

2001

cream of chestnut and celery (and-leek-onion-potato) soup

We had leftover roasted chestnuts from the [Thanksgiving stuffing](#). Enough to weigh on the conscience and keep in mind for an eventual trial run on chestnut soup, but not really enough to actually do the soup without recruiting reinforcements (more nuts). And doing soup is tough for the dr bob cooking team since it takes more of a time investment than is usually available. But if outside guests are invited, this time can be found.

A few months after Thanksgiving the team starts out the first month of the true third millennium ([Y2K+1](#)) with two lasagna Saturdays at home after an earlier refresher course on the road at rita's, daughter of [gabriella](#), relocated in the States within a reasonable driving range. For us, authentic lasagna takes all day to produce, although sauce simmering time does allow us to escape for a while midway. Doing it saturday works for the convenient Saturday night dinner gathering, leaving a day of rest afterwards for the Monday thru Friday working crowd.

On the second such saturday bob made the mistake of not pulsing the celery destined for the Bolognese sauce. While food processing. Turning away momentarily after hitting the on-switch, bob discovers for the first time how quickly celery can be turned into mush. (He'd already learned this lesson with onions.) Initially he was determined to use it anyway but on second thought, it seemed wiser to restart with some other celery. Leaving a lonely pile of celery mush sitting in green juice without a clear future.

However, the same [French cookbook](#) that delivered us that terrific [no way cream of artichoke soup](#) also had this cream of chestnut and celery soup recipe that was in mind as a possible appetizer choice because of the leftover chestnuts. With the fateful celery accident, its time had come. Ani claimed to have given this recipe a try years earlier and said it turned out disappointingly sweet. bob didn't really recall, though a vague memory of disappointment seemed almost plausible. Which led to a few modifications designed to push the soup away from any hint of sweetness. Like white onions replaced by yellow ones (less sweet perhaps, and also sitting quietly in the fridge). And a leek thrown in for good measure (to keep the potato company). And bob turned the other way when ani attacked with the salt...

The result? Well, no one forced the guests to rave about the soup, which they did repeatedly. They could have just been polite. But this unsolicited praise confirmed our own impression. It was another apparent cooking team success story.

ingredients

- 2 c (1lb = 500g) unsweetened chestnut puree in a jar or 1.5 lb (750g) fresh chestnuts food processed into 2 c of crumbs (14 or 15 oz jar recipe ready chestnuts will do)
- 1/2 c (4oz = 125g) unsalted butter
- 2 yellow onions, chopped
- 3 celery stalks, coarsely chopped (or even mashed)
- 1 leek, chopped

- 1 large potato (we used 2 medium Yukon Golds)
- 4 c veggie broth
- 2 c light cream (or even lowfat milk)
- 1 T salt
- 1 t or more freshly ground black pepper

instructions

1. Start by preparing the chestnuts if you don't find them already to go in a jar like we had for the stuffing. Preheat the oven to 400° F, cut an X into the end of each chestnut to prevent exploding nuts, and roast in a shallow pan for a half hour or so. Remove and crack open with your [handy large nut shelling tool](#) while still warm. After cooling a bit, food process into crumbs.
2. Chop the onion, and carefully food process the celery and leek separately without mushing the former if possible. Peel the potato(s) and chop up. (We julienned them with our manual food processor, which is how we usually do our onions to prevent them from mushing.)
3. From later experience, it is okay to food process all of this stuff to a pulp, but keep the potato separate to add after cooking the onion-leek-celery mix a bit.
4. Start about 5 c of water boiling in a teapot for the veggie broth.
5. Next melt the butter in a large pot that will hold all the soup (nonstick works best, we use our 4qt [Calphalon](#) professional flat bottomed pot) and saute the onion, leek and celery until well softened.
6. If you mush your celery, you can add them in after this stage with their juice.
7. Put 4 cups of boiling water in a measuring glass and sufficient veggie broth paste or powder. Our powder package said 4 heaping teaspoons so we went with that, unable to find our trusted paste product in recent times.
8. Add the chestnut crumbs (or puree), potato and broth, then the generous salt and pepper and bring to a boil. ***Simmer for about an hour.***
9. Puree with your trusty electric handblender. No kitchen should be without one.
10. Add in the light cream, which can also be done with the handblender, and reheat through.
11. This can all be done ahead of time and the soup reheated for the performance, as we did. Adjust for spices.

notes

1. For a moment we thought about the [crema di marrone](#) (chestnut cream) from the carry-on glassware story, but it was sweetened. For spreading on bread or waffles or [pancakes](#) or just direct spooning like [Nutella](#) or [dulce de leche](#).
2. In spite of all the chestnut roasting experience in ani's past, one still exploded in the oven. No casualties.
3. For years ani was lusting after a big ugly soup tureen, which is a big covered china piece only good for serving soup which can perfectly well be served up in our beautiful pots. And bob was discouraging her from acquiring one. But was thwarted by sister-in-law susannah who presented one to ani at christmas. Not much bob could do but grumble. This occasion was the first use of the tureen. We heated it by sitting it on the hot stove first and then transferred the soup to it before serving. The sky did not fall. Maybe it was not such a bad thing to have after all.

4. [Illustrations](#) available.

postscript

1. For our second run through of this recipe, ani had found a 14.8 oz (420g) jar of steamed chestnuts at [Trader Joe's](#) for only 6 bucks (compared to 10 bucks at [Williams-Sonoma](#) a few years earlier!) so she grabbed it with the soup in mind. In the actual execution for an intimate dinner with the parents-in-law, we were in the middle of dinner prep when we read step 8 (simmer one hour) so the soup serving had to be postponed till the next day. But we got a taste after the puree step and it was a terrific preview. Made about 10 cups, just enough to fit in our square 10 cup Rubbermaid plastic container for safekeeping. And it was really good. So good we made it again shortly afterwards for a larger in-law group. Nice when people rave about your food.
2. Well, we kept making this one because it is really spectacular, but the downside is that recipe ready chestnuts are not only seasonal, but can be outrageously priced. Up to 12 bucks a bottle in Fall 2002 at Williams-Sonoma with a chestnut soup recipe promotion to help move the product (one of the few times we have been ahead of the crowd!), which we rebelled against and did the [mushroom version](#) again. But then Trader Joe's had some packages of frozen roasted chestnuts (8 bucks for two packages needed for the soup) so we grabbed a few before realizing at the time of use that they were unshelled, and very tedious to shell after the freezing/unfreezing process, breaking our resolve not to give in to Williams-Sonoma for only 4 bucks difference. BUT then Trader Joe's sent us their fall flyer advertising their previous CHEAP jars of steamed chestnuts, even cheaper at only 4 bucks for the one jar necessary, so we bought a bunch, knowing we would have to use them up within 6 to 8 months. We won't get tired of this recipe.
3. Those of you living in Paris don't have to wait for fall, since apparently the upscale food market at the upscale department store we hit during our long weekend almost spring visit there has them all the time (see below). Maybe this is an indication of more widespread availability? However, moving to Paris just for convenient nut access is not recommended.
4. The Williams-Sonoma recipe even refers explicitly to its expensive French chestnuts, but Trader Joe's imports them from Spain. Both in 14 or 15oz jars, about 400 to 425 g, must be European size bottles. They turn out to be lowfat, and were once a part of the native American Indian diet. Looks like both the American Indians and American chestnuts got screwed by history, the latter by immigrating blight bugs, the former by immigrating aggressive white men. Having bought so many bottles this season, we decided to try the other W-S chestnut soup recipe, the one with carrots, see [below](#).

the mushroom option

[We like chestnuts. We like mushrooms...](#) but this time a switch rather than combo came to mind. Since the onion, leek, celery base for this soup is so good (what a "profumo" it emits when being sauteed in butter!), why not try making a mean mushroom soup out of it by a simple nut replacement? We have had some really good cream of mushroom soups in various restaurants over the years, but have never managed to make a spectacular version ourselves. And after all, chestnuts are not always available, especially the recipe-ready ones in a jar. After two successive winter renditions of the chestnut soup, the jarred chestnuts disappeared. [We later picked up a jar in [Bon Marche Paris](#). The lengths one must go for the right ingredients when they are out of

season!]

the switch

1. 1 lb chestnuts => 12 oz upscale mushrooms, cleaned and chopped.
2. split the stick of butter in half, use half for sauteeing the onion-leek-celery mixture and half for sauteeing the mushrooms in a separate nonstick pot, with a hit of 1/4 c Marsala wine evaporated off at the end of the mushroom saute.

We used a 1/2 lb (= 8oz) package of baby bellas (small portobello mushrooms) and a 4 oz package of mixed upscale mushrooms: creminis, oysters, not sure what else. We looked in our cookbook library and saw a saute time of about 5 minutes, during which the mushroom liquid comes out, but we must have had them in there 10 minutes before hitting them with the Marsala wine that two different Italian soup cookbooks suggested, taking a few more minutes at higher medium heat to evaporate it off a bit.

Then we dumped the mushrooms into the other pot and added the remaining ingredients, including the light cream, and proceeded, although we could not wait a whole hour before starting our dinner. The cream separated along the way but pureeing [made it look okay anyway](#). Perhaps one should add the cream at the end and just heat through. Maybe a real cook could tell us. No matter, the result is what we had hoped. Delicious.

Did we say we had never made a spectacular cream of mushroom soup ourselves before this? Not so. Seven years earlier we had done [portobello mushroom and leek soup](#) and liked it enough to repeat a number of times. The writeup seems pretty enthusiastic. But was it spectacular? Hmm. Maybe a comparison test is in order here...

carrot celery chestnut soup

Trader Joe's way-cheap prices facilitate an oversupply of recipe ready chestnuts in the dr bob kitchen in the 2002 Thanksgiving preseason, calling for some experimentation with the excess product. We like carrot soups but it is hard to find the right way to temper the sweetness of the carrots to satisfy our fickle tastebuds. The Williams-Sonoma [recipe](#) pushing their chestnuts this season is relatively similar though with a shorter ingredient list to what we have already been doing, so the alternate recipe with [carrots](#) catches our eye. But 4 lbs of carrots? bob looks at the little bag he brought back from the supermarket. Only 1 lb. ani vetos another trip to the supermarket for another pound to at least increase them a bit compared to the recipe target. But this time celery is on hand, unlike the [carrot bean soup](#) event when more carrots substituted the missing celery, so 4 stalks make up the difference, after pulling all the yellow outer stalks off and chucking them. Yeah, 4 lbs would have been way too much carrot. And celery has already proven itself to be a good chestnut companion.

The original recipe also recommends passing this soup through a chinois, which is a fancy conical shaped French sieve with a pronunciation way different from its spelling (shin-wa?), the net effect of which is to make the soup much smoother but remove valuable fiber from the diet, reducing the body's defenses against colon cancer which is a current hot topic, striking even [the Osbournes](#) during their 15 minutes of fame that are lasting a bit longer than one might have imagined.

It also recommends serving this with some finely chopped parsley in whipped cream, but plain yogurt dolloped on at serving time is a better idea healthwise. Mixing in chopped parsley is just extra work.

ingredients

roastables

- 1 lb carrots
- 1 T olive oil
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

sautee-ables

- 2 T unsalted butter
- 4 - 6 shallots, minced
- 4 stalks of celery, food processed

simmerables

- 4 c veggie stock
- 1/2 t ginger
- 1/4 t allspice
- 1 c chestnuts, food processed to crumbs

finishers

- 1 c lowfat milk
- optional nonfat plain yogurt in individual servings

instructions

1. Peel the carrots and chop into 1 inch lengths. Coat with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper and roast in the oven at 400° F for about 45 - 50 minutes. Must give the soup extra flavor or something.
2. Meanwhile, sauté the shallots in butter in a big flat-bottomed nonstick soup pot and soon after add the finely processed celery and continue until both are softened.
3. Boil some water in the teapot for the veggie broth. We use about 4 t of the [paste](#) added into the 4 c boiling water.
4. When the carrots are done, add in the simmerables to the soup pot, bring to a boil and simmer for about 15 minutes on medium low heat.
5. Remove the soup from the heat and puree it with a hand blender until smooth.
6. Stir in a cup of milk to thin it out a bit and lighten the color. Check the seasoning.
7. Reheat a bit if necessary.
8. Serve with small dollops of optional plain yogurt.

notes

1. We liked [this one](#) too. After all, no need to wear out a good recipe by repeating it too often. Trying variations reduces that problem. On the other hand, an oversupply of recipe ready chestnuts is probably not a problem for most of us. And an undersupply can always be remedied by web shopping. If [quality](#) is an issue, you can do the work yourself.

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

waiting for gabriella's lasagna no more

Well, after all the [waiting](#) and our own [trial-and-error based experience](#), the one thing we learned is that there is no single right way to do really good lasagna. [Gabriella and rita](#) have inspired us with some key points, but the specifics are pretty flexible. One thing is essential: paper thin noodles stacked high separating sparing amounts of sauce. The best solution for the lasagna noodles is to buy sheets from a quality pasta provider and cut and roll them to the thinnest possible thickness in a traditional roller type pasta machine with an [electric motor](#) attached. We follow [Marcella](#) in omitting the traditional coarsely grated mozzarella in favor of just sparsely spread Bolognese sauce mixed with bechamel sauce and sprinkled with freshly grated high quality parmigiano over each layer, aiming for 10 to 12 layers. With different pan sizes and the irregularity of how much of each ingredient goes into each layer, it is difficult to predict exactly how much of everything you need.

When we do this, since it involves considerable effort, we like to make a lot, but found that the really big roasting pan is only good for feeding a really big crowd, since otherwise you are stuck with a large pan partially filled with lasagna afterwards, which does not fit very well in most refrigerators. Two smaller pans seems like a better idea, but this depends on what you have on hand at the moment. They must also be deep enough, at least about 2.5 inches, to hold the many layers. Bake them both and serve one to 8 to 10 people, keep the other for another similarly sized group. You need roughly a pound of pasta and 2 large cans of peeled Italian tomato based Bolognese sauce per pan, say if it is about 10x14 or 9x13, a little more, a little less. To complicate matters, the "large" size of canned tomatoes is not standard, since there are 28-oz and 35-oz sizes, differing by 25 percent in volume. And if you do rise to the challenge of making your own pasta dough, it is not clear to us what the egg/flour amounts are that correspond to one pound, which is why there are still question marks in the [previous attempts](#) at quantifying these numbers. We originally got 3 eggs/2.25 c flour per lb from early marcella, but other books seem to have 3 eggs/2 lb c flour per lb estimates. And then there are large and extra large eggs...

As for how much of the sauce ingredients to combine at show time, we have tried various extremes differing by factors of two with no discernable difference. Our friend and certainly more expert Italian mom herself, rita, has the following widely different (from us) ingredient ratios:

Gaby's Lasagna: 1.5 lb pasta (3 to 4 large eggs/2 c flour, she uses finely ground semolina flour), 4 c béchamel sauce, and a 3 or 4 large tomato sauce can / 2 lbs ground beef / 1 onion / 1 carrot / 2 celery stalk meat sauce. She also adds salt to the meat to bring out flavor, throwing all the stuff in together with optional water / oil, but only uses wine and no milk in the evaporation stage. Plus large amounts of both mozzarella and parmigiano.

ingredients

pasta

2 lbs pasta sheets (typically 8 2-oz sheets per lb), cut in half lengthwise (3 – 4 in wide)

bechamel sauce

8 to 9 c milk

2 sticks = 16 T butter

1 c flour
 1/2 t salt
 1/2 t nutmeg

Bolognese meat sauce

meat saute group

1 – 2 lb ground beef, not too lean
 3 – 4 T olive oil

food process group

1 – 2 c onion
 1 – 2 c celery
 1 – 2 c carrots
 1 leek

sauce group

1 – 2 c dry white wine
 1 – 2 c milk
 1.5 t nutmeg
 3 28-oz or 35-oz cans italian plum tomatoes

cheese

as much as needed, maybe 1/2 lb, freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Allow at least 4.5 hours for the meat sauce, which can be done a day ahead. It takes about 1.5 hours to reach the stage where you throw in the tomatoes and begin simmering and then it needs at least 3 hours simmering.
2. Assembly takes about 2 hours, maybe less, for 2 chefs working as a team. Baking is then half an hour. So we're talking 7 hours here, with 3 hours of down time while the sauce just cooks without being watched. Make sure your guests deserve this before you take on the challenge.
3. For now, [reread the previous attempt](#) for the actual instructions. We use a couple pans, like one 9x13 and one 10x14. But everything depends on how you dole out the components on each layer, so you just go until you run out of noodles or sauce. The extra sauce is great on any pasta later. Cook only the noodles you need as you assemble and you won't have extra noodles if you run out of sauce. This requires a team of two in the kitchen. We bought a big [stainless steel fine sieve](#) with a handle to pull out the noodles from the boiling water one at a time, 3 at a time in the pot, and dunk them in cold water so we could then handle them with our fingers to straighten them out on cloth kitchen towels spread out over large cookie sheets as we used them. Shoot for a minimum of about 12 layers.
4. Good luck.

notes

1. We're still waiting to finish this one...
2. And a visit by afsaneh's parents from Tehran provides the excuse in 2002. We realize the baking temperature and time is nowhere to be found in our 3 separate stories, so we consult marcella and decide to do this one for **20–25 minutes at 400°** to finish it off after assembly, which took about 1.5 hours this time for our now experienced team of two, with

trained division of labor. We do the single 12x18 in Calphalon baking pan version, but it is more like 11x17 on the inside when fitting the lasagna noodles. For the bolognese sauce done a few nights earlier, we used 2 big onions and about 1.5 c each of celery and carrots (we measured them after food processing them together) and a big leek, and the 1 cup amounts of milk and wine. And a 9 cup milk bechamel sauce, but we had to thicken it up a bit with some additional flour when it seemed a bit thin at completion.

Two pounds of lasagna noodles, about 12 (maybe 13?) 6x11 inch sheets of pasta which we sliced lengthwise into 3 inch wide strips, then two passes through the pasta roller machine (the second one stretched it a bit further) to about 3.25x19 inch noodles. We boil them 3 at a time for one layer of the 11x17 inch interior of the big baking pan. They expand a bit further during the 1 minute boiling phase (sometimes longer), then they are fished out one-by-one and layed flat on a kitchen towel. Cutting off 3 to 4 inches to make the cut to 17 inches, measuring with a carpenter's tape measure. The three noodles seem exactly right for the pan size. ani is the assembler while bob feeds the cooked noodles into the line. Starting with 24 noodles, 3 at a time bob figures 8 layers of whole noodles plus the piecework from the cut ends. Ani counts 12 layers amazingly reached by incorporating the pieces along the way and on the last one we have only two whole noodles, so we cut each in half lengthwise and lay them down equally spaced as the last and 13th layer. She drops globs of the two sauces around each layer and spreads them around with a plastic spatula, then sprinkles some grated parmigiano we did up earlier to be ready, about a half pound from our imported freezer supply. The sauce and cheese amounts prove to be just right with no leftovers. The afternoon result waits a few hours till dinner covered on the stove. Had we refrigerated it (difficult considering the size) which would have been necessary if we had done it in advance, we would have had to rethink the baking time. Marcella said 15 minutes for her little lasagna, pulled out of the fridge. Use some common sense and check. You are shooting for a nice baked top look, golden without browning.

The guests were pleased. Take a [peak](#).

Feeds about 16 people.

chocolate chip cookies: the comparison test

traditional tollhouse versus puffed-up lower fat

[Speaking of chocolate chip cookies](#), by coincidence [Cooking Light](#) arrives midweek and ms_ani browses through immediately while bob is otherwise occupied. Spots low fat chocolate chip cookies. Decides to make them that very evening. This is a woman who has never made a chocolate chip cookie in her life, doesn't even really like them, and suddenly has a burning desire to crank out a batch. Go figure. [Hint: she knows bob has a definite weakness for this treat.]

The trick here is applesauce instead of fat. More precisely, instead of half the fat, presumably enough to reach the target number of one third calories from fat. Bob is a bit skeptical about messing with the traditional recipe, but as a committed chocolate chip cookie addict, how could this sudden urge be discouraged? Worth risking a trial run for sure. Bob lends moral support.

The moment of truth. Soft and puffed up as promised. And the taste? Well, the initial impact confronts decades of traditional flavor and texture memories and reveals an obvious difference. But difference can be good. In fact in this case, the result is "[kicked up a notch](#)", to quote an overused phrase from a ubiquitous food TV voice at the time. The applesauce adds an extra something that validates this healthy meddling with tradition. bob is quickly won over. So is the woman coworker Ani also had in mind when inspired to act. Remember, only one third calories from fat. And redesigned by a guy of course.

We do a side-by-side comparison of the traditional and lightened versions.

ingredients (comparison test data)

trad 1/2 trad puffed

dry stuff

2 1/4	1 1/4	1 1/4	c all purpose flour
1	1/2	1 1/2	t baking soda
1	1/2	3/4	t salt

wet stuff / sugar

1	1/2	1/4	c butter, softened (1 c = 2 sticks)
-	-	1/2	c applesauce
3/4	3/8		c granulated sugar
3/4	3/4	1	c packed brown sugar
1	1/2	1*	t vanilla extract

finishers

2	1	1	eggs
2	1	1	c semisweet chocolate chips (1 c = 1/2 12oz package)

- 1 1/2 c chopped nuts (usually walnut)
- - cooking spray

*oops, the original had 1 T which we automatically read as 1 t since it was in the right ballpark, but when these cookies surfaced again for Christmas 2002 in a Cooking Light e-mail, we checked out the reader ratings and the very same day someone had noticed the 1 T and thought for sure it had to be a typo. Probably wasn't. Hmm, we'll have to try these again soon.

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350° F (traditional) / 375° F (puffed-up lower fat).
2. Combine dry ingredients in one bowl. Sifting does not hurt.
3. Puffed-up only: drain applesauce into a fine sieve over a bowl for 15 minutes. Discard liquid. Insert into next step.
4. Beat wet stuff / sugar ingredients in another bowl (until light and fluffy, a couple minutes on medium speed, if using electric beater).
5. Beat in eggs, one at a time, into the latter.
6. Gradually beat flour mixture into wet(ter) mixture (low speed, if electric), then mix in chips and nuts, if any.
7. Drop rounded tablespoons (puffed-up: level tablespoons) onto ungreased (puffed-up: cooking sprayed) baking sheets.
8. Bake 9–11 minutes or until golden brown.
9. Cool on baking sheets 2 minutes. Remove to wire racks to cool completely.

notes

1. Yield: ? / ? / 3 dozen cookies. Serving size: one cookie. (Yeah, sure.)
Puffed-up nutrition data per serving:
Calories 78 (33% from fat); FAT 2.9g (sat 1.7g, poly 0.2g); PROTEIN 0.8g; CARB 12.8g; FIBER 0.2g; CHOL 10mg; IRON 0.5mg; SODIUM 87 mg; CALC 20mg.
2. The new twist presented as a whole batch recipe is really a half batch of the traditional recipe minus half its butter, which is replaced by applesauce and extra sugar. Half a batch translates into less temptation, a secondary fat saving feature. And the tripled baking powder does the puffing. Boosting the apparent intake amount per cookie, which one could argue is another fat saving feature, though marginal.
3. [Cooking Light](#), January/February 2001, p.90: "[puffed-up chocolate-chip cookies](#)", courtesy of Don Mauer, cookbook author.
4. Adding in optional nuts blows the nutrition stats over the limit, presumably. We added in hazelnut crumbs in one rendition, finding our walnut supply momentarily exhausted. Maybe chunks would have made them more noticable. Serving a warm cookie with a small slab of (high fat) softened caramel with pecans ice cream also tends to defeat the intention here. But it was good that way. Twice in a row at one sitting.
5. During the blizzard of 2003, ani is inspired by the new [Eating Well](#) magazine [Winter 2003] discussion of low crisp versus high chewy chocolate chip cookies and bob reminds

her of this recipe, which she finally reads (and discovers a typo). But we have no applesauce, so the jar of aging [sweetened chestnut puree](#) comes to the rescue for the substitution, and no brown sugar either so we go with granulated [Sucanat](#) Honey (dehydrated sugar cane juice and honey). We try the trick of refrigerating the batter for 15 minute or so to yield taller cookies (they set upright before having a chance to dissipate down). Interesting. [Illustrations](#) available.

6. Another trick for softness is to skip the salt and add one small package [3.9oz = 110g] of chocolate pudding mix to the wet/stuff sugar mix in the standard recipe size batch but bake at 375° F. [After three years pass, this variation calls our attention to the original recipe for comparison purposes and we discover inadvertently that we had listed baking powder instead of baking soda. Oops.] These have to be called [chocolate chocolate chip cookies](#) though. Don't skip the nuts. Walnuts and chocolate turn out to be good for us after all.

But unrefined sugar is being uncovered as a stealth assassin these days. We used [Sugar in the Raw](#) in place of regular white sugar this time and tossed out our traditional rock-hard remnant brown sugar [we won't mention any names] after reading the label on the Whole Foods product we'd grabbed in case we ran out after trying to resuscitate it: "Why natural brown sugar? Many brown sugars are only brown on the outside—underneath they are really just refined white sugar. Not Billington's. Our natural sugars are simply produced in Mauritius with the aim of locking in—and not refining out—the natural molasses of the sugar cane. This is why our sugars contain so much more flavour and natural colour." [Billington's Light brown muscovado sugar](#). Sounds good to us. Hmm, [Mauritius](#) sounds interesting too. An island country way east of Madagascar. Another gift of the global economy: natural cane sugar produced in Mauritius, [packed in the UK](#) and distributed stateside through [Sugarland \(!\), Texas](#), sold by Whole Foods Markets, formerly our Fresh Fields which is so hard to unlearn when referring to these stores.

lemon garlic chicken with water or wine and garlic-tahini-yogurt sauce on the side (no pressure cooker)

How many people actually know somebody who has been present at a pressure cooker explosion? A rare event indeed. Fortunately. But a possibility that still keeps some of you (not us!) from taking advantage of its wonderfully quick cooking power. The new generation of multiple backup pressure release safeguarded super cookers has made it virtually impossible to have such an exciting event occur (unless you really try hard of course). bob got his first super cooker at a home show and—not knowing anything about the product—was taken to the cleaners by unscrupulous venders just trying to make a living on the move who can blame them? To compound the damage, bob returned the same week, paid a second admission into the home show and bought a second one for his about-to-be sister-in-law's wedding shower. First generation [Magefesa](#), imported from Spain where they were clearly ahead of us in this line of technology way back in 1991.

Meanwhile bob accumulated a few [Lorna Sass](#) pressure cooker cookbooks. She apparently rode the wave of increasing renewed interest in this kitchen device in America in the nineties. Mid-decade some lame excuse inspired bob to give one to another sister-in-law, perhaps triggered by a food magazine article by Lorna Sass, yeah that was it ... and bob wrote to Lorna and asked her advice. She actually responded, singing praises of the Magefesa II, the second generation successor. Ordered by phone and well received by the recipient. Much cheaper than the first pair. Come to think of it the first Lorna Sass cookbook was picked up to accompany that later gift, but after years of neglect and absolutely unused, bob repossessed it from its chance home in yet another sister-in-law's house shortly before our very own mother-in-law pressure cooker event, making a grand total of three Sass books acquired in the intervening years and neatly shelved in the cooking library. Regretfully having seen little use. Our fault entirely.

As the indisputable first year of the new millennium began, Isgouhi's old-fashioned jiggle top pressure cooker that always seemed to cook faster than bob's Magefesa (I), screwing up her dictated recipes when executed in her daughter's kitchen, after seeing regular devoted use for over 30 years, found itself just a little too full of [malanga soup](#) at the wrong time and while she stepped out of the kitchen for a moment, it redecorated the walls and ceiling with a shockingly loud and absolutely unexpected quick pressure release. Whose lasting mark on the stove hood remained after the tedious cleanup activity as a reminder about not overfilling any future pressure cookers at that location.

This time bob wasted no time in going right to the Magefesa website where numerous food mag review excerpts hyped the supercooker II as the best choice on the market. bob eagerly bought their line and courtesy of e-commerce, days later it arrived. Even Lorna Sass came along in the 13 minute video promoting the product. But a couple of key O-rings in the lid central pressure release mechanism did not. Come along. Requiring intervention with customer service to get the replacement parts. No installation video this time, but paper instructions. Even bob could have handled the job. Especially since the O-rings turned out to actually be there but the top had not been properly assembled, all of which Barkev fixed on his own without bob's intervention. This

little anecdote has nothing to do with this recipe, however.

A few nights after the exciting explosion, ani volunteers to do the chicken breasts at the scene of the crime. Having failed to bring along the leftover grilled chicken from the previous night cookout (in February? global warming?) that Isgouhi was expecting, the dinner was missing an entree and ani took responsibility to fill the gap. She was thinking lemon garlic with white wine but there was no corker remover for the wine so it became lemon garlic with water. The result was so moist and tasty and appealing to the eye, bob had to write it up for repeat business. We tried it with wine soon afterward. Even better. And really simple. In fact so simple, can we convince anybody we should actually be writing this down? Do we care?

ingredients

marinate?

1 lb chicken breasts
salt and pepper

flour it

flour
touch of salt, pepper, paprika

saute it

2 T olive oil

moisten it

2 cloves garlic, pressed
1/3 - 1/2 c white wine or water
1 lemon, juice of

instructions

1. Salt and pepper the breasts (ani and her mom always clean and rinse them first in the sink and pat them dry) and let sit awhile (preferably overnight).
2. Add a touch of paprika, salt and pepper to some flour and flour the breasts.
3. Brown the breasts in olive oil until a golden brown color is reached.
4. Add the garlic and wine or water. If wine, evaporate a bit before adding the lemon juice. If water, no need to wait.
5. Cover and cook on low heat 10–15 minutes.
6. Serve with yogurt-garlic sauce on the side.

yogurt-garlic sauce

1 c plain yogurt
1 t tahini
2 cloves garlic, pressed

action:

Mix up the stuff and serve on the side. Real garlic lovers can increase the garlic component.

notes

1. Be careful not to burn the chicken when aiming for that attractive golden brown coloring. bob naggad ani a few times on this point. Unnecessarily of course, but he had to contribute something...
2. We repeated this five years later, but ani decided to spruce it up a bit colorwise as well as add a little flavor kick with some chopped fresh parsley and capers, making this a lemon-caper sauce, a combination that is not unusual to find associated with chicken. No garlic sauce this time since we had some left over pesto penne with green beans on the side, next to which the green-flecked chicken looked like it was right at home. This is really quick and delicious, something our heroine 30-minute-meal master [Rachel Ray](#) would certainly approve.
3. [Illustration](#) available.

lgcw3npc.htm: 16-aug-2006 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

potato salad from isgouhi's mom

What defines potato salad? Contains potatoes? Served like a salad? Can be cold or warm? I guess this one fits the description. The dr bob first impression was: tabouleh, lose the tomatoes, substitute potatoes for bulgur. But of course the real story is a bit more complicated.

Isgouhi remembers her mom making this when she was a kid in Aleppo, Syria. Origin unknown. Not much to report here.

ingredients

- 2 lbs potatoes
- a bunch of green onions
- 1/2 cup chopped parsley
- 1/2 t cumin
- 1/2 t allspice
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 1/2 t Middle Eastern red pepper
- 3 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 lemon, juice of
- 2 T olive oil
- 1/2 t mint (fresh better)

instructions

1. Pressure cook the potatoes whole with skins. Should be firm, not mushy.
2. Cool and peel them. Cut into 1/2 inch chunks.
3. Add the chopped green onions and parsley.
4. Mix together in another bowl the remaining ingredients, then mix all together.
5. Taste and adjust the lemon and spices. This part is hard to duplicate, since only Isgouhi knows what it should taste like.

notes

1. Once we repeat this ourselves, maybe we can add some useful comments. Note that the T and t measurements are Isgouhi's version: flat tableware usually heaped full to count as one unit.
2. Aleppo has a reputation as a center of good Middle eastern cuisine [[Arab cuisine](#), [Syrian cuisine](#), [Aleppo](#), [Turkish cuisine](#)].

not chantal's onion soup (roasted garlic and onion cream soup)

Once upon a time there was a pretty young Italian lady named Chantal of Italian expatriate-parents-in-France descent and she was a marvelous cook. We so looked forward to our rare opportunities to dine in her kitchen in Rome and always enjoyed whatever her imagination treated us to on each such occasion. She made a heavenly smooth pureed onion soup several times once she learned how much we liked it. Something related to the French influence in her life. And so simple to make—something like one onion and one cup of water per person plus ... well, we'll never know the rest. bob has trouble retaining simple pieces of information and never wrote it down and then suddenly at 39 Chantal was no more. And her recipe gone forever. Perhaps a fitting sacrifice that we can only dream of that soup and not actually make it without being able to share it with her.

This is not that soup. But it is a pureed onion soup and we are big garlic fans so this combination makes us happy campers. We'd tried it many years earlier in our early newlywed phase and liked it. Then a [Neiman Marcus](#) lunch pureed Vidalia onion soup hit the mark with ani one day and we put this project back on the to-do list. A family dinner provided the excuse and it lived up to the expectations set by the first trial run.

ingredients

root group

4 large onions (we used 2/3 lb Vidalia onions), cut into 1/2 inch slices
2 heads garlic (we used big cloves, big heads), cloves separated and peeled
2 c veggie stock (2 c boiling water plus 3 level t Plantaforce veggie paste)
1 1/2 t dried thyme
1 t coarsely ground black pepper (our pepper mill is one size fits all...)
1 t coarse (Kosher) salt
3 T unsalted butter

additional liquid group

2 c lowfat milk
1 t salt to taste
1/2 – 1 c veggie stock as needed for desired consistency/thickness (as above)

garnishing

2 T chopped fresh Italian (flat leaf) parsley

instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F.
2. Place the chopped onions and garlic in a shallow roasting pan and add 2 cups of the veggie stock. Sprinkle with the root group spices and dot with butter.
3. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 1.5 hours. Stir once or twice during baking phase. You'll want to do this just to get a wiff of the smell this produces.
4. Remove pan from oven and put into a flat bottomed pot to puree with a hand blender until

smooth. Then mix in the additional liquids and puree it together a bit.

5. Now you can wait until dinner, if you do this stuff ahead of time. When ready to go, taste to correct seasonings if you can, and reheat without allowing the soup to boil. Sprinkle with the chopped parsley and serve.

notes

1. Serves about 6 as an appetizer soup.
2. This is a variation from [The New Basics Cookbook](#).
3. After not seeing it on their shelves for a few years, we had to wait a while till our local health food store order list met the minimum order for the suppliers of Plantaforce veggie broth paste [[A. Vogel](#) Plantaforce concentrated vegetable bouillon from Switzerland; USA exclusive distributors: [Rapunzel Pure Organics](#), 2424 SR-203, Valatie, NY 12186, tel: 800-207-2814]. Now we're well stocked again. The original had chicken broth of course, but we like to make this small change to pretend to be vegetarians when we can.
4. This seems like as good a place as any to take a hit on typical French onion soup in America. Murky brown liquid with onion strips packed like dead fish under a glob of stringy melted cheese that tops them off like a plastic pool cover. Maybe ripping off the cheese and food processing would improve this mess. Probably not. Did I forget the soggy bread? Why can't we see a little more imagination out there with the onion soup business?
5. [Illustrations](#) available.

grlconsp.htm: 17-jan-2005 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

san pietro e paolo purple pizza (crema di radicchio)

One of bob's usually unsatisfied food desires is crema di verdura style pizza where the topping is based on some kind of vegetable puree like cream of artichoke or cream of asparagus, a remnant of a decade's old memory of such a pizza experience in a notable rural pizzeria in the Castelli Romani near Rome where the pizza was served on big wooden slabs. Unfortunately this kind of pizza does not seem to make the usual list of traditional pizza varieties in most Italian pizzerias although bob is always studying the menus hoping for something exotic to show up. And the probability of rediscovering that pizzeria from the past AND then actually returning there seems to be near zero.

Instead a combination of circumstances lead to a sort of chance pizza revelation on San Pietro e Paolo Day, Rome 2001. Most Italians have not only a birthday which is an automatic gift from mother nature, but also a name day which they get to celebrate almost like an extra birthday [since most Italian first names coincide with the name of an existing saint or some slight variation of one each of which is assigned to a calendar day and there are plenty of such names to go around, which means that some of them have to share days since these are in shorter supply, limited by mother nature of course]. In addition Italian cities usually have [patron saints](#), like San Gennaro for Naples, San Silverio for Ponza and San Antonio (not the Texas one) for Padova, the last of whom's tongue was part of the plot for a cute little movie bob caught in his amazing 5 movie attendance record at the 2001 Tenth Anniversary [Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema](#), but that is another story altogether. Rome has two patron saints, Peter and Paul (hmm ... what about Mary?—oops, a sixties connection—apparently no name day but she is covered by another category, will have to research this point later), since for some reason they share the same day (the fact that they both met their end in Rome might have something to do with it and their patron saint affiliation). And when a city has a patron saint, the corresponding name day is a legal holiday for that city. When this holiday falls on a Friday or a Monday, even better since it means a long weekend. Good for residents maybe but maybe not so good for tourists. Since the stores are all closed.

This particular June 29 was special in three ways. As a Friday holiday before the July vacation exodus, it meant people in Rome could leave a day early for their traditional month long vacation (either July or August for certain business sectors). Which they did all at once as usual (long weekenders plus long vacationers) creating enormous traffic jams a day early, making bob and ani's Saturday drive to northern Italy with donato a piece of cake. July 29 also meant no longer having to dial the urban access digit 0 before cell phone numbers, so bob had to reprogram all the numbers in his borrowed cell phone. And July 29 also meant ani had arrived on the usual Philly-Rome direct flight that morning, and since nothing was planned, it seemed like a good occasion to wander around the historical center window shopping. Hard to do more than that when almost every shop is closed. We headed for the Spanish Steps anyway where we found the usual tourist crowd milling about. Not much to do besides look in the windows and take a rest with an overpriced but genuine cappuccino to bust the jet lag blues which even bob seemed to share thanks to a poor night's sleep. Overpriced like the rest of the shops in this exclusive shopping district. Killing time before a lunch date at the home of some friends.

Which meant passing by the attractive little side street trattorias starting to emit those irresistible smells. But at a certain point passing up the airline breakfast caught up with ani right at this little pizza by the slice shop and a little solid food snack was in order. At first glance the offerings did not seem so appealing but then this strange purple pizza caught bob's eye and when the explanation came back radicchio, he knew this had to be the choice. A layer of mozzarella followed by a layer of cream of radicchio generously sprinkled with parmigiano. A terrific appetizer for the lunch that kept us from eating more. Fiorfiore at 17–19 via della Croce, Rome. We'll be returning there. And not just for another slice. We'll ask for the pizzaiolo (pizza maker) and try to pump him for details. Who knows what we'll learn.

ingredients

[to be found]

instructions

1. [to be found]

notes

1. If you can help us with this recipe, please e-mail us.
2. On our trip north we made it to the home of Parma's smaller prosciutto competitor, San Daniele, near Udine in Friuli (west of Trieste), to sample really excellent prosciutto in a prosciutto outlet/restaurant [Dall'Ava](#) (Prosciutterie DOK). They go through so many prosciuttos a day you always get the freshest possible cuts. Wow.

pizzaradi.htm: 14-aug-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

garlic salmon filets

The [prediction](#) of interesting recipe potential from the new Armenian sister-in-law from Lebanon turns out to be correct as she matures in the American kitchen, surrounded by new food possibilities and an open mind. We've done salmon in various ways, but this one struck home by a direct hit to the weakness-for-garlic nerve. Ani only accepts a 2/3 portion so bob went for the remainder after finishing his own full portion. And when baby Barkev refuses to eat his little piece carved out of his mom's portion and dinner is about over, bob makes his move. But as the first forkful rises from the bowl a screech puts on the brakes and bob hurriedly returns the untouched fish to the crying baby. Who continues to refuse it from mom. Must be an ownership thing. A bit later, bob gets it anyway.

No need to steal this from screaming babies. Just make a little extra.

ingredients (for 4 adults)

- 2 lbs salmon filets, skin removed
- 2 big cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 lemon, juice of
- 1/2 t salt
- 1/4 t [Middle Eastern red pepper](#)
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 1/4 t Middle Eastern allspice, okay just regular will do
- 1/4 t Old Bay seasoning
- 2 T olive oil

instructions

1. Divide fish into 1/2 lb serving cross-sections, or as desired.
2. Combine the rest of the stuff, coat the fish and let sit only 15 to 20 minutes, otherwise the fish begins chemical cooking, darkening in color.
3. Bake in a preheated oven 350° for 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Serve with some freshly squeezed lemon juice.

notes

1. The spice amounts are guestimates, since the cook cooks by eye, but the relative proportions are right.
2. We've had [Old Bay seasoning](#) lying around the kitchen for some time from another in-law fish dish made on the premises, but never knew exactly what to do with the stuff until now.
3. Obviously other fish can get the same treatment. We'll be experimenting.

garlic beer tilapia for two

bob is not a beer guy. It's the carbonation. Before grad school he didn't even drink soda—perhaps due to an early childhood experience with the stuff which reportedly led him to object to the "scissors" in the drink. "Reportedly" since bob has difficulty remembering what he had for lunch the day before let alone recalling details of pre-school experiences. We'll trust his mom's memory on this one.

But the USA is a beer drinking nation so bob eventually decided to overcome his distaste for it—by downing a pitcher a piece with a beer guy friend two evenings in the space of a week before acquiring dr status. This at least neutralized the distaste without actually crossing the line into appreciation. Which later came in handy with the frequent pizza and beer socializing in Italy that later followed.

Pennsylvania (where bob resides) is a liquor controlled state so it is a hassle to actually buy beer for home use, as required by hospitality etiquette when beer drinking guests get invited to dinner occasionally. Either you have to go to a beer distributor where you have to buy a case at a time, or if lucky, a half case, or go to a bar and overpay for a six-pack. Of course this leaves lots of leftover beer at home (in the garage, warm) which never gets drunk. At least in bob's home. Ani is not much help these days, having had a few too many cold ones as a grad student herself, many more times than bob.

After one such dinner from which three cold ones still remained in the fridge afterwards, bob brought home a pair of tilapia fillets for dinner. Thinking of doing them up quick in garlic and wine, white of course. But no leftover white wine was available and our white wine stocks were dangerously low, discouraging the opening of a bottle (warm) just for cooking—and no time for a quick freezer chill since this was supposed to be a fast prep. So the light bulb goes off in bob's head—why not beer instead? Why not, indeed.

So a big garlic clove, pressed, plus a few chugs of light beer, warmed in the chef's pan, joined by the tilapia fillets and simmered a few minutes did the job. With a little fresh lemon juice and black pepper contributed by ani. The beer basically evaporated for the most part leaving enough of a garlicky lemon pepper sauce/residue to nicely flavor the fish. Simple. Effective. Easily transferable to other kitchen situations. Maybe we'll get rid of that extra beer yet.

ingredients

- 1 big garlic clove, pressed
- juice of 1/2 lemon
- a few chugs of a beer of your choice (lighter beer for fish?)
- a few grinds of fresh black pepper
- 2 tilapia fillets for 2 people

instructions

1. Press the garlic clove into a nonstick pan.

2. Dump in some beer, enough to simmer the fish a few minutes without disappearing first. Add in the fresh lemon juice, or whatever you got, container juice is acceptable.
3. Simmer the fish a few minutes, adding some more beer if necessary (judgement call). Hit is with the pepper.
4. Serve immediately.

notes

1. bob also will drink soda these days, although infrequently.
2. bob has been known to actually try unusual beers in brewery restaurants, which seem to have come into fashion in the nineties.
3. bob knows you don't really care about his beer drinking habits.
4. Eating food cooked with beer will not make you drunk.

grlbtla.htm: 21-sep-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

scrambled eggs and armenian sausage (sujuk)

Sitting across the table from me was a Turkish ex-patriot, a mature suit and tie Princeton professor type we'd sat down to share lunch conversation with at the faculty dining facility. Turks and Armenians have a lot in common cuisine-wise, so armed with the general background handed to me by my in-laws and Turkish friends to start small talk, I somehow opened the exchange with Turkish food as the icebreaker. What emerged was a wonderful little anecdote about his memories of the homemade sausage his mom used to make full of all these spices that seemed unusual to me at the time (where's the meat?)—memories that had finally inspired him to action. The details did not stay with me but somehow he had tracked down an old used sausage machine for next to nothing and then scored a whole bunch of sausage casings from some ethnic butcher who wasn't really selling them to the public but finally decided he could make an exception for this one time. With no recipe to work with and no past sausage making experience, he inventively recreated something that compared favorably with what he remembered from the old country. I had no idea what he was so lovingly describing at the time, but found out a few months later.

John Wheeler, who had been my sophomore modern physics teacher some three decades earlier had kindly invited me to lunch that day during my trip up from Philly to ask him about some obscure bits of Princeton mathematical history. Mentor of Richard Feynman, friend of Einstein, and a grand old man of relativity physics responsible for coining the term "[black hole](#)", he'd brought the Italian physicist Remo Ruffini to Princeton who in turn later granted me part time ex-patriot status in Italy. An offer I couldn't refuse. (Actually I just fell into it after dumb luck threw us together.) Johnny, as Remo called him (but I could never get beyond "Professor Wheeler"), had recognized the familiar face as we looked around for a table at the informal Prospect dining room. Apparently he knew this engineering economics guy from another university connection other than lunch. And so I got the sausage story.

I'd known my in-laws did sausage once in a great while but skeptically paid little attention. After all, sausage is like the garbage can of the meat world—the Rodney Dangerfield of my food product line-up. So they made this Armenian sausage and insisted that we take some home. Ani said it was good with scrambled eggs. Wouldn't hurt to try. We're not really big egg breakfast people. Occasionally on weekends. Omelettes more often than scrambled eggs. So...

Our first pass is from our most reliable [Middle Eastern cookbook](#) by Linda Chirinian which the in-laws say is a good start.

ingredients

- 4 lb lean ground sirloin
- 2 lb (not too lean) ground chuck
- 2/3 c cumin
- 5 1/2 T allspice
- 3 1/2 t garlic powder

- 3 1/2 T crushed fresh garlic
- 2 T cayenne
- 2 1/2 T sweet paprika
- 2 1/2 T salt

instructions

1. Place all ingredients in a large glass bowl. Wear plastic gloves and mix all ingredients very thoroughly by hand. Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight to blend flavors.
2. Cut 6 rectangles of double-thick cheesecloth, each 5x15 inches. Sew on 3 sides and set aside.
3. Heat skillet. Remove meat from fridge and pinch off a walnut sized piece. Add to heated skillet, cook over medium heat, taste, and add more seasoning if needed.
4. Slip on plastic gloves. (New ones.) Divide meat into 6-equal portions. Divide each portion into 8 smaller portions and place each set in a cheesecloth bag so that the meat mixture comes to within 3 inches of the top of the bag. Tie the bags with long pieces of string and flatten the bags with a rolling pin to smooth out the filling.
5. Hang the bags high (hang 'em high?) with the string in a well ventilated cool place 7 to 10 days until meat is dried. Remove cheesecake casings. Wrap in foil, and refrigerate 2 days or place in freezer.
6. When ready to serve, heat a nonstick skillet. Thinly slice sujuk and cook briefly on both sides. Serve hot with wedges of warm pita bread.

notes

1. Okay, now for the modifications.
2. in progress...
3. And once these suckers are ready, use two of these finger sized sausages for 3 or 4 egg scrambled eggs for two people. Cut them up in small pieces and put them into the scrambled eggs as you scramble them. These are really spicy so you don't need anything else in the eggs.

ravioli with sage butter cream sauce

While ani was at [Trader Joe's](#) picking up the jar of chestnuts for [soup](#), she grabbed a bag of little squash-filled half-moon ravioli for \$2.49. Either a good price or a mistaken purchase ("how can such cheap filled-pasta be good?" was the thought). bob was leaning toward the latter conclusion before sampling them with this inspired sauce.

We keep the fresh sage leaves in the freezer. So we can't use our fancy French style herb shredder from Williams and Sonoma on them since the herbs have to be absolutely dry, but that's a different story. [On our first trial run of the shredder we made the mistake of washing the target herb first and spinning "dry", but the result was very disappointing. But later it worked great on dry herbs. Although most dry herbs one buys are already suitably subdivided...] So our sage leaves have to be cut up with a knife.

We started with the oil and butter and garlic and sage and then just improvised. Ani suggested the red pepper and cream and normally skeptical bob said "why not?"

ingredients

- 1 lb authentic looking ravioli
- 2 T olive oil
- 3 T unsalted butter
- 6 sage leaves, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, pressed
- 1/8 t middle eastern red pepper (optional)
- freshly ground black pepper to taste
- freshly grated parmigiano to taste (1-2 T)
- 3/4 half pint light cream (3/4 c?) or half and half

instructions

1. Start pasta water boiling and dump in salt and pasta when boiling. Cook al dente.
2. Meanwhile, chp the fresh sage leaves and heat the oil and butter in a large enough nonstick pot to hold drained pasta (4 qt chef's pan).
3. Saute briefly the sage and pressed garlic, just to infuse the garlic tast into the butter/oil without browning the garlic.
4. Add in the remaining ingredients and warm up, then turn off heat.
5. Combine with the pasta in the pan and serve with additional freshly grated pepper and parmigiano.

notes

1. Maybe one can do a leaner version of this by omitting the cream and increasing the oil/butter a bit.

ravisbc.htm: 20-nov-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

strawberry tiramisu

Thanksgiving 2001 (late November to those outside American culture) was coming up with an imported mascarpone tub sitting in the fridge dated September 2001, left over from an August [tiramisu](#) in which the key ingredient had somehow been forgotten. During the assembly, bob had cut down on the whipped cream from 1.5 to 1 cups since the previous experience seemed to have produced a bit too much batter for the usual 9 inch spring-form pan destination. While noticing that this intended small reduction seemed to have resulted in much less batter than intended, bob did not think about any other possible contributions to this state of affairs and just made do. Guests complimented the product, while bob said there was still something not quite right, blaming his tinkering with the liqueur component which had still not met his satisfaction.

Yeah, no mascarpone does make a bit of a difference, but surprisingly not as dramatic as one would think. When bob discovered the still virgin container hiding behind some other stuff in the fridge a few weeks later, the facts suddenly fell into place.

Being an Italian product, the date interpretation was ambiguous. No helpful "Use by..." or "Sell by..." language for clarification. But the stuff is pasteurized and sealed, so what's a few months more or less. It turned out to be fine. However, the approaching and then receding date did create an increasing pressure to find the right occasion to do another tiramisu. Which is when an issue of the woman's magazine *Rosie* ripped off from a doctor's office waiting room by a sister-in-law for another recipe crossed bob's path. And the strawberry tiramisu recipe popped out, reminding bob of his first such experience with this converted traditional tiramisu dish two decades earlier on Procida just off the coast of Naples. Most people of a certain experience have heard of Capri (although usually mispronouncing it), the jet set destination also just off the coast of Naples, at least for the people who stay the night, which bob has never done. Procida is the larger down-classed version that regular people from Naples can vacation on and even spend the night, leaving the also nearby intermediate class island Ischia as a compromise, both of which do not carry "bob slept here" signs even though he did so in both islands. Anyway, Laura must have seen this food concept somewhere because when they had to improvise a dessert for a little group dinner on Procida, under primitive conditions in somebody's getaway home, something like this was the result.

Nevertheless, the authenticity of *Rosie* recipes lacked some credibility in bob's mind, so he tried a web search, including a leading Italian site, for alternatives, finding none. Okay, it seemed pretty reasonable as a stretch from the usual tiramisu, so bob decided to follow it exactly to see what would happen.

bob had to go out and buy some creme de cacao since more than a decade had passed since he'd last used it for a chocolate cheesecake. And although using frozen strawberries crossed his mind, reasonably looking real world strawberries were found in a supermarket that were acceptable, considering they were destined to be pureed anyway. But in a 1 lb container. Leading to 2 cups of puree instead of $1 \frac{1}{2} \text{ c} = 2 \times \frac{3}{4} \text{ c}$ as one can infer from the actual recipe. And the [imported mascarpone](#) comes in 500 g = 17.5 oz versus 16 oz = 1 lb containers so a little extra went into the mix, which probably would have been a little less lumpy when combined with the whipped cream if bob had left it out a little longer to warm up. Still worked.

ingredients

puree group

- 3/4 lb strawberries (1 pint), rinsed, hulled, quartered
- 1/3 c granulated sugar
- 2 T creme de cacao liqueur or vanilla syrup

batter group

- 1 1/2 c mascarpone cheese (3/4 lb), room temperature
- 1/4 c confectioner's sugar
- 1 T creme de cacao liqueur or vanilla syrup
- 1 1/2 c chilled heavy (whipping) cream (1.5 half pint containers)

cake layers

- 24 imported crisp ladyfingers (savoiard cookies)

topping

- bittersweet or semisweet chocolate shaving (1 oz)

instructions

1. Puree the berries, sugar and 2 T creme de cacao in a blender. The result is a very liquid puree.
2. Mix 1 T creme de cacao with the mascarpone and confectioner's sugar in a large bowl.
3. Whip the cream and fold into the mascarpone. This is a lot easier if the mascarpone is really warmed up to room temp. Our batter looked really lumpy like it was filled with miniature marshmallows. But it worked just the same.
4. Pour half the berry liquid into a pie plate or bowl for dipping the ladyfingers in. About 13 will do for each layer in a 9 1/2 in spring-form pan, if you break those that don't fit and wedge into the gaps. Roll each ladyfinger around making sure the ends get coated too and then lay it down in the liquid to soak through, continuing on with as many that fit. Check them to make sure they don't oversoak and begin to fall apart. With regular tiramisu, the diluted coffee is absorbed in seconds so one has to be quick, but with this more viscous strawberry fluid, the same kind of dipping resulted in only thin surface penetration which derailed the tiramisu effect, as we noted on the first run of this recipe.
5. As the ladyfingers appear to be soaking through (break one open to check), fill in the bottom layer side by side. Use your imagination here. Then dump what remains of the berry liquid from the first half over the middle of the ladyfinger layer and spread around. And carefully cover with half the batter, spreading it around like icing, a bit difficult since the liquid base is not very cooperative if much remains from the soaking phase.
6. Repeat with the second half of the liquid and batter.
7. Cover and refrigerate at least 6 hours for the lady fingers to absorb the berry liquid.
8. Garnish with chocolate shavings at serving time.

notes

1. From Rosie Magazine, May 2001, pullout recipe insert. Another celebrity getting her more than 15 minutes of fame: Rosie O'Donnell. Her magazine didn't last long though.
2. At 9 servings, each serving has: 515 Cal, 7 g Prot, 38 g Carbo, 37 g Fat, 2 g Fiber, 210 mg

- Choles, 81 mg Sodium. No surprise. This is not a light dessert.
3. Just to experiment, bob mixed some gelatin with the residue of the berry mixture and 2 T of really hot water, since he was too impatient to boil some. And mixed it into the second half of the berry liquid as a test, with the first layer acting as a control. No visible difference afterward since the liquid phase condensed anyway.
 4. The largely unsoaked ladyfingers contributed to a disappointing total impression compared to the real tiramisu in our first attempt, leading to the soaking revision incorporated above, but the contrasting chocolate shavings could also be improved by shaving them directly into the batter before spreading in either layer since the few shavings on the top do not find their way to the forkfuls coming from below. We used part of a 3.5oz (about 100g) Perugina bittersweet chocolate bar and a cheese slicer to shave the chocolate onto the top. Maybe 2oz could be folded directly into the batter, and then the final oz prior to serving for the presentation. Finally the liqueur component was not very evident and so could probably be safely doubled in both steps to kick it up a notch, which is what the original recipe needs.
 5. [Illustration](#).

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

spinach risotto

It was the night before Thanksgiving and a nutritious but not labor intensive meal was needed before embarking on the next day's side dish preparation ([stuffing](#), nontraditional mashed potatoes, [squash puree](#)). That morning bob had heard about the mental health benefits of the Omega-3 fatty acids in fish like salmon and sea bass: high enough levels help reduce depression and other various head malfunctions. So when the stuffed salmon rolls in various stuffing configurations wafted into bob's view at the seafood counter during the last minute supermarket acquisition trip, it was only a matter of choosing the more interesting version. Consultation with ani settled on the spinach, goat cheese and pinenut stuffing. Just pop in the oven and come up with a complimentary starch/veggie side... why not spinach risotto, since we had an unopened bag of pre-washed baby spinach in the fridge requiring no prep, purchased as an alternative salad green.

Hauling out a few of our many risotto cookbooks led to the obvious result: just do a standard risotto base and throw in the spinach at one point or another, with nutmeg as the usual affinity spice. The only question was to chop or not. These babies were kind of small already, and more delicate, so why not dispense with the chopping too. After all, a long evening of kitchen work was waiting. Halfway through, the baby spinach joins the mix, but after wilting down and blending in, bob noted a lack of convergence, i.e., of color diffusion, so he whipped out the hand blender and took a wack at a few spots to liberate some green, while leaving the still pre-al dente rice grains largely intact. Next time a bit of chopping first perhaps.

Served with the stuffed salmon and some plain yogurt on the side this was a pretty good start to our evening.

ingredients

1)

2 or 3 T olive oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped

2)

1 c arborio rice
1/2 c white wine
2 t (rounded) veggie broth paste
spinach: 1 package 6oz washed baby spinach, or any fresh spinach,
or even frozen spinach in a pinch

3)

freshly ground pepper, salt to taste
1 t nutmeg
1 T butter
1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. This is the usual 1-2-3 risotto treatment. Start a teapot with at least 4 cups of water boiling.

2. Chop up the washed fresh spinach. This can be done dry or wet in a food processor, finely or coarsely as your mood suites you. You can also sauté it with some garlic first, then add 1/4 c water and food process it as a variation, making it more like a pesto paste. In a pinch you can also used frozen spinach, which you cook first according to the directions. Set aside.
3. Prepare the chopped onion, which can be a large one if you like onions.
4. Sauté the onion in olive oil until translucent (softened and a bit transparent).
5. Stir in the rice until well coated and mix it up a bit for a minute over medium heat, then throw in the white wine and evaporate it off.
6. Then add a cup of boiling water and the [veggie paste](#) (or equivalent powder or cubes) and stir the paste into the mixture to dissolve it.
7. Continue adding about 1/2–3/4 cup of boiling water at a time when the water is showing signs of being absorbed and before the rice starts sticking to the bottom, for about 12–15 minutes.
8. Stir in the spinach and continue for another 5 minutes or so.
9. Turn off the heat and stir in the salt and pepper, nutmeg, butter and parmigiano.
10. Serve immediately with extra freshly grated pepper on each serving, optional extra parmigiano.

notes

1. Pre-washed baby spinach is another product that seems to have become universal in the US. The markup from the extra processing makes a nice profit for the producers and the convenience is nice for those who can afford it. Often now found in supermarket salad bars for an even higher markup, though in optional smaller quantities.

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

mixed winter squash puree

bob spotted these strange looking red kuri squash at Fresh Fields—looked like little reddish pumpkins, and the produce lady said she'd tried it and liked it so that was good enough for bob. He got one and two organic acorn squash. When he overheard the checkout girl (literally, i.e. young) verbally mistake the leeks for celery, then corrected by ani, he was not surprised when next the rather expensive gourmet squash got checked in as pumpkin for a grand total of forty some cents. Normally bob is the first to correct errors in his favor, but not recognizing a leek working in an upscale supermarket chain like Whole Foods and then not noting the clearly red color of the "pumpkin" seemed like a systemic failure that that bob was not ready to enter into. And the store had discontinued selling his Dole brand (but not Dole owned) cartoned pineapple juice again this year so bob was ready for some minor compensation.

Surfing the web did not turn up anything useful about these squash—only one hit on some red kuri casserole from a vegetarian magazine. bob improvised.

ingredients

above ground veggies

- 2 acorn squash
- 1 red kuri squash

below ground veggies

- 1 pathetic looking parsnip
- 1 medium potato
- 1 smallish turnip

spices

- 2 T olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1/4 t nutmeg
- 1/4 t black or white pepper
- salt to taste

instructions

1. Cut the squash in half and scoop out the seeds.
2. Bake cut side down on a baking sheet (with rim) 1 hour at 350°.
3. Scoop out the squash meat.
4. Meanwhile boil the root tubers, chopped, in salted water for 20 minutes. Drain.
5. Then mash the root tubers and mash in the squash meat, and then mash in the already mixed together spice group and put into a pyrex baking container.
6. Canned be stored in fridge and reheated when ready to serve.

notes

1. Distracted during the scooping phase, bob forgot one half acorn squash. Saved for a later

occasion. Always look around your kitchen regularly when absentmindedness is a problem.

2. [Illustration](#).

mwsqpure.htm: 7-mar-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]