

1999

pasta alla nora

[DeCecco](#) pasta packages always have a recipe on the back of the box. A few of them have found their way into the dr bob food files, but like most of the stuff there, never got used. Penne alla norma is one of them. An eggplant pasta sauce from Sicily. Who knows what "norma" means (certainly unrelated to "[Norma Jean](#)", for example)¹. Of course we do make eggplant pasta sauces but for some reason always improvise.

This time the new sister-in-law had made a really tasty eggplant side dish. Confirming her promise as a source of delicious new family food ideas. So the eggplant recently acquired with pasta in mind was recruited for this experiment the following night. We called her up for her ingredient lineup. It was simple. And it was good.

We used cavatelli because we were experiencing a glut from hoarding hand carried high quality Puglia pasta from Italy inspired by exaggerated US prices for the stuff (orecchiette and cavatelli). Gnocchi would have been an equally valid choice, and if we can trust [DeCecco](#)'s cardboard box recipe, penne as well.

ingredients

- 1 lb penne, cavatelli, gnocchi, whatever
- 1 large eggplant, skinned, cut into 1 cm cubes
- 2-3 T olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic (1 big one)
- 1 big can pelati (peeled Italian plum tomatoes)
- 1 T tomato paste stirred into pelati liquid
- allspice
- red pepper (not too much)
- black pepper
- salt
- 1/3 c freshly ground parmigiano

instructions

1. Get the pasta water boiling and cook the pasta al dente when the water is ready, with salt.
2. Prepare the eggplant.
3. In a large chef's pan if you have one, sauté the onion and garlic in olive oil until softened, then dump in the eggplant cubes and cook say 5 minutes.
4. Dump in the pelati and the tomato paste and the spices and cook for about 20 minutes or so. Check for spices.
5. Mix in the cooked drained pasta and parmigiano if your pan is big enough or vice versa if not.
6. Serve with some extra cheese on each serving.

notes

1. A few days later the last Book and the Cook Show of the 20th century added "[The Dictionary of Italian Food and Drink](#)" to the dr bob team cooking library, a prize that had been wanting for years. It seems that pasta alla norma may have been created to commemorate the Bellini opera Norma (1821). Who would have thought an answer to this question would come so soon?

pstanora.htm: 28-mar-1999 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

fennel fish (red snapper)

As social dining hosts the bob and ani show is gun-shy. We love to dine with people, especially in the relaxing atmosphere of a home, and we love to cook, but how to meet our own expectations of providing an elegant meal for the guests, when—let's face it—we're rank amateurs? As a result, we rarely put ourselves in the stress state of planning for an upcoming social dinner, but when we do, it always comes down to: what to do, what to do?

Fish is healthy. Red snapper we first met in an anniversary dinner in Aruba, and we liked it a lot. Since then we have seen this whole fish with its pinkish eyes looking at us from many fish counter displays, and our recipe antennas have had this subject on its hit list ever since. And since this was our year of the fennel, a match of the two was a high score in our main dish idea search. Which we left till right before the dinner with ani's former boss and his wife. Our starting point: Epicurious.com which immediately yielded a bunch of interesting fennel recipes, but after careful comparison shopping, the RED SNAPPER ROASTED WITH FENNEL AND BREADCRUMBS (the recipe titles are in caps there) from [Bon Appetit](http://BonAppetit) (March 1991) won the contest. (We're subscribers since November 1982 and still have almost every issue, including that one!) Thank God for the internet. How else could we find anything in our back issues, in spite of the many Post-it's marking interesting looking recipes in our food mags over the past decade.

So we gave it the old college try, and accompanied it by SAUTEED FENNEL, RADICCHIO, AND PINE NUTS (Gourmet, March 1995) and steamed asparagus and Armenian rice, with Sona's pudding for dessert. And without abandoning modesty altogether in this assessment, dr bob was completely surprised, even almost shocked, by how good this fennel fish turned out to be. WOW!

And it is so easy. Was it a dream? Why haven't we done it again in the few months since? What are we waiting for...? Alas, life is not logical, but a series of random events, etc. Let's not get too philosophical here. But YOU can try this the first chance you get. And if you have any taste at all, you won't regret giving it a shot. Trust us on this one.

ingredients

what they said:

2 bulbs fennel, chopped
 6 large shallots/green onions, chopped
 1/2 c parsley
 2 c fresh breadcrumbs
 1/4 c olive oil
 salt and pepper
 3.5-4 lbs whole red snapper
 1/4 c dry white wine
 olive oil

what we did:

1 1/2 bulbs fennel
 3 green onions
 1/4 c parsley
 1 c fresh breadcrumbs
 1/8 c olive oil
 salt and pepper
 2 lbs red snapper fillets
 1/4 c dry white wine
 olive oil

instructions

1. Pull off the tough outer layer of the fennel bulb if necessary, trim off the protruding stalks, cut off the hard bottom, and peel the layers apart, disassembling the bulb. Then food process it together with the cleaned green onions and parsley.
2. Transfer to a mixing bowl and add the breadcrumbs, salt and pepper to taste, and olive oil.
3. Spread half the fennel mixture on the bottom of a baking dish (we used an 11x14in glass dish) and sprinkle with wine.
4. Oil up the fish and salt and pepper it.
5. Lay out the fish over fennel mixture in the baking dish and pour the rest over the top. Our fillets just fit nicely in the allotted space. We patted down the fennel mixture on top of the fish to make it stick.
6. Bake at 450° for about 45 minutes.

notes

1. In the [original recipe](#) they used only a cup of the fennel, green onion, parsley mixture for the outside with the extra stuff, and put the rest inside the whole fish, after oil-salt-and-peppering inside and outside the fish.
2. Our version feeds 4. Two couples or whatever. Adjust for your needs.
3. Literally minutes after recording this recipe, browsing the then current Bon Appetit issue entirely on Provence (southwestern France), the trendy new name in food circles¹, remarkably several fennel fish combination recipes from the region were found (May 1999), including Red Snapper à la Niçoise with 4 fennel bulbs for 2 lbs of fillets! Looks like the dr bob cooking team was slightly ahead of the game on this one. [Coincidence, no doubt.]

¹The first restaurant dr bob ever took ms_ani to (before she was an academic ms_) even recently changed its name from Quissett to Provence. Pronounced sort of like "pro-**vonts**", not like "Providence, RI" with a few letters missing.

fenlfsh.htm: 18-apr-1999 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

junk mail sour cream coffee cake

As if we did not already have enough recipe pollution entering our home voluntarily with cooking mag subs, new cookbooks and newspaper food sections, even the unsolicited junk mail now comes with recipes. We love the [Williams-Sonoma](#) store down at the local (only the second largest mall in America but with the largest retail space as we speak in 1999) [King of Prussia mall](#) and often just browse through when we don't have a specific target purchase in mind. Somehow we got onto their mailing list, along with [Victoria's Secret](#) (which ms_ani actually uses to purchase casual and dress clothing—there is more to the catalog than underwear!), both of which inundate us with catalogs, although W-S is more restrained with only monthly (12) and seasonal (4) hits a year. Except when our little address peculiarities and list trading result in a streak of double hits: we have two last names and several variations of our street name which is too long for the allotted number of characters in certain mailing list software, BUT even notifying the distributor leads to a 6 to 8 week waiting period before they can alter the flow of their catalogs, so ...

Both of these catalogs make interesting browsing although with quite different hooks (food versus sex), but the W-S version has scattered many often interesting and possibly usable recipes throughout its pages, encouraging the reader to look at every page for fear of missing a really good one. (Clever marketing tool, eh?) Of course we go for it.

ms_ani spotted this sour cream coffee cake recipe. bob was a bit skeptical, but it tasted really good. One of the few pages of the many torn from these catalogs where we actually took action. Who knows what other treasures are hiding in our overflowing archives.

ingredients

dry group one

- 2 T sugar
- 3/4 c chopped walnuts
- 1 1/2 t ground cinnamon

dry group two

- 2 1/2 c cake flour
- 2 t baking powder
- 1/2 t baking soda
- 1/2 t salt

wet group

- 12 T = 1 1/2 sticks chilled unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 1/4 c sour cream
- 1 1/2 t vanilla extract

topping

- 3 T nonfat milk
- 1 1/2 c confectioner's sugar
- 1 c fresh raspberries

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350° F. Butter and flour rosette pan.¹
¹The rosette pan is a new product from Germany which is a flower shaped pan (8 small petal indentations in the side wall) with a removable bottom, pictured next to the recipe. Not having one, we just used a 9x5 pound cake pan.
2. Combine dry group one ingredients in a bowl.
3. Combine dry group two ingredients in another bowl, sift mixture two times and set aside.
4. In a third bowl, beat butter until creamy with electric mixer/beater.
5. Gradually add the wet group sugar, and beat on medium speed until light and smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl occasionally, say 5-6 minutes.
6. Add eggs one at a time and continue beating until mixture is thick, fluffy and doubled in volume, say 4-5 minutes. Beat in sour cream and vanilla, say 2 minutes more.
7. Fold flour mixture (dry group two) into the wet group mixture with a rubber spatula half at a time until smooth.
8. Pour half the batter into the pan and spread to the edges evenly.
9. Sprinkle half the walnut mixture (dry group one) evenly over the batter.
10. Spread remaining batter on top, making the sides higher than the center.
11. Bake in center of oven until top is set and springs back when touched, and cake pulls slightly away from the sides of the pan, say 55-60 minutes.
12. Let cake cool one hour.
13. Remove from pan and set cake aside .
14. In a bowl, whisk milk and confectioner's sugar until smooth.
15. Garnish cake with raspberries and drizzle glaze over cake.

notes

1. Serves 12 according to the [W-S Kitchens](#).
2. We skipped the topping and it was still very good. Someday we'll have to try the whole thing. Maybe after we order that fancy pan which gives the cute shape to the cake in its attractive photo in the catalog.
3. Somehow when we called to eliminate the second copy of their catalog, they cut us off completely. Until one started arriving at our address in ani's sister's name a few years after that.

potato and eggplant layered 2-d meatloaf

In math jargon, 2-d means "two-dimensional", as in "flat". This is basically an Armenian dish, with minor bob modifications. The original is a layer of ground beef, a layer of potatoes, a layer of sliced tomatoes baked in the oven. The mother-in-law put the potato slices on top of the meat, but the new sister-in-law says put the potatoes on the bottom so they suck up the flavor from the meat and spices (gravity, you know). We imported nora for the spice control on this variation with eggplant to make the dish a little more interesting and because bob is always looking for new ways to use eggplant. And since the tomato slices on top seemed a bit minimalistic in the original, he thought loading up a layer of chopped tomatoes would increase the coverage. Whichever variation of this you make, it is delicious.

ingredients

meat group

- 2 lb ground veal/beef mixture
- 1 large white onion
- 1 clump parsley (2 c), cleaned and chopped
- 2 t salt
- 1 t allspice
- 1 1/4 t sweet ([Middle Eastern](#)) red pepper powder
- 1/4 t cumin
- 1 t black pepper

veggie group

- 4 medium potatoes (Yukon golds, for example)
- 4 small eggplants or equivalent
- 13 plum tomatoes (approximately of course)

liquid group

- 1.5 c water
- 2 T tomato paste
- 1/4 t salt
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 1/4 t allspice
- 1 t lemon juice

peripherals

- 2 8.5 x 11.5 inch glass/porcelain baking pans or equivalent
- 1 hour, 400° F

instructions

1. Slice the eggplants lengthwise about 1/8 inch thick. Salt and stack in a colander and let sit a while. Then rinse.
2. Mix all the meat group ingredients together evenly.
3. Spray veggie oil in baking dish(s).
4. Clean (and peeling is better probably) and slice potatoes about 1/4 inch thick. Layer the bottom with the potatoes, then the eggplant slices.

5. Press the meatloaf mixture evenly on the next layer.
6. Chop the tomatoes and layer them next.
7. Combine the liquid group ingredients and pour over the previous layers.
8. Bake at 400° F for 1 hour.

notes

1. If you omit the eggplant, this is okay, and still delicious. A version of this called potato and meat bake appears in [Secrets of Cooking etc.](#)
2. The [original](#) really should be here too because it is really good. Armenian comfort food.

ptegmtlf.htm: 7-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

potato and meat bake (kenakuntzorov mees)

Take the [previous recipe](#), lose the eggplant, shuffle the layers, and adjust the spices and you are back to the original mother-in-law version which is a traditional Armenian recipe. And another dish that bob overeats when given the chance. Which is not often enough.

ingredients

refrigerator group

- 2 lb ground beef (or lamb or veal)
- 1 onion
- 1 c parsley
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 t salt
- 1 t allspice
- 1 t [Middle Eastern](#) red pepper
- 1/4 t cumin
- 1 t black pepper
- 1 t seasoned meat tenderizer
- 1/2 c breadcrumbs

veggies

- 4 medium potatoes
- sliced tomatoes, enough to cover

other stuff

- enough water to cover meat and potato layer
- 2 T tomato paste
- 1/4 t salt
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 1/4 t allspice
- 1 t lemon juice

instructions

1. Combine the refrigerator group together and refrigerate about 2 hours.
2. Then press hamburger sized lumps into the bottom of two 8.5x11.5 inch glass/porcelain baking pans, or a single large round aluminum baking pan like isgouhi usually does, and mash them all together to form a single uniform depth 1/2 inch thick meatloaf layer.
3. Slice potatoes into 1/4 inch thick rounds and let them sit in salt water 15 minutes, then drain.
4. Spray a baking pan with cooking spray and spread out the potatoes on the pan.
5. Bake the potatoes and the meat together (separately) at 400° for about 30 minutes until the potatoes are golden brown.
6. Then remove both and place the potato slices side by side on top of the meat to make a potato layer. Cover with sliced tomatoes arranged in the same fashion.
7. Add in the liquid group (other stuff) and bake 1 hour.

notes

1. This needs some feedback to perfect.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

ptmbk.htm: 7-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

cold sesame asparagus

We had this at a friend's dinner and clamored for the recipe. Neither they nor we exactly followed the recipe.

ingredients

2 lb fresh asparagus
1 1/2 T soy sauce
1 t sugar
1 T rice vinegar
1/2 t salt
1 T sesame oil

instructions

1. Blanch asparagus in rapidly boiling water, until just tender, about 1 minute.
2. Drain and immerse in ice water.
3. Drain again, pat dry, and set aside.
4. In a large bowl, combine the remaining ingredients.
5. No more than 1 hour before serving, add asparagus to the soy sauce mixture and toss.
6. Chill until ready to serve, at least 30 minutes.

notes

1. We didn't cut the asparagus nor did they.
2. We also did not have rice vinegar or sesame oil and so substituted champagne vinegar which we did have and hazelnut oil, which seemed like a good choice because of past experiences with hazelnut-butter sauces for asparagus.
3. We also skipped the chilling step, out of laziness probably.

aspsess.htm: 25-jan-2000 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

yoga truant mushroom soup

We had a summer break from yoga. September arrived. Hari called. Yoga class tonite at Betty's place. Okay. But it was not okay. ms_ani finally had the guts to back out and leave bob to do solo yoga. So while he was out going through the motions, unable as usual to even come close to most of the positions, ms_ani tried to compensate for his all too obvious disappointment by experimenting with one of his favorite foods: cream soup. Ready when he returned. Really hit the spot. bob didn't last long as a solo team. The truant count soon increased to two.

ingredients

base

- 3 T butter
- 3 leeks, chopped
- 1 big potato, diced

mushrooms

- 4 portobello mushroom caps

liquids

- 2 1/2 c veggie stock (water + 2 t veggie paste)
- 1 1/4 c milk
- 1/3 c [Parmalat](#) cooking cream (evaporated milk or real cream?)

spices

- freshly ground pepper
- salt to taste

instructions

1. Melt butter in saucepan, add leeks and potatoes and mushrooms. Stir to coat with butter. Cover and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, 5 minutes or so until beginning to soften.
2. Add stock and bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 15 to 20 minutes or until veggies are tender.
3. Stir in milk and puree with hand blender.
4. Reheat and add cream, salt and pepper.
5. Serve.

notes

1. In Italy every supermarket sells this thick cooking cream in a little carton, just enough for a single recipe. Panna da cucinare. Our heavy cream is like water in comparison. No waiting time to thicken up the panna, since it comes just right. But we can only bring over so many little cartons per year in our baggage, so we ration this closely. Parmalat has begun importing its cartoned milk, but not the cream so far. Maybe one day...
2. Oops. We forgot to read the expiration date. This stuff doesn't last very long.

ymshrms.htm: 6-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

turkey/veal-pork-beef/whatever meatloaf

The advent of cable TV in the late 20th century created nationally known chef celebrities with all kinds of personalities. Jacques Pepin seems to be one of the more believable ones, and won points in bob's rating book for his series "Cooking With Claudette", his cute twenty something daughter at the time of the season, of which we caught maybe two episodes. [We impress easily.] He also has a cooking pedigree that dates back to Julia Child's first cookbook, in which he played some kind of consulting role that led to their lifelong friendship. More to the point ani had already picked up one of his healthy cooking cookbooks where we discovered his delicious solution to the post-Thanksgiving leftover turkey problem: turkey meatloaf.

Then we discovered that it easily converts to any kind of meat-based meatloaf and still remains delicious, taking us a great leap forward from the early days of bob's canned mushroom soup [meatloaf](#). We like this a lot and actually make it quite often, probably since it is an addictive comfort food when accompanied by garlicky mashed potatoes and a little red wine.

ingredients

original recipe

1 1/2 lb ground turkey breast
 4 slices bread into 2 c breadcrumbs
 8 scallions
 2 -3 medium domestic mushrooms
 1 small onion
 1/2 c whole chicken stock or low salt canned chicken broth
 1 egg, 1 egg white
 2 - 3 cloves garlic
 1 small piece fresh ginger
 1 t salt (adjust if canned broth)
 1/4 t freshly ground black pepper

ani's version

2 lb ground veal/pork/beef pack or turkey or leftover turkey
 2 c breadcrumbs
 2 scallions
 4 medium domestic mushrooms
 1 large onion
 1/2 cup no MSG veggie broth
 2 eggs
 4 cloves garlic
 0 ginger (ani veto)
 1 t salt
 1/4 t freshly ground black pepper
 1/4 t cumin

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Mix all the ingredients in a bowl.
3. Lightly coat an 8x4 inch loaf pan with veggie cooking spray. Press the meatloaf mixture firmly into the pan. Cover the surface with plastic wrap and press the surface level.

Remove. Cover the pan loosely with aluminum foil.

4. Bake for 1 1/2 hours, or until a meat thermometer inserted into the center reads 160°. Remove and let sit covered 20 to 30 minutes.

notes

1. Seems easy, no? But we're not through. Even the original dr bob meatloaf recipe came with its own soupcan-based meatloaf sauce to top it off. This one has an upgraded sauce.

tomato-mushroom sauce

ingredients

4 large tomatoes (2 lb), cut into 1 inch pieces
1 T olive oil
1 small onion (2 -3 oz), peeled and thinly sliced
1 stalk celery (about 2 oz), washed, trimmed, chopped (1/2 c)
5 - 6 domestic mushrooms (about 3 oz), washed and thinly sliced (1 1/2 c)
2 - 3 cloves garlic, peeled and thinly sliced (1 T)
1 t herbes de Provence or Italian seasoning
1 t sugar
3/4 t salt
1/4 t freshly ground black pepper

instructions

1. While the meatloaf is baking, food process the tomatoes into a puree.
2. Saute the onions and celery in the (already hot) oil over low heat for 3 minutes.
3. Then add the tomato puree and the rest of the ingredients and simmer 5 minutes.
4. Serve the sauce over each slice of meatloaf.

notes

1. Often we are out of celery. No big deal.
2. Herbes de Provence ... we never had any of this stuff until recently, but it sometimes has rosemary. Ours did and ani has this thing about rosemary, so she uses a mixture of thyme, marjoram, and oregano instead. Guess we better give away the herbes etc.
3. We really love the meat 3-pack version of this meatloaf. But since we are only two, we end up freezing some precut double portions to use later. Usually much later since we tend to forget about the stuff in the freezer. Comes out just as good as it went in though.
4. This is one of our most repeated recipes. Check out the [illustrations](#), including a variation with a diced roasted red pepper and some 4 or 5 roasted garlic cloves, and some ready-to-eat Carlino's arrabiata sauce heated in the microwave saving some effort along the way.

breadcrumb spaghetti sauce

This recipe was so simple that I never bothered to write it down that night that emanuela prepared it for us in [Ponza](#). And of course subsequently forgot it. Apparently it is actually a traditional recipe from some region of Italy including Rome, since tonnino volunteered during dinner that the classic recipe also has olives, later confirmed by emanuela's mom (both romans) during a later telephone consultation used to try a out a new cheap US long distance company offering 15 cents-per-minute calls to Italy, with no hidden extra charges (a bargain at the time). Since emanuela carries a cell phone (like most Italians at the turn of the millennium), getting ahold of her to re-explain the recipe was a pretty sure thing. And by luck her mom was visiting at the time to remind her about the olives and other details, which after a long day of island boat rental business at the beach were a bit frazzled in her mind. (Italian moms, what would we do without them?)

Simplicity is the beauty of a lot of Italian cuisine. And this one is terrifically simple. So simple that asking about the approximate amounts of each ingredient slipped my mind when recording them. All of the amounts given below are, as they say in the cookbooks, "to taste", and since they represent wild guesses can be adjusted for personal preference. emanuela used 6 anchovies but this did not overload my anti-anchovies-on-pizza attitude. This is the only detail that stuck in my mind. Looking to our cooking library for some guidance produced a somewhat similar recipe "spaghetti con le acciughe" (anchovies) by the American diplomat wives team in Rome who produced a [pasta/risotto cookbook](#) from their stay there together. In fact "breadcrumb spaghetti sauce" is not exactly orthodox naming procedure here, but explicit anchovies up front might put off others like me who are not exactly in love with these little fish.

ingredients

group 1

- 1/c c olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced or chopped
- 2 T capers
- 6 anchovies, mashed up beyond recognition
- 1/3 c olives, chopped

group 2

- 1/3 c breadcrumbs

group 3

- 1 lb spaghetti

instructions

1. Start the pasta water and dump in the spaghetti with some salt when boiling.
2. Saute the first ingredient group in a large chef's pan to infuse the mixture with the garlic.
3. In a separate saucepan, brown the breadcrumbs.
4. When the spaghetti are very al dente, drain and dump into the large chef's pan and mix in the breadcrumbs like parmesan cheese. Toss around a bit over the heat.
5. Reserve some pasta water in the draining phase in case the mixture is too dry, in which

case you can loosen it up by judiciously adding just enough of the liquid before serving.

notes

1. Eliana, any suggestions, since emanuela is not wired? [This unplugged state did not last long ...]

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

chestnut mushroom stuffing

We like [chestnut stuffing](#). We like [mushroom stuffing](#). So why not do both at once by combining recipes? Which is precisely what we did for our last Thanksgiving of the millennium. With four cooks in the kitchen the process was not exactly under control, but the dr bob cooking team is more into anarchy than control anyway.

On our trial chestnut roasting and shucking (shell removal), with no special shucking tool, the results were not terribly pleasing. When done right the chestnuts look like little rat brains. Ours were a bit mangled and seemed to have some bad parts. So the next day a special trip to a kitchen stuff store produced just the right nutcracker in which the nut sits resting comfortably as you squeeze. The next batch came out great. The right tool for the right job always makes the difference. We did this in advance of the big day of course.

We went for a turkey breast for the second year in a row. A lot easier to deal with and surprise—it cooks much quicker than the whole turkey per pound time estimates. The extra chestnuts we used in a brussel sprouts recipe from [Epicurious.com](#) [Bon Appetit, Nov 1998, we've got the paper version] with convincing enthusiastic feedback from a number of satisfied customers. And our usual leek-garlic-yogurt unskinned-baked-mashed-potato dish. And a bunch of middle eastern dishes that came with the in-laws. Way too much food. Not counting the [tiramisu](#), [french apple tart](#), [pumpkin pumpkin pie](#) and several middle eastern desserts that came along too, plus a zucchini bread we never got to.

ingredients

veggie group

- 1 leek, chopped
- 2 onions, chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, pressed
- 8 stalks celery, food processed
- 3 T butter

mushroom group

- 1.5 lb crimini, shitake, portobello mushrooms, chopped
- 3 T butter

spice nut group

- 3 c veggie broth
- 2 c chestnuts, chopped
- 1 t salt
- 3/4 t pepper
- 2 t marjoram
- 1/2 t ground nutmeg

bread group

- 1 1/2 12oz bags herbed seasoned bread stuffing
- 1 c fresh parsley, chopped
- 1/3 c veggie broth

finishing group

3 eggs, beaten
1 c milk

instructions

1. Saute the veggie group in its butter allotment until tender in a large nonstick pot.
2. Meanwhile saute the mushroom group in its butter a few minutes to soften in another nonstick pot.
3. When the mushrooms are ready, mix into the veggie mixture and add the boiling veggie broth and the rest of the spice nut group.
4. Simmer a while as the liquid component matures with flavor from the various pot constituents.
5. Meanwhile mix the parsley into the stuffing bread cubes and then mix in the allotted veggie broth.
6. Finally assembly time. Mix in the veggie mushroom mush and then incorporate the beaten eggs and then the milk.
7. Spread out evenly in an 11x14 inch baking pan. One of those aluminum supermarket throwaways will do (we wash and reuse ours).
8. Cover with aluminum foil until ready to put in the oven. Our fridge is usually too full with other stuff but this can be done the night before and refrigerated.
9. Bake 45 minutes to an hour at 350° (turkey temperature), say 30 to 40 minutes covered, the rest uncovered.

notes

1. Makes about 20 servings. Think about cutting this recipe back unless you really like leftovers. The [guests](#) were happy.
2. We repeated this recipe many Thanksgivings, and one such holiday some leftover chestnuts led us to our [favorite cream soup](#) which increased the need for recipe ready chestnuts, obligingly supplied by the free market, even at a reasonable cost after the intervention of the Trader Joe's eclectic food products store chain.

chsmshst.htm: 19-nov-2005 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

armenian rice / lebanese rice pilaf

[arishdaov printz / riz bish'ayriyyeh / ruz bish/irreeyeh / roz bil shariyah ?]

Not being an international culinary expert, it is hard to decide who gets the credit for this dish—the Armenians or the Lebanese. In fact it appears to be a widespread Middle Eastern staple with slight regional variations. The two tone mixture of browned vermicelli noodles and white rice with optional scattered pine nuts makes it an attractive [and tasty] addition to the dinner table.

Whatever its origin, this is a frequent starch component in the Middle Eastern / Armenian diaspora dinner menu at the in-laws, and is an absolutely necessary complementary dish to the [red wine pot roast](#) we inherited from them. We always serve it with a couple of heaping tablespoons of some good quality plain yogurt on the side of each serving portion to eat together as a kind of accompanying sauce. We like doing this so much that we have transferred the yogurt serving practice to our Italian risottos, to which even a few of our Italian guests responded approvingly.

ingredients

1 c	2c	long grain rice
1/2 c	1 c	vermicelli egg noodles broken into small pieces
2 T	1/4 c	optional pine nuts (variation of basic recipe)
2 T	4 T	butter (can be substituted by oil or mixture)
2 1/2 c	5 c	water
1 t	2 t	veggie broth paste /cube (optional chicken broth substitute)
1/2 t	1 t	salt

instructions

1. Wash the rice by raking your fingers through it in a bowl (like raking leaves in the fall) under running water (or rinse 2 to 3 times) until the water runs clear, to remove the extra starch. A plastic rice cleaning bowl with a water escape grid on one side makes this step easier. Drain and set aside.
2. Heat butter in a deep saucepan over medium heat. Add the noodles (and optional pine nuts) and stir to coat them. Cook about 7-10 minutes stirring constantly until golden brown but not dark brown.
3. Add rice and saute about a minute.
4. Pour in water, salt, and veggie broth paste/cube and bring to a boil.
5. Cover and reduce heat to low and cook for 20-30 minutes until the water is completely absorbed [and the rice is nicely softened].
6. Turn off heat and let sit 10 minutes.

7. Serve on a large serving platter.

notes

1. The optional pine nuts can also be browned before the noodles and set aside, then sprinkled over the top of the rice on its serving plate for an attractive presentation.
2. Cooked chick peas can also be added to make this dish more substantial.
3. Isgouhi used to make this with twice as much butter (one American stick for 2 cups of rice) before increasing American health conscious considerations modified her traditional ways.
4. The whole food awareness of the third millennium led to using fast cooking brown rice in place of the long grain white rice, leading to a more nutritious as well as tasty improvement on the original dish.

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

cinnamon rice with cauliflower

This is apparently a Jordanian recipe, but we don't have any Jordanian cookbooks to check for comparison with Isgouhi's version. If Queen Noor had an e-mail address, we could try to use our common Princeton [class of '74](#) connection to break the ice and ask her about it, but then she probably has more important things to do than internet food consultation with perfect strangers. We Americans think of cinnamon as a spice for sweet dishes, like our famous ("as American as ... ") [apple pie](#), but this spice finds its way into many Middle Eastern entrees that are not sweet. This rice dish is one of our favorites frequently served at family meals.

The recipe proceeds in two parallel procedures which merge ingredients towards the end. We give small and large recipe ingredient quantities, some of which are not so critical in amount.

ingredients

cauliflower

1 small	1 large	cauliflower
2 T	1/3 c	veggie oil

meat

1 lb	1 1/2 - 2 lb	lamb stew meat
2	2	bay leaves
2	2	whole cloves
2 - 3	2 - 3	peppercorns
4 T	4 T	butter

rice

1 - 1 1/2 c	2 c	long grain rice
2 - 3 c	4 c	water
1/2 - 1 t	2 t	cinnamon
		allspice
		black pepper

instructions

1. Separate the cauliflower into florets and cut each one in half lengthwise. Steam the florets until cooked but still firm (maybe 5 minutes but check), or boil them just a few minutes to achieve the same result.
2. Heat the oil in a large nonstick pan and place flat side down in the oil as many of the florets that will comfortably fit and leave them until browned on the bottom side. Then turn over to brown the other sides. Remove to a plate and repeat with the remaining florets.
3. Meanwhile put the stew meat in a pressure cooker, just cover with water and bring to a boil. Then remove the meat and rinse it in water to eliminate the yucky fatty stuff that boils off. Trim away excess fat that remains.

4. Meanwhile rinse the rice by putting it into a bowl and filling it with enough water to just cover the rice and raking your fingers through it over and over to clean off the excess starch, then pouring off the water. Do this about 3 times until the water runs off clear.
5. Return the meat to the pressure cooker, just covering with water, add the bay leaves, cloves and peppercorns and bring to full steam and cook 10 minutes. Then open.
6. Drain the meat water into another pot through a colander or strainer to save it for later and dry the meat with paper towels so it won't cause the hot butter to splatter at the next step. The meat can be stripped away from the bone if one is present and cut into bite sized pieces if not already so at this point.
7. Next melt the butter in a large nonstick pot and brown the stew meat in it.
8. Dump in the rice over the meat and add back in enough meat water and additional water if needed to meet the rice liquid requirement, together with the cinnamon, allspice and black pepper. Cook the rice about 20 - 30 minutes until the liquid is completely absorbed.
9. Halfway through cooking the rice, arrange the cauliflower on top of the rice.
10. When done, let it sit a few minutes.
11. Serve by inverting onto a serving platter delicately, trying to keep the rice mass as intact as possible. Choose your pot with this inversion step in mind (lower sides, large diameter).

notes

1. A variation of this is to omit the cauliflower and add in a large bottle of cooked (green) fava beans when the rice is added to the meat. Can also be done with eggplant, preferably the small ones: remove stem, slice 1/2 inch thick rounds, salt and pepper, squeeze, fry in veggie oil.
2. Serve with plain yogurt on the side.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.

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

pizzoccheri with broccoli and sausage

Our fontina Val d'Aosta supplier at the local farmers' market cheese chop had led us to believe that he was giving up on the product—not enough demand he said and when he tried to order it for us anyway, it failed to come through. Soon after while browsing in a trendy Manhattan gourmet food market [ABC Foods] that our French-speaking friends pascale and jamila showed us on a rare visit to [the Big Apple](#), bob spotted the cheese and scored a hit for a subsequent batch of the [traditional pizzoccheri recipe](#). Meanwhile we coincidentally observed several recipes in food mags calling for this very same cheese.

We return to our former supplier browsing for ... cheese, of course, when we spot a big hunk of Val d'Aosta! After bob had just finished telling ani it was useless to ask if they might have some. We request a whole pound this time in our excitement but the cutter's guess is way low at 0.7 lb. We say okay, expecting to return for another hit the following week, which we did, this time asking for a half pound, and getting ... 0.7 lb. Okay, we give up. By a further coincidence, one of the food mags we'd bagged at a local book superstore has an alternative pizzoccheri recipe. Saturday night we plan another malanga soup workshop but the new sister-in-law doesn't like soup so much and requests an additional entree. We use the occasion to try out the new pizzoccheri recipe, using up our last box of the noodles. Presenting a new problem—how to find a new pizzoccheri supplier. It's always something.

But this pizzoccheri recipe turned out to be really tasty. Worth doing again. And again.

ingredients

- 1 lb pizzoccheri
- 1 T salt
- 1 potato, peeled and diced
- 2 c broccoli florets
- 2 T unsalted butter
- 4 sage leaves
- 3 oz chicken (or other) sausage, casings removed, crumbled
- 1/2 lb fontina Val d'Aosta, cubed

instructions

1. When the pasta water starts boiling, salt it and throw in the pasta, potato, and broccoli and cook until tender (al dente pasta). Drain. [If you like your broccoli crisp instead of soft, you can delay its entry for 5 minutes.]
2. Meanwhile, melt the butter with the sage in a pan large enough to fit the pasta when it's ready to join the party. Add the sausage and cook until done, not crisp, stirring frequently.
3. Toss the pasta broccoli with the sage butter sausage mixture, cook one minute and remove from the heat. Fold in the fontina and let melt a minute. Serve.
4. 4 hearty portions according to the magazine. 582 calories per serving. A cooking software output number of course.

notes

1. We used Italian fennel pork sausage, our favorite, and baby broccoli, sold with the line "milder, sweeter and more tender than broccoli or asparagus" ([Asparation](#), a food scam we thought at first, but apparently a real [cross](#) between broccoli and chinese Kale).
2. We'd already picked up a few issues of [The Magazine of La Cucina Italiana](#), a slick Italian cooking magazine in English spawned by its much older partner magazine [La Cucina Italiana](#) in Italy, both now on the web. This recipe [Jan/Feb 2000, p.31: buckwheat pasta with sausage = pizzoccheri con salsiccia] we found in Italian at the partner site, nearly the same [tempo prep. 25' C.I. (La cucina rapida) 11/98 pag. 43: [pizzoccheri con broccoletti e salsiccia](#); broccoletti are broccoli florets according to our 1999 [Book and the Cook](#) book find: [The Dictionary of Italian Food and Drink](#)]. Looks like we'll be picking this magazine up more often now.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.
4. To get into the recipe section of the original Cucina Italiana site, you must first register, and then you need to be able to read Italian, otherwise the above recipe link will not be very useful. When checking the link, a search on pizzoccheri turned up a potato variation that one might consider. The following is an example of a typical Italian style recipe, published with their permission. Note those metric units and quantities all by weight rather than volume:

Pizzoccheri, broccoletti e patate

Tempo: 25'

Ingredienti: (dose per 4 persone)
 pizzoccheri della Valtellina g 400 -
 broccoletti g 250 - burro g 100 - Grana
 padano g 100 - 3 patate - 2 spicchi d'aglio
 - salvia - rosmarino - sale

Conto calorie: kcal 434 (KJ 1816) a
 porzione

Sbucciate e tagliate a tocchi le patate.
 Mondate i broccoletti e divideteli a
 ciuffetti. Scaldare abbondante acqua, al
 bollore salatela e unitevi le patate e i
 broccoletti. Fate riprendere il bollore e
 unite i pizzoccheri, lasciandoli cuocere,
 insieme con le verdure, per circa 12'.
 Soffriggete in una padella il burro con i due
 spicchi d'aglio sbucciati e un ciuffetto di
 salvia e rosmarino. Scolate la pasta con le
 verdure. Conditela con il burro ancora
 sfrigolante, il Grana grattugiato e servite
 immediatamente.

Consigli:

È una variante dei classici pizzoccheri (tagliatelle di grano saraceno), piatto unico tipico della Valtellina solitamente preparato con le verze.

5. E-mail us for a translation. We might even honor the request.
6. If you can't score a hit of pizzoccheri where you live, you might consider [making some yourself](#).

pizzocr2.htm: 7-jan-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

millennium cheesecake four-pack

In our youth, a regular sized cheesecake seemed regular. Not too much to deal with at one time. As we aged, regular looked more and more like, well, too much. So we bought small 7 inch spring-form pans to make half recipes, calculating volume ratios to match the original height in the smaller package. Then we got the idea of spreading out the half recipe in a full sized 9 inch pan to lower its height as well, making it even easier to cut small pieces that weren't top heavy. Then we got the idea of making a full recipe and splitting it among two small pans: one to take to an invited dinner, and one to keep at home for family consumption, compromising on the 8 inch pan for the half recipe. We could even split the batter and make two different flavors.

Running out of ideas for presents for friends and neighbors and an invited dinner before the last Christmas of the second millennium (from the popular point of view), a brilliant idea hit us: the cheesecake four-pack, with split flavors in each cake!

We did the hazelnut enhanced graham cracker crumb crust from the lingonberry recipe twice and pressed it onto the sides and bottom of two pair of 8 inch pans. This was the most tedious part. Then we did one full sized lingonberry batter batch in one bowl, and then an alizé (say "ah-lee-zay", it actually says that on the info label) version using this passion fruit juice cognac liqueur we spotted in the state store (liquor store for the rest of you out-of-staters) in place of the guavaberry liqueur (1/2 cup, which we arrived at starting at 2 T —*before adding the eggs of course*— and adding a T at a time until we were convinced that all 8 were needed).

Then we cut some thin cardboard exactly the inner diameter of the crumb crusted pans and stood them up across the center leaning on a strip of scotch tape just off center across the top with our chicken flattener disk sitting against the bottom edge to prevent it from giving way when we poured the batter into the other side. But we needed a third hand to hold the cardboard in place when we removed the chicken flattener to pour the second flavor into that side. Next we marbled the lingonberries into its side and vibrated the cardboard as we raised it to pull it loose, and then scraped the sides with a spatula to return some of each flavor to its respective side. Four times. We were a bit too generous on the first pan, so we tried to pull back a bit in quantity after that, and even though at first it seemed like the last one would pay the price for our bad estimation, it turned out fine anyway.

We put two pans per cookie sheet on the two shelves in the oven and set our new electronic timer for 50 minutes. The upper one was clearly done then with a hint of golden color and one brown spot, but the lower one was still raw batter colored so we put it up top and let it go another 10 minutes. It raised higher and then collapsed a bit away from the edges in cooling, but no problem since the sour cream layer covers all irregularities.

We did one full recipe sour cream for each pair, using 1 t of Frangelico per recipe as a compromise between the two flavors underneath (splitting the top layer seemed a bit over the top ...) and sprinkled a dusting of hazelnut crumbs over it before returning each separately (10 minutes out of sink from the unequal baking times) to the oven for the sour cream setting.

ingredients

crust

2 separate full recipes of [hazelnut enhanced graham cracker crumb crust](#)

lingonberry

1 full recipe of [guavaberry / lingonberry cheesecake](#) batter / addins

alیزé

1 full recipe of [guavaberry / lingonberry cheesecake](#) batter with guavaberry liqueur replaced by alیزé, no lingonberries

pans

4 8-inch springform pans

notes

1. The dr bob cooking school [illustrations](#) show some of the steps.
2. Portion control versus the fat/no-fat ingredient question—after experimenting with the latter, we've moved on to the former. We cut this little 8 inch cake into about 20 little pieces. Just a little taste of each flavor per person is enough not to overwhelm them after a good dinner. The nonfat cream cheese doesn't simply bake as well and this is an occasional treat so it might as well be at its best.
3. When we have done a single split recipe (a double shot), we have done limoncello and hazelnut as the two individual flavors. The basic recipe is easy to vary with interesting liqueurs.
4. Dental floss can be used to precut a cheesecake for self-service at an uncontrolled serving event where some guests will hack off overly large portions with no concern for the remaining anxiously awaiting dessert feeders. A trick seen on a TV cooking show. First floss the cake in half and then in half again to make quarters and then decide on appropriate further subdivision. For really tight wedges, you can cut a centered inner circle of about an inch in diameter to break off the hard-to-get ends, making extraction easier. The crust will probably resist the flossing (must be like hardened tartar) but once the cake is divided, most guests will take the hint and just release on existing pieces with a knife assist cut. dr bob is a dedicated flosser ever since his periodontic experience (3/4 gum cut to eliminate deep pockets!) in his early thirties.

a nice pair

Our best (and original) cheesecakes are guavaberry-lingonberry and limoncello. Why have to decide between them when trying to impress a target audience? But honestly, the cardboard separators were a real hassle for splitting the cakes before baking in this millennium edition. The afterbake split is much easier, an inspired improvement in 2002.

We did two separate half recipes in two separate bowls simultaneously and baked them individually, lining the bottoms of the pans with rounds of parchment paper cut by tracing out the removable bottom with a pen. And reversed the bottom when inserting into the springform side so that it sat up above the lip instead of down below it, for easier later removal by sliding off the bottom, and allowing the floss cuts some hope of penetrating down through the entire bottom only crust. We guessed one cup graham cracker crumbs, 1/2 c hazelnut crumbs, 1/4 c sugar and 3/4 stick melted butter, which was about right for two 7 inch pan crusts.

Then when ready to deliver the goods, we pulled it from the fridge, removed the sides carefully, slid the cake off the bottom onto a wooden cutting board and halved the cakes with our titanium chef's knife, which makes a terrific cheesecake divider because of its incredible thin blade. A careful reshuffling of the halves then provided two separate cheesecake samplers for two different occasions. We floss cut the new cheese cake configurations into halves 3 more times for a total of 16 underwhelming pieces, guaranteed not to cause regret even if one of each were sampled.

We repeated the pair for a larger group a few days later, saved from the reshuffling since both cakes went to the same destination, but each floss cut into 16 pieces. Cheesecake—it's still a dangerous drug best used in moderation.

Check out the [photos](#).

chk4pck.htm: 16-aug-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]