets converted into an equivalent amount of cornstarch following the *Joy of Cheesecake* variation of the New York Cheesecake recipe. And hazelnuts in the crust? How can you live without them!

Since it was Christmas and multiple targets were designated, the actual recipe executed was jacked up by 50 percent and split almost equally 3 ways into two 7 inch pans and one 9 inch pan ($3/2 = 5/12 + 5/12 + 2/3$, can you still add fractions?). Big cheesecakes are just too much these days, so even for lots of people at one sitting, the 7 inch size is fine with appropriately smaller portions. And putting a half recipe into a 9 inch pan for a reduced height result also works.

This recipe hit the mark. Here is the standard full 9 inch pan recipe.

ingredients

bottom only crust

- 2/3 c graham cracker crumbs
- 1/3 c hazelnut crumbs
- 4 T = 1/2 stick butter, melted

batter

- 4 packages 8oz cream cheese
- 1 c sugar
- 3 T flour replaced by cornstarch
- 1 c sour cream replaced by Yoplait strawberry mango yogurt (two 6 oz containers)
- 1 T vanilla omitted (optionally replaced by 3-6 t guavaberry liqueur)
- 4 eggs

thin topping

- 1 c sour cream
- 3 T sugar
- 1 t guavaberry liqueur (substitutable by a strawberry liqueur or even Frangelico or just vanilla)

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Melt the butter, crumb the hazelnuts and mix with the graham cracker crumbs and then mix in the melted butter until uniformly combined. Press into the bottom of a 9 inch springform pan. [We ignore advice to bake the crust first and let cool slightly before slapping on the batter.]
3. Beat together the cream cheese and sugar until smoothly combined, then beat in the rest of the batter stuff except for the eggs. Taste the batter while you can do so safely.
4. Now beat in the eggs one at a time until uniformly combined. We're a bit skeptical about this one-at-a-time business, but are afraid to blow off the advice of so many recipes which repeat this mantra.
5. Pour batter into the pan and insert into the oven. Lower the temperature setting to 325° F. Bake about 1 hour and 10 minutes, but check after 1 hour just in case your oven is hotter than you think. [Although our oven thermometer seemed to be reading fine at the beginning, it was up around 400° F when we pulled out the cakes, leading to big cracks in the smaller cheesecakes, but none in the larger one of the three.]
6. Let cool 10 minutes. Prepare the topping by mixing together sour cream, sugar and liqueur. Pour into the center of the cake and spread around towards the edge but leave a ring of cheesecake showing.
7. Bake 10 minutes more and remove. Let cool. Refrigerate at least overnight.

notes

1. By putting the eggs in the batter last, one can taste the flavor before risking salmonella. Yum. We decided against adding liqueur to the batter to see how the natural flavor would come through on its own. It came through just fine.

2. Don't be confused by the 1 cup = 8 oz liquid equivalent you might see on your measuring container: that is for real liquids which are much less dense, no matter how nicely the Yoplait European style yogurt seems to flow. We measured out three 6 oz containers of yogurt and found that it exceeded 3/2 cup by a few tablespoons, so the small excess of using two containers for 1 cup is not worth worrying about.
3. If you decide to split the recipe for two 7 oz pans (or even two 9 oz pans for an even less health threatening height), you'll need to adjust for the area of the bottom-only crust. One of those formulas from high school you never use anymore. Without recalling it explicitly, you have to adjust by the ratio of the squares of the diameters. Try to get a college student to do that for you sometime... Anyway that ratio for 9 to 7 is $7^2/9^2 = 49/81$, so use about 5/8 cup instead of 1 cup total of crumbs. Other crust options can be calculated in a similar way. E-mail dr bob if you need help.
4. The sour cream topping was a judgment call. We were waiting to see if ugly cracks would need to be covered up. They showed up, but in order not to overwhelm the cake (and save on fat ingestion) we did half the normal amount of sour cream topping. Actually only the small cakes cracked, and the larger one was fine... until the last 10 minutes of topping baking when they opened up from [beneath under the sour cream](#). Doesn't interfere with the taste.
5. Of course, once you realize that you can use strawberry mango flavored yogurt in place of the sour cream batter shot, it doesn't take a genius to extend the concept to whatever favorite flavor comes to mind. Browsing the painfully small yogurt display in the local super grocery store, hoping for some tempting new product that rarely seems to appear there, bob spots a lonely 4-pack of [Dannon Le Crème](#) Dulce de Leche more than full fat cream-laced yogurt and grabs it immediately. Yummy stuff, but no trace of it at [Dannon.com](#). Maybe a test product? Will it ever appear again? Time will tell, but meanwhile, this serendipitous discovery was the obvious next candidate for this recipe (especially since the flavor had been on bob's mind for some time in this context). We did one-half plus one-quarter recipes in parallel, easy to calculate since most of the key ingredients are divisible by 4, with target pans of 7 and 6 inch diameters respectively. One half strawberry mango (3 t guavaberry liqueur in the batter), one quarter dulce de leche (1 t frangelico in the batter), 1 cup (1 t guavaberry laced) sour cream topping for the former, a light sprinkling of confectioner's sugar at serving time for the latter. Dulce de leche seems to be popping up everywhere this year, and deservedly so. Starting out the new millennium with some latino style in white bread america. [dulce de leche ice cream: [Haagen Das](#), [Starbucks](#), [Stonyfield Farms](#) (they call it just "caramel", which is basically what dulce de leche is: caramel spread)]
6. Well, you cannot serve these two [together](#) since the strawberry mango with sour cream top overwhelms the more subtle flavor of dulce de leche with no topping other than the confectioner's sugar, but when the latter is ingested on its own merits, very nice. If you need to crank up the effect, marbling in some real [dulce de leche](#) spread is an option. If you can't find the stuff to buy, you can [make it yourself](#).
7. We soon found time to act on the marbled dulce de leche variation. Again a quarter recipe for a 6 inch pan for a special dinner for 4, with about 8 mounded half teaspoons of dulce de leche spread dropped onto the top of the batter and then swirled into it with a butter knife for the marbled effect. Again just some confectioners sugar sprinkled on top at the time of serving. Real good. And in small portions, not so damaging!

dulce de leche cheesecake: the upgrade

Well, again bob is set up for a big disappointment by the free market system. Yoplait is the first to introduce a great marketing gimmick: moussed yogurt. You take 2/3 the yogurt, fill it full of air [[Whips!](#)] and then sell it for the same price in the same size containers and people actually buy it because the mousse-like texture seems to kick its flavor up a notch [[Bam!](#)]. Soon Dannon follows suit. But the ironclad law of supermarket yogurt product placement then kicks in. More new products, shelf space remains frozen, some older products have to go. Strawberry mango went.

However, the full fat Dannon dulce de leche yogurt took off with its four other [Le Crème](#) companion flavors, and dulce de leche also appeared in the [Stonyfield Farms regular](#) [caramel, very addictive, loaded with sugar, like bob's other favorite: [vanilla truffle](#)] and the [Yoplait custard](#) [crème caramel] yogurt lineups. Looks like we have to get more serious with this flavor instead.

Meanwhile ani has been building up bob's cheesecake reputation at work and bob is happy to comply. But repetition kills. The best recipes had been delivered more than once and the only way to maintain reputation is to continue to surprise. ani starts lobbying for a cheesecake for a lunch affair at work, which means no bob at the table. bob gives her some resistance, saying he will help her make the cake but not do it alone. In the end the challenge breaks bob's will and the opportunity is taken to experiment with the dulce de leche upgrade. Subtle is not good at impressing crowds. You have to sock it to 'em.

ingredients

bottom only crust: 10 inch crowd pleaser

3/4 c graham cracker crumbs

1/2 c hazelnut crumbs

1/4 c sugar (optionally unrefined)

6 T = 3/4 stick butter, melted

[*kick it up again version*: 1/2 c chocolate wafer crumbs]

[*kick it up again version*: sprinkling of semisweet chocolate minichips (bits?)]

batter

4 packages 8oz cream cheese

1 c sugar

3 T flour replaced by cornstarch

1 c sour cream replaced by dulce de leche or creme caramel yogurt

[three 4 oz containers (Dannon) or two 6 oz containers (Yoplait or Stonyfield Farms)]

1 T Frangelico

4 eggs

1/2 c = about 1/3 1 lb jar dulce de leche

topping

2 c sour cream (1 lb, standard large container)

1/4 c sugar

[*kick it up again version*: 1 T sugar]

1 t caramel ice cream topping/sauce/syrup
[*kick it up again version*: 8 oz = 2/3 c dulce de leche yogurt]
zig-zagging drizzle of caramel ice cream topping/sauce/syrup
light sprinkling of fine hazelnut crumbs

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Melt the butter, crumb the hazelnuts and mix with the graham cracker crumbs [and optional chocolate wafer crumbs] and sugar and then mix in the melted butter until uniformly combined. Press into the bottom of a 10 inch springform pan. [Make sure the bottom is inverted so that the edge rim is down, allowing easier floss division of the cake right down through the crust as well. Cutting out a round of parchment paper after tracing out the bottom and inserting over the bottom helps removal as well.] Sprinkle lightly with optional chocolate minibits if desired.
3. Beat together the cream cheese and sugar until smoothly combined, then beat in the rest of the batter stuff except for the eggs. Taste the batter while you can do so safely.
4. Now beat in the eggs one at a time until uniformly combined. We're a bit skeptical about this one-at-a-time business, but are afraid to blow off the advice of so many recipes which repeat this mantra.
5. Microwave the dulce de leche in a small bowl for about 20 seconds on high to loosen it up a bit, then combine with about 1/4 c of the batter until smooth.
6. Pour batter into the pan and then drop spoonfuls of the dulce de leche mixture evening about the top of the batter and then swirl it around to create a marbled effect with a butter knife.
7. Insert into the oven. Bake about 1 hour and 10 minutes, but check after 1 hour just in case your oven is hotter than you think. We stuck it with toothpicks which came out clean, so called it done even though it looked kind of suspiciously moist in the center.
8. Let cool 10 minutes. Prepare the topping by mixing together sour cream, sugar and caramel topping. Pour into the center of the cake and spread around towards the edge, making contact with the springform pan side. Shake the caramel sauce sideways in quick jerky movements while pressing on the plastic container slightly to splatter the top elegantly. Fake it, we did. Sprinkle with maybe a tablespoon at most of hazelnut crumbs.
9. Bake 10 minutes more and remove. Let cool. Refrigerate at least overnight.

notes

1. We used [Salamandra brand](#) dulce de leche = milk caramel, imported from Argentina. We only had a third of the jar left in the fridge, so that became the amount we used.
2. To serve for large numbers of people outside your home, do the floss prep. Remove the side of the springform pan and clean it to replace later for the transport. Take a piece of dental floss and cut down through the crust first in quarters, then eighths, then each remaining piece into thirds for a total of 24 slices. Restore the side. Transport. Remove the side. Don't watch if you allow self-service. It won't be pretty.
3. Pretty good. But we are jaded. The coworkers seemed to like it.
4. The *kick it up again version* soon followed for Christmas, split into two 7in pans and one 8in pan (total of 2 c of crust crumb mixture with the added chocolate wafer crumbs).

Recalling the Italian necessity of using yogurt in the topping for lack of sour cream, two more 4 oz containers of dulce de leche go into the sour cream topping. The usual suspects give it the green light. bob confirms.

5. [Illustrations](#) available.

post mortem

This yogurt tale has racked up its share of casualties along the way. Full fat Dannon Creme yogurt flavor dulce de leche is discontinued by 2003, like a brief falling star in the food sky. But Yoplait custard crème caramel works great in this recipe so we are not flat out of luck like the strawberry mango story. Yet.

[2004: With the explosion of new yogurt product lines, there is no more supermarket shelf space left for this Yoplait flavor, which had to make way for original, light, whips, healthy heart, and thick and creamy custard style yogurts, as well as drinkable yogurts, all in the same sorry tiny yogurt ghetto that used to only house a few of these lines.]

This cake was requested by Ira, the food vacuum not completely without a taste for the finer elements of food production, for a 50 something birthday at the sister-in-law's. Bob decides on further recipe modification. Having found Nabisco Oreo chocolate cookie crumbs for an earlier experiment, it was easy to go full chocolate on the crust to contrast the dulce de leche:

9 in crust: 1 c Oreo cookie crumbs, 1/4 c sugar, 4 T = 1/2 stick = 1/8 lb butter melted

batter additive: no hazelnut liqueur this time

dulce de leche marbling batter: 1 c batter, 1/2 c dulce de leche, 1 T [Kahlua](#) Especial liqueur [higher priced Kahlua for suckers like dr bob who are easily fooled by clever marketing in the search for something better.]

We apportioned the results to a pair of 9 in and 7 in spring-form pans in a 3:1 ratio (wild guess) to keep a [sample](#) for ourselves since it looked like we would not be at the party. Ira will never know.

the verdict.

Susannah says it is her favorite from our cheesecake collection. The others liked it too. But bob still leans towards the guavaberry-lingonberry cheesecake. The Especial liqueur was not really noticed here, but the chocolate cookie crumb base was a decided improvement, both visually and tastewise.

2006 update: the saga continues

[prune yogurt debuts in America.](#)