

# 2003

# red lentil and chestnut soup

As is the case with our [star cheesecakes](#), we don't like to wear out a good recipe like top 40 radio overplay of a hit single, so we are driven to try new variations of winning themes. This one is a continuation story, following up the [excess fall purchase](#) of recipe ready chestnuts motivated by our love for our very own version of [chestnut soup](#). Which we had recently repeated a number of times. So when [Martha Stewart](#) described how to make a lentil and chestnut soup on [Food TV](#), bob's radar immediately tuned in, especially since the lentils were red, and [red lentil soup](#), a joint Turkish-Armenian tradition, is another favorite soup in the household. While remembering the key ingredients, bob felt no need to write down the quantities since all the Food TV recipes are on-line. Where dear Martha turns out to be an exception.

The link to the recipe is there at the Food TV show site for that program, but no recipe. And although later Martha programs prove to actually have recipes attached to the links, this one never comes up in the recipe finder. So bob [googles](#) it and immediately comes up with a [Nigella Bites](#) hit [lentil and chestnut soup](#) at the Food TV Canada website, copyrighted 4 years earlier from her book [How To Eat](#), and Martha's recipe seems exactly the same(!), modulo bob's somewhat flawed memory skills. By this time Nigella Lawson was a familiar face—ani is a big style fan, so Nigella's [sensual cooking show](#) on [Style TV](#) was a favorite surfing parking spot for both ani and bob. Some reviews suggest she might even unseat queen Martha from her reign.

## ingredients

- 1 small onion
- 1/2 leek
- 1 carrot
- 1 stick celery
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 c = 1/2 lb = 225 g red lentils
- 9 c veggie broth
- 1/2 lb = 225 g cooked chestnuts (just over half a 400g jar)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 c optional light cream or lowfat milk in the final warming phase
- optional dollops of plain nonfat yogurt, to serve

## instructions

1. Clean the veggies and food process them together till finely chopped.
2. Sauté them in olive oil until softened.
3. Add the lentils and stir to mix with the veggies and oil, then add the veggie broth (boiling water plus instant veggie broth [paste](#)/cubes/powder).
4. Bring to a boil and simmer for about 40 minutes till the lentils are very soft (they should disintegrate).
5. Meanwhile, food process the chestnuts finely.
6. When the lentils are ready, add the chestnut crumbs and simmer another 20 minutes or so.
7. Puree with your hand blender, adding water if necessary to thin it to taste.

8. Before serving an optional cup of light cream blended in to the soup and heated through adds extra flavor.
9. Accompany each serving with freshly ground black pepper and optional dollops of plain nonfat yogurt and an optional sprinkling with parsley.

## notes

1. Nigella believes in cream. We prefer yogurt since it is our normal Armenian-Lebanese influenced choice of accompanying sauce for a wide range of stuff, and it is more healthy as well.
2. We still had one bag of [frozen chestnuts](#) from Trader Joe's left to use up. bob stuck ani with the shell removal. She has a lot of experience with shelling nuts and seeds. A family tradition. The 400g of imported roasted Italian chestnuts had a yield of 1 1/3 c crumbs when food processed, a bit more than called for, but only half what we used for our chestnut soup so we dumped it all in. Turns out the frozen chestnuts are a year-round product after all. Unlike the convenient bottled item.
3. We also had to jack up the water (veggie broth) content from Nigella's 6 c to 8 c during the chestnut simmering stage, with the expectation of adding probably another 2 c in the reheating phase when we actually served it. In fact influenced by our recent cream soup experience, we added 1 c water and 1 c light cream blended in for an extra kick. Salt and pepper to taste was another correction, and although we tried the chopped parsley sprinkled on top of each serving with the dollops of yogurt, it did not really add to the taste and only seemed to serve as a garnish color prop. Who needs it. And since we hit it with the cream, the yogurt can be dispensed with as well. But you decide. Here's the garnished version: [illustration](#).
4. So what's the verdict? Another winner.

## cream of fennel soup

"Soup of the day?" It's a question we love to ask, always hoping to be surprised by something new or if not new, really tasty. And cream soups are our favorite category. So finally the casual restaurant/bar next to the Bryn Mawr movie theater reopens after a remodeling phase with an upgraded menu style to match the new decor and name change: from "Marbles" to "Citron Bistro". An early weekday pre-movie meal before catching a film in one of the few remaining old movie houses that divided into a twin to survive the multiplex era in what we think of as our town. And survived the turn of the century even.

"Cream of fennel soup" was the answer. Very intriguing. We're already fennel conscious but would never have thought of the soup angle. So we go for it and find it delicious. At which point it would have been natural to ask for a recipe from the cook [Lek Poeta?, according to food chatter in the [Philly Inky](#)]. But we didn't. We'll have to fake it. The waitress does tell us it has some anise liqueur in it. Good hint.

A few days later Sarah Moulton does a cream of fennel soup! So we go to [FoodTV.com](#) to download the recipe and while we're on-line we check out [epicurious.com](#) and find a version from Bon Appetit, except the recipes are not coming up, so we go to the hard copy on the shelf of our [cooking library](#). Later we return on-line and read the very helpful user comments. Great to have feedback before trying out a recipe.

The restaurant version was very smooth and not thick—and not overpowering. FoodTV had 5 fennel bulbs an onion and garlic clove for the standard 8 cups of stock/cream, which seemed a bit much. Cutting back to 1 bulb might do the trick as an eventual second try. Bon Appetit has our favorite potato leek base but maybe a bit more than we imagined for the light soup we'd already experienced.

Going back to the original [Bistro Cooking](#) cream soup recipes that gave us our two favorites ([artichoke](#), [chestnut](#)), for inspiration, we put together a reasonable lineup. Working in the chinois at the right point, suggested by one of them. Normally straining the soup is against our principles because removing good stuff for the sake of texture seems like the wrong kind of trade-off. But the Williams-Sonoma chinois came as a Christmas gift. In the category of things you'd never buy yourself. So we have to try it out of politeness if nothing else. What is a chinois? First of all, it's "shin-wa". Those French are always ready to confuse us with the pronunciation of their words. And it's a long conical fine sieve with a convenient handle and a wire stand for it to sit in while resting. Or sieving. So we'll do that just before adding the light cream.

A few days later we're food magazine browsing at the Bryn Mawr Borders and bob spots the reborn Eating Well magazine that had folded earlier while we were subscribing. Now four seasonal issues and no ads. Leafing through the fennel soup recipe just jumps out. A done deal. This mag's making the trip home. It too has the potato-leek base confirming our initial inclination. We increase the single leek and potato we had in mind to two. And act the next day, putting it all together.

## ingredients

**base**

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 fennel bulb, food processed with:
- 2 leeks
- 2 garlic cloves, pressed (isgouhi suggestion)
- 2 medium potatoes, food processed or chopped
- 7 (or 6) c veggie stock

**finishers**

- 1 c light cream (or 2)
- salt and pepper to taste (maybe 1 T salt, 1 t black pepper, but you decide)
- 1/3 c Arak/Ouzo/Sambuca/etc anise flavored liqueur

**instructions**

1. Clean and prep the veggies. Peel the potatoes, remove the hard core of the fennel and peel away layers, clean the leeks.
2. Food process the leeks and fennel together and then sauté with the garlic and a little salt to bring out the flavor (we forgot). Until softened, maybe 10 minutes.
3. Meanwhile boil the water to make the [veggie broth](#) and food process the potatoes.
4. Add the potatoes and veggie broth and simmer 45 minutes to an hour.
5. Puree the soup with a hand blender.
6. At this point one can refrigerate the soup until another day, or let it sit on the stove a few hours for a later dinner, or proceed directly to the finisher step.
7. Stir or hand blend in the light cream, choice of anise-flavored alcohol and the salt and pepper, tasting for a possible correction.
8. Reheat through and serve.

**notes**

1. We took it to the mother-in-law's and finished it there, forgetting the chinois at home. But we had simmered it so long, it pureed into a silky smooth consistency. No need for the chinois. Maybe it will come in handy for another recipe.
2. [Arak](#) (anise liqueur) is the national drink of Lebanon, similar to the Greek Ouzo, Turkish Raki, Italian [Sambuca](#), French Anis/Pastis. Clear until you add some water (traditional way of serving, with optional ice) which turns it milky colored. [Apparently](#) oil of fennel (green anise) is added to the Italian version, confirming bob's association of fennel with this class of products. Barkev often offers bob a shot before dinner at the in-laws. When bob accepts, he notices the effects even after dinner. Powerful stuff so be careful with it.
3. Inspiration goes to [Citron Bistro](#) of 818 Lancaster Ave in Bryn Mawr, owned by the Lebanese Wakim brothers. Spanish influenced smoke-free Mediterranean opened Winter 2003. Hope it lasts.
4. Delicious, in case you wondered. We must be on a roll with this line of soups.
5. [Illustration](#).

# cream of cauliflower soup (with floating asparagus)

Continuing our recent period exploring [cream soups](#), we try the cauliflower route again many years after several other versions we had tried. This time a new cooking magazine impulse buy has a recipe with a similar onion, leek, celery base that has proved so successful so far with our other cream soups, and the photo looked pretty convincing with the little asparagus pieces floating in the bowl. Every recipe photographed, how could we resist.

## ingredients

### base

4 t olive oil (we used 2 T)  
1 small onion  
1 celery stalk (we used 3)  
1 leek (we used almost 2)  
salt to taste to bring out flavors

### addins

5 c veggie broth  
1 head cauliflower, chopped  
1 small potato, peeled and food processed  
1 t dried thyme

### finishers

salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
1-2 c lowfat milk  
1/4 chopped parsley (optional)  
1/2 lb asparagus, cut into 1 in pieces (optional)

## instructions

1. Food process the cleaned onion, celery and leek together and saute in olive oil with a bit of salt to bring out the flavor (?) in a large flat-bottomed nonstick pot until softened, say 10 minutes.
2. Meanwhile boil the water in a teapot for the concentrated veggie broth. Combine together and dump into the soup mixture when ready.
3. Meanwhile clean the cauliflower and cut out the hard core, chop up the florets a bit. We used the extra time to spray them lightly with olive oil and broil them on a cooking sheet under close supervision for somewhat less than 10 minutes until they started to brown, to precook them slightly. Probably not necessary.
4. Add the broth to the base, stir in the food processed potato, dump in the cauliflower, and add the thyme. We had some "fresh" thyme in the freezer, which we used instead of the dried thyme.
5. Simmer for about 45 minutes.
6. Add the milk (amount depending on how thick you want the soup to be) and puree with a hand blender.

7. **Optional Step.** If you have a **chinois** (fancy funnel shaped French strainer with a wooden wedge roller) and some patience, you can pass this through it in several batches, rotating the wooden tool around in a circle to squeeze the puree through the fine mesh in a slow process. We decided to help it along by pureeing further the resistant part of the slop in our [Vita-Mix](#) super blender. With persistence, we were able to force most of the soup through with very little residual loss in large grain residue. This experience lessened our suspicion of this kitchen tool, which initially impressed us as a fiber and nutrition stealer. Apparently its main function is to refine the puree through the forcing action of wood against mesh.
8. Add salt and pepper to taste and the optional parsley if desired. Then reheat through slightly and serve.
9. **Optional finisher.** Cook the asparagus following the standard game plan. Then cut off the tougher lower portions to serve as a side dish and cut the tender upper halves into 1 in pieces to add to each serving as a nice complementary touch, together with freshly ground pepper on each serving, or Middle Eastern red pepper (paprika in a pinch) to kick it up a notch.

## notes

1. [healthy cooking](#), February, 2003, p. 54.
2. [Illustration](#).

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

## whole wheat pizza

Let's face it. Toscana has become a little worn out as the American dream of a temporary home away from home in Italy. [Under the Tuscan Sun](#), [The Hills of Tuscany](#)... we had read them both in the paperback stage. But when it came time for our own Italian countryside farmhouse experience, we landed next door in the heart of Umbria, the new Toscana so to speak. Land of the truffle. Just a May weekend outside of Spoleto, by coincidence when the [amazing hills](#) of red papaveri (poppies) were in season. Only a couple hours from Rome not even, we finally connected with Valeria and Andrea at their regular retreat from the city perched on a magical hillside surrounded by a fairytale panorama. Joined by Paola and Arif and daughter Anita. Three couples all connected together in that moment through the friendship of three of us in the Roman physics scene decades earlier, needless to say when we were all much younger.

Of course one meal had to have the famous local black truffles, so Andrea picked some up at his trusted supplier, but alas they were duds, somehow lacking the usual kick. Truffles are a funny business. The dish that stuck in our minds though was a simple pizza recipe that Valeria showed us how to do. With a potato in the dough. That we later tried at home several times, initiating us into the world of homemade pizza.

But it wasn't until Miriam invited us over for a wonderful impromptu evening with her family to celebrate her newly renovated kitchen that we got the extra push we needed to take this more seriously. Whole wheat pizza. Everybody knows that whole wheat is much better for you than regular wheat flour, so it makes sense to do pizza that way AND we really like the flavor so it is no sacrifice at all as the uninitiated might expect. Eating right can also mean eating well. This time Miriam was showing us the way while we sipped on wine sitting on kitchen bar stools at the granite countertop Ani has been lusting after for some time. After preparing a batch of her famous scones in three flavors (chocolate chip was bob's favorite) for afterwards, Miriam attacked the pizza. A puffy whole wheat base with lots of yummy things on top. A little too puffy. Miriam thought it would never finish baking and was ready to call take out. We said let's give it some more time. What's the hurry? Rami backed us up. So it took a little longer than normal, it was a little puffier than normal. It was more delicious than normal and that's all that counts. Naomi agreed.

bob remembers all those food magazine feature articles on homemade pizza that he never marked, thinking we'd never do them. Lost in the archives. But fortunately pizza is popular so it wasn't long before a few more of these articles popped up. Rediscovering the rebirth of the magazine [Eating Well](#), "Five Easy Pizzas" all based on a whole wheat crust catch our eye. With toppings like potato and artichoke or white bean and prosciutto to sink the hook. We go the potato and artichoke route, substituting some red pepper eggplant sauce from Trader Joe's for the marinara sauce. bob slices the potato with the plastic el-cheapo veggie hand slicer he'd gotten from a street vendor in Munich several decades earlier, starting out without the hand guard which is absolutely necessary for the final few passes. A little distraction and bob's thumb slides right into the blade. Not enough for stitches but enough to leave a lasting impression on his fingerprints after it finally healed. The pizza turned out swell.

Then annual fundraising for the [Armenian Sister's Academy](#) where the local niece and nephews go just down the hill provides a box of three whole wheat pizza dough crusts with fixins for even

quicker production times. The tomato sauce is a bit too sweet, but we add some fresh sliced mushrooms, black olives and little chunks of feta to the shredded mozzarella in the kit for a delicious upgrade. Next time we'll replace the sauce too. And in the future we'll be marking those pizza articles. And just maybe, doing a new one once in a while.

## ingredients

### whole wheat dough

3/4 c whole wheat flour  
3/4 c all purpose flour  
1 package = 2.5 t quick rising yeast (like Fleischmann's RapidRise)  
3/4 t salt  
1/4 t sugar  
1/2 - 2/3 c hot water (120°-130° F)  
2 t olive oil

### potato and artichoke topping

2 medium potatoes, preferably Yukon Gold, peeled,  
cut lengthwise into quarters and sliced 1/4 in thick (we did 1/8 in thick)  
3/4 c prepared marinara sauce  
1/4 t crushed red pepper  
1 t extra-virgin olive oil  
1 c grated part-skim mozzarella cheese  
1 14oz can artichoke hearts, rinsed and quartered  
1/4 t salt  
freshly ground black pepper to taste  
2 T chopped fresh parsley  
1/4 c freshly grated parmigiano

## instructions

### crust

1. Dump all the non-liquid ingredients in your food processor and pulse to mix. If you don't have a food processor, order out.
2. Combine the hot water and oil in a measuring cup and pour in enough over the processing dough ingredients until the mixture forms a sticky ball.
3. If it seems dry, add 1 to 2 T warm water, if too sticky, add 1 to 2 T flour. Process until the dough forms a ball, and then continue one more minute to kneed the dough.
4. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured surface, or one of those fancy new French plastic dough rolling surfaces. Spray a sheet of plastic wrap with cooking spray and place the sprayed side down over the dough. Let it rest for 10 to 20 minutes before rolling out into a 12 in circle. Meanwhile put your pizza stone in the oven and preheat it to 500° F. Pre-dust it with corn meal if you like but we forgot and had no problems with it sticking to our pizza stone. If you don't have a pizza stone, return to instruction 1 alternate solution.

### topping

1. Peel the potatoes and slice them 1/8 in thick in your veggie slicer or by hand. Then cut in quarters if the slice is big enough. Steam them about 6 minutes until tender. Rinse in cold water to stop the cooking and pat dry with a paper towel.
2. Meanwhile prepare the artichokes hearts: drain and quarter.
3. Combine your choice of prepared sauce with the red pepper flakes for an extra kick and set aside.
4. Rollout your pizza dough on a floured countertop or one of those fancy new flexible plastic dough sheets until it is about a 12 or 13 in circle (don't measure, just guess).
5. Put the dough on your wooden pizza paddle and make a slight rim to the edge. [This is easy with the flexible nonstick dough sheet.] Brush the edge with olive oil. Don't have a pizza paddle? See alternate instruction 1 for the crust.
6. Spread the sauce evenly around the center and out to within a half inch of the edge.
7. Sprinkle with your grated cheese. We had no mozzarella on hand and used fontina instead.
8. Scatter the potatoes and artichokes evenly over the cheese. Season with salt and pepper, and the parsley if you wish. Finish with the parmesan.
9. Place the pizza on the pizza stone in the oven and bake 10 to 14 minutes until the crust is crisp and golden.
10. Serve and eat.
11. Leftovers can be reheated in the microwave.

## notes

1. [Eating Well](#), Winter 2003, pp.54-59, "Five Easy Pizzas" by Patsy Jamieson.

## ps email from rome

Subject: Re: pizza?

Date: Tue, 7 Sep 1999 16:18:41 +0200 (MET DST)

From: Valeria Ferrari

To: Robert Jantzen

Dear Bob and Ani,

yes, we finally are in the new house and we are very happy because it is nice, and our cats are very happy about the garden!

the summer was quite tiring, because we moved at the end of July, and half of August was spent in opening boxes, cleaning and putting in the right place furnitures, books (too many books!), dresses and every thing is usually hidden in a house. But now almost everything is reasonably in order.

So at the end our vacations were only ten days in Spoleto, where we had the chance of enjoying the olive-tartufo sauce several times. I agree it is really special.

The pizza I do is very easy to prepare:

the secret is that it is made not only of flour, but also of potatoes.

what is important is not to exceed the right amount:

about two potatoes of medium-small size for one kg of flour.

You first cook the potatoes in water, peel and smash them, and then add to the flour, mix together with 25-30 grams of yeast (the one is used to prepare bread, we call it lievito di birra) previously melt in warm water like if you were doing bread. The dough must be smooth, elastic and not too stiff. Don't forget salt.

Then you put the dough in a big cup, cover with a towel and live it there for 2-3 ours to make it grows. In summer 2 ours are enough.

when it is ready, make the pizza in a pan with olive oil, put tomatoes on top and put in the oven (medium temperature) for a while (about 15 minutes). when it is close to be cooked (I lift one corner with a fork: if it is golden and does not bend it is ready) add the sliced mozzarella and put it again into the oven for another 5-8 minutes until it melts.

At the end the pizza must be soft inside, but quite crunchy outside.

That is all!

I hope you will be able to come to Italy before next summer so that we can enjoy your company and make some other "cultural" exchange.

Incidentally, I am still waiting the recipe of the yoghurt-mint soup!

Un grosso abbraccio da me e da Andrea  
valeria

## options

Supporting kid's school fundraising campaigns led to several years of buying frozen ready-to-use whole wheat pizza crusts following our initial well-intentioned efforts in this direction. One really good and quick topping we stumbled upon was the result of not having had any pine nuts left on hand to finish off some basil-garlic-oil pesto from the local excess basil production at several in-law yard plantings. We had been freezing the pesto minus the cheese for future use as a rule, but this batch remained in the fridge awaiting some further elaboration in the nut department. And so was ready to help get rid of the last frozen crust to finally use up some of the stuff robbing us of freezer space. We brushed some olive oil on the crust, and then spread very sparingly some of this almost-pesto mixture over the interior with a fork, then slices from one (real) mozzarella ball sliced as thinly as the texture allowed were symmetrically placed on top, with a sprinkling of crumbled blue cheese. And then 5 peeled medium white mushroom halved and thinly sliced. Topped off by some baby spinach leaves and a little bit of olive oil sprinkled on top. About 20 minutes in the oven at 375° F and it was [ready](#). Tasty enough to inspire this end note. And repeat again.

Meanwhile a little lobbying at the University had led to a regular offering of really crispy whole wheat pizza crust at the student center. The public has to demand better from the food supply people. Sometimes small successes reward individual efforts. We have to all do a better job of pushing on the system. The next local step in food agitation was the food court at the previously family-owned local supermarket chain bought out by the big national chain Safeway (that in 2004 had been in a bitter strike situation in California as it tried to cut employee pay and benefits to "compete" with WalMart). When the carb revolution was explained to the food court manager and the suggestion of introducing a whole wheat pizza crust option was made, she said it was a

good idea, why didn't they think of it? (Exactly.) Months later bob asks the pizza grunts behind the counter about whole wheat and they say all the dough comes from corporate, nothing they can do. So bob fires off a letter to the person who receives company product suggestions and eventually gets a polite answer but no real commitment. Meanwhile hundreds of carb revolution product lines are selling in their stores and they cannot connect the dots. Not only would it be the right thing to do but it would be good for business. Idiots. To be continued.

*wwpizza.htm: 31-oct-2004 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# fan mail

[dear rosanne,](#)

It all started 21 years ago with a peck on the cheek. I was 30 and living in Cambridge, waiting for a bus to take me home to my apartment from the Commons above Harvard Square one afternoon. A young woman smiled at me as she got on the bus before me, but I went and sat by myself at the back. To my surprise when I got off the bus, she did too. Apparently we lived only a few houses apart. Me with my two Italian and Greek astrophysicist flatmates. She in need of a replacement. We talked a few minutes before going to our separate destinations, but smack, she pecked me on the cheek as we parted. Another surprise. I was used to cheek kissing from my year in Italy, but this was the US. Strangers didn't do that the first time they met.

Our first year lease together was about up so I found a replacement and jumped ship from the bachelor pad. It turned out that Diane, a psychologist, was one of your fans. I had never heard of you, but I kind of liked what I she played for me just before she dragged me to some small bar music venue on the North Shore one night to hear you perform. From that night on I was also a fan. I have always had a special liking for female vocalists over the years, but you were unique. Even now still classified as country when you don't seem like that at all. A strong intelligent woman with strong feelings. I don't know exactly what connected with me, but somehow you worked your way into my music heart and never left. Diane and I both moved on after that year and I eventually lost track of her somehow, one of the few important friends from my past that slipped through my fingers.

Flash forward to the 12th annual Philadelphia Film Festival, April, 2003. Ani and I like to catch the opening and closing films each year if possible, and I like to catch as many other films as circumstances permit, which is often not very many. The inertia of life and the threshold of crashing the city from the burbs. We've only seen the opening film this year and it's already a week later, one week to go. All my post-it marked choices in the program booklet are passing me by. When the woman film critic from the Inkie, the one I trust on the "chick-flick" reviews that are also one of my favorite categories, does a four star review (4 out of 4) of this Bollywood film *A Peck on the Cheek* that I had somehow overlooked. We had missed my selection *Bollywood/Hollywood*, sadly, but here was a reprieve. I had once watched a whole Bollywood film without subtitles on the ethnic programming public television channel, so engaging and easily interpretable that the dialogue was not essential. So you see where I am coming from. But at 9:45pm? Returning home after midnight? This would be a hard sell with Ani. But it was a Friday night. Maybe...

Then I hear on our special listener supported local radio station XPN, where we have been joint member supporters even before they thought up the different membership levels to raise more funding, that you will be on the World Cafe that day at the 2 o'clock hour, exactly when my second class in differential equations meets, BUT... I was giving a quiz and then a take home test for the students to start, allowing me the option of catching the live interview/performance on my 20 year old Walkman while they worked away. Which I forgot to bring to class! So I call the station to see how I can find out when they will rebroadcast the program and find out that every night at 1am they repeat the day's show. I go to your website and read your long essay about the awarding of a purple heart to your uncle 58 years after the fact, and the need for dissent in a

democracy, and I was happy that your smart thinking in feelings expressed in your songs also extended to the larger world at a time when musicians are experiencing backlash from "patriots" for voicing opposition to Bush's Iraq war. You proudly took a stand anyway.

I convince Ani to make the effort. She too has a soft spot for Bollywood from when she was a little girl growing up in Lebanon. We go early and finally choose to eat Indian before the movie. The movie turns out to be worth every star Carrie gave it. A touching tale about a 9 year old Tamil girl born in an Indian refugee camp and adopted by Indian parents who tell her on her 9th birthday that she was adopted, and then end up taking her to Sri Lanka to find her birth mother, and get caught up in the guerrilla war. A love story. Mother and daughter. Father and daughter. Mother and father, who were brought together in marriage by this little abandoned baby. *A Peck on the Cheek*.

Back home in bed it is only a short wait for your segment. I taped it to make sure I did not miss anything if I fell asleep. The last time I had recorded a tape had been years ago, when I would put together a mix of eclectic music for my friend Emanuela in Rome each summer before departing for my several month visit. Since which she and her husband Domenico have been spending a few months each winter in Sri Lanka. It's a small world in some ways. I was jolted out of my awake-sleep state at the 30 minute mark by a loud click as the tape deck shut down the recording. I had forgotten that tapes have to be flipped halfway through. But I managed to stay awake for the whole thing and I enjoyed hearing you speak. I'd already picked up your CD that had just come out the week before.

So my kiss on the cheek in 1982 had come full circle in this coincidence of events that brought together music and movies and nostalgia about friendships. Thanks for contributing to the mix and for all the heartstrings you've pulled with your music over the intervening years.

—a fan

## notes

1. [Rosanne Cash](#), daughter of the legendary man in black [Johnny Cash](#).
2. [World Cafe](#), [April 11, 2003](#), Philly. [XPN](#), listener supported public radio at the [University of Pennsylvania](#), Philly.
3. [Carrie Ricky](#), [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) music critic.
4. [Philadelphia Film Festival](#), codirected by [TLA Video](#), which bob used to go to when it was still just an eclectic movie theater on South Street decades ago.
5. *A Peck on the Cheek*, original title: [Kannathil Muthamittal](#), India 2002. Director: Mani Rathnam. Cast: R. Madhavan, Simran, Prakashraj, Nandita Das. [[Philly Fest page](#), pdf]
6. [WYBE TV](#), one of two public television channels that claim us as member supporters, host of the Armenian Hour that is only 30 minutes long.
7. Emanuela and Domenico, [Diva Luna Ponzà](#), [Piccolo Hotel Luisa](#) and now [RelocationsInItaly](#).
8. Diane Kaufman, psychologist. A northeastern transplant to Austin, Texas who found her way back to the northeast in time to cross bob's path in life. Where are you now?

# TJ Maxx pesto pasta with asparagus

Let's say [TJ Maxx](#) is not one of bob's frequent shopper destinations, but recently bob was caught snooping around not one but two different area stores multiple times. Gourmet Italian and European food products in the Home department was the magnet. There must be a story behind this product line at that store but where would you go to try to uncover it?

[Roi](#) crema di rucola (alias arugula in the US, a.k.a. "rocket" in the UK) was a multiple purchase item. The TJ Maxx label says: "Compare at \$7.00, our price \$3.99". Americans love the 1 cent less trick, used in gasoline prices as the one tenth of a cent less per gallon price that seems to be a matter of national law: "The Final Nine Pricing Rule". How else could ever gas price in the country that we've ever seen end in 0.9 cents per gallon? This "arugula cream" is produced in Baldalucco (IM) Italy. Sounds like a pretty authentic Italian town. Ingredients listed as "rocket, extra virgin olive oil, salt, no coloring or preservatives." I guess that puts it approximately in the pesto family. And "a specialty of an antique Ligurian tradition." Hmm... so it must be near Genova (=Genoa, the pesto capital) somewhere, but IM? One of the more obscure Italian provinces? The company "where we are" page says they are near Genova and nearer to the music festival town San Remo. Let's leave it at that. One of those little mysteries of life.

No more arugula cream left on the Main Line. bob tried one and liked it, then bought a few more. Every one he could find. There weren't that many. Good with cheap [Trader Joe's](#) tagliatelli imported from Italy, or on practically any kind of pasta. We usually do a half jar in a pound of pasta, or a third of a jar in a half pound of pasta if we don't want to overdo it. One jar being approximately 7 oz or 200g, though neither unit appears on the jar. Following the Italian pasta sauce motto "less is more". Adding a bit of zing by sautéing briefly a pressed garlic clove in a few tablespoons of olive oil first, the immediately dumping in the pesto to stop it from going too far. A little pasta water with the pasta and generous freshly grated parmigiano and bam! It's ready. Not enough to claim as a recipe.

So one spring evening asparagus is \$.99 a pound at the local supermarket after work on a weekday (the 1 cent less rule again), half the usual bargain price, so bob decides to do a quick pasta with it. The Trader Joe jar of asparagus appetizer in the supply stash would probably be too much asparagus if the fresh asparagus was going into the mix which it was, so the last third of the opened jar of arugula pesto in the fridge was called into action. Let's see, how many pounds in the bunch? Fishing out the receipt and scanning down to the asparagus, it reads 0.99 lb @ .99 /lb = .98. So that's where the internet @ symbol came from. Somebody must have been reading their supermarket receipts. We used about 2/3 of the cooked asparagus in the pasta. About 66 cents worth. Or was it about 3/4 lb? This eyeball estimation stuff is not very reliable. The whole pound would have been good too. We reserved a few for the next dinner.

## ingredients

- 1 lb pasta, we used gnocchetti but orrecchiette or cavatelli would also work here
- 1/2 jar, about 3-4 oz, of arugula or any green colored pesto sauce  
[we exclude the sundried tomato variety, it's red]
- 1 large garlic clove, pressed

2 T olive oil  
2/3 - 1 lb fresh asparagus, ends cut and tossed  
some pasta or asparagus water, reserved, maybe a half cup  
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
1/2 parmigiano

## instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling. When ready, salt and dump in the pasta. We always eyeball the salt quantity too, and have no idea what amount is correct. We've probably been wrecking our pasta for years, but ignorance is bliss. Cook until al dente.
2. Meanwhile clean the asparagus and remove the hard ends. We did it in one cut with our large chef's knife. Cook until tender in an upright asparagus pot.
3. Put the oil and garlic in your 4 quart chef's pan and sauté briefly, then dump in the pesto and stir around a bit. Turn off the heat.
4. Cut the drained asparagus into 1/2 inch pieces and toss into the pesto.
5. Grate the parmigiano. Also eyeballed. We like lots so maybe we used more.
6. So when you drain the pasta, don't worry about excess pasta water and dump it into the chef's pan. Stir around a bit. Hit with the pasta water and spices. Mix it up.
7. Serve.

## notes

1. Ani's sister Nora is a shopping bargain ferret, always finding incredible clothes at TJ Maxx for a couple of bucks or even less. Many of which she donates to Ani. Ani did not get the bargain shopping gene.
2. Bob once found a yogurt sieve at TJ Maxx. For making labneh, a.k.a. yogurt cheese. It sat in the closet until bob gave it to Ani's mom, hoping someone would use it. She also makes great plain yogurt. But now it is just sitting in her closet.
3. [TJ Maxx](#) is a national chain of economically priced clothing and some home products. It may not be your first choice for shopping, but once you nose around, you can find some great buys.
4. Italy is divided into 20 [regions](#) (if I counted right) which are like states in the US, and each region is divided into provinces, like counties in the US, although any further comparison probably makes no sense. dr bob's adopted home is the province of Rome in the region of Lazio in central Italy where the line between North and South is drawn either above or below "the city where nobody works" (as the seat of the government and its bureaucracies) depending on who is drawing it. The two letter province abbreviations used to be on the license plates in Italy, but this practice was finally ended, partially due to regional tendencies to treat people differently based on their origin. Not a nice thing. Every country has its own problems, right?

## postscript

Well, Nora told a culinarily inclined neighbor about the TJ Maxx arugula pesto (turns out that "arugola" is a rarely used spelling) and she said she had tried an arugula pesto from [epicurious](#)

and loved it. We had tried to invent arugula pesto a few years ago by simply replacing the basil by arugula in normal pesto, but it was too strong (=bitter) for our taste. Among the various arugula pesto recipes we found at epicurious was a mix of 2 cups packed arugula to 1 cup packed basil leaves, with some lemon peel [Bon Appetit, June 2001, Flavors of the World]. We backed off and went 50-50 with the greens and the cheese and remembered our experience with the Bini family pesto in Sabaudia: add in the cheese at the pasta mixing stage, not before.

## ingredients for 1 lb pasta (tagliatelli or fettuccine)

### food processor stuff

- 1/2 c extra virgin olive oil
- 1 c packed arugula leaves, washed and spun dry
- 1 c packed basil leaves, washed and spun dry
- 1/3 c pine nuts
- 2-3 garlic cloves
- 1/2 t grated lemon peel
- 1/2 t salt
- freshly ground black pepper to taste

### food processor stuff

- 1/3 c parmigiano
- 1/3 c pecorino Romano
- 1 T pasta water, reserved

## instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when ready throw in the salt and a long pasta like tagliatelli or fettuccine, although this would also work with our pesto favorite target: fusilli. Cook al dente.
2. Meanwhile prepare the greens.
3. Food process the food processor stuff.
4. Grate the cheese.
5. When the pasta is ready, drain and combine first with the pesto sauce, then incorporate the cheese and if necessary a tablespoon or so of pasta water.
6. Serve.

## notes

1. This fresh pesto business is so easy. A little more work than opening a jar, but at least you know for sure what's in the mix.
2. This time we snapped a [photo](#).
3. bob ate two big helpings plus some arugula salad with the arugula that we held back on: served plain with olive oil and shaved parmigiano, ani's idea from memories of Italy. The first plate of pasta was really good but by the second plate, the extra garlic bob had thrown in (4-5 cloves altogether) was heating up bob's internal food processor—i.e., stomach. Not having to watch how much you eat can sometimes take its toll. ani also was impressed by how tasty it was but watched her serving size and did not go back for more. Smart lady.

(This time.)

*tjmxpsta.htm: 17-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# chocolate glazed frozen mocha cake

The full page photo looked very inviting. The recipe very long. The reader feedback on-line seemed to indicate possible trouble in execution—but worth every bit of hassle was the universal conclusion. Indeed this is a three stage, multi-day, labor intensive project with required time delays between and during the stages. However, nothing that a rank amateur with an upbeat attitude can't handle. dr bob rises to the challenge for brother-in-law Paul's 45th birthday. Paul is also convinced by the photo. A promise is made for the birthday cake. Will it be kept? Only by resorting to inventive time management involving 6:10am kitchen activity.

The first weekday morning before heading off to work produces the thin chocolate cake layers so that the abbreviated evening that followed could handle the mousse production and sandwiching in time for the overnight freeze. Then a real early morning to do the melted chocolate two hour two stage application process before a 9am hair appointment and then work. (Academic flexibility in play here.)

The first stage is familiar from the many out-of-the-box cakes bob made as a kid. (Betty Crocker, Duncan Hines...life was simple.) The 30 plus year old 9 inch round aluminum pans come out of the closet for the first time in ... longer than we can remember. Parchment paper is a new twist that bob has recently adopted for all cheesecakes after decades of fighting with sticking crusts. Almost like the wax paper that wrapped decades of peanut butter and jelly or bologna and cheese white bread sandwiches that were synonymous with lunch in school or on the job with dad. But must be more sophisticated to rate a classy word like "parchment". Ani had bought the stuff for some recipe or other, and then some cheesecake recipe called for it and observing the results, the light bulb went off (= ahah!) and the practice became a dr bob standard. Quick release paper makes all the difference. You trace the bottom of the pan on the paper with a pen, then try to judge how much inside the line you have to cut with the scissors to take into account the thickness of the sides (not necessary for the removable spring-form pan case). With these delicately thin chocolate layer crusts, the parchment paper is essential, since it is very easy to crumble when removing from the pan otherwise. The original recipe called for buttering the pan before inserting the paper, but we decided using cooking spray was easier and more efficient. The paper sticks nicely onto the sprayed pan bottom, which is good since it wants to curl up from being tightly rolled up before use. While you are cutting the paper, find some stiff cardboard to cut circles in the same way to help in the removal process.

The second stage is familiar from the [bad egg tiramisu](#) zabaione (zabaglione). Same deal. Minor aggravation waiting for the temperature to reach the critical value. Whip up some cream. Whip up some egg whites. Combine. Sandwich. Followed by almost problematic plastic wrap packaging activity. Requiring a partner to help pull out long enough strips of wrap without it immediately catching on itself. That leaves the third stage. Not familiar. Working with quickly hardening melted chocolate application to the exterior of the cold cake. Even carries a more sophisticated name: ganache (guh-nosh' !). Contemplating the bare cake before glazing it, bob realizes the unconscious attraction: it's a super-sized cookie snack! The Italian name for a round chocolate-bit studded ice cream sandwich available almost everywhere prepackaged ice cream bars are sold in Italy. A dr bob favorite. After the chocolate layer goes on, another memory surfaces—the dreaded chocolate glazed marshmallow filled "[scooter pie](#)" that found its way into his lunch against his will all too frequently while underage. (From the product line of [Burry's](#)

[Best](#) cookies, no longer with us.) Fortunately the comparison is only superficial.

Scouting out the bittersweet/semisweet chocolate offerings in the local supermarket, economic considerations came into play. The convenient semisweet chips in 12 oz packages were cheaper than a single 4oz bittersweet bar. We decided on the classier bar for grating into the mousse, and chips for the cake and glaze, saving a few bucks. Not that we couldn't afford it, but somehow your childhood influences the rest of your life. Intellectually bittersweet would have made a richer glaze as a higher grade chocolate, but the final result was perfectly yummy anyway.

Then there was the light corn syrup. A forgotten staple in the closet with the bread maker supplies, long dormant. A nearly empty bottle of dark corn syrup emerges at glaze-making time, and a full tablespoon does not quite accumulate after a slow drip, but enough to call it close and move on. And what's the deal distinguishing between heavy cream and heavy whipping cream? We go for a 2 cup 1 pint package of heavy cream for the 1.5 cups needed, and then throw the extra half cup into the glaze together with the remaining 1/6 package of chocolate chips since neither one was looking very useful as a leftover ingredient. Didn't seem to make a difference with the glaze except that it never stiffened up enough to require reheating for the second application. Success in spite of the bad judgment.

For transport we discovered that our 11 inch spring-form pan clamped nicely around the Corelle plate on which we'd set the cake sitting on the inverted 9 inch spring-form pan bottom. Transport quickly if necessary and reinsert in the target destination freezer until immediately before serving as instructed below.

## ingredients

### cake

4 oz bittersweet/semisweet chocolate, chopped [2/3 c chips = 1/3 12oz package semisweet chips]  
2 T water  
3 large eggs, separated [recipe total: 8 eggs]  
touch of cream of tartar for egg white beating  
1/4 c sugar

### filling

5 large egg yolks  
1/4 c sugar  
1/4 c Kahlua coffee liqueur  
1 c chilled heavy (whipping cream)  
2 1/2 t instant espresso powder  
3 large egg whites  
touch of cream of tartar for egg white beating  
1/4 c sugar  
1/2 c finely chopped bittersweet/semisweet chocolate [about 1.5 oz from a 4 oz bittersweet bar, grated with a cheese grater]

### glaze

1/2 c whipping cream  
1/4 c Kahlua coffee liqueur

1 T light corn syrup  
6 oz bittersweet/semisweet chocolate, chopped [3/4 c chips = 1/2 12 oz package semisweet chips]

## instructions

1. **CAKE (2 hours).** Make sure you've got a rack moved to the middle of your oven, preheat to 375° F.
2. Trace out and cut parchment paper circles to fit into the 9 inch cake pans. Repeat for cardboard circles to help remove the cake layers after baking.
3. Spray the cake pans with cooking spray and apply the paper, curl side down, and flatten. The cooking spray acts like glue.
4. Combine the chocolate and water in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water and stir until smooth. Remove, transfer to a large bowl and cool 5 minutes.
5. Wisk the egg yolks into the chocolate.
6. Beat the egg whites in a medium dry bowl with dry beaters and a touch of cream of tartar until soft peaks form, then add the sugar 1 T at a time, beating until stiff and "glossy" (judgment call).
7. Gently fold 1/4 of the whites into the chocolate, then follow twice with the remaining two halves of what is left, doing the minimum folding to combine without deflating the batter.
8. Pour half the batter into each of the pans and bake until the cakes begin to pull away from the sides of the pan and a sharp metal object stabbed into them comes out clean, about 10 minutes.
9. Cool the cakes in the pans on a cake rack 1 hour, then put your cardboard circles into the pans and carefully invert, jiggling a bit to release the cakes and then lay down on the cardboard on the cake rack. Peel off the parchment paper and let cool completely.
10. **FILLING (1 hour).** Get out your 9 inch spring-form pan. With a partner, pull out enough plastic wrap to go across the bottom, come up the sides and then fold over across the cake, like  $9 + 3 + 3 + 10 = 25$  inches, twice. Make a centered cross over the bottom of the pan and then lift into the sides and lock.
11. Carefully put one of the two cakes into the pan. Set aside.
12. Grate your bittersweet chocolate onto a plate and set aside.
13. Beat together the egg yolks, 1/4 c sugar and Kahlua with an electric mixer in the top of a double boiler until mixed and then put it on the double boiler with preheated simmering water (make sure water does not touch bottom). Continue beating until this zabaione thickens and reaches 140° F and stays there for 3 minutes, about 9 minutes total.
14. Remove top from double boiler and continue to beat for 3 minutes until the mixture has cooled somewhat. Set aside.
15. Clean the beaters and chill them a few minutes together with the medium bowl in which you will then whip the cream and espresso powder together until firm peaks form. Do that. Set aside.
16. Clean the beaters and dry thoroughly, then beat the egg whites with a touch of cream of tartar in a medium bowl until soft peaks form. Gradually add the remaining 1/4 c sugar and beat until stiff and "glossy".
17. If your double boiler is anything like ours, the zabaione is in the smallest bowl, so gently dump it into the whipped cream bowl and fold together. Then fold in the egg whites gently. Finally dump in the grated chocolate and fold it in until uniformly distributed. The mousse is complete.

18. Pour it into the waiting cake layer in the spring-form pan and jiggle it around with the spatula until it is leveled off. Then top off with the second layer and fold the plastic over the top to enclose.
19. Insert the cake into the freezer and leave overnight.
20. **GLAZE (1.5 hours)**. Simmer everything but the chocolate in a small nonstick saucepan. Remove from heat.
21. Add the chocolate and whisk smooth. Put half in a small bowl and chill 10 minutes till it is slightly thickened.
22. Meanwhile get the cake out of the freezer, remove the spring-form pan side and the plastic wrap. Clean the springform pan bottom and place the cake on the inverted bottom on a plate (resting on a round heat protector to take up the slack if you have one). Working quickly with the cooled chocolate, pour half from the bowl onto the center of the cake and spread towards the edges and then over the sides. It will solidify rapidly. Try to make an even layer. Then put back into the freezer to set the glaze for about 1 hour.
23. Get the cake out again and repeat with the second half of the chocolate, which you can slightly warm if it is too stiff to work with.
24. Freeze again for at least 4 hours until serving.
25. **SERVE**. Cut with a long thin sharp knife, dipping into a tall glass of hot water and wiping between cuts. Pull the knife out the side to avoid messing up the glaze edge at the top. Be restrained in the size of the slices. This is not a light cake.

## notes

1. Bon Appetit, May 2003, frozen mocha cake with chocolate ganache glaze, p.114, from "The Pleasures of Cake" by Cindy Mushet. "Ganache" is a bit weird for us, so we dropped it. Probably a French word, which in 2003, is not very popular anyway in the USA. The coffee beans suggested for garnish were never even in the running to retain. Who wants to eat a whole coffee bean?
2. For once bob is ahead of his time. Maybe even the first food [blogger](#)? bob was "blogging" before there was a word for it last century. On-line diary writing. That's exactly what this lifetime cook"book" project has been since its move to the internet. Actually this makes twice—who hasn't heard of tiramisu among the restaurant frequenting American public? bob started his tiramisu (producing) career in 1981 before anyone stateside had a clue.
3. Oh, that's where the word "blog" comes from. Web log. Blog. Weblogging. Blogging. Got it. We're a bit slow.
4. [Illustrations](#) available. The original magazine shot is perfection, with a mirror smooth chocolate glaze. Ours is kind of frumpy, and developed a little white speckle from freezing condensation in the freezer. I guess that's why they are the professionals and we are not.

## jack's lemon mint zucchini long pasta

How does one arrive at a particular recipe in a particular book in one's [cooking library](#) on some particular day of the week? Often it is the result of a complex chain of circumstances, like most events in life. This time ani is struck by a sudden springtime cleaning urge to rid our kitchen cabinet storage area of some long overdue-for-use items. Two such items are discovered that can be fast-tracked to willing recipients at work, momentarily satisfying her quest. One many(too many!)-year-old special [chocolate cake mix](#) from a not so recent Philly food show, enticed by a free sample, and one [pumpkin bread mix](#) that most probably was a Christmas gift from bob's Vermont brother's family. The first needed zucchini, the second canned pumpkin, raisins and walnuts. bob offers to make a quick supermarket run. No, don't bother. bob insists, pulling himself away from the nightly [Entertainment Tonight](#), and sacrificing the follow-up [Access Hollywood](#). Only 10 minutes to the supermarket but [NPR](#) captures his attention. Keeping him in the car in the parking lot for the second half of a Terry Gross [Fresh Air](#) interview with the author of "[When Religion Becomes Evil](#)". Followed by a quick ingredient harvest and beeline home, arriving one hour after departure. "Where were you?"

So pumpkin bread gets chosen, done, taste tested. Yummy, even better spread with a little aging left over creme fraiche still lounging around in the fridge, no mold yet, must have been the pasteurization. Leaving the zucchini for another day. But bob bought extra for a healthy veggie dinner theme. Meanwhile an impulse buy from [Amazon.com](#) had arrived and had been getting some browsing action. One of those affinity suggestions—bob discovered used books were easier on the conscience as well as on the wallet and went for Mark Bittman's [How to Cook Everything](#), snapping up [Cook's Illustrated Italian Classics](#) collection and their [Cook's Illustrated The Best Recipe](#) when they flashed on the screen. Bulls eye. A [Cook's Illustrated](#) fan, these cookbook collections seemed like a great way for bob to catch up on all those issues he'd either missed or resisted while keeping his food literature habit under control. [Not to mention the [TV show](#) that had completely escaped his notice.]

The Italian one comes first. Jack Bishop is senior editor. A familiar name since his [Italian vegetarian cookbook](#) has been on our shelf for a few years eagerly awaiting use. Sure enough, the book's inside jacket mentions his Cook's Illustrated connection, unnoticed earlier. The Cook's Illustrated Italian is Italian cooking with a brain, in contrast with our bible from Marcella: Italian Cooking from the heart, both directed at Americans. bob checks out the tiramisu and finds pretty good food chatter in line with his own experience. Where is all this going you ask? What's the point?

Well, Jack's book is now implanted in bob's forward memory when the zucchini dinner theme needs a script the next day. The recipe jumps right up and says I'm the one. Do me. It calls for both mint and lemon—two of our favorite flavor enhancers. But ani's trying to watch the carb intake so the recipe gets tilted a bit towards more zucchini and less pasta, working with a half pound of spaghetti—no fettuccine on hand. Either will work here.

Jack spent some time in Italy a few years after bob's full year residence in Rome, and like bob, tended to eat vegetarian without being one. Unlike bob, Jack had an Italian grandmother. Not fair!

So we stretch a little and like what we've done. Check out his other stuff. We will surely be doing so.

## ingredients (low carb intake version)

1/2 lb spaghetti or fettuccine  
2 T olive oil  
3 cloves garlic, pressed  
3 small zucchini, cleaned and cross-swiped into matchstick sliced cross-sections  
in a hand food processor  
1 t lemon zest (about 1 lemon)  
2 T lemon juice, fresh squeezed  
1/4 c chopped fresh mint  
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
parmigiano and extra black pepper on each individual serving

## instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling. When boiling, salt and throw in the pasta and cook until al dente, then drain.
2. Meanwhile, prepare the zucchini. Zest the lemon. Squeeze the juice. Clean and chop the fresh mint. Press the garlic.
3. Saute the garlic in the olive oil briefly in a large nonstick chef's pan.
4. Throw in the lemon zest and zucchini and cook for about 10 minutes on medium heat until the zucchini softens up considerably, stirring occasionally.
5. Dump in the lemon juice, mint, salt and pepper. Mix it up. Cook a minute or two.
6. Cover and turn off the heat.
7. When the pasta is done and drained, dump it into the chef's pan and mix well with the pasta, trying to evenly distribute the zucchini sticks with the pasta. Add an optional 1/4 c parmigiano directly to the mixture.
8. Serve, freshly grating parmigiano and black pepper on each individual serving.

## notes

1. Slightly deformed from Jack Bishop's [The Complete Italian Vegetarian Cookbook : 350 Essential Recipes for Inspired Everyday Eating](#).
2. bob first had a lemon pasta sauce in some unsophisticated trattoria just north of Piazza del Popolo in Rome. Surprising what great stuff you can find in run of the mill places in Italy. And often reasonably priced. Wish that were possible here.
3. [Illustration](#) available.

# musa dagh green potato salad

No, this is not a [Dr Seuss recipe](#). No green potatoes. Green additives, yes. Parsley, mint, green pepper, green onion, with a few spices, bound together by healthy olive oil and lemon juice instead of mayonnaise, the usual glue of typical American potato salad. Apparently this is a variation of a Musa Dagh tradition, written up in a cookbook from [Anjar](#), all in Armenian of course. Not very helpful for the rest of us outsiders. This struck us as sort of like tabbouleh with the bulgur and tomato replaced by potato. It has a nice bite to it.

When potatoes turn greenish by themselves (from too much light exposure), it's bad news. Some chemical named solanine forms which is toxic if ingested in sufficient quantities. They never say how much is too much though. Better to just avoid the risk by keeping your potatoes in the dark. Like the elite try to do with the common people.

## ingredients

- 10 small new potatoes, cleaned, boiled and chopped
- 1/2 - 3/4 c chopped fresh parsley
- 4 small green onions, chopped
- 1/2 green pepper, chopped
- 2 T chopped fresh mint (or 1 t dried mint)
- 1/2 t cumin
- 1/2 t Middle Eastern red pepper powder
- 1/4 t Middle Eastern allspice
- 1/8 t black pepper
- 1/2 t salt
- 1 lemon, juice of (1.5 lemons?)
- 3 or more cloves garlic, pressed
- 2 T olive oil (2-3 T?)

## instructions

1. Clean the potatoes and boil them with a little salt. Then cool down with cold water and peel them, then chop them into roughly 1/2 inch cubes.
2. Meanwhile clean and chop the parsley, mint, green onions, and green pepper.
3. Juice the lemon. Press the garlic.
4. Combine everything with the spices and olive oil in a big bowl and mix until evenly distributed. You can adjust the ingredient amounts a bit to your liking.

## notes

1. This is really tasty and worth giving a try.
2. [Oops](#), is this a repeat?
3. [Illustration](#) available.

*mdgpsld.htm: 10-sep-2004 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# bulgur pilaf with chick peas

Back during bob's Stockholm period, he discovered vegetarian buffet restaurants and whole grain dense dishes that were really appealing and which made a lasting impression in his usually unreliable memory. Little did he know at the time that the only way he'd ever see similar stuff back home was by marrying into Middle Eastern cuisine. Lentil and chick pea bulgur pilafs are probably the two best representative bulgur pilaf dishes (that bob nearly always overeats at dinner at the in-laws), and as combinations of whole grains and legumes, are also extremely healthy, for reasons only true vegetarians can remember. (We're not.) There are lots of variations of bulgur pilaf in Armenian cooking, but these two are the staples of Isgouhi's kitchen, and this one apparently has evolved from the Anjarian variation of the dish.

After several conflicting versions of this recipe were transcribed into the spiral bound loose-leaf notebook bob keeps to record Isgouhi's best stuff, most dictated after the fact without witnessing the process (big mistake!), bob finally finds the occasion to do a recipe watch-through using the nice measuring spoon set he'd gotten her for this purpose much earlier, still unused. A consensus is reached.

## ingredients

### key ingredient

1 c bulgur

### saute stuff

3 T olive oil

1/2 c egg noodles

1 onion, chopped

### addins

1/2 t salt

1/4 t black pepper

1/4 t [Middle Eastern red pepper](#) (3 parts paprika to 1 part cayenne)

1/8 -1/4 t [Middle Eastern \(all\) spice mix](#) (just use regular allspice plus cumin)

1 15-16oz can (cooked) chick peas

2 c water

1/2 T tomato paste

### serving topping

chopped green onions

## instructions

1. Rinse the bulgur 3 or 4 times until the rinsing water comes clean.
2. Heat the oil. When hot add the broken egg noodles and sauté 1 to 2 minutes until browned.
3. Add the chopped onion. Sauté a few minutes until softened.
4. Add the bulgur and mix around for a minute like doing risotto.
5. Add the spices, the tomato paste already dissolved in the water, and the chick peas and simmer covered for about 30 minutes until the water is absorbed.
6. Serve with a sprinkling of finely chopped green onions over each serving for color and

taste contrast.

## notes

1. [Illustrations](#) available.
2. This can be expanded to include the vegetables you would need as a side dish to make a one pot meal but adding some or all of chopped tomatoes, potatoes, zucchini and green beans, in amounts and proportions that make you happy.

*blplfchp.htm: 17-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# spaghetti isgouhi

bob grew up with American spaghetti and meatballs, including experience with the stuff that came in a can. When he first arrived in Italy for his year-long visit as a twenty-something young man, he started in with his customary practice of cutting real spaghetti with a knife and fork to more easily shovel it in, but this was immediately corrected. [Thanks, [remo](#)!] This is simply not allowed over there. Returning stateside after a year of intensive indoctrination and a cooling off period in Munich, spaghetti eventually became "pasta" and bob grew up to become a pasta snob.

So when he first came face to face with Isgouhi's version of spaghetti with meat sauce (they call it macaroni in the Middle East) and bright green dried mint to sprinkle over it, he was justifiably skeptical. First it sort of looked like spaghetti from a can and second—cheese isn't green! (Except on the moon, perhaps.) How could they get the cheese mixed up with green glitter? (bob's unspoken reaction.) Well, not having voiced his reservations beforehand, bob didn't have to eat crow over this one when it turned out pretty darn good.

This is another regular meal bob always looks forward to at Chez Isgouhi. Eventually they stopped calling it macaroni at least.

## ingredients

- 1 lb spaghetti, broken in half to shorten length of noodles
- 1 lb ground beef (or lamb)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 t salt
- 1/2 t black pepper
- 1 t Middle Eastern spice mix (just use allspice)
- 1 t Middle Eastern red pepper (3 parts paprika to 1 part cayenne)
- 1 6oz can tomato paste
- 1–1 1/2 (tomato paste) cans water
- 1 heaping T red pepper paste
- optional 1/2 t oregano
- dried mint to sprinkle over each serving

## instructions

1. Prepare the spaghetti al dente, breaking it in half before tossing into the boiling salted water.
2. Meanwhile brown the meat in a large nonstick pan (that will accommodate the pasta later).
3. Add the onion and sauté until softened.
4. Add the spices and tomato and red pepper pastes and water, stir it up.
5. Cook a few minutes.
6. Drain the pasta and combine with the sauce.
7. Serve with dried mint sprinkled over each serving in place of the usual parmesan cheese.

## notes

1. Isgouhi. An unusual Armenian female name (to bob, not to Armenians). And bob's mother-in-law and direct pipeline into the motherload of Middle Eastern cuisine with an Armenian twist.
2. After doing this recipe, deja vu set in and bob discovered an earlier version the same year that had been forgotten to be included in the table of contents as 03-02: [meat-tomato-sauced spaghetti with mint](#), which has a completely different write-up. The result of not taking this business very seriously, no doubt.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.

*spgisghi.htm: 17-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# meat-tomato-sauced spaghetti with mint

The first time bob had spaghetti at the in-laws, they passed around this little teacup plate with green flakes on it. Everybody sprinkles some over their spaghetti with their thumb and adjacent two fingers, so bob follows suit. Welcome to the dried mint version of spaghetti. It turns out that when Isgouhi was a little girl back in Aleppo, Syria, her old uncle would come over for dinner and when they had spaghetti their way, he would ask for dried mint to put on top. This was new to them too, but they tried it and liked it and it became a family tradition. Who knows where the uncle got the idea. But we thank him for it.

As for how an Italian style spaghetti dish got to the post World War II Middle East in the first place is a more challenging question. But Aleppo had a reputation as a culinary hot spot, so probably they knew a good thing when they found it and adopted it straightaway.

## ingredients

- 1 lb spaghetti
- 1 lb ground beef (or lamb)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 t salt
- 1/2 t black pepper
- 1 t allspice\*
- 1 t Middle Eastern red pepper
- 1 6oz can tomato paste
- 1 - 1 1/2 can water
- 1 heaping T red pepper paste
- 1/2 t oregano (optional)

## instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when boiling, add the spaghetti and usual amount of salt (we just dump in some without really ever knowing what we are doing) and cook until al dente.
2. Meanwhile brown the ground meat and when nearly done, add the chopped onion and sauté until softened.
3. Then add the spices, red pepper paste, and the tomato paste first mixed with the water and continue cooking until heated through.
4. Combine the sauce and drained pasta well, coating each spaghetti strand. There should not be "extra sauce" not bound to the spaghetti. If there is, something went wrong. This is a really spare coating, as it should be.
5. Serve with dried mint sprinkled on each portion instead of the usual parmigiano cheese treatment.

## notes

1. Until this point allspice as listed in all recipes originating from Isgouhi is really a "Middle Eastern spice mix" that includes allspice, nutmeg, cardamom and a few others. This is transported back from Lebanon to us by hand but can also be found in Middle Eastern food stores and [on the web](#). Or just pretend that it is ordinary allspice.

*spgtimnt.htm: 6-jan-2003 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

## more arugula pasta

Arugula. In Rome they call it rughetta (UK translation: rocket) and sometimes you see it called rucola. The Roman stuff has jagged edged leaves compared to the rounded American leaves but the flavor is approximately the same. And in the past few years it has become commonplace in American supermarkets, coincidentally about the same time frame in which it appeared on our radar screens while dining in Rome. Or should we say lunching in Rome.

[Marisa](#) at the Bar delle Scienze got bob's attention with this magic ingredient and has since remembered that it is his favorite at the little lunch bar outside the first [University of Rome](#) not far from the [central train station](#). In Italy a "bar" has alcohol, but it is primarily a coffee/pastry/lunch food stop. Marisa's (the mom and boss) family owned place expands on the concept at lunch time to offer some "home cooked" to order pasta dishes in addition to the many side dishes (several types of cooked greens, pasta salads, vegetables, etc) and the usual display of panini of various sorts. Having also been renovated with air conditioning, it is a comfortable place to do lunch in those hot summer months bob passes in Rome as a [connected relativist](#), although increasingly shorter visits and the long hike from the other side of the Policlinico (CNR Matematica Applicata) where he often finds himself at lunch time has reduced the frequency of his Marisa kitchen experiences.

This recipe was read in the food section of the newspaper in the morning (Rush-Hour Gourmet by Renne Schettler of the Washington Post), and actually tried out that evening, in sharp contrast with the 99 percent of newspaper clippings that only get saved and not acted upon. Presented as a prototype for a summery pasta dish, adapted from a similar recipe in *Simple Meals* put together by the editors of Organic Style magazine (Rodale, 2003). We had just gotten a bag of baby arugula the day before and had already some experience with using ricotta salata as a pasta cheese that seemed right for this occasion, so that was acquired in the afternoon with some fresh pancetta (so we wouldn't have to unthaw the frozen slice in the freezer). Since bob is trying to control his bad influence on ms\_ani's calorie intake this summer, the 12 oz package of cheap but seemingly elegant Trader Joe's tri-colored farfalle (butterfly) pasta seemed like a good downsizing measure. The result only has lemon as a subtle flavor so it seemed reasonable to promote the clearly present ricotta salata to the named co-ingredient, giving the dish its kick and nicely complimenting the arugula. Another happy ending.

## ingredients

### their name

**pasta with asparagus  
and lemon**

### what they said

1 lb penne or other tube-shaped pasta

1 large bunch asparagus or zucchini  
or shelled peas or a few handfuls of

### our name

**pasta with arugula and  
ricotta salata**

### what we did

12oz = 3/4 lb tri-colored farfalle

a few handfuls of coarsely chopped  
baby arugula

freshly torn arugula, spinach or basil leaves

1 T extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 c finely chopped pancetta (optional)

1/2 c chopped yellow onion

1 T finely chopped garlic

freshly ground black pepper

zest of 1 lemon

juice of 1/2 lemon

1/2 to 1 c ricotta or grated Pecorino cheese

1 T extra-virgin olive oil (the only kind we use)

1/3 c almost finely chopped pancetta

1 yellow onion, chopped

2 large garlic cloves, pressed

freshly ground black pepper

zest of 1 lemon

juice of 1/2 lemon

1/4 lb ricotta salata, grated coarsely

## instructions

1. Do the boiling salted pasta water thing and cook the pasta al dente.
2. Meanwhile prep the arugula, onion, garlic and pancetta, and lemon stuff so it is all ready when needed and coarsely grate the cheese when you have a free moment later on.
3. Heat the oil in a large chef's pan (or whatever pot that will accommodate the pasta as well when ready) and cook the pancetta until softened, a few minutes. Remove to a paper towel covered plate.
4. Now do the onions in the same pot until softened, and then briefly the added garlic so it does not brown. Season with the black pepper (no salt is needed since the ricotta salata does that job). This is where you could also do the chopped asparagus until just crisp but still green instead of the arugula. Turn off the heat if the pasta is not yet ready.
5. Drain the pasta reserving a cup of the pasta water and add the pasta and a half cup or so of the pasta water and the lemon stuff and pancetta to the sauce pot and toss to combine over low heat or no heat, depending on your mood.
6. Finally toss in the torn/chopped arugula and cheese and mix it up until the cheese begins to melt slightly and the ingredients are evenly distributed.
7. Serve immediately.

## notes

1. Of course "American" should refer to the entire continent, of which the USA is only a small fraction of the total land mass, but cleverly there is no adjective for United States in English, so we go around appropriating the whole deal all the time. Kind of like we do in many other ways on the world scene. Forgive me for continuing this practice.
2. Bar delle Scienze = Bar of the Sciences, since it is on the corner across the street from the national headquarters of Italy's [CNR](#) = Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, as well as a stone's throw from the university science buildings on the other side of Piazzale Aldo Moro, formerly Piazzale delle Scienze before the assassination of a [famous Italian politician](#) led to its renaming. At the corner of via dei Liburni (no. 28) and via dei Ramni. Ask for Marisa and tell her dr bob sent you.

3. Marisa had already inspired us to fake another [arugula pasta dish with zucchini](#) the summer before but we forgot to give her credit.
4. [Illustration](#) available.

## the precursor: pasta with arugula and ricotta

Before leaving for our first visit to [Rio](#) (made possible by a relativity conference), followed by our second visit to Buenos Aires (where scattered Armenia relatives live, first visit made possible by a relativity conference), we had tried a recipe that was written down on a bank machine receipt from a [Crate and Barrel](#) displayed cookbook *Fast and Fresh: Quick Recipes for Busy Lives* by Louise Pickford that caught our eye because of the arugula pasta recipe which we promptly tried out a few days later. We used whole wheat penne (more healthy perhaps but we threw in the whole 1 lb package) and a plastic container of ricotta (no time to get just what we needed of the fresh stuff at Carlino's), half of which lived on in the fridge partway through our 12 day trip but died before our return. We managed to finish off the pasta before leaving. Good. We enjoyed our trip too.

## ingredients

12 oz = 3/4 lb penne  
1/3 c olive oil  
1 c pine nuts  
4 oz arugula, chopped  
2 T fresh basil, chopped  
2 T fresh parsley, chopped  
8 oz = 1 c ricotta  
4 oz parmigiano (half in, half per serving later)  
1/4 c reserved pasta water  
black pepper to taste

## instructions

1. Cook the pasta al dente.
2. Meanwhile sauté the pine nuts in olive oil in a large pot that will accommodate the pasta later on. Turn off the heat before overly browning the pine nuts.
3. Do the chopping and grating prep work.
4. When the pasta is done, drain and toss together with the remaining ingredients in the sauce pot until evenly distributed.
5. Serve immediately with freshly grated parmigiano and optional extra black pepper.

# pistachio banana bread surprise

Pistachios are the nut of choice in the Middle East, like [hazelnuts](#) in Italy and walnuts in the USA, so when the Cooking Light cover photo of a delicious looking banana bread arrived and we immediately turned to the accompanying 7 recipe article, the pistachio variation stood out immediately. Not only does ani munch on these nuts around the house, perhaps driven by a childhood association from growing up in Lebanon, but the ice cream flavor seems to be her favorite. Pistachios are perhaps best known for the various baklavas of the region, where they often provide the meaty filling. So we did one up to try it out and even the guys at work, used to all the variations that we could find of ready-to-bake chocolate chip cookies brought in frequently by ms\_ani, seemed to like it. Then when a getting-to-know-each-other first family dinner with a Turkish university colleague arrived with a portable dessert request, cheesecake bob, always trying to think up something new and different, gambled on a variation of the [carrot cake cheesecake](#), with more banana bread hiding the surprise cheesecake interior this time, based on the pistachio-cardamom flavoring of the banana bread.

We modified the bad carbohydrate content of the bread/cake by substituting half of the white flour by white whole wheat, compensating slightly by using better-for-bread white flour on the other half naively thinking that might help it rise a bit better than ordinary flour, and jacking up the baking soda a bit (an extra 1/2 t). Then we used some unrefined cane sugar in the bread component where it would not show. Okay, not very helpful in a diet-busting dessert, but small changes are better than none. We had bad experiences with reduced fat cream cheese so we left that alone.

## ingredients

### dry stuff

- 1 c better-for-bread or all-purpose flour
- 1 c white whole wheat flour (or all-purpose flour)
- 1 1/4 t
- 1.2 t salt

### wet stuff

- 1 1/2 c mashed ripe bananas (about 3)
- 1/2 c "[sugar in the raw](#)" cane sugar or the usual white stuff
- 1/2 c packed brown sugar
- 1/4 c = 1/2 stick = 4 T = 2 oz butter, softened
- 1/3 – 1/2 c reduced fat sour cream or the real stuff
- 1/2 t ground cardamom

### misc stuff

- 2/3 c coarsely chopped pistachios
- cooling spray

### surprise stuff (cheesecake filling!)

- 2 8 oz packages = 1 lb cream cheese
- 1/2 – 2/3 c sour cream
- 1/2 c white sugar
- 2 eggs

1/2 t cardamom  
1/4 c finely ground pistachio crumbs  
1/8 t = pinch of salt

## instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F.
2. Wisk all the dry stuff together in a large bowl. Set aside.
3. Put all the wet stuff in a blender (peel those bananas!) and blend smooth. Easy, eh? Set aside.
4. Blend together the cream cheese, sour cream and sugar in a medium bowl with electric beaters.
5. Beat in the cardamom, salt and pistachio crumbs.
6. Beat in the eggs one at a time until just incorporated. Set aside.
7. Dump the wet stuff into the dry stuff and blend with the electric beaters until well mixed.
8. Beat in the pistachios.
9. Cut out a parchment paper circle traced from the bottom of a 9 in spring-form pan bottom and place in the bottom of the assembled pan. Spray the sides and bottom with cooking spray.
10. Pour half the banana bread batter into the spring-form pan and even out. Then go around the side pushing some batter against the side with a rubber spatula to form a well for the cheesecake batter.
11. Pour the cheesecake batter into the center and even it out, trying to keep it a bit away from the side of the pan.
12. Go around the pan dropping a spatula glob at a time against the side to wall in the cheesecake batter.
13. "Lay" the rest of the banana bread batter down by stretching it out as you dump spatula globs over the cheesecake batter trying to cover it as best possible.
14. Smooth out the top with the spatula trying not to let the cheesecake batter escape to the surface.
15. Bake for 1 hour.
16. Give it the old cake test with a sharp instrument stuck in the middle. If it comes out clean its done, otherwise keep baking and testing. We used a shish-kebab skewer and it came out clean the first time.
17. When done, remove and let cool completely.
18. Place in the refrigerator.
19. When ready to serve, or transport to a serving destination, remove from the fridge and take a thin sharp knife to ease around the side of the cake to free it from the cheesecake pan side. Remove the side and clean. Put back in place if transporting to another destination.
20. Remove the side at the serving destination. Place on a nice serving dish. Cut small wedges. Enjoy. Make a wish for peace in the Middle East.

## notes

1. This procedure can be reverted to the original banana bread by stopping at the surprise stuff and just using a standard 8x4 or 9x5 in bread loaf baking pan. "Cardamom banana bread with pistachios" from *Banana Appeal* by Jean Patterson, [Cooking Light](#), September,

2003, p.158.

2. Our bad carbohydrate awareness index was recently raised by exposure to a news-entertainment piece on the [South Beach Diet](#), whose author seemed to actually make sense about changing the way we eat rather than just trying another fad.
3. The white whole wheat flour had been sitting in a Rubbermaid container for several years, a relict of our bread machine baking days. Why is there so much bad carbohydrate bread around us here in the US?
4. The Greeks are out of the pistachio zone: they use walnuts in their version of baklava. Cardamom ([hale](#)) is another common Middle East ingredient, often [added to](#) Lebanese coffee and throughout the Middle East.
5. [Illustrations](#). The target audience seemed to approve.

*pbbsrprz.htm: 18-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# susannah's eggplant stew improv (with shrimp, chicken or tofu)

The occasion was a big family cookout on the new Home Depot designed and brother-in-law executed big high-rise back deck. This brilliant home improvement made every day seem like an island vacation since it facilitated the pleasant experience of the natural backyard breezes up at the second floor level (really the first floor but the house is elevated for some reason). Of course shish-kebob and grilled chicken were the headline food lineup, but apart from salad some sides were needed to round out the meal. Susannah had some fresh shrimp and an eggplant on hand so the question was how to whip up something tasty with these two star ingredients. Her result was terrific, and even the neighbor got addicted with the leftovers later that night. Repeatedly made for many eager recipients. Except Susannah. Who won't eat eggplant. How she eyeballs all the spice measurements without even tasting it is a mystery. Each time bob tries it, the flavor is better than the previous time. But when we tried it at home, an impatient weekday night, we didn't simmer it long enough and the eggplant was still too chewy. Don't rush this one to reach its delicious potential. Works also with chopped up grilled chicken, or for vegetarians, tofu.

## ingredients

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 large eggplant, peeled and cubed small (3/8–1/2 in?)
- 1 t salt
- 6 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 15 oz can peeled tomatoes
- 2/3–3/4 same can water
- 1–2 T lemon juice
- 1/2 t pepper
- 1/2 t [Middle Eastern red pepper](#) or a hit of cayenne to taste
- 2 lb fresh or precooked shrimp, or some adequate amount of small cubed grilled or fresh chicken breast, or tofu

## instructions

1. Do the eggplant, onion and garlic prep work.
2. Sauté the onion in olive oil until softened.
3. Add the eggplant and salt and soften up the eggplant while browning the exterior a bit.
4. Put in the garlic and briefly cook without burning it, tossing it around until it releases a bit of flavor.
5. Add the tomatoes, water and spices and simmer for about 30 minutes, no less.
6. Towards the end add in the shrimp and cook till they turn pink and are done. If using precooked shrimp, even less time is required to just heat them through.
7. If using grilled chicken they can be added near the end to be warmed up to the dish temp.
8. If using fresh chicken or tofu, it can be sautéed with the eggplant.

## notes

1. The tricky part is the hot red pepper spice level. These measurements are just guesses, so some experimenting for personal taste variation is required. But it needs just the right kick without being overly spicy so don't wimp out here or go overboard.

*egpltstw.htm: 18-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# risotto post paella

Risotto is a great recipe category because its basic approach accommodates an infinite number of variations, sort of like paella in Spain where everybody seems to have their own favorite version of the internationally famous dish. In the wake of a recent reawakening (oops, wake wake, poor style) of our limited paella making experience (we've got the pan!), several convenient leftover vegetables were available while saffron was still on our minds. (We'd used too little in our getting reacquainted experiment.) So it seemed natural to create something less ambitious as a risotto for two, which also has a well known affiliation with saffron (alla milanese).

It was the usual story. Weekday after work. No animal protein on hand, vegetables and carbs will have to do. Half a bunch of asparagus is the starting ingredient suggesting the risotto route. And the fresh peas from a local farmer's market. Both from our [paella experiment](#). Then a lonely medium sized zucchini (we'd used tiny 4 inch baby zucchini with attached flowers in the paella). A few leftover big white mushrooms. And a great [30 minute meal](#) is the outcome.

## ingredients

### base

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 c arborio rice

### flavor add-ins

- 1 zucchini (small to medium)
- 2 big white mushrooms, sliced
- 1/2 lb thin asparagus, cut in thirds
- 1/2 c fresh peas
- 1 t veggie broth paste
- 2 12.5g packages saffron
- salt and pepper to taste

### finishers

- 1/2 c parmigiano
- 2 T fresh parsley, chopped

### serving

- freshly ground black pepper and parmigiano on each serving

## instructions

1. Start 4 cups of water boiling in a teapot.
2. Do the onion, zucchini, mushroom, and asparagus prep work.
3. Sauté the onion a bit and then add in the mushrooms and zucchini and continue until they are also softened.
4. Stir in the rice and cook a minute, mixing it up. A hit of white wine is an option here, evaporate it off another minute.
5. Throw in the first 3/4 c or so of boiling water (guess), stir in the veggie broth paste, saffron, salt and pepper and continue doing the risotto thing, adding additional boiling

water as needed in hits of about a half cup.

6. Ten minutes after starting the rice add in the remaining veggies and continue for about another 8 minutes (don't time it), testing the grains of rice for al dente but not chewy consistency, making sure the rice is not too dry but still flowing (more so than less since the cheese hit and subsequent delay until serving will tighten it up a bit).
7. When declared ready, turn off the heat and mix in the cheese and parsley. Serve.

## notes

1. We are big fans of the Food Network's [Rachel Ray](#) who has two cooking shows by the numbers: 30 Minute Meals and Forty Dollars a Day.
2. [Illustration](#) available. Looks pretty good. Tasted that way too.

*rstppla.htm: 18-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# risotto with baby bellas and greens, lower carbs

I guess arborio rice is a bad carb, seeing as how it's been polished to a white rice state. So trying to aim lower with bad carb intake means reducing the percent of arborio rice compared to the veggie flavor ingredients in risotto. This translates into decreasing the usual cup of rice by a third and increasing the veggies.

The inspiration for this dish came from a newspaper recipe calling for spinach only and blue cheese (isn't that what Roquefort is?). Feta was as close as we could get. The crumbled feta from Trader Joe's seems to last forever in the fridge. Hmm. We are not questioning this miracle—just periodically checking for mold each time it comes out for another use. And we had a leftover zucchini on hand, plus some baby bellas ([portabello/a](#) mushrooms) that we were using for salads a few at a time. The salads have been given much higher priority lately. On the other hand bob is losing weight so once this recipe reaches completion, he goes for thirds finishing up [the pot](#). The extra feta applied directly onto the second and third servings made it especially delicious. Even without the extra hit of fat, it is quite tasty.

## ingredients

### starters

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium zucchini, julienned
- 2/3 c arborio rice
- 1 large garlic clove, pressed
- 1 heaping t veggie broth paste, or equivalent

### funghi

- 1 T butter
- 3 medium baby bellas

### addins

- 1 6oz bag prewashed baby spinach

### finishers

- 1/4 c parmigiano
- 1/4 c crumbled feta cheese
- freshly ground black pepper to taste

### serving option

- more feta sprinkled on top

## instructions

1. Yet another risotto, eh? You know the drill. By now, autopilot.
2. Start the teapot with a couple cups of water boiling.
3. Peel and chop the onion. We use our plastic mandoline substitute.
4. Clean and julienne the zucchini. Same deal.

5. Sauté the onion in olive oil in a big flat deep nonstick pan.
6. Throw in the zucchini after a few minutes. Keep going, say 8 minutes.
7. Meanwhile sauté the mushrooms in butter in another small nonstick pan. About 5 minutes. Then turn off heat.
8. Stir in the rice and let cook a minute. Then add 2/3 cup of boiling water and press in the garlic and incorporate the veggie paste. Stir around. Dump in the mushrooms. Stir around. Etc.
9. Simmer, adding in a half cup boiling water or so when needed, until al dente. Maybe 20 minutes or less. Less.
10. Meanwhile toss in the baby spinach leaves a handful at a time, stirring into the rice mixture until they wilt. Continue until all the spinach joins the party.
11. When done, remove from the heat and stir in the cheese, grate in some pepper.
12. Serve, with optional additional feta on top of each serving, or at least on the diet partner's serving.

## notes

1. Maybe stopping at seconds would have been better, but the full impact of thirds did not fully materialize till a few hours later. Next time, moderation. Remember that diet partners.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

*rslowcrb.htm: 18-aug-2006 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]*

# store sample sausage pesto penne

Stores give away free samples with good reason. The customer likes the sample. The customer may buy the sample product. A product that otherwise might never have gotten any consideration. If the product is food, and tastes pretty good, this is food seduction in the name of marketing. It must be cost effective or Costco wouldn't be constantly trying to tempt us as we fight our way through the hunter/gathering hordes of discount shoppers to make our way to the checkout lines. Normally we are not big sausage people, but for some reason bob went for the sausage sample. It had a heavy dose of internal garlic, and was made from chicken and turkey, so no red meat involved. The garlic hit hooked the deal. bob convinced ani to give it a try and picked up a package. Naturally it was a too big for two people—Costco usually markets BIG—so we gave half of the sausages away to the in-laws and split the remaining half again in half, one part to use, the other to freeze for another day.

Then came the question of what to do with the sausages to work them into a well balanced meal. Pasta would be the natural answer, but ani is trying to lose a few pounds by aiming for low bad carb intake. Luckily Trader Joe's has come to the rescue with low carb penne pasta—80% less carbs than the usual stuff, plus claims about fiber and protein (it's soy based) and imported from Italy too. So we go for the combo, throwing in some Trader Joe veggie pesto for a quick sauce. Some purists would argue that non-basil-based pesto is not pesto. We are not purists.

## ingredients

- 2 T olive oil
- 4 links sausage (about 14oz), cut in thin slices crosswise
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- 1 [6.7oz = 190g] jar veggie pesto
- 12 oz penne pasta
- 2 T fresh parsley, chopped
- freshly ground black pepper to taste
- freshly ground parmigiano on each serving.

## instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and then salt and dump in the pasta and cook until al dente. Meanwhile...
2. Cut up the sausages and ready the garlic. A little extra, why not.
3. Sauté the sausage in the olive oil, browning it and cooking through a bit with the extra garlic added.
4. Dump in the veggie pesto sauce and mix it up. Heat through.
5. Get the fresh parsley ready.
6. When the pasta is done, drain it and combine in the sauce pot. Mix in the parsley and black pepper.
7. Serve with some parmigiano grated over each portion.

## notes

1. "[Chef Bruce Aidells](#)" Smoked Turkey and Chicken Sausage with Sundried Tomatoes and Basil (that must be where the pesto came to mind), item #80378: fully cooked, just grill or bake or sauté 8-10 minutes over medium heat (don't overcook), courtesy of [Costco](#), or some suitable equivalent product. 3 lb package with 14 links in the Costco size. But apparently also comes in normal sizes.
2. [Trader Giotto's](#) Pesto Verdure, mixed vegetable pesto, product of Italy.
3. Bella Vita Low Carb Penne Rigate Pasta, product of Italy imported by Bella Vita Foods: defatted soy flour, pasteurized egg white, rice flour, wheat gluten, isolated soy proteins. 80% less carbs, all natural high fiber, high protein, GMO free (?), cholesterol free. Best if used by July 07 2006! Great, a 3 year shelf life.
4. Very [photogenic](#).

# brussels sprouts with hazelnuts

Brussels sprouts? Why does it always sound like brussel sprouts? Must be a conversational word contraction like the French are always doing. Which is one of the languages they speak in Brussels (Bruxelles). Where we discovered [Le Pain Quotidien](#), a delightful Belgian bakery/deli chain that also has stores in NYC. And which is actually responsible for developing this veggie [about the same time](#) as the US Constitution arrived on the scene, which by the way has been taking a real beating lately as the third millennium gets going.

These are actually cabbages (Chou de Bruxelles in French), which is a food family not high on bob's list of favorites. Brussels sprouts we like though. This is a veggie which has not gotten its proper level of respect in the American kitchen, and undeservedly so since these little green balls are packed with nutrients. They just need a little something to accent their flavor. We'd experimented with this enhancement before, but not until this recipe find from a supermarket checkout line food mag impulse buy did we hit the right combination, and without inflicting any dead animal essence on the dish as almost happened from the competing recipe using prosciutto bits which just happened to be waiting for some imaginative end in our refrigerator from one of our recent trips to the newly opened Trader Joe's on the Main Line. Bob considered merging the two recipes but was emphatically overruled by the guest cook Nora up from Baltimore for Thanksgiving week. Okay, we deferred. Just hazelnuts, which is our favorite cooking nut.

We lowered the bad fats a bit by shifting the butter-to-oil ratio from 4/1 to 2/3 and if you trust [Mario Batali](#) who says he never uses butter in cooking since "olive oil rules", then you can go all the way to 0/5. And the original recipe called for roughly chopped pecans but admitted that hazelnuts were a good substitution that had been used by the author, so hazelnuts it was. Crumbed though. A little bit of food anarchy we could not suppress.

Nora was right of course. This was terrific. We did it again on Thanksgiving Day. A great side with the [mushroom stuffing](#). We will probably be doing this frequently. Who needs a holiday to eat well?

## ingredients

- 1/4 cup recipe ready hazelnuts, crumbed
- 1 1/2 lbs brussels sprouts, trimmed
- 2 T butter
- 3 T olive oil
- 1 small to medium yellow onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and pressed
- freshly ground black pepper, salt to taste

## instructions

1. We got two 1 lb bags of brussels sprouts, that trimmed up to 1 1/2 lb after removing the outer leaves. Cut an "X" into the base with a knife to help cook the toughest part. Steam these until tender to retain nutrients instead of boiling in salted water like the food mag

said.

2. Remove from heat and when you can handle them, slice them all in half lengthwise.
3. Meanwhile heat the butter and oil together and sauté the onion, stirring often, until softened and golden, about 5 minutes.
4. Press in the garlic, toss around a bit being sure not to burn this delicate addition, then dump in the brussels sprouts and the hazelnut crumbs, and stir around, continuing to cook them another 5 minutes or so.
5. Season with salt and pepper.

## notes

1. [Saveur](#) Cooks, Winter 2003, p.59: sauteed brussels sprouts with pecans.
2. The unmade competing recipe was [Cooking Light](#), December 2003, brussels sprouts with prosciutto by Joanne Weir, p.120.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.

*brslspts.htm: 18-aug-2006 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]*

# brussels sprouts with hazelnuts

Brussels sprouts? Why does it always sound like brussel sprouts? Must be a conversational word contraction like the French are always doing. Which is one of the languages they speak in Brussels (Bruxelles). Where we discovered [Le Pain Quotidien](#), a delightful Belgian bakery/deli chain that also has stores in NYC. And which is actually responsible for developing this veggie [about the same time](#) as the US Constitution arrived on the scene, which by the way has been taking a real beating lately as the third millennium gets going.

These are actually cabbages (Chou de Bruxelles in French), which is a food family not high on bob's list of favorites. Brussels sprouts we like though. This is a veggie which has not gotten its proper level of respect in the American kitchen, and undeservedly so since these little green balls are packed with nutrients. They just need a little something to accent their flavor. We'd experimented with this enhancement before, but not until this recipe find from a supermarket checkout line food mag impulse buy did we hit the right combination, and without inflicting any dead animal essence on the dish as almost happened from the competing recipe using prosciutto bits which just happened to be waiting for some imaginative end in our refrigerator from one of our recent trips to the newly opened Trader Joe's on the Main Line. Bob considered merging the two recipes but was emphatically overruled by the guest cook Nora up from Baltimore for Thanksgiving week. Okay, we deferred. Just hazelnuts, which is our favorite cooking nut.

We lowered the bad fats a bit by shifting the butter-to-oil ratio from 4/1 to 2/3 and if you trust [Mario Batali](#) who says he never uses butter in cooking since "olive oil rules", then you can go all the way to 0/5. And the original recipe called for roughly chopped pecans but admitted that hazelnuts were a good substitution that had been used by the author, so hazelnuts it was. Crumbed though. A little bit of food anarchy we could not suppress.

Nora was right of course. This was terrific. We did it again on Thanksgiving Day. A great side with the [mushroom stuffing](#). We will probably be doing this frequently. Who needs a holiday to eat well?

## ingredients

- 1/4 cup recipe ready hazelnuts, crumbed
- 1 1/2 lbs brussels sprouts, trimmed
- 2 T butter
- 3 T olive oil
- 1 small to medium yellow onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and pressed
- freshly ground black pepper, salt to taste

## instructions

1. We got two 1 lb bags of brussels sprouts, that trimmed up to 1 1/2 lb after removing the outer leaves. Cut an "X" into the base with a knife to help cook the toughest part. Steam these until tender to retain nutrients instead of boiling in salted water like the food mag

said.

2. Remove from heat and when you can handle them, slice them all in half lengthwise.
3. Meanwhile heat the butter and oil together and sauté the onion, stirring often, until softened and golden, about 5 minutes.
4. Press in the garlic, toss around a bit being sure not to burn this delicate addition, then dump in the brussels sprouts and the hazelnut crumbs, and stir around, continuing to cook them another 5 minutes or so.
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## notes

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3. [Illustrations](#) available.

*brslspts.htm: 29-nov-2003 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

## [musa dagh](#) zucchini and potato stew

Stew usually has big chunks of large farm animals as the characterizing ingredient, plus some veggies and sauce. This one is a little different because the large farm animals are processed into America's favorite fast food format: hamburger meat. Ground beef. Recipe ready cow. No obvious carnivore clues to remind us false vegetarians of what we're really eating.

This recipe is from the Anjar St Paul's Orthodox Church Women's Association Cookbook (2001). Translated from the Armenian, executed and slightly improved upon by Isgouhi for the son-in-law who now always comes to dinner armed with his digital camera. Eater to be impressed. And add to his on-line food blog content. Stew is great winter comfort food. And we were suitably comforted.

### ingredients

#### farm animal starter

- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 T oil or cooking spray

#### veggie chunks

- 5 medium potatoes, cubed
- 2 medium zucchini, chopped

#### sauce stuff

- 4 plum tomatoes, chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1/2 T tomato paste
- 1/2 T red pepper paste
- 2 c water
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 1 t salt
- 1/4 t allspice (isgouhi add-in)
- 1/4 t red pepper (isgouhi add-in)

### instructions

1. Prep the veggies.
2. Brown the ground beef with the onions using oil or cooking spray in the bottom of a pressure cooker.
3. When the browned state is achieved, add the potatoes and zucchini and cook for another few minutes.
4. Dump in the sauce stuff and bring to a boil. Adjust spices.
5. Close the pressure cooker and bring to full steam. Cook 5 minutes.
6. Cool and open the cooker.
7. Cook opened for 1/2 hr to evaporate some water and thicken the sauce.

## notes

1. Serve with plain yogurt on the side. Isgouhi also makes really creamy homemade yogurt for us. The store-bought stuff can't compete with its flavor.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

*mdzpstw.htm: 18-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]*

# especial® chocolate chip cheesecake

Recently the dr bob team eagerly acquired a newly published cheesecake book with a high density of beautiful photos to add to our already enormous selection of such specialty recipe books. But when it came down to choosing something that resonated with that inner cheesecake alarm, no bells went off. Maybe we need some food psychotherapy to overcome our hidden cheesecake demons. Nahhh...

So this Christmas we looked inside our sugar addicted imagination to try a simple variation of our standard base that would bring on the satisfied customer response from those in our inner cheesecake circle. We'd gone from losing track of where they keep the Nabisco chocolate wafers in supermarket shelf strategy (no longer with the rest of the cookies, usually) to buying the Oreo cookie crumbs ready to use for chocolate cookie crumb crusts back to rediscovering the chocolate wafers when our supply ran low and the supermarket was out of stock and a helpful store employee said why not just get the wafers and crumb them. Because we are lazy? But without any alternative other than wasting time stalking the user friendly crumbs in a series of other stores, we bought into the logic. Of course we had to add in hazelnut crumbs to maintain our loyalty to our favorite cheesecake nut additive.

We've been interested in espresso and cappuccino cheesecake recipes, and have had major success with a real [labor intensive version](#) of the latter, but until this experiment, were not inspired by what we had read. Of course, only by trying can one really know, but with limited opportunities to try, the choice is critical. Having acquired a new upscale [Kahlua](#) product Especial®, this seemed to be the simple substitution we could make to our hazelnut starter recipe together with mini-chocolate chips and some artfully dribbled caramel sauce garnishing of the simple sour cream topping.

Since this effort had to supply a Christmas gift and a couple of dinner desserts, we went with a 6 package (=3 lb) cream cheese recipe, which is 50 percent more than the standard 4 package (=2 lb) recipe, and by eye split it among two 8 in pans and a 9.44 in (=24 cm) pan, using the extra crumbs for a low side crust, adequate since only about 4/10 the total went into the bigger target pan compared to maybe 3/10 apiece in the smaller ones, leading to a lower than standard height cake (about a 2.5 package recipe equivalent). Remember the motto "less is more", with rich desserts. We give the standard size recipe here and leave it to you how to distribute it or scale it up/down for the right portion for the right pan combination. Usually there are 4 eggs per standard recipe but by accident we only used 4 for the 50 percent scaled up batch, so maybe one less egg is okay at this batch size.

## ingredients

### 9 to 10 in bottom only crust

- 1/3 lb butter (3/4 stick)
- 1 c chocolate wafers, crumbed or Oreo cookie crumbs
- 1/2 c ground hazelnut crumbs
- 2 T sugar

### batter

2 lb cream cheese (4 8oz packages)  
1 1/2 c sugar  
pinch of salt  
4 T Especial (upgraded Kahlua) liqueur  
3 large eggs  
1 c mini chocolate chip crumbs

### topping

1.5 c sour cream  
1/4 c sugar  
1 t Tiramisu liqueur or some imaginative substitution  
artful dribbling of fat free caramel sauce from a squeeze bottle

## instructions

1. Trace out the bottom of the spring-form pan on parchment paper and cut just inside the line to make a circular pan bottom liner.
2. Crumb the skinless hazelnuts, and the wafers if necessary should Oreo crumbs not be available.
3. Melt the butter, mix together wafer/Oreo and hazelnut crumbs with sugar and butter, and press into the bottom of a 9 to 10 in spring-form pan. A half-batter recipe would lower the nutritional damage. Adjust if you split the recipe into two smaller pans.
4. Beat room temperature cream cheese and sugar together until soft. Then add the salt, the liqueur, and one egg at a time at minimum batter speed, followed by the chocolate chips.
5. Pour into crust and bake 55 minutes in a preheated 350° F oven. Top should be just slightly golden.
6. Remove for 10 minutes.
7. Mix sour cream, sugar, and your choice of appropriate liqueur or vanilla extract or nothing and spread over cheesecake, artfully dribbling it with caramel sauce just before returning it to the oven for 10 to 15 minutes. The quantity of sour cream mixture should be such that you can just coax it to within 1/2 in of the border without it wanting to flow further, leaving a bit of the golden cheesecake rim framing your streaked white topping.
8. Remove and chill overnight at least before serving.

## notes

1. This was the first time we used our new 5 qt [Kitchenaid](#) mixer that we had been lusting after for years but never thinking it appropriate to acquire. Until a big pre-Christmas sale at Bloomingdales brought down the price by 75 bucks, enough to convince us to take the plunge. What a dream. The cheesecake batter is so effortless to do this way and so creamily uniform.
2. You may have to use ordinary Kahlua coffee liqueur (or some competitor's offering) if this Especial upgrade turns out to be an abandoned test product. There is no longer any trace of it at their website, not a good sign.
3. Maybe we really should have named this a chocolate bit recipe since the chips are minis, but this is a pretty small point, no?
4. [Illustrations](#) available.
5. This one is a crowd pleaser.

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