

Part 2

This second part is a product of new technology: the end of the (20th) century computer revolution. With a large backlog of unillustrated draft recipes and dim prospects for ever finding the time to finish them off in the tradition established in part 1, the world wide web seemed to offer the perfect solution, including availability to anyone on the planet with access, and allowing amateur photo illustration of the recipes and instant updating. Eventually the two parts were combined onto a CD as well starting in 2002, much easier to duplicate for others and keep current together with lots of digital photos from the new age of do-it-yourself photography. This also brought the organization of a cooking diary by chronological order, making it a sort of food blog (= web log).

There is just one problem: few readers act. We do this to share food ideas that we have enjoyed and hope others can as well. Try some!

part2.htm: 27-may-2004 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

title [the recipe format]

paragraphed material [The cute little story about the recipe goes here.]

To print out in a standard form on US 8.5x11 inch paper, set margins of 1 inch on the sides and on the top and bottom, and select Page number, Page total, and Document title from your browser print setup. For black-and-white printers, set unvisited and visited link colors to black. For color printers set the visited link color to the color for unvisited links.

ingredients

definition list

listing of ingredients

or

multicolumn table

listing of ingredients

instructions

1. An ordered list of carefully considered instructions.

notes

1. Some endnote comments, occasionally cute, occasionally useful, possibly containing an illustration link from our amateur food photography department or some esoteric fact or two.
2. Followed by the end line with the 8 or less character filename of the page (a holdover from the DOS era), the date this file was last modified, a link to the contents page, and the copyright date when this lifetime project originally took form:

recipeb.htm: 27-may-2004 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

198?

broccoli-potato(e?) cheese glop

or

what are we going to do with the broccoli this time?

It was a fish, potato, and veggie night. [Say, doesn't that sound like "It was a dark and stormy night."? Never mind.]

Once we figured we'd make the veggie broccoli, we had to figure out how to make it interesting. We did not want to be accused of dull American cooking, even if we were eating alone. The general idea was clear. Kill it in the pressure cooker and hit it with some kind of cheese sauce. The details were anything but. (Clear.) So we went to the dr bob cooking team library and consulted the serious cookbooks. You know, the heaviest ones on the shelf. The ones you could use for weight training. No luck. On our own again.

Out came the 6 month old can of Campbell's cheddar cheese soup. Which we proceeded to warm up. Meanwhile we peeled 3 medium potatoes and chopped 'em up to boiling size, and persuaded them to boil, for 15 minutes. Standard procedure. This time we forgot the salt. [Too many close relatives with high blood pressure, probably has broken our habit. No problem, the canned soup has a semi-lethal dose.]

The average hunk of fresh broccoli also got the standard treatment. Eliminate those ugly little leaves, cut off the ends, slice down the stalks. Into the pressure cooker. Instead of the usual cup of water, we dumped in some cheap white wine, maybe half a cup, and the rest water. It seemed like a good idea at the time, even if probably in vain. Three minutes at full steam. Decidedly dead (soft), appropriate for this recipe. Chopped it up.

Drained the potatoes, chopped them up a bit more just for good measure (half inch size, maybe five eighths). You've heard of parsleyed potatoes? Well, broccoli is green too. So we threw them all together in a burst of imagination. Then we got out a bunch of spices that seemed like they might fit in somewhere. Forgot most of them. Generous salt and pepper, nutmeg did find their way into the cheddar cheese soup warming up on the back burner (no water added). As already noted, the salt we could not stop. The nutmeg came to mind from a spinach recipe. Again the color affinity thing. We added too much naturally. Then mixed the broccoli and potatoes with the over nutmegged cheese soup in a large mixing bowl. To our surprise it tasted pretty good. Maybe you can figure out how much nutmeg to add.

ingredients

- 1 bunch broccoli
- 3 medium potatoes
- 1 can cheddar cheese soup
- nutmeg "to taste"
- pepper, no salt

instructions

1. See above. Be prepared to lie about this dish if you serve it to guests. It is quick and tasty in spite of its low brow cuisine level.

notes

1. WARNING. This recipe bears no resemblance to any previous recipe the team has ever seen, published or perished. As you might have guessed.
2. The "potato(e?)" in the title has its origins in an infamous misspelling by Reagan's vice president Dan Quale. I guess you had to be there at the time.

brocptcc.htm: 10-jun-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

quick hot shrimp pasta

The dr bob food stuffs department is usually seriously under stocked, so much so that it usually requires brilliant inspired and imaginative thinking to figure out how to combine what is lying around into an acceptable facsimile of an edible entree.

This time Claes the pasta hating Swede was expected to arrive by train but it wasn't clear when and our stomachs decided after waiting that it was definitely going to be too late. For him. So we had little time to move since he could call at any minute and nothing lying around to improvise with. Pasta of course. And a cream of shrimp soup—we always keep that around for the orecchiette. But what to do, what to do. (Not orecchiette again—no need to overdo a good thing.) So it looked like the cream of shrimp would have to be the base for a pasta sauce—say with fusilli—that's the pasta that always reminds dr bob of VD (spirochetes?).

So we started throwing in stuff in a hurry (remember Claes on the way) and ani overdid the salt so we compensated with some sugar and more red pepper. Pasta just al dente, drained and mixed with the sauce, and the phone rings. Claes the pasta hating Swede. Just missed the hourly train out to the burbs (reduced evening schedule). We said there's a McDonald's in the station. We'll be waiting at the stop in the burbs. And sat down and enjoyed this successful creation.

After the dishes a knock on the door. Claes? Impossible. A policeman and a detective wanting to check out a funny smell like a dead person reported by the neighbor this morning in our absence. No dead people or other formerly living creatures were found.

ingredients

pasta

3/4 lb fusilli

not pasta

1 can cream of shrimp soup

1/2 can tomato paste

2 T white wine

10 chopped olives (more better)

red pepper powder

black pepper

no salt

1 T sugar

garlic powder

1/2 c or more grated parmigiano cheese

instructions

1. Do the pasta.
2. Mix all the rest of the stuff and heat through.
3. Drain pasta and mix with sauce.

notes

1. What, NO notes?

shrimpsta.htm: 10-jun-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

rita's mom's daughter's over the phone quick pasta e fagioli

This one was a quickie over the phone, long distance.

ingredients

3 T olive oil
4 small ripe Italian plum tomatoes, chopped up
1/4 c finely chopped celery and carrots (supermarket salad bar!)
1 19oz can white kidney beans (cannellini) (blend 1/4 can to mush)
salt to taste
garlic salt (touch)
ground red pepper (touch)
pepper
freshly grated parmesan cheese
when served, abundant
1/4 lb broken spaghetti

instructions

1. Sauté the celery, carrots, and tomatoes in a large pot for 5 minutes or so.
2. Dump in the mashed beans and continue another 5 minutes.
3. Add remaining beans and broken pasta (about 1/4 lb for 2? broken in several inch lengths at most) and continue adding boiling water now and then like the risotto ritual to keep the stuff flowing and cook the pasta.
4. After about 15 minutes it should be about done. Stir a lot.

notes

1. Feeds 2 hungry people.

qpstafag.htm: 10-jun-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

1990

90-00.htm: [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

ani's reawakening lemon nut cake

Once upon a time ms_ani spent 450 bucks for a 5 year subscription to 5 (not even politically correct) women's magazines without consulting dr bob. "WHAT?!" was the shocked response (shades of male chauvanist piggery? ... naahh.) Just to prove him wrong she found a lemon nut cake recipe in one of the mags and broke her 15 year hiatus in the baking department by JUST DOing IT.

Everybody loved it. Her family. Her coworkers. Even skeptical dr bob. But especially her family. After the first pair of cakes disappeared, they imprisoned her at home until she made another pair. Explaining her 15 year fabrication of baking inability.

bob sprung her and offered junior partner status on the cooking team. And equal status at the alter. Everybody lived happily ever after.

Sure.

One thing though. The recipe got misplaced. Hmm.

anilemck.htm: 10-jun-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

1991

refrigerator leftover vegetable risotto

We have four or five whole books devoted just to risotto, as well as many other Italian cookbooks with risotto sections, more great recipes than you can count. But when you come home and open the fridge, your possibilities are limited. That's why we advocate the impulse-creative flexibility style of cooking—fake it with what you've got on hand.

These leftovers were discovered in the refrigerator one night:

ingredients

leftovers

- 1 onion (well, not really a leftover but a staple)
- 1 stalk celery
- 1 clove garlic (ditto, we try never to run out of this)
- 1 plum tomato
- 1 small yellow squash

additives

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 T butter
- 1 cup arborio rice
- 1/2 c white wine
- 1 vegetable cube
- 1 T parsley
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Start a teapot of about 4 cups of water boiling and reduce to a simmer when it starts doing just that.
2. Shred the leftover veggies coarsely with a magic hand shredder or food processor.
3. Sauté the chopped onion and celery and pressed garlic in olive oil and butter for a while.
4. Add the chopped tomato, carrot and squash and continue sauté-ing.
5. Stir in the rice and mix it up a bit, then the wine. Evaporate the wine and then start adding boiling water a half cup or so at a time, with the veggie cube or paste with the first shot.
6. Continue for about 20 minutes of this phase. Taste the rice.
7. At the end when you think it is done, add a little more boiling water if it is not sufficiently a touch liquidy, recalling that some water will continue to dissipate through the next step and until serving time.
8. Remove from heat and stir in parsley for color, salt and pepper to taste, and the cheese. Let sit one minute and serve.

notes

1. This was 2 months after the honeymoon. Not that this fact adds anything much to the recipe.

rlorsto.htm: 28-oct-2000 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

giovedì', gnocchi!

[joe-vay-dee, nyoke-key]

Although we may have heard that Wednesday is spaghetti day in America, maybe back in the early days before we understood what a crime spaghetti in a can is (a Madison Avenue ad campaign had to be responsible for planting this popular slogan "*wednesday, spaghetti day*" in the back of our minds), as I was saying, Thursday really is gnocchi day in Italy. Fresh pasta shops or even family restaurants can often be spotted with that little temporary sign in the window "giovedì gnocchi" (no comma or exclamation mark), something about getting ready for the weekend, or maybe its just like fish on Friday. Anyway gnocchi are little potato dumpling blobs that pass for pasta and which easily conceal their potential for yummy good taste. But can nevertheless be found in Italian-American pasta shops and even generic supermarkets (frozen pasta section). And can even be made fresh if they can't.

Once you've got them, the question is: what sauce? Here is where Marcella Hazan made a believer out of us. She'd already convinced us with her lasagna noodle remarks (another story), but this was a pleasant confirmation. For about 6 people, Marcella says:

ingredients (marcella classics -> essentials)

1/4 lb butter (-> 1/3 c)
 3 T finely chopped yellow onion
 3 T finely chopped carrot
 3 T finely chopped celery
 2.5 c canned italian tomatoes, with their juice (-> or 2.5 lb fresh ripe tomatoes)
 2 t salt, more if necessary (-> left to taste)
 1/4 t granulated sugar (-> omitted)
 1/2 c heavy cream
 (-> freshly grated parmigiano for the table)

instructions (marcella)

1. Put everything except the cream in a saucepan and cook at the "merest simmer" for 1 hour (-> 45 minutes), uncovered. Stir occasionally with a wooden spoon.
2. Purée the stuff and bring to a simmer, stirring again with the same wooden spoon. (-> increase simmer heat and then...) Add the heavy cream and stir-cook for 1 minute more. Taste and correct for salt.
3. Use immediately. (or else!)

notes (but we say...)

1. butter? we used to substitute margarine, but since we were getting soft margarine for a long time, we had to go with the butter anyway since it was conveniently packaged in T unit marked 1/4 lb sticks. we gave up margarine when we decided that it was too plastic.

- looks like marcella cut the butter in half for the new edition.
2. onions don't come in neat T units. we just grated up a smallish medium onion.
 3. same for the carrot. we just took a smallish carrot and grated it in sections in our Moulinex cheese grater. maybe now we would use our food processor.
 4. celery? we forgot. usually when we buy a bunch of celery for a 3 T recipe, they just sit in the fridge until they go soft on us. but nowadays supermarket salad bars solve this problem. if we remember.
 5. canned plum tomatoes? yeah, we usually use them in our sauces. a 28 oz can (the standard big one) is probably right. but lately we've been thinking more about eating fresh. so we have been buying fresh plum tomatoes, the softest ones we can find. (even regular tomatoes work here.) we put them in boiling water for 20 minutes to remove the skins ... just once and never bothered again. and even that time we had some trouble with splitting skins. skins are fiber, no? the food processor is probably the right tool to pulverize them before using. (our [Vitamix juicer](#) really loses the skins anyway, but we never lift it up to use anymore.)
 6. meanwhile we sautéed the onions and carrots but not the forgotten celery in the butter in a big pot. then added the tomato sauce, salt, sugar and simmered for about an hour on low heat. nice to know that only 45 minutes are really necessary.
 7. for the gnocchi (about 1 lb), a big pasta pot of boiling water—a little salt and dumped 'em in. they rise to the top. you have to do the al dente test to figure out if they're done. when they are, drain 'em.
 8. heavy cream? we bought light cream, being more health conscious. worked fine.
 9. added the gnocchi to the sauce pot. and 1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano. it's all right to let it sit around a few minutes but not more.
 10. enjoy.

waiting for gabriella's lasagna

or

getting too familiar with a roller type pasta machine

As [Marcella Hazan](#) rightfully says, the only way to make real lasagna is with homemade (as in do-it-yourself, the "you" being you or somebody you know or are willing to pay well) lasagna noodles. For exactly this reason most of us true Americans (including a certain notorious comic strip cat the cooking team no longer follows) rarely if ever get to experience the real thing, but never having experienced the real thing don't know what we're missing anyway. (Here the "we" means you, because we are lasagna veterans!) Thanks to a late arrival for a Rome commuter train from the Pope's [country-home town](#) (of course He uses a helicopter), dr bob knows.

bob met lele and lele introduced him to rita and bob introduced rita to bill and bill introduced rita to george and the [Vatican Observatory](#) was never the same again but after rita's adoption by the Observatory she was introduced to david in Tucson where the Observatory actually observes ... but that's another story. So rita has a mom named Gabriella, an authentic Italian mom who makes the best lasagna bob has ever had. For years the famous lasagna lesson was talked about, wherein dr bob would be expertly coached by Gabriella in the finer points of excellent lasagna making, but jet-setting schedules and real life considerations conspired to prevent the realization of this historic cooking opportunity.

Meanwhile dr bob merged with ms_ani and various roman friends began asking for wedding gift suggestions. By sheer coincidence (really) he was ready with street addresses and price quotes. From the dr bob scientific work group (thanks, guys!), a Pavoni Europiccolo super espresso/cappuccino machine for making ms_ani excellent coffee every morning to help ease her into the day (not a morning person like dr bob, who was relieved of this duty after a couple years by the realization that high blood pressure called for less caffeine in ms_ani). And from emanuela and domenico came the classic roller-type pasta machine [WITH ELECTRIC MOTOR](#) (making it a super pasta machine), cheap in Italy compared to the US, but requiring electrical connection through the dr bob ugly heavy duty possibly dangerous voltage transformer for cheap Italian pasta machines that don't run on US electricity (previously hauled to America for the estruder-type [Pastamatic pasta machine](#) bought on a visit to the still smoking volcano Mt Vesuvius). For dr bob to finally make excellent lasagna. Not every day of course.

Well, what to do. No lasagna lesson looming on the near horizon. No substitute Italian moms nearby. [Marcella Hazan](#) to the rescue. Marcella Hazan, on an extended visit to the USA on loan from Italy (Giuliano?'s mom), did a pair of classic Italian cookbooks in English, imaginatively titled the "Classic Italian Cookbook" and "More Classic Italian Cooking", that made her a pile of dollars in America, some of which she converted to lira enabling her to live in an outrageous piece of real estate on the Grand Canal in Venice. dr bob had her first volume on the shelf for years but like most of the cooking team library, it was left largely undisturbed on the shelf.

Marcella Hazan? Who's she? that was the before story.

Well, forced to research the team library for some help in invalidating Emanuela's claim that he would never actually use the pasta roller machine, the best bet looked like merging helpful hints supplied by rita with Marcella's Bolognese sauce for the soon to be attempted without Gabriella's strategic lesson classic lasagna. Chosen partly on the basis of the opening remark of this story.

dr bob tackled the noodle job while ms_ani handled the four hour Bolognese sauce ritual, lightened somewhat by the 90's food awareness fears, details to follow. And it was great. Not quite like Gabriella's but an acceptable substitute. But that's not the whole story. An encore performance was arranged with not one but two different lasagnas, one classic and one an asparagus white sauce version. Again raves from the privileged guests. However, a slipup occurred. The instructions of the pasta machine say NEVER let water touch it. Who knows what happened. Maybe bob used really hot water and thought it would evaporate. Maybe bob was just absentminded. Or more likely just plain stupid. The result was RUST. Disabling the machine and requiring serious correctional measures.

You never imagine how complicated one of these roller machines is until you've gotten it disassembled and forget exactly what went where. And with no instructions at all to refer to, not even in the wrong language or by a nonnative speaker of the right one. Armed only with questionable mechanical abilities and a desperate hope for the day when we might again enjoy homemade lasagna. It took a while to get around to the attack. Life is complicated too. Steel wool, tarnish removers, old toothbrushes, and some miracle product WD-40 super lubricant from bob's amateur car mechanic days. It wasn't pretty. The first time was only a partial disassembly. With a manageable reversal. And more lasagna followed. But YUCK! What's this black grease oozing out of the ends of the rollers! Miracle product that had gone where no such product had gone before? And returning? The fun (if this word can be used in the same sentence with roller pasta making) was gone. Between trying to avoid touching the edges and unsuccessfully surgically removing black stains in between passes (hoping guests wouldn't notice the failed attempts), it was clear that more drastic action would have to remedy the latest dumbmeister mistake.

Complete disassembly, hoping to remember how things fit together during the dirty deed. Ooze removed. Almost successful reassembly. After a long and determined battle. Except for the pasta guides. Flimsy little things that just wedge in between the two sides of the machine, catching on some little thingamajig somehow. Impossible to coax into position. Time passes. Another attempt, with a do or die attitude. A monumental struggle. Met with success! Only two casualties, a finger on each hand, some blood left inside as a souvenir. And more residual familiarity with the pasta machine than anyone should know about outside the factory.

[Along the way, a dead hairdryer contributed its electrical cord to the famous voltage transformer after bob accidentally made contact with a screwdriver, the cord, and the wrong place on it and ZAP, the pasta machine stops. Did bob only fry the aging wire to the transformer or the machine as well? Fortunately the hairdryer fix worked and it was back to the fight.]

Still, to this day dr bob always browses the kitchen store roller machine models noting the more affordable prices and the team's increased ability to pay them, since the black stuff at the edge problem has not entirely disappeared. But ... it seems such a waste to junk a perfectly good

machine for a minor little problem like that. Something to remember next time the dr bob team makes a lasagna dinner invitation and you are the recipient.

why lasagna noodles have to be homemade (almost)

Of course you're wondering. What's the big deal? Why do the noodles have to be earned by some masochistic kitchen rite rather than just plopping a box into the old shopping cart? The answer is twelve layers. At least. Homemade noodles can be paper thin to form a heavenly stack of feather-light noodles alternating between just the most delicate combination of red and white sauce layers, unlike any crude imitation version with at most 4 thick noodle slabs separating gobs of overpowering meat and tomato sauce.

However, the increasing popularity of more authentic Italian food products in America may seriously reduce the pain here. Buy pasta sheets in a fresh pasta store. Before they pass them through the cutting rollers to make strip pasta noodles. Right there you cut out most of the work. But they are still not at the thinnest notch on the pasta machine and have to be cut and rolled on the home pasta machine to get that last squeeze to the ideal thickness. Then there is the boiling stage in which one has to fish out these noodles from the big pot of scalding water, about 48 times for 16 layers of 3 noodle width lasagna pan. And find enough towels to lay them all out flat in the kitchen somewhere, layer after layer because of the numbers. More about that later. They still qualify as homemade, though. [Partly in the store home, partly in yours.]

why there has to be an electric motor attached somewhere

The classic Italian mom turns a crank with one hand while trying to use the other single lonely hand for what is clearly the two-handed job of guiding the pasta sheet as it goes through and gets bigger and bigger and more and more unwieldy. All this after clamping the machine down to some clampable surface to keep it from sliding all over the place trying to get away. With an electric motor, it just sits there content without physical restraints and the rollers go much quicker and smoother leaving both hands free to "work the pasta" as they say. The difference between night and day. Hey, that rhymes. Hmm, food poetry ..., naahh!

[The story continues ...](#)

wfglsnga.htm: 22-sep-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

1992

tilapia for two

the fish

on low heat:

2 fillets tilapia, salt and peppered

2 T butter in nonstick frying pan

3 cloves garlic, chopped

sauté garlic in butter 2 minutes (don't burn garlic). add fish

cook fish 1 minute each side. add:

2 T chopped parsley

1 lemon, juice of

cook again both sides 1 minute to coat both sides with added stuff.

cover and leave 1 minute. turn off heat. eat.

the fish story

bob never knows what to do with fish.

But this woman was offering cooked fish samples on toothpicks in the supermarket. bob tried one. It was great. She offered more since she was about to shut down the giveaway but bob automatically said no (childhood training). A few minutes later he changed his mind but returning it was too late to get another sample. He forgot even to ask how she cooked it.

Returning the next night bob asks the fish counter person if he knows anything about cooking this fish. He doesn't. But there is a 2 page publicity sheet. bob buys the fish for dinner.

Later that day bob is tied up software consulting with a friend of a friend about typesetting line numbers for a 4 thousand page document on biblical manuscripts. ani takes over the fish problem. bob returns for dinner. ani solved the fish problem brilliantly.

the fish facts

The publicity sheet says this freshwater fish is super healthy (to eat). And of Middle Eastern origin (Nile, Sea of Galilee, River Jordan) though most recently fish farmed in California. It's the fish from the fish and bread multiplication miracle of Jesus and Peter (fisherman later turned saint). A holy fish. (unrelated to "Holy mackerel!") And hard to overcook so it's great for kitchen amateurs like us. Even millenia before the fish trick, it was "preferred by nine out of ten pharaohs" in ancient Egypt. They got the best. Or else.

Ani served it with Near Eastern barley pilaf from a box. Excellent.

Here are some fish pointers. The fish is apparently good in every possible way you can cook a fish except undercooked.

Raw it's firm and rubbery.

Slightly cooked (2-3 min) it's white outside, pink and rubbery inside.

Nearly cooked (3-4 min) it's golden outside (hence the full name "Golden Tilapia"), soft and mushy inside.

Fully cooked (4-5 min) it's flakey, firm, and tender throughout.

Out in California they must have these fish doing aerobics. They're only 1.3 percent fat. And no "fishy" taste. Moist, sweet, and firm. Second only to carp in domesticated production world wide. We get this fish regularly. Almost. Give it a try.

tlapia42.htm: 10-jun-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

couple cavatelli

the short story:

pasta:	1 lb frozen or dry cavatelli
processable veggie group:	1 medium onion 1 celery stalk 1/3 (orange) bell pepper 7-8 small mushrooms 1 elephant garlic clove or a couple regulars
sauté facilitators:	2 T butter 2 T olive oil
tomato sauce component:	1 28oz can Italian plum tomatoes
serving touch:	1/2 c freshly ground parmesan freshly ground black pepper to taste (optional salt to taste)

instructions

1. Start the cavatelli water boiling and dump in when ready with your best guess about the salt.
2. Meanwhile chop and sauté the processable veggie group in the saute facilitators in a large (nonstick) saucepan. We used our food processor for veggie prep.
3. When the processable veggie group is softened, dump in the (contents of the) can of tomatoes and cook over medium heat for 30 minutes or more until liquid is reduced. Try not to burn it near the end. Coordinate with the cavatelli boiling time.
4. Combine with the drained pasta and cheese.
5. Serve with freshly ground black pepper to taste.
6. Feeds 2 with improved leftovers for lunch the next day (or 4 if not main dish). This ages well.

the long story

The dr bob kitchen had no real food processor originally. This was not because dr bob does not like kitchen gadgets. It's the decision making process. If a food processor is as great as the freely given hype one hears about it from regular people, one should get the best. The best that one can afford, that is. After absorbing enough advertising to be convinced that the French sounding one might be the best, it proved to be expensive enough to wait for the good deal. The best deal. The

deal which never seemed to come. Years went by.

So dr bob merged with ms_ani and DRAT! they get a not-a-real-food-processor as a wedding gift. A blender with a pathetic looking little food processor attachment. Which sat in a closet for 5 months along with many other closet wedding gifts. dr bob not only had a better regular blender, but a [Vitamix superblender](#) to boot. No problem shelling out the 3 C-notes (plastic of course) at the home show for that gadget. Nothing else like it to require decision making delays and the home show provided the deal. Same story with the super pressure cooker which came in just under 2 C-notes. Another fantastic gadget. But this story is about the food processor.

dr bob picked up a pound of "homemade" cavatelli in the supermarket. Cavatelli are like poor man's macaroni, a poor man lacking an extruder pasta machine that pushes out pasta with holes in the middle. One cavatello is about an inch and a half long with the sides sort of pushed together to simulate an almost closed tube. A little thicker in the middle. Needing a tomato sauce that would go well with our other favorite strange pasta orecchiette (also from the same Pugliesi people in the heel of Italy). So as usual on hand ingredients had to suffice. A leftover orange pepper piece, some leftover mushrooms, an uncustomary celery bunch almost never on hand since it rarely survives the refrigerator wait. An onion. An elephant garlic clove surprisingly found in the supermarket for the first time. So it looked like a lot of chopping. Of course bob already had a manual vegetable dicer bought on the street long before in Germany (also seen at the home show). But then the not-a-real-food-processor blender in the closet popped into mind. Might as well try it out since they were clearly stuck with it, and even farther from buying a real one with it on their conscience. So out of the box, the usual new product warm water procedure and chop chop chop. Waddaya know. Works pretty well for 2 people size food processing. Effortless. Maybe even acceptable.

So here's the deal. If you've got a food processor, cheap, expensive, or not real as the case may be, or a manual veggie dicer, or just an appropriate knife, chop up the processable group of 5 veggies into small pieces, and sauté them in the butter and oil. Then dump in the can of Italian plum tomatoes—better if they already come with internal basil leaves. Break up the tomatoes—we had some hard ones this time—and cook on medium heat. Stir occasionally. The sauce stiffens up by liquid reduction. Be careful at the end to reduce the heat since it may begin to burn even in a nonstick pan as it thickens up. Drain the al dente cavatelli that were meanwhile boiling a good 10 or 12 minutes. We like lots of freshly grated parmesan cheese mixed right in with the tomato sauce and pasta before serving.

One last detail. dr bob avoids using salt perhaps more than he should, due to the bad rep it has in the American diet. ms_ani thought the sauce could have used a touch more salt and maybe even just a tad of red pepper powder to give it an edge. Use your judgment. Makes just enough for a couple of hungry humans with a microwavable leftover plate for the next day when it will taste better than the first. Nothing like aged pasta. Enjoy.

chicken artichoke mushroom sauté

dr bob was working late with dr claes. dr stuff, you know.

ms_ani volunteered to do dinner solo. what a pleasant surprise this was. (The way the result turned out, not that she volunteered ...). The dr bob cooking team cookbook and recipe collection is pretty big. Mind boggling how many recipes there must be in just the cookbooks alone, not counting the box of all the compulsively (but selectively) collected rarely ever consulted newspaper food section clippings. And the multiple boxes of past issues of hardly read food magazines. One of the food mag cookbooks is *Too Busy to Cook*. Unfortunately we're *Too Busy to Look*, usually. This time ms_ani found the time. And what a great find. Who knows how many other fabulous recipes will go undiscovered in our remaining days.

ingredients

2 large chicken breasts, boned, skinned, halved (4 pieces)
flour
4 T butter
8-10 mushrooms, sliced
1 15oz can artichoke hearts, rinsed well and drained
1/2 c chicken stock or broth
1/4 c white wine
juice of 1/2 lemon to taste
salt and freshly ground black pepper

instructions

1. dredge (?) the chicken with flour, shake off excess.
2. heat butter in medium skillet, add chicken and sauté' until golden brown and cooked.
3. transfer to heated platter.
4. add mushrooms to skillet and sauté' 1 to 2 minutes.
5. stir in artichoke hearts, stock, wine, lemon juice, salt and pepper to taste and let cook until sauce is slightly reduced, stirring occasionally.
6. return chicken to skillet and warm through.
7. serve immediately.

notes

1. veal scallops can be substituted for the chicken.

baked fish steaks (jaws tamed)

It helps to have a cooking partner. "Surprise me," you say, and the partner checks out the cooking library and comes up with this. Delicious way to have fish fillets or steaks. Especially thick shark chunks (hence... jaws). Great with [spinach and potatoes](#).

ingredients

2/3 lb = 4 small shark steaks (?)
1/2 c warm milk
1/2 t salt
dry bread crumbs to coat fish
3 T melted butter

instructions

1. Mix the warm milk and salt and soak the steaks a minute in it.
2. Then coat with the bread crumbs.
3. Drizzle over the melted butter.
4. Bake 10 to 12 minutes in the top shelf of a preheated 550° oven.

notes

1. We seem to have smaller stomachs that Joe Blow, typical American supermarket fish consumer. When we tell the fish counter person how many people it's for, they usually try to push 1/2 lb per person and we then try to downside the total estimate so we are not overwhelmed. But this amount for 4 people seems a bit low. Maybe they were mini-steaks?
2. The original handwritten notes of this event were: "Bake 10 to 12 minutes in the top shelf (oops)." Be careful not to overbake or burn these guys.
3. Inspired by or simple stolen from "baked fish fillets Spencer", from [The Joy of Cooking](#), a pretty standard reference. We still had an old edition before CD-ROMs and the [website](#). Wonder who Spencer was.

spinach and potatoes

This is a simple recipe, but a nice combination. It was a newspaper food section harvest recipe, which at one point was misplaced in the archives to our enormous regret. Fortunately it re-emerged from the chaos to be permanently recorded here. Not much else to say.

ingredients

- 2 medium potatoes, peeled, quartered
- 1 clove garlic
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 T butter
- 1 lb fresh spinach, washed, drained
- salt, pepper to taste

instructions

1. Standard boiled potatoes: cover with salted water in small saucepan, boil until tender.
2. Put garlic on toothpick for later removal. [Forget the toothpick and leave the garlic in!]
3. Sauté garlic in oil and butter until lightly browned.
4. Drop spinach into oil and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently. Don't overcook spinach.
5. Drain potatoes and add to spinach. Reheat 2 to 3 minutes. Remove garlic [not!]
6. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

notes

1. Makes 4 servings. According to the newspaper. We say at most 2, would be served to one in Italy.
2. The original recipe had margarine instead of butter but we have long maintained that margarine is unnatural.
3. We have used frozen spinach that we cooked first when fresh was not in hand. And always use more garlic and of course leave it in.
4. [Philadelphia Inquirer](#), August 5, 1992. I wonder if they remember?

spnchpts.htm: 10-jun-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

pumpkin pasta? (fettuccine con zucca)

Rita whose famous mom Gabriela makes super-lasagna (famous in dr bob's mind at least) sent a brief note with a few lines of roughly this recipe added at the end. Unfortunately the whole recipe is slightly ambiguous, since Italian has no special word for "pumpkin", which instead is just another squash (zucca), but one that you rarely see over there since they don't have our Thanksgiving pie or Halloween traditions.

Rita actually wrote "zucca (pumpkin)", but although she has an American husband (indirectly bob's fault) and survived lengthy stays in Tucson and Phoenix, AZ (not noted for their abundance of pumpkins), our instincts told us not to trust her translation. A simple telephone call would have cleared up the matter, but it was always in the middle of the night back in Italy when we thought about it (she had returned to Rome for a while, but now years later is back in the USA). The butternut squash we tried was pretty orange, thus in a sense covering both sides of the ambiguity. In any case, if you like pumpkins, or pumpkin-like squash, you'll like this. We did.

ingredients

- 9 oz fresh fettuccine
- 3 T olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 butternut squash, chopped in little cubes
- 1/3 c white wine (or even water)
- 1/4 pt (1/2 c) light cream
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. The butternut squash is a bit user-unfriendly. Peel the thing and cut it into smaller pieces without losing any fingers, finally getting to smaller little cubes. Size is not so important since this will be pureed.
2. Sauté the onion and butternut squash cubes in olive oil, but since this will take a while (hard little suckers!), throw in the wine when the oil seems inadequate to prevent burning and cover, cooking on low heat for a total of about 15 to 20 minutes till soft.
3. Blend the result with the cream and some salt and pepper to taste in a blender or food processor.
4. Cook the pasta al dente. For fresh fettuccine this is quick.
5. Combine the pasta and cream sauce with the cheese and serve.

notes

1. The odd size 9 oz was from one of those "almost fresh" supermarket pasta packages. The recipe can be adjusted slightly for a full pound. Still one butternut squash will do.

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

cavatelli with clams

dr bob made a weekend visit to the heart of Puglia, the heel of Italy responsible for orecchiette and cavatelli. Where olive trees have been growing since the fall of the Roman empire or before. If you believe the local hype. Cavatelli had already been discovered in the frozen food section of local US supermarkets by the dr bob food reconnaissance team, so points were scored with the hosts when the pasta was recognized by name. [Those dumb Americans! What do they know about pasta.] Homemade cavatelli actually made in the home, with shellfish (no shells, no fish) caught by local fishermen, unforgettable taste.

But the details...? Clams or mussels?* We never remember the difference between them, or whether cozze or vongole are mussels or clams, or clams or mussels, and we've forgot which of the two in either language were in this dish. Little orange guys if that helps. All we do remember is mussels/clams, lemon juice, olive oil, and basil or was it parsley? In short, we don't remember much. In fact we even forgot how we made it the first time in our own kitchen.

* no relation to "pets or meat?" (from the rabbit scene in Michael Moore's movie "[Roger and Me](#)").

ingredients

	first try	later corrections
1 10 oz can	baby clams	[mussels are better]
2	cloves garlic	
1/2	lemon, juice of	
1/6 - 1/3 c	olive oil	
1/4 - 1/2 c	white wine	
1/3 c	fresh chopped basil	[no basil, just more parsley]
1/6 c	fresh chopped parsley	
1 lb	cavatelli	
	parmesan, freshly grated to taste	[pecorino romano is better]
	black pepper, freshly ground to taste	

instructions

1. Drain baby clams, putting the clam liquid (you can pass it through a paper towel if you want) into a nonstick frying pan. Press in garlic and simmer a while, not for long. This is a pretty quick pasta sauce, so you should already have gotten those cavatelli boiling. [Note: those canned clams look a bit sick compared to the memory of the real thing, but they're good enough for routine homecooked meals.]
2. Throw in the baby clams, add some dry white wine to increase the quantity of liquid diminished by evaporation. Simmer. Add lemon juice. Add olive oil and spices. [We have since learned that they should all be parsley, no basil. The olive oil is especially important

for taste with fresh shellfish.] Cut heat. Mix in the al dente cavatelli.

3. Serve with fresh ground pepper and some freshly grated parmesan cheese to taste.

notes

1. clams = vongole, mussels = cozze.
2. Adding some fresh chopped plum tomatoes is another option.
3. This is best with big fresh colorfully orange looking mussels, especially if made for you with handmade cavatelli in southern Italy. Since that's not gonna happen, see what you can do for yourself.

cavclams.htm: 10-jun-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

chicken and zucchini in a pot

Sunday afternoon. In-laws on the way. What to do, what to do?

Macaroni and cheese slightly classed up by the [New Basics ladies](#)? But no color, no veggie. So we go for something green—a zucchini thing. Something about shallots and grated zucchini there. So off to the nearest super. No zucchini and Dying Evil Empire lines at the checkout. So we're history there. Off to the slightly more distant better supplied supermarket. Get the stuff and we're back in the kitchen. Oops, the shallots and grated zucchini remark was a variation of the previous recipe in the cookbook and the in-laws are now on the couch! Chicken to do somehow. Pressure's on in the kitchen. But still the idea has not gelled.

Abandon the book. Get out the pressure cooker. Start the grated onion and shallots in butter and slap in the breasts until browned (maybe tanned is more like it) on both sides. Then throw in the chopped garlic, white wine, hot water and the leftover spice pack from the (Near East) Barley Pilaf mix. Then the zucchini we do on our manual food processor, then skin and chop the tomatoes (did we really skin them?). Everything dumped in and brought up to steam. 15 minutes. Done.

Separate the chicken to serve, drain off liquid into container and serve vegetables with parmesan and freshly ground black pepper. Hey! we finally made some chicken stock, which no matter how many times we check the fridge, never appears.

Oops! an unnamed dr bob cooking team member is getting the pineapple out to cut and plop! The pineapple hemorrhages yellow blood! No, it just dropped into the bowl of first ever dr bob chicken stock for the fridge, which proceeds to cover the counter and floor. Just wasn't meant to be. Remember, in the kitchen be flexible, stay loose, be forgiving.

ingredients

- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 big shallot, chopped
- 3 T butter
- 6 or so (2lb) chicken breasts
- 1 garlic clove, pressed
- 3/4 c white wine
- 1 c hot water
- spice pack from (Near East) Barley Pilaf mix
- 4 medium zucchini, diced
- 3 skinned tomatoes
- black pepper to taste
- freshly ground parmigiano to taste (on each serving)

instructions

1. See above.

notes

1. This is a bit vague, huh?

chkzucpt.htm: 10-jun-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

pesto!

We love pesto and regularly make it ourselves using a modified version of Anne Willan's [Look and Cook Perfect Pasta](#) recipe.

ingredients

- 1 lb fusilli
- 2 large bunches fresh basil
- 6 garlic cloves
- 1 1/2 oz pine nuts
- 3/4 c parmigiano
- 1/4 c pecorino romano
- salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2/3 c olive oil

instructions

1. Blend everything except the pasta and cheese.
2. Cook the pasta al dente.
3. Combine the pasta, pesto and cheese.

notes

1. We used to blend the cheese too and still do sometimes, but when serving fresh (and not saving in the fridge or freezer if you make extra), it is a nice option to keep the cheese from getting soggy by adding it at the last moment. In fact, the ingredient amounts can be varied here. Instead of achieving a thick paste-like state, less solids per liquid (oil) creates a coating of the pasta with little flecks of green that is also quite good as we learned in Sabaudia from the Bini clan.

pesto postscript

When bob was in high school, he used to do a week every year at Presbyterian summer camp in New York State (as a camper). After the 9th grade, that summer the upperclassman camp in parallel somehow faltered, and instead of going ahead at the nearby but separate site, they got mixed in with us, the lower class (in age). This was the summer of [Cream](#) riding high with Disraeli Gears and Wheels of Fire setting the soundtrack beat. Bob met this upper class woman Karin who was quite unique and interesting, and began penpal-ing with her, eventually collecting a whole bunch of [crazy stories](#) spun in those letters, some of which were gathered into a senior year English composition project that was clearly perplexing to the reigning English teacher of the time (appropriately named Mr. Grimm :-|).

Karin grew up to be a speech pathologist administrator at some New York City hospital, and Colleen was working in her group, looking for a change of life experience, one with destination

Italy. Networking ensued. Colleen tried out a year as a native English speaking secretary for bob's Italian relativistic astrophysics group in Rome and then returned to the US, eventually marrying Luigi, bob's roommate during one year at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, also from the same research group. More networking, but of the romantic kind. So eventually Colleen served bob pesto pasta with green beans and potatoes at their home in Rome. And eventually repeated the performance. bob was very enthusiastic about the dish thinking this was Colleen's imagination at work, or some Roman variation she'd picked up, but never got around to implementing the recipe for some reason. It turns out this is actually a traditional combination for pesto in the land of its creation and current copyright holders: Liguria, which is the region of Italy containing both Genova (=Genoa) and the nearby Cinque Terre, five little towns hugging the mountainous coast just to the south, connected by a local train line from Genova to La Spezia, in turn not far from Pisa, where the famous leaning tower resides. Cinque Terre is a fabled tourist destination and we'd seen it on Rick Steve's public television travel show and heard about it second hand from our colleague and world traveler Najib who also agreed that it was a must see destination. And dreamed about one day actually going there. Finally social forces convinced us it was time to do Northwest Italy visiting friends in Parma and Genoa and finally find our way to Cinque Terre, which it turned out was also connected to ([sundried-tomato-pesto](#)-) piero's soon to be bride's family whom we had been informed the summer before had a vacation house in Corniglia, the middle village of the five, but lived in Pisa, the wedding destination our final night in Italy a few weeks later (to be followed by a midday flight out of Rome). More networking, this time the travel connection kind. And we got to spend a lovely afternoon with Lorenza exploring 3 of the towns, starting with a fabulous lunch across the doorstep from the entrance to their house in the center of Corniglia. It was that evening, alone, that we first experienced the pasta pesto potato and green bean combination in the heart of pesto country. It was good. And this time it only took a matter of months before we did it ourselves.

But with whole wheat fettuccini. We were just recovering from the South Beach period which had seriously reduced our pasta intake levels to historic lows, but fortunately the food delivery system was responding to the wide spread US pasta recession by making available more and more whole grain pasta products, which improved in quality considerably with time. A success for the free market theory. We started returning to our trusted Italian food source Carlino's and discovered a few whole wheat fresh pasta products as well as some freshly baked whole wheat Italian bread that a few years earlier we had expressed a wish for but the response was that not enough people seemed to want it at the time for them to make any. Times change.

So we did this at the in-laws one November Sunday night and it was so good, of course bob over ate, the usual story when Isgouhi is serving her own stuff there. Luckily bob seems unable to put on weight, and it does not hurt that the indulgence is in Mediterranean diet food (as in food of the Mediterranean diet =cuisine, not another food reduction scheme to lose weight). We had about 1 cup of homemade pesto in the freezer (maybe even a year old?) minus the cheese, which is how we salvage and save oversupply of home grown basil from in-law production. Adding in the cheese only after combining the pesto and pasta reduces the soggy cheese effect and seems to add to the general flavor of the result. We just threw some parmigiano into the mix, and then casually sprinkled some on each serving. This will be repeated often.

ingredients

1 lb fusilli or penne or spaghetti or fettuccini

(we used fresh whole wheat fettuccini but dried farro fettuccini and spaghetti is also available at Carlino's)

about a cup of small cut potato pieces, boiled but not crumbling (we used cute little fingerling potatoes)

about a cup of thin green beans, cooked and cut into smaller lengths

about 1 cup of previously prepared pesto minus the cheese (see above)

about 1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano for the mix, additional freshly grated parmigiano for each serving

optional freshly ground black pepper to taste

instructions

1. Prepare the potatoes and start them boiling. Get the pasta water started too.
2. Clean the green beans and cook them. We got some frozen recipe ready French green beans (seems to mean thin style, not overgrown in size) from Trader Joe's and microwaved them and then cut them into smaller lengths (1 1/2 in roughly).
3. Warm up the pesto in a pot large enough to contain the entire dish (a 4 qt pot will do).
4. Meanwhile cook the pasta al dente and drain.
5. Combine the pasta and pesto first, then dump in the potatoes and green beans and finally the cheese, mixing thoroughly.
6. Serve immediately, with sprinkled parmigiano on each serving.

notes

1. [Illustrations](#) available.
2. And oh yes, about that [wedding in Pisa](#). Beautiful ceremony in a 12th century church, also leaning. Followed by another Italian wedding reception to remember, this one in the hills of Tuscany about 45 minutes southeast of the city at an agriturismo place: "drinks" by the swimming pool (no one ended up in the pool) but this was really the finger food antipasti stage, including the traditional wheel of parmigiano, plus drinks of course. Then the real dinner plate size four food station antipasti course up by the dining hall outside in the romantic Tuscan twilight, surrounded by vineyards and a sweeping Italian panorama, and finally the reasonably portioned (after what had preceded it) seated table dinner inside. Followed by 4 hours of sleep in the inn and a 4 hour drive with Colleen's Luigi back to Fiumicino to catch our flight. The joy of friendship. What comes around goes around.

sudden flat fish

Last minute casual dinner affair. An old faithful pasta dish, salad and flat fish. 1 1/2 lbs of big flounder arrive from the supermarket with no advance planning. The old fish problem again. So this time we go to our favorite well photographed [Armenian, Lebanese, Persian cookbook](#) (of which, 7 of the 10 discounted copies we bought in bulk still remained at the time while we were figuring out to whom they should be given). Ani finds a baked trout recipe. Fish vocabulary is not high priority for your average nonnative English speaker. But a trout is a fish, a flounder is a fish, so why not? After explaining that trout is the fish that arrives on your restaurant plate still looking like a fish, head-tail-skin and all, we go for it. It calls for scallions, fresh parsley and basil. Well, green onions we still have (sitting around in the fridge, one of those multiple-named food items that confuse even us regular Americans) so we're in business. Except for the stuffing the fish part (no cavity) and the lime part (we got lemons).

ingredients/instructions

what we saw

fish stuff	4	cleaned trout	salt and pepper the fish, rub oil on them
		salt and freshly ground pepper	
		olive oil to coat	
additives	2 T	fresh chopped chives ¹	stuff in trout cavities, bake at 400° F for about 10 minutes
	2 T	fresh minced parsley	
	2 T	fresh minced basil	
	1/4 c	lime juice	

¹oops, it was chives, another confusing but distinct close relative of scallions. Guess we need a well photographed herb book.

what we did

fish stuff	1.5 lbs	flat fish (flounder)	salt and pepper the fish, rub oil on it
		salt and freshly ground pepper	
		olive oil to coat	
additives	4 T	fresh chopped green onion	mix and spoon over top of fish arranged in aluminum foil covered cookie sheet, bake at 400° F for about 10 minutes
	1 t	dried parsley	
	1 t	dried basil	
	2	minced garlic cloves	
	1/2	lemon, juice of	
	1/3 c	orange juice ¹	

¹this seems a bit strange with hindsight, but we must have done it.

what we thought afterwards

This is good enough to share with other people.

notes

1. The most memorable thing about this recipe is a cartoon [Non Sequitur](#) by Wiley ©1992 [Why we evolved after the dinosaurs](#) which perfectly illustrated its title and which we dreamed of redrawing as a two frame illustration but never did get around to it.

sdf1tfsh.htm: 10-jun-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

kwick but keyless key lime pie

Food snobs skip this one. It has that unforgivable American ingredient: [Cool Whip](#). I kind of suspected it was coming when my 82 year old great aunt Gussie began listing the ingredients. Having first heard that the recipe came from New York rural relatives who retired to a big fancy new home in Florida, the state (as opposed to Florida, the village, childhood home of dr bob). Cool Whip and Florida retirements seem perfectly consistent in our small minds.

But this pie is wonderful. Besides being a snap to do. And a perfect use for that can of sweetened condensed milk we've had in storage for several years. (Oops, it puffed out and leaked. Better check your bomb shelter supplies!) Hire a kid to buy the Cool Whip. Or substitute it with real whipped cream. (Fat city!) Better yet, just lie about the recipe.

ingredients

- 1 pre-baked 9 in graham cracker crust shell
- 1 14 oz can sweetened condensed milk
- 8 oz cream cheese (we use light!)
- 1/4 – 1/2 c lime juice
- 8 oz Cool Whip whipped topping (or 1/2 pt whipping cream, whipped).

instructions

1. Beat all ingredients (except the crust!) until very thick, with an electric beater of course.
2. Stick in the crust and smooth down level (it's stiff and requires persuasion).
3. Stick in freezer an hour or two to speed up the cool down. Then shift to fridge.
4. We used a springform pan and a bottom only graham cracker crust from scratch (read the box) since side crusts are a hassle to press into place and because we failed to score a pre-made crust in our supermarket drive-by.

notes

1. Like tiramisu, key lime pie has increased in visibility in the past decade. You can even find [key lime juice](#) on the market these days. [Key limes](#) are a special kind of lime found only in the Florida Keys—a string of islands on the coast of southern Florida—and in Mexico and the southwest US. A bit yellowish both inside and outside in contrast with the usual green limes. However, this has been made millions of times across America without the real thing, so why bother now?
2. There are many variations of this no bake recipe, including using the Cool Whip or whipped cream only as a garnish. [The baked one](#) uses eggs or egg yolks instead of cream cheese and Cool Whip and then bakes it to kill salmonella (and set the eggs), for example.

1993

pressure cooked cow (pot roast) in red wine sauce

Cooked cow is not high on our list of favorite foods. But let's face it, we're still not vegetarians even if we do like to eat that way generally. We grew up carnivores. We still are. And in our defense, it must be said that we did not seek out this red meat recipe. It is a regular dish at the in-laws where we are regular guests. Where in addition to being frequently fed animal parts we are also continually subjected to mainstream American television. I'm not sure which is more damaging but we seemed to have survived both. Thus far.

So having reconciled ourselves to eat beef, this is a great way to go. The combination of pressure cooker efficiency and spicy red wine sauce magic help to soften up this sucker like overcooked potatoes. It's a Lebanese/Middle Eastern/Mediterranean/who knows exactly dish. That we've grown to love having occasionally, until such time as politically correct cuisine forces decide otherwise.

ingredients

cow group

- 4 lbs top round roast beef (least visible fat) cut in 5/8 in thick slices
- 2 heaping T (1/3 c?) Crisco
- 1 T vegetable oil

spice group

- 1/2 t allspice
- 1/2 t salt
- 1/2 t pepper
- 1/8 t red pepper

prepared stuff group

- 1/2 c red (or white) wine (red in title refers to tomatoes)
- 1 lemon, juice from
- 2 c chopped mature tomatoes (2 medium tomatoes, if available)
- 1 sweet red pepper, chopped (for the smell, if you have one)
- 2 T (heaping) tomato paste (3 if no fresh tomato)
- dissolved in:
 - 1 1/2 c hot water
 - 1 head garlic (8 cloves, coarsely chopped)
 - 2 t salt

instructions

1. This is the family-serving-with-leftovers serving size. If you are capable of advanced preparation kitchen technique, rub the dried spice group over both sides of the beef the morning before the meal (or at least several hours before) and leave in the fridge to get acquainted better. If not, just do it at the cooking stage and skip the socializing period.
2. Heat the Crisco and oil in the pressure cooker (in an amount moderated by your fear of fat

level) to brown the slabs of beef (in stages until all are browned, removing them as done to make room for more). Meanwhile have somebody else do the veggie, garlic, and lemon preparation, or do it yourself before starting the browning.

3. Return all the browned beef to the pot and add the prepared stuff group (everything else in the list). Stir around a little. Cook about 5 minutes without pressure, loosely covered or not as you like, and then 10–15 minutes at full steam, letting it sit until the pressure subsides naturally.
4. We like it with [Armenian rice](#), and fresh nonfat plain yogurt on the side, and some veggies. You can serve it with anything you think is appropriate.

notes

1. A [cute illustration](#) is available from the original hand written recipe.
2. Some [photos](#) too.

pcprirws.htm: 2-aug-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

tuna pasta?

Fancy pasta dishes are for planned dinners, which allow ingredient gathering and unpressurized preparation time. This pasta is for coming home with no lead time and a dinner goal of "as soon as possible," no hassles allowed. It's a one pot meal (actually 2 before they are combined into one) for quasi-vegetarians like dr bob and latent Catholics on the wrong side of Lent season, like ms_ani. It requires having a few standard canned items on hand for just such improvisations, but little else. And it even has great taste. (Like the dr bob cooking team, although we have to confess the "tuna helper sin" committed repeatedly during our early twenty-something phase.)

ingredients

- 1 lb fusilli (or penne)
- 1 onion, minced
- 2 T butter
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, halved
- 1 28oz can Italian style tomatoes (can a tomato have style?)
- 1 2.2oz can (= 1/3 c) chopped black olives
- 1-2 T capers
- 1 6oz can dolphin-safe tuna
- salt to taste
- cayenne red pepper powder
- 4 inch squeeze of anchovy paste tube
- generous freshly ground black pepper

instructions

1. Start by getting the pasta water going on the stove. It takes a while to get boiling and the fusilli/penne then take their time on their way to al-dentization.
2. Then do the onion. dr bob does his onion in one of three ways. With the cowbell shaped cheese grater which is very quick but produces excessive onion juice which you must lose before sautéing. Who knows what escapes with the liquid. Or with his super duper veggie dicer (manual food processor, folks), seen at various U.S. home shows but picked up on the street in West Germany when there still was one. Or with increasing affluence, a food processor. This time we went with the dicer. Dry onion sautéed in butter and olive oil. With the two garlic cloves.
3. Okay, now for the cans. Open the pelati (tomatoes). Open the olives. Open the tuna. Open the capers. Oops, that's from a jar in the fridge. Then dump in the pelati. Dump in the olives. Dump in the tuna. (Into the pan with the onion.) Shovel in a couple of forkfuls of capers. Sprinkle in some salt and red pepper powder for a slight kick. Grind in some black pepper. Uncap the anchovy paste tube and squeeze out about 4 inches into the sauce. Simmer until the pasta is done.
4. Drain pasta, combine with sauce. Serve.

notes

1. We hate anchovies. Never have them on our pizza. Yuck. But a little bit in a sauce can add to the taste. Since the word "little" is the key word here, toothpaste tubes of anchovy paste left in the fridge do the job nicely. (Don't mistake it for toothpaste: superyuckies!) We got the idea from an Italian woman's magazine with an accompanying paperback cookbook. Unacceptable to purists of course.

tunapsta.htm: 2-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

asparagus and red potato salad

We like asparagus a lot. Of course it wasn't always that way. dr bob doesn't remember ever eating it as a kid. Fresh or frozen. In fact it was way into adulthood that he became vaguely aware of this usually overpriced vegetable that people apparently just had to have in season. Eventually he started having it too. There wasn't anything immediately grabbing about it. But as time passed, it became more and more valued. He began reading various ways of preparing the stuff. He bought one of those tall narrow pots that aren't good for anything else but asparagus. Without any clear moment of revelation, dr bob found himself among(st) the converted—a full fledged member of the asparagus lovers society.

dr bob also compulsively collects recipes. Cookbooks, cooking magazines, women and fashion magazine articles, and newspaper FOOD sections. Any category alone represents an information overload, but noncookbook categories have a sort of natural window of opportunity for overloading, so that any particularly interesting item, even if tagged in some way, gets lost in the growing stockpile of paper-based media on which it comes. This particular asparagus recipe got clipped from the paper and entered its temporary still-lying-around-in-plain-sight period before being committed to the archives. Amazingly enough the right combination of circumstances involving a surprise Sunday afternoon visit by a brother-in-law gave us the excuse to try it out and we all loved it. Enough to tell other people about it. So here's how it goes.

ingredients

1 1/2 t garlic, minced

2 1/4 t Dijon mustard

6 T balsamic vinegar

salt

1 c (-1T) extra virgin olive oil

2 lbs small red potatoes (about 2in diameter) cleaned but not peeled

2 lbs fresh asparagus

1/2 c chopped scallions, including
2in green stems

black pepper, freshly ground

1 head Boston lettuce, leaves
washed and dried

Boston lettuce? What is it? We skipped it the first time, but used 3 red leaf lettuce leaves the 2nd time, finely chopped.

1 head radicchio, leaves washed

We chopped it the first time, forgot it the 2nd time.

and dried

1/4 c chopped parsley or chives or combination

We forgot this the first time, replaced it with 1/2 c chopped green of leak, sprinkling of freeze dried chives.

instructions

1. Place garlic, mustard, vinegar, and 3/4 t salt in a nonaluminum bowl and whisk well. Gradually whisk in olive oil. (Dressing can be made 1 day ahead, covered and refrigerated, but really, how much time would that save?)
2. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil and add potatoes and 1 T salt. Cook until potatoes are tender when pierced with a knife, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain well. Cut potatoes into quarters, then halve the quarters.
3. Cut and discard tough ends from asparagus stalks. With vegetable peeler, peel stalks, starting just below the tips. Cut stalks on diagonal into 2 in pieces. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil and add 2 t salt and asparagus. Boil until tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain in colander and refresh under cold running water. Pat dry. (Both potatoes and asparagus can be prepared several hours ahead, covered loosely with plastic wrap and left at room temperature.)
4. When ready to serve, toss potatoes, asparagus and scallions in bowl. Heat dressing over medium heat until hot. Pour over vegetables and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper. Arrange border of alternating lettuce and radicchio leaves on serving plate. Mound salad on leaves and sprinkle with parsley. Makes 8 servings. [We just served it all mixed up.]

notes

1. We had something similar to this at the [Philadelphia Restaurant School](#), which added inspiration to try it. We had a couple great meals there years ago, but seem to have too much inertia to return. Must make a note about that.
2. **THE ARUGULA MAKEOVER.**
Ten years later we are cutting down on carbs to help ani lose a few pounds. We see a piece on the South Beach Diet and the cardiologist who wrote the book and he actually sounds sensible and honest. The next day bob is thinking a salad with chunks of potato (not a lot, low carb remember?) and veggies, and some tuna on the grill pan, rare inside. Trader Joe's provides us with the small red potato chunks and garlic all ready to go (intended product use: garlic mashed potatoes) and since they have to be cooked, the hot potato salad idea naturally emerges, so we consult this recipe for ingredients on hand. Oops, that last bit of green onion gone. Only 3 leftover asparagus stalks and a half jar of baby asparagus (ready-for-use). We'd also grabbed a bag of triple washed baby arugula at Trader Joe's (how do they guess what we want so well?) to replace the greens, since we have been on an arugula trip lately. We start with a handful, tossed into our newly acquired inverted flat topped square pyramid shaped Crate and Barrel salad dish. And by now we have high end balsamic vinegar on hand for the dressing: we settle on about a third of the dressing ingredient amounts since this is only for the two of us, whisked together in our brand new 1 quart stainless All Clad saucier waiting to be heated. Only whole grained Dijon mustard

is available and turns out to be an improvement. We throw in a medium tomato, chopped, into the salad bowl that is. Then the chopped remnant asparagus. Ani cuts up a few fresh white mushrooms, into the mix they go. A handful of baby French string beans get steamed. The potatoes are done, heat turned off. Ready to do the tuna, salt and pepper, olive oil, ani takes care of that end. Meanwhile we heat the dressing. Dump in the drained warm potatoes, then the crisp green beans chopped into inch long pieces. The chopped tomato. Then the heated dressing. Grind a little fresh pepper into it. We toss until evenly distributed. The tuna is done. We thinly slice it and serve. Yes. A keeper. [A real chef would have wiped down the sides of the salad bowl, [the balsamic vinegar dressing looks quite messy, eh?](#)]

3. Maybe we should write ourselves a big note on the fridge to try to return to the Restaurant School this next decade since we never made it back this past one either.

asprpsld.htm: 16-aug-2003 [what, ME cook? © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

spaghetti squash or squash spaghetti? (or both!)

Wednesday, spaghetti day! Somehow this phrase was plugged into the postwar boomer generation that spawned dr bob. But can spaghetti in a squash substitute for spaghetti in a box? To be on the safe side, you can combine both.

dr bob loves food that comes with instructions. Like the [tilapia fish deal](#). With the 2 page supermarket owner's manual. Kitchen hints make the product so much more user friendly. This time it was spaghetti squash. Never had any before. And there was this little sticker on the end about how to cook it. For dr bob and the rest of the target market who had no clue what to do with the stuff. In the microwave even (oven, also fits the phrase). So we picked it up. It sat on the refrigerator a while. This yellow football-like veggie with a green sticker. "Do me this way." But the challenge was to do something more interesting with it.

One cookbook said it was perfect for combining with pasta sauces. Since dr bob was already thinking squash-based pasta sauce, he mistakenly took this as confirmation of his goal. But there were no squash-based pasta sauces in that book. Out came the *Talismano della Felicità*, *La Cucina della Felicità*, and various other Italian language sources of promised culinary happiness. Useless. The index just lists recipes by name, names which rarely reveal key ingredients, and which are organized by pasta type and not sauce names. These enormous tomes must have lots of secrets which will forever remain safe from the dr bob cooking team. At least they look good on the shelf.

So we went with the spaghetti squash casserole idea from the first American cookbook we had looked at. We even has some nearly deal scallions (= green onions, close enough) hiding in a bag of stuff from the mother-in-law jammed in the vegetable drawer at the bottom of the fridge, called for by this recipe. We improved on the cheese, since asiago was all we had lying around. A TV cooking show informed us that asiago is sort of like pecorino romano, the sharper tasting competitor for parmigiano reggiano. We had gotten it for a risotto with radicchio we'd seen on another cooking show and forgot to use it.

ingredients

- 1 spaghetti squash
- 2 medium tomatoes
- 3 T olive oil
- 2 or more garlic cloves
- 1 t salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 c coarsely grated asiago cheese
- 1/4 c freshly grated parmigiano
- a few chopped up scallions (green onions?)

instructions

1. Okay, this is pretty quick. First we cut the squash in half lengthwise and scooped out the seeds.
2. We put it in a dish with 1/4 c water, covered it with plastic wrap and nuked it on high for 9 minutes face down and 9 more face up.
3. It probably would have been easier to scoop it out later as advised by the book that we forgot to pay attention to. Seeing spaghetti squash become spaghetti strands for the first time was truly amazing. Once cooked, as you begin to pull out the squash from its skin, it just breaks apart into these spaghetti-like strands.
4. Meanwhile we sauteed the chopped garlic and chopped tomatoes and salt and pepper. Not long.
5. [Optional fish detour: Then threw in about 1/4 c white wine. And a couple pieces of white flat fish for the rest of our meal for two. They cooked pretty quick. Once removed,]
6. We threw in the spaghetti squash scooped out from its skin and the asiago and parmigiano and the scallions and stirred it up.

notes

1. Not long after this first encounter with spaghetti squash, at a food fair (The Book and the Cook 1993), we picked up an Italian cooking magazine sample giveaway. And they had a whole section on winter squash, including spaghetti squash with spaghetti from a box. The *Journal of Italian Food & Wine*, Volume III, Number 1, Winter 1993 (p. 27), out of NYC. No trace of it on the web in 2002. Another casualty of the 20th century? Couldn't find the entrance ramp for the bridge to the third millennium? Here's what they said.

spaghetti with spaghetti squash

ingredients

- 1 spaghetti squash (most are rather large)
- 3 garlic cloves
- 5 medium thick slices of unsmoked bacon, or pancetta
- 3 T chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 1 t rosemary, leaves only
- 1/4 c white wine
- 1/4 c chicken broth
- 1 lemon, juice of
- olive oil
- 1 lb spaghetti # 8 or #9 (what, they have numbers?)

instructions

1. Open the squash the long way and remove the "spaghetti" inside. Heat a little olive oil in a frying pan and add the garlic cloves and squash until they become a bit browned. Do not overcook. Boil water for pasta.
2. In a separate pan, brown the bacon or pancetta and discard the fat. Drain the cooked meat thoroughly and crumble.

3. Remove the garlic from the squash and add the rosemary, crumbled bacon, 1 T extra-virgin olive oil, white wine and broth. Cook on high heat stirring to coat all the squash.
4. When pasta is done, pour squash over it, squeeze lemon juice on top, sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve. If it needs moistening, drizzle a little olive oil on top. Serve with parmigiano cheese.

NOTE: Additions to this dish can be made. Saute onions slowly until they caramelize and add at the end. You may treat leeks the same way. Good tiny peas may be added at the end. The adventuresome might try hot red pepper flakes.

spgsqsh.htm: 8-jan-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

red lentil and rice soup

I don't know if this is Armenian. Or Lebanese. Or a family tradition. Or just Isgouhi's invention (dr bob's mother-in-law). Whoever is responsible, this is a darn good soup, to use an awful(ly) American expression, and easy too. Unfortunately when we make it, it's never exactly like when she does. Must be the mother/mother-in-law curse.

ingredients

namesake stuff

- 1 c cracked red lentils (washed)
- 1/2 c white rice

other stuff

- 1 large onion, quartered
- 2 1/4 qts water
- 1 t salt
- 1/2 stick (= 4 T) butter
- some small pieces of bread (at least a slice worth)
- 2 lemons, juice of
- red pepper powder, cumin to taste (optional)

instructions

1. First you have to seek out the red lentils in an Armenian or Lebanese or Middle East specialty store, now also conveniently available at the local branch of the national natural whole foods supermarket chain. They look just like green split peas except they are a reddish orange color (putting split peas in orange dye is not an acceptable substitute). If you are lucky enough to score a bag, don't forget it in the closet like we did for so long. We have Isgouhi. You don't.
2. So get started by rinsing the lentils. About six times or so until the rinsing water is clean.
3. Then put them with the rice, quartered onion, and water into the pressure cooker and boil about 10 minutes uncovered.
4. Skim off as much of the white foam on the surface as possible. (Unlike beer, this soup shouldn't have a head). Then close the pressure cooker, bring to full steam and let'er go for 5 minutes, then lower for 10 minutes. Open and add salt to taste.
5. In a saucepan brown the pieces of bread (pita, American, whatever) in the butter.
6. Add to the soup together with the lemon juice. Then simmer together for a few minutes or until the desired consistency is reached. We like it thick. So we cut down Isgouhi's original 3 1/2 qts to 2 1/2 qts and then simmer it down longer afterward. After all this pressure cooking, the rice should almost dissolve into the creamy soup. Sprinkle some red pepper powder or paprika and cumin on each serving. Then enjoy.
7. If you're wondering who to thank afterward, it's "iss-goo-HEE."

notes

1. Hours after typing in this recipe, the dr bob cooking team enjoyed a candlelit October backyard dinner at our close Turkish friends' house. Red lentil soup was the first course and bob had 3 bowls. Müge's mom also makes it, so it must also be a Turkish thing. She adds a large carrot for color (although it couldn't be seen in the dark!) and purees the result smooth, instead of the bread step. Either way, we are talking powerful comfort food here.
2. This gets really sluggish as a leftover in the fridge. Add some water to thin it out and heat it up and then mix in a bit of [Middle Eastern red pepper powder](#) and cumin (to taste) and some fresh lemon juice to give it a kick.
3. A twist on this is to use Italian arborio rice instead of the usual white rice, but you have to compensate by adding at least a cup and a half (estimate) more water. The result is even creamier and when appropriately thick, you can't beat this as serious "comfort food." Using crunchy bread croutons is also an excellent option and simplifies the preparation.
4. This recipe is bullet proof, and even interplanetary miscommunication (men are from mars, women are from venues) cannot ruin it. One much later run-through of this winter favorite, bob decides to help ani with the prep before getting back to test grading and sets out the cookbook recipe and each of the ingredients and gets out the quart glass measure for the water and puts in the first quart to be ready to add. Ani, notorious for not reading recipes, interprets this as the quantity called for in the recipe and goes with it, more than a quart low so to speak in the language of the old gas station tradition of checking the oil under the hood, very last century. When she realizes the soup stuck to the bottom forming a crust, she began trying to scrape it off and bob takes a grading break. The light bulb goes off. Not enough water. bob doesn't talk enough. It didn't seem to do much damage. A little thicker than normal. bob had two bowls, later realizing this was equivalent to four. His stomach realized this first. bob survived.
5. [Illustrations](#) available.
6. **UPDATE 2006.** Isgouhi decided to substitute bulgur for the white rice, which is news to bob but apparently not to the Middle East. Of course bulgur is much healthier than white rice, so this was a welcome surprise. Since hubby Barkev does not like the soup pureed, we ate it lumpy, but in fact it tasted like non-red lentil soup since red lentils disintegrate while other lentils retain their texture and the bulgur simulated the undistintegrated lentils. However, Isgouhi says the pureed soup would taste even better. Same procedure with direct substitution. We'll have to try it ourselves next time.

mashed potato king

Once upon a time there was a typical meat, potato, and vegetable American family. The potatoes were often mashed. And in abundant supply. One family member would often assume the awesome responsibility of avoiding leftover mashed potatoes. By eating much more than the average meat, potato, and vegetable guy portion. Preferably with lots of gravy or butter. Though at the end of the meal the butter would no longer melt in its little well in the middle of the mound. Actually it was margarine, since this family was not in the butter tax bracket. [It was also the golden age of pre-fat awareness.] And when there were leftovers, they became mashed potato cakes, fried in butter (margarine) in hamburger shaped globs. In shorter supply being already in the leftover stage. But still fair game for the mashed potato king. dr bob before the dr.

Lately dr bob hasn't been having much mashed potatoes. But being an avid newspaper recipe collector, he stumbled on an article about mashed potatoes and ways to enhance them, assuming that one felt the need to improve on the traditional hunk of butter (margarine) and not too much milk. [Too much makes potato slop, right Claire?] However, with a food info glut of regularly and irregularly arriving cooking magazines and women's magazines in addition to the big cardboard box full of newspaper clippings, dr bob's faulty memory couldn't pin down the place he'd seen it. Fortunately it was on top of the pile where he first looked and became one of the few to actually get used.

Among the suggestions was using buttermilk instead of milk, but the supermarket was closed and the last bit in the fridge had fed the bread machine that afternoon. Nonfat yogurt could be substituted it said. And boiling a yellow turnip with the potatoes was another presumably mutually exclusive idea. Almost never had turnips before. The ones on hand turned out to be white. One was added with some garlic pulp leftover from pressing about 4 cloves for other purposes. The potatoes had been around too long and had to be peeled, but the new ones bought for the occasion got to keep their skins. The vitamins are supposed to be there. After about 15 minutes of full (salted boil), the chopped potatoes (roughly 3/4 in) sat in their potato water until serving time.

Then some leftover nonfat yogurt, about 1/3 an 8oz container, with a little milk thrown in, and a tablespoon of unsalted butter, and some fresh chopped parsley. And a half cup of grated parmigiano and romano were mashed together with our 5 speed electric beaters. Some salt and generous freshly ground pepper. Not bad.

Did we forget to list the ingredients?

ingredients

- some potatoes, with skins if good enough
- 1 turnip
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1/3 c plain nonfat yogurt
- not too much milk
- 1 T unsalted butter

some fresh parsley, chopped
1/2 c grated parmigiano, romano
salt, freshly ground pepper to taste

instructions

1. See above.

notes

1. This is not a real rigid recipe. But it began the mashed potato renaissance in the dr bob cooking team circle.
2. Claire is half-American, half-French, but raised French. Apparently without cooking lessons. With a newborn daughter on a year long academic visit to [Berserkely](#) with her absentminded professor husband (totally French), she was initiated into the mom/housewife business. Being European, it was natural to invite the neighbors for dinner. She had an American cookbook (sublet furnished apartment) and tried the mashed potatoes, but not being well versed in the amazing American units, overdid the milk a bit. Not being (fully) American, she did not know the difference. We did not tell her.

mshptkng.htm: 2-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

still waiting for [gabriella's lasagna](#)

[in progress]

INGREDIENTS FOR AN 11in x 14in x 2.5in ROASTING/LASAGNA PAN

OR 12in x 18in x 3in CALPHALON ROASTING PAN

Note: 11*14 = 154, 12*18 = 216, so percentage increase about 40 percent

bolognese meat sauce

11x14	12x18	in ² pan size
food process group		
1 c		large onion
1 c		celery
1 c		carrots
meat saute group		
3-4 T		olive oil
1.4lb		lean ground beef
sauce group		
2 c		dry white wine
2 c		milk
1.5 t		nutmeg
3 28oz cans		italian plum tomatoes

bechamel sauce

11x14	12x18	in ² pan size
5 c	7 c	milk
10.5 T = 1 stick + 2.5 T	16 T = 2 sticks	butter
7.5 T flour	11 T = 2/3 c	flour
1/3 t	1/2 t	salt

lasagna pasta

11x14	12x18	in ² pan size
5	7	large eggs
3 3/4 c	4 1/2 c	pasta flour

or
 ? lb ? lb pasta sheets
 [?? ?x? sheets] [?? ?x? sheets]

two years later: preliminary notes

We again find the courage to face The Lasagna. By this time we have been using Marcella's [new book](#) rather frequently so we check the new version of her Bolognese sauce recipe. Surprise, it seems completely different. So we decide to fake it based on our previous experience and the license given to us by the radical change in proportions in the official recipe. Not that we carefully recorded our improvisation. Feel free to be imaginative.

We'd been hunting down a suitable big deep lasagna pan that would do justice to the real thing and finally we found an adequate solution: a 2.5 in deep 11 in x 14 in nonstick roasting pan. When we go to all this trouble, we want to make a lot of it. For this pan we decided a 6 egg pasta recipe would be needed, but it turns out that 5 would have been enough. The trick is not to boil all the noodles while assembling but to hold off till you see exactly how many you need—and then you can make fettuccine out of the rest. We had to freeze most of our boiled remnants but did catch on in time for enough fettuccine for two some night. Also frozen. Later we bought our first [Calphalon](#) pan: a bigger roasting pan, this one 12 in x 18 in x 3.5 in, for a real monster lasagna, though we got it for a turkey.

The 5 egg recipes should take about 2 hours to "work" and boil, but you have to make the dough in advance and refrigerate it in a bowl covered by a damp towel at least 1/2 hour (or the day before if you like) before this phase. The boiling is done immediately afterward. We got two 12qt stock pots 2/3 full of water boiling during the rolling phase and did 3 noodles at a time in each pot. They are done in some fraction of a minute but fishing those suckers out with a big round flat hole-filled long handled kitchen tool (what is that thing? a strainer?) and a long handled flat wooden spatula is no picnic—and not quick—so who knows how much longer than necessary we abused the noodles. They taste great anyway.

Assembly is rather quick compared to the other phases—about a half hour. We were able to do 9 layers with the amount of sauce per layer we used. Afterwards, it seemed like too much sauce compared to the noodle value. One really has to try to use the minimal amount per layer for a good result.

Phase one: the sauce

This takes about 4 hours minimum and is probably best done in advance (like days before). We chopped up the onion, celery, and carrots in our small food processor (since we had not yet purchased the real one). The "1 cup" quantity is only a guess. We sautéed this a while in olive oil, first the onions, and then together with the carrots and celery, but cannot see any reason why they can't all start together. As for the meat, one could probably just skip it and convert this to a vegetarian dish that would be just as good, but we haven't tried that yet. (Mushrooms are a thought.) We added 1.4 lb only because that was how much our frozen package in the freezer weighed. Less would have been fine. Throw in your choice of amount (thawed is better!) with

salt and a few pepper mill twists and break apart the ground beef into its grinds (?), cooking it until no longer red. Then add the milk and simmer, stirring frequently until the milk has bubbled away (judgment call) and stir in 1/4 t nutmeg. Add the wine and simmer till it evaporates. Then add the tomatoes and stir everything up well. Once the mixture starts to boil again, turn down the heat so that the sauce barely simmers—with solitary bubbles surfacing occasionally. Cook uncovered at least 3 hours or more, stirring occasionally. When done, taste for salt and add if insufficient.

Phase one: the noodles

the hard way

later.

the easy way

Buy fresh pasta sheets. We have gotten them both at the national whole food supermarket chain and at our favorite Italian specialty store. They are still not thin enough for real lasagna, which we prefer at the last notch of the roller pasta machine setting (they are at the next to last setting), so they must be cut in about 3 in strips and passed through the roller machine to flatten out a bit (to about 4 in). Then 3 strips per layer, with lengths cut to match the pan.

phase three: boiling and fishing

[in progress]

phase four: assembly

[in progress]

phase five: baking

[in progress]

notes

finally gabriella shows us her technique under extenuating circumstances in the States.





amazing. Move on to our [concluding remarks](#).

wfglsgn2.htm: 22-sep-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

rachele's woman's magazine carrot vegetable pasta (maccheroncini alle carote)

rachele made this pasta for us in Italy after other friends raved about it. We liked it too. But our letter reminding them of our request for the recipe took quite some time for a response via gianpiero's e-mail. Finally the photocopy of the magazine page showed up in the mail with a little note saying that it takes a lot less than 40 minutes if you use a pressure cooker as she does. bob forgot this part of the note until after following the original recipe pretty closely.

For 4 persons, about 40 minutes total, unless you pressure cook:

ingredients

400 g maccheroncini (1 lb elbow macaroni or butterfly pasta)
300 g carrots (about 3 or 4 medium carrots)
1 smallish eggplant
2 narrow zucchini
1 large clove of garlic (or to taste)
20 g ~ 1.5 T butter
3 T oil
.05 l ~ 1/4 c cream of your choice
30 g ~ 2/3 c grated parmigiano or other "grana"
1 T chives, chopped
salt and pepper to taste

instructions

1. Peel carrots, slice and boil in salted water until soft, about 10 minutes. Drain and puree' in a suitable kitchen gadget: blender or food processor.
2. Put the result in a small nonstick pan on low heat for about 5 minutes, then salt and pepper to taste (dr bob has no taste so just eyeballs it unless ms_ani is around to handle the salt decision) and stir in the cream, presumably with the heat off.
3. Meanwhile after the carrots are on their own on the stove, peel the 2 zucchini, and cut each lengthwise in half and then in half again (in quarters) and then slice widthwise about 3/16 inch slices. At least that's what we did once. You may julienne them or chop them in any way you see fit (the recipe says cube them). Slice the unpeeled eggplant widthwise and then into small cubes.
4. Peel and press one large garlic clove into the oil and butter in a saucepan and start heating. As soon as the garlic starts dancing, throw in the chopped zucchini and eggplant. Sauté 10 or 15 minutes, 15 is better. Then salt and pepper to taste.
5. Meanwhile, probably at step 3, start the pasta water boiling. Dump in your choice of pasta when the water is boiling (preceded by some salt). Cook until al dente. Drain. Put back in the pot over low heat (?). Stir in the carrot sauce and parmigiano and finally the sautéed vegetables and chopped chives.
6. Eat.

notes

1. rachele used butterfly pasta (farfalle). We used cavatelli. Maccheroncini you will never find written on a box of pasta in the USA, but they are just small elbow macaroni. Since our version did not measure up to rachele's maybe we should have stuck with the farfalle.
2. Chives are not an ingredient that frequently finds its way into our cooking, and when we did this originally in the early nineties where we live, fresh spices were more difficult to come by. Nowadays they are much more easily found in supermarkets.
3. So we should redo this in a pressure cooker. Hmm. What about the liquid? We better get in touch with rachele again. gianpiero, ..., help!

rachele's revision 2001

ciao Bob and Any,

You are very patient, but finally you get the answer to the macaroni with carrots recipe.

I use the pressure cooker to cook all the vegetables. Starting with the carrots, peel them off and put them into the pressure cooker with a quarter of glass of water and cook them for about 5 minutes. When they are done, puree them in a mixer and make it creamy but adding the boiling water and the cream.

Then, you can cook the other vegetables into the pressure cooker. In another 5 minutes they will be ready. It is difficult to say how much water you must put into the pressure cooker (maybe 2 tablespoons?)... if it is too much you will have some "broth" (vegetables are releasing their own water!!!).

The chef final touch is to put all the ingredients together with the too much "al dente" pasta and let it cook for another 3 minutes on fire, stirring it continuously.

Try it and tell me which method you prefer.

Ciao
Rachele

still to try...

bucatini two ways

One of our favorite "long pasta" dishes in Rome is *bucatini all'amatriciana*. Bucatini are spaghetti length straight macaroni, about 3mm wide, while perciatelli are somewhat narrower. For some reason [DeCecco](#) imports perciatelli to the US instead of the more common bucatini found in Italy, so we end up using them, instead unless we get fresh bucatini from [Carlino's](#), our local trusted fresh pasta source. When cooked, both are somewhat less user-friendly than spaghetti in the fork-rolling and mouth-insertion phase because of their extra thickness, seeming to have a mind of their own which easily leads to sauce splattering. Wearing a big napkin tucked in at the neck is a wise move when feeding, if protecting your shirt from ugly tomato sauce stains is something you care about. If you are one of those long-pasta amateurs who already has trouble rolling spaghetti on a fork, you're in trouble here. Lots of slurping is required, but try to avoid overly loud sucking noises.

The traditional amatriciana sauce is made with tomatoes, garlic, and pancetta, an Italian lean bacon that comes in a roll like lunchmeat until sliced (thick, request about 1/8 in thick slices from the 3 1/2 – 4 inch diameter roll) but which is not really substitutable by American bacon and should not be tried. With a touch of pepperoncino for an extra kick, but not enough to make it spicy hot. We trust [Marcella](#) on this one.

But if we don't have any pancetta in the freezer waiting for this dish, we have to improvise. For our nontraditional sauce, we had some garden fresh tomatoes from a relative and some farm fresh sweet peppers and a bag of mint leaves from a friend. Fresh tomato based sauces are quick and delicious and can even be nutritious, as we hope this one is.

perciatelli with fresh tomato and sweet pepper sauce

ingredients

for two people, no leftovers:

- 1/2 lb bucatini/perciatelli
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 sweet red pepper, chopped
- 2 medium, ripe tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 1/4 t cayenne red pepper
- salt to taste
- black pepper, freshly ground
- 2 T fresh mint, chopped
- 1/4 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. First start the pasta water boiling. Then begin the sauce but take a timeout to throw in the pasta when the water starts boiling enthusiastically, preceded by some salt of course. (Our

DeCecco perciatelli box says 11 minutes boiling time.)

2. The tomatoes also require maybe 30 seconds in boiling water to loosen the skins, which must then be peeled. You can do this in the pasta water just before throwing in the pasta.
3. Over low heat, sauté the garlic in olive oil a few minutes, then add the chopped pepper.
4. A few minutes later throw in the chopped tomatoes. Let simmer.
5. 10 minutes from the start throw in the spices. Turn off after few minutes.
6. When the pasta is done (al dente), drain and return it to the pasta pot, stir in the sauce and parmigiano and serve.

notes

1. We never peel the tomatoes, but maybe this once we did... If it's too much of a hassle, forget it. A little skin never hurt anyone... [This attitude was confirmed by a Philly food writer Jim Quinn whom we really respect for his wonderful food writing, in a [Philadelphia Magazine](#) article about fresh tomato sauces from South Philly (saucy things; Quinn on Food; Aug 2000 (Page 235).]
2. A little detail we never discuss: How much salt in the pasta water? Big grained salt, fine grained salt? bob never really knows and just dumps some fine salt in, but marcella says 1 1/2 t per pound of pasta.

bucatini all'amatriciana

ingredients

1 lb bucatini/perciatelli
2 T olive oil
1 T butter
1 medium onion, chopped fine
2 1/8 in disks of pancetta, chopped into small pieces, say 1/2 x 1/4 x 1/8 in
1 1/2 c canned imported Italian plum tomatoes, drained and cut up
chopped hot red chili pepper to taste
salt to taste
3 T freshly grated parmigiano
3 T freshly grated romano

instructions

1. Again start the pasta water boiling etc.
2. Put the oil, butter and onion in a saucepan over medium heat and sauté a bit, like usual.
3. Then add the pancetta and cook about a minute, stirring a few times.
4. Add the tomatoes, chili pepper, and salt and gently simmer uncovered for 25 minutes.
5. Taste and correct for salt and hot pepper.
6. Drain the pasta and toss with the sauce, then mix in the cheese.
7. Serve with optional freshly ground black pepper, more cheese if you really love it.

notes

1. We just use the standard large can of Italian plum tomatoes, or even just fresh plum tomatoes, skins and all.
2. This is a terrific pasta combination.

bucatini.htm: 2-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

zucchini with saffron pasta sauce

We are continually resisting being seduced by new pasta cookbooks, without any consistent success. The ones full of glossy color photos are the hardest on our resolve. And when a sales guy walks into the ms_ani workplace with a sample copy to generate interest at only \$2.99 per copy, complete with the glossy color photos, it was an offer that could not be refused. ms_ani took the lead and others followed suit.

Of course usually these cookbooks just end up on the shelf. Unused. But we had some fresh zucchini in the fridge and not much else. And needed a zucchini idea to make it through dinner, without going to the supermarket, which we love to do of course, but not when it's too late. So since this cookbook was a fresh acquisition, we checked it out and came up with a winner. Zucchini with a creamy saffron sauce. Alas! No cream in the house, laments dr bob. We can't do it. No problem, says ms_ani. We'll just use milk. Milk? No, we can't do it. Milk with cornstarch. Hmm. Maybe. After all, what alternative was there? Besides, this substitution makes it much healthier! Still skeptical, the dr left it to the ms. And it was a success! Even better as leftovers for lunch the next day. The well known (to some) aging effect of pasta.

Of course your kitchen may have the cream but not the saffron. dr bob is a big importer of cheap Italian saffron for Iranian friends who are heavy users. 125 mg packets at roughly 50 cents a shot compared to an outrageous \$3.50 circa for a probably comparable amount in those big glass jars you see in american supermarkets. So we keep a few packets ourselves just in case. Italians use saffron for risotto alla milanese, which is probably the most famous risotto dish that we've never made. Just yellow rice seems a bit boring to us, so we rarely have occasion to dip into our saffron supply.

ingredients

1 lb penne or orecchiette
3 T olive oil
1 1/3 lb small young zucchini, cut into 1/4 in slices
salt, pepper, nutmeg to taste
2/3 c milk + 1 t cornstarch or 2/3 c cream (light, half and half, heavy, whipping?)
1/2 T saffron ?
parmesan cheese

instructions

1. THE PASTA:
Cook the pasta. You know the routine. Al dente.
2. THE VEGGIES:
Sauté the garlic and zucchini until browned but still crisp (i.e., not limp, nor as in "burned to a crisp"). Add the spices "to taste".
3. THE SAFFRON CREAM:
If your arteries are feeling daring, bring the cream and saffron to a boil and simmer gently until it thickens slightly and attains a "mellow saffron color" (is that anything like "mellow

yellow"... the 60s song by Donovan?). If you are health conscious like us or just don't happen to have cream on hand, mix the cornstarch with the milk and saffron and proceed as in the cream scenario.

4. ASSEMBLY:

After draining the pasta, return to the pot and combine with the zucchini and saffron cream.

5. SERVE.

notes

1. The american motto "bigger is better" does not apply to zucchini. Look for the narrowest ones at your supermarket.
2. You might consider an Italian specialty store for the saffron.
3. Oh, the [pasta cookbook](#)... we should pull it out and try some more things...

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

pizzoccheri?

Pizzoccheri are a well kept secret of northern Italian cuisine, from the part of Italy at the northern border where they speak Italian with a German accent and make smelly fontina cheese. But a secret that has not escaped [Marcella](#) or the pasta cookbook author whose [book](#) we grabbed in Pier I Imports when we spotted the authentic looking recipe.

The dr bob team had been introduced to pizzoccheri, long buckwheat pasta noodles about fettuccine size but shorter, by [Piero](#), who brought them to us from Italy and showed us how to make the traditional recipe. We forgot to take notes at the time. Years later we had one box left and managed to find a one time buy of another box at our local authentic Italian products store. But we were saving them for a special occasion which never seemed to come. When we discovered them in our local supermarket, we finally decided to buy the smelly cheese and do up a box for no special occasion at all. But the Savoy cabbage took some time to locate. It finally showed up at the same supermarket and the dish was immediately green-lighted. By this time the smelly cheese was also seriously moldy, so it had to be trimmed down a bit. To our chagrin, the expiration dates were respectively 2 and 3 years earlier than the current year. Although we had a brand new box in our hands and several more boxes in stock waiting in the supermarket (not moving fast, as you might imagine), it seemed a shame to waste such a great product. We went with the two year expired box to see what would happen.

Without Piero nearby, we went with the cookbooks and our better judgment. One said half a pound of Savoy cabbage, the other 3 1/2 cups. The cabbage head we had seemed like it was heavier but we didn't stop to weigh it. Once cut up it seemed like more than 3 1/2 cups too but what the hey. We through it all in anyway. The recipes weren't very clear about how the potatoes should be cut up either. Between the two cookbooks and the 3 different brand box abbreviated recipes, we went with the "small cubes" suggestion on one. About 1 cm or 3/8 in on a side, on the average. [Note that since potatoes are not rectangular, this is only a rule of thumb.]

ingredients

boilables

- 1 lb pizzoccheri della [Valtellina](#)
- 1 T salt
- 3 - 4 medium potatoes, cut into small cubes
- 1 small head Savoy cabbage (1/2 lb?, 3 1/2 c?), cut roughly into strips 1/2 in by 2 1/2 in

sauté-ee's

- 2 T unsalted butter
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, sliced
- 6 fresh sage leaves, chopped [or 1/2 t dried]
- 1 leek, chopped [optional, if unavailable]

finishers

- 1/4 t salt
- freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1/2 - 2/3 c grated parmigiano

1/4 -1/3 lb fontina valle d'aosta

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling.
2. Ready the potatoes. Peel if you must, then cube.
3. Wash the cabbage and cut into strips.
4. Cut the cheese into thin slivers.
5. When the water is boiling seriously, dump in the potatoes and salt, cover, return to a boil, and continue uncovered for about 4 minutes.
6. Add the cabbage, cover and bring to a boil again, then continue uncovered for 5 minutes.
7. Add the noodles, cover and bring to a boil yet again and cook 8 - 12 minutes until the pasta is not quite al dente.
8. Meanwhile sauté the garlic, sage and leek in butter and oil until softened up a bit.
9. When the pasta is ready, drain briefly but don't shake out the liquid.
10. Return the pasta to its pot and mix in the sauté mixture, parmigiano, salt and pepper.
11. Put half the mixture in a large enough casserole dish (or a large one and a small one) and cover with half the fontina slivers. Repeat.
12. Put on the top rack of a 400° F preheated oven for 5 minutes to melt the cheese.
13. Then remove and let sit a couple minutes and serve. This is a hearty meal.

notes

1. [Marcella](#) actually prefers Swiss chard stalks (leafy parts removed) to savoy cabbage, but if necessary, one can use whole Swiss chard or even under desperate circumstances spinach according to the more flexible alternatives. However, we don't think it will be the same.
2. If the stinky fontina valle d'aosta is out of the question, regular Italian fontina or even Bel Paese may be substituted perhaps. We've never betrayed our valle d'aosta. [Although its from the Valle d'Aosta region and not the Valtellina region to the east, where they may use caseri cheese instead.]
3. Not only did we survive the 2 year outdated box, but the 3 year one as well.
4. If pizzoccheri are just a pipe dream where you live, both our cookbook references have slightly differing recipes for the fresh pasta, one with eggs, one without. But without trying it first, you'll never be curious enough to go to all that trouble, will you?
5. [Illustrations](#) available.
6. After trying the [new pizzoccheri recipe](#) with sausage a few times, we have been adding 4 links of sweet fennel Italian sausage, skins removed, diced, sautéed with the garlic and sage to add an extra kick to this dish. Increasing the comfort food index a few notches.
7. **2002 update.** This recipe is bullet proof. We find ourselves stretching it a lot each time we do it. Besides the sausage. Extra garlic, pressed into the leek sage butter oil mixture instead of just sliced. Extra sage which we always keep in the freezer ready for this dish. Maybe 12 leaves chopped. Oops, we found ourselves out of leeks when we tried this with some buckwheat gnocchetti della Valtellina we found next to the pizzoccheri on the supermarket shelf in Rome this summer. (Bosco brand from Cepina Valdisotto, usual pizzoccheri recipe on the 500g package.) So two yellow onions finely chopped stood in for them (minus the sausage, which turned out not to be left waiting in the freezer as we had thought). And instead of the broiling routine, we put the whole thing in the oven at 350°

for a while waiting for some in-laws who then did not even show up. Still great for just the two of us. With lots of leftovers. Refrigerates well. Freezes well.

pizzocri.htm: 3-sep-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

fresh avocado and tomato cold spaghetti

Avocado and cold spaghetti? Pretty weird, huh? I guess this qualifies as a [summer pasta](#), served cold to beat the heat. We did this once and liked it, but somehow never got around to a second trial for a long time, just out of sheer laziness. It comes from Julia della Croce's [pasta book](#) which we snagged in a Pier One impulse buy. An accompanying story was never recorded, so that this recipe was later almost yanked from the collection in 2002 except that 1993 was a prolific year and the following 9 recipe files and table of contents listing would have had to have been edited to change the consecutive numbering if removed.

Adding an after-the-fact note seemed like the path of least resistance. We love avocado's and will try it again this summer. Promise. Meanwhile, this is how it goes.

ingredients

3/4 lb spaghetti
1 lb sweet vine ripe tomatoes, or cherry tomatoes
1 ripe avocado, peeled, pitted and thinly sliced
a large garlic clove, minced finely with a knife
1/3 c extra virgin olive oil
1/2 t salt or to taste
freshly ground black pepper to taste

instructions

1. Boil the pasta water and dump in the pasta and some salt when ready.
2. Prepare the tomatoes, chopping into small pieces unless cherry tomatoes are used, in which case they can be halved.
3. Put the tomatoes in a large serving bowl with the avocado and rest of the ingredients.
4. When the pasta is cooked al dente, drain and while dripping wet, transfer to the bowl and toss with the sauce.
5. If the pasta is too dry, add a little more olive oil and re-toss.

notes

1. The original recipe called for blanching peeling and seeding the tomatoes, an activity we refuse to do. It also noted an optional additive: 1 T of drained capers.
2. We probably refrigerated the sauce while waiting for the pasta.

fatcspg.htm: 26-may-2002 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

purple rice (blueberry mushroom risotto)

sales pitch

Okay, so you had to be convinced about [strawberry risotto](#). But you tried it. [Right?!] And you liked it. [Right?!] So once you open up the door to one fruit, it's no big deal to let another one sneak in. [Right?] Meanwhile we are reminded that the king vegetable of Italian cuisine, the tomato, is technically a fruit! [Out of the closet, you fraud!] So here's another delicious exotic risotto to impress your dinner guests with, namely, blueberry mushroom risotto [risotto con funghi e mirtilli!] from a fashion magazine.

history

We're experiencing a cultural explosion here on the Main Line (western Philly suburbs) these days. Two new book superstores in our town alone, with a super alternative video store, and a great new Tuscan Italian restaurant with brick oven pizzette. A new high tech supermarket down the Pike (Lancaster) at the exit of our new superhighway, the Blue Route (destination IKEA!). A new wholesome food supermarket a bit farther west (followed by another branch in the east). A new Mediterranean Lebanese restaurant not far in the other direction. Etc. etc.

So we were book browsing in the west end super bookstore with some international astro guests. dr bob was in the math book section for a change (from the cookbook section of course). ms ani was magazine browsing fashion magazines. Which are occasionally covering some fashionable food. This one was courtesy of some expatriate Italians living in Australia who had tried it in Venice. Their recipe called for a third of a "punnet" of blueberries, which our Scotch-Canadian female astro guest said was either a basket or rare unit only used for berries in British English, of unknown quantity. Our Cambridge Italian-English Dictionary says it's a little basket of fruit (retranslated from Italian). We just guessed.

the test

So we finally had a night free to cook and stopped at the supermarket on the way home for the only ingredient left to acquire: fresh mushrooms. This had been a big fruit summer for us with a near constant supply of cheap kiwis (which later became year round), and not so cheap strawberries and blueberries to keep our banana and overpriced breakfast cereal company every morning—so the blueberries were already on hand. But this was to be our first crack at the new supply of arborio rice personally imported from Rome several months earlier. Two 1 kilo boxes in a plastic bag purchased at a small fraction of the local outrageous price for the stuff. But with one small catch. The kitchen shelf time for our imported rice has always been longer than the life cycle of the dreaded starch bugs which had invaded us earlier in the year. Getting into everything starchy in our cabinets. This rice had its own contingent to add to the ranks. Except dr bob, after instructions from the ms, sifted and shook the rice a bit at a time over the sink like the old gold rush prospectors searching for gold, picking out the more agile specimens when necessary, while ms ani did most of the testing of the purple rice recipe.

ingredients

our list**the original quantities****base**

1 c arborio rice	500g (about 2 c)
2 T olive oil, roughly	3 T
1 medium onion, finely chopped	1

addins

1/2 lb mushrooms, sliced finely	400 g (about 1 lb)
salt and pepper to taste	(say 1/2 t and 1/4 t)
1 c blueberries (maybe 3/4 c)	1/3 punnet?
3/4 c dry white wine (125ml)	250 ml
1 veggie broth cube/paste for about 4 c broth	7-8 simmering cups broth

finishers

1/3 c freshly grated parmesan	2-3 T
1 T butter	1 T

our instructions

1. The astute reader will see that we downsized this recipe by a half. The unastute reader will just keep on reading.
2. By now you're old hands at this risotto stuff so a short version suffices. [Check out another risotto recipe if you're not.] Start boiling about 4 cups of water in a teapot.
3. Sauté the onion in olive oil until soft, then over high heat do the mushrooms until they "give up their liquid" (?), accompanied by a lot of stirring activity. [We suppose they must sweat heavily under duress, leading to a liquid accumulation in the pan.]
4. Add the salt and pepper and chopped up veggie cube/paste and continue stirring until the given up liquid evaporates.
5. Then stir in the blueberries and rice and stir around about 1 minute, then pour in the wine and evaporate it. [A couple minutes.]
6. Then add the boiling water a cup or half cup at a time, depending on your patience (half cup is better) for about 3 1/2 cups.
7. Do the al dente taste test at around 20 minutes of the boiling water phase.
8. If passed (the test), remove from the heat, add the butter and cheese and stir it all up.
9. Serve immediately with freshly ground pepper and parmesan cheese at the table.

notes

1. Risotto Rosa con Funghi, [Australia Vogue Aug/Sep 93](#), p.141.
2. **purple trivia.** The first record dr bob bought himself as a teenager was Jimi Hendrix, Smash Hits, with the cut Purple Haze. A live rendition of which he just missed at Woodstock, the Event. But which he caught in Woodstock, the movie. And dr bob saw Purple Rain, the movie, when it first came out and Prince was still just Prince. And he first discovered purple potatoes at a Philly food fair (Book and the Cook). Now available at our

super whole foods supermarket. [See purple potato salad.] Maybe yours too. What does this have to do with this recipe? Absolutely nothing.

3. **2006 Update.** 13 years later Australia Vogue is lost in the dust bin of history by now, as are Toscana Cucina Rustica (now Bianca) and Marbles (now Citron) in Bryn Mawr, but the TLA Video store is still going strong, and many other new and worthy restaurants have opened. The stach bugs are a dim memory now that arborio rice is everywhere. And [blueberry mushroom risotto](#) is still a "[down under](#)" [hit](#) on search engines (also new since 1993), although it credits European origins, while apparently Philadelphia's Italian food guru Marc Vetri has discovered the sauce for pasta applications, as recounted offhandedly by Philly Inquirer food writer Rich Nichols on March 23, 2006. However, Google has arrived in the intervening years to help us with the definition of the punnet as an almost unit:

[punnet](#)

a small square or sometimes rectangular container for fruit or vegetables, such as strawberries or bean sprouts. When used as a unit of measure, a punnet is generally the same thing as a dry pint in the U.S. or an Imperial pint in Britain; see pint [1] above. However, grocers use punnets of several sizes to package berries, fresh mushrooms, etc.

slightly different macaroni and cheese

It was another one of those nights. A Monday night. Back from the front lines of the math/science crisis in America, complicated by economic pressures to get faculty to do more and more besides teaching (let's not even talk about research), dr bob and ms_ani have carpooled home to a creative cooking project—alternative macaroni and cheese. The goal: to use up a hunk of asiago cheese that had been around awhile, and some of the new block of pecorino romano—both of which by the way seem to last nearly forever in the fridge, unlike the precious parmigiano supply we keep there. From the early days of mr bob (the pre-PhD period), the Betty Crocker Cookbook had been the bible for making macaroni and cheese, but it never seemed as tasty as the killer yellow stuff sold as a side dish by cafeteria/deli/diner type food providers.

This time, apart from the cheese constraints, Dijon mustard was suggested by an intense period of recipe section extraction the day before from a dozen woman's magazines culled of their possible jewels prior to waste disposal after years of procrastination. [Now the impetus for the editing was the big upcoming first time home ownership move. Also responsible for the need to use up existing pasta supplies to avoid taking along the dreaded starch bug plague to the new residence, but that's another story.]

Already late, there would not be excessive time for creativity. Boil the pasta water, then the pasta about 12 minutes (read the box) to an al dente state. Meanwhile do the béchamel sauce. Combine and layer twice with cheese and freshly grated black pepper in a deep baking dish. 20 minutes at 400°, then the broiler to brown the top a few minutes.

ingredients

- 1 10 oz box of elbow macaroni (we used organic pasta)
- 2 2/3 c béchamel sauce:
 - 3 T butter
 - 3 T flour
 - 2 2/3 c milk
 - freshly ground pepper
 - 1 T Dijon mustard
- 2 c grated asiago cheese
- 1/2 c pecorino romano

instructions

1. Didn't we already go over this?
2. Well, melt the butter and whisk in the flour until smooth, then add a little milk and whisk until smooth, then dump in the rest and try to smooth it all out. Add in the other stuff and the cheese too, which should melt and smooth in as well.
3. Combine with the cooked macaroni and throw in the preheated 400° oven for as long as you can stand waiting, then finish it off with the broiler if you want a browned top.

notes

1. Once you relax the rules on a recipe, anything goes. ms_ani had a macaroni and cheese craving during the media hyped ICE STORM '94 that caught us by surprise one winter Friday. And we had some fresh generic mushrooms to use up, and some frozen veal to nuke back to life (i.e., usability) in the microwave. And some pre-move DeCecco rigatoni still to get rid of.
2. So we decided to substitute the 1 lb box of rigatoni for the 10 oz elbow macaroni we used the first time and jack up the béchamel sauce to 3 cups. Except we were real low on milk, so we hit our dried milk supply for the electric bread machine, recently joined by a lone can of dried buttermilk powder found misplaced on a supermarket shelf. So we used 1/2 c of nonfat regular milk powder plus 1/4 c buttermilk powder plus 3 c water for the liquid milk. From the 8oz of generic fresh mushrooms, halved and finely sliced, half were sautéed in 2 T of butter just briefly with freshly ground black pepper. The cheese was about the same, but only eyeballed. We just mixed it all up in the pot this time, cheese and freshly ground black pepper. Some added breadcrumbs on top and some shaved Kaisori (?) cheese that was left over, not enough. That's all.
3. Meanwhile we revived the veal, floured it and sautéed it in olive oil. Then removed the veal and did the mushrooms with a few tablespoons of chopped leaks. Quickly adding the 1/3 c Marsala wine, maybe 1/2 c. Then returned the veal to the pan to simmer a bit while we attacked the macaroni. A little Frascati wine from the fridge, open for cooking, a little salad. What a meal.
4. Guess you had to be there...

asparagus leek risotto

(plus second anniversary surprise)

dr bob never had a fresh leek until his forties. dr bob never even had a can of leek and potato soup until his forties. dr bob still feels pretty young and looks pretty good for a middle aged grownup person. It's hard to believe how fast life seems to go by. But thanks to a week on a small impoverished Caribbean island at a luxury hotel on a beautiful beach with a subcompact rental car, the food team got to cruise a lot of local minimarkets and "supermarkets", and had one dinner in town trying to escape the outrageous prices on the beach. Of course since it was a second wedding anniversary, not a whole lot was saved, but we did accidentally discover a wonderful vegetable pasta dish with leeks in the lineup. So wonderful that after a decade of not having time to try any of the recipes we tagged in [Bon Appetit](#) (well, hardly any), we were inspired to write to "Ask Bon Appetit" to see if they might coax a real by-the-numbers recipe out of the chef who, by the way, had mysteriously appeared from the kitchen to ask us how we liked the food (another first for us) and then roughly explained the recipe upon request.

We came home and promptly gave it a try, and it was good, but just not the same. So we figured we'd have to write the chef, since there was no guarantee our magazine would help us out on this one. [We didn't. They didn't.] Meanwhile we had half the white trunk part of the leek left from the trial pasta event and a bunch of trim-looking asparagus both relaxing in the fridge. Asparagus risotto came to mind, so we got out [Marcella](#) (Hazan, the book) and then dr bob had the brilliant idea of using the leek in place of the token chopped onions in her recipe. But was conveniently getting sick so ms ani executed the idea. She's getting to be quite a risottatrice. Excellent!

One question remained. Riso arborio or riso integrale? Those Italians have a whole lineup of different rices. For risotto one can use either arborio or "roma" or "classico" or "integrale", the latter of which is a kind of brown italian rice. dr bob hauled about 2 kilos each of both arborio and integrale back on the last Roman expedition, influenced towards the integrale by vague health food considerations. These contributed to the great starch bug plague of '93 which we have still not emerged from at this writing. One evening the food team had spent hours sifting and pawing through all this rice to eliminate hordes of these little creatures that could not escape from the plastic bag in which the four 1 kilo boxes were sitting. (Others had already escaped from previously imported stocks of arborio rice or [DeCecco](#) pasta to establish a colony behind the counters in the apartment kitchen, sending out search parties on a daily basis. We had to buy a house to escape them.)

One might wonder why we went to such lengths with our rice import business. The answer is simple. We're cheap. [Frugal?] About 5 bucks plus for a pound here. 2 bucks for a kilo there. Do the numbers. [Hint: \$5/lb here versus \$2/2.2 lb there -> 5.5 here/there ratio.] [Later note: prices have fallen considerably in the interim due to the increasing market for real Italian food, saving us from having to fill our bags with this heavy product on our return trips from risottoland.] Anyway, while we were cruising the minimarkets in Antigua, picking up our annual supply of mango and guava jams and jellies and various and other sundries, we discovered a lonely 1 lb box of arborio sitting on the shelf. Which we snapped up. Tilting our stocks in favor of an arborio surplus. So we went with arborio for the asparagus-leek risotto.

So the lineup for our variation of the traditional asparagus risotto goes like this:

ingredients

1)

- 1 lb fresh asparagus, thin stalked
- 1 1/2 T butter
- 2 or 3 T olive oil
- 1/2 white leek stalk, finely chopped (about a cup)

2)

- 1 1/2 c arborio rice
- 1/2 t salt, or to taste 1 vegetable broth cube, or equivalent

3)

- freshly ground pepper
- 1 T butter
- 1/2 c freshly grated parmesan

instructions

1. Asparagus prep: break off the ends of the stalks and potato peel the harder parts down if there are any. Ours were tender enough without the peeling. Steam in an asparagus steamer standing up for about 5 minutes after boiling. Cut into half inch lengths and reserve the tips to add in at the end. Save a cup of the asparagus water to add to the risotto.
2. Meanwhile, have a teapot boiling up about 4 or 5 cups of water for the rice to be added as needed.
3. Sauté the leeks in the olive oil and butter until translucent, then add the detipped asparagus pieces for a couple of minutes, stirring to prevent sticking. Then add the rice and mix around till it gets well coated.
4. Then add the cup of asparagus water. When absorbed, begin adding the boiling water from the teapot a half cup or so at a time for about 20 minutes or so that the rice takes to cook (al dente test!), together with the veggie broth cube and the salt.
5. Final touch. Turn off the heat and mix in the tablespoon of butter, the asparagus tips, and the almost half cup of parmesan, and freshly ground pepper to taste. Serve immediately. We quite enjoyed it.

notes

1. You don't have to fly to the Caribbean to move on the leek question. Just go out and buy some. And try our version of the St John's leek and veggie pasta. Whatever, it's a winning vegetable. [Or is it a root?]
2. And try it before your golden years are here. We did and we're glad.

variation: asparagus and baby shrimp

1. Many years later no leeks are on hand but some asparagus has been sitting way too long in the fridge, so a risotto burial seems like the only solution. The usual onion replaces the

leek, and a small plastic container (1 cup size) of previously frozen baby shrimps are snagged on the way home from work to do a combo flavor kind of thing. Rice cut down to one cup to intensify the mix. The asparagus are a bit soft in places. bob whacks off the stiff ends, rinses them rubbing off the soft spots and does the asparagus pot boiling routine separately. And chops up some left over fresh chanterelle mushrooms, just a partial handful also aging in cold storage, which are sautéed in a little butter separately. No open bottle of white wine there though, so bob hits the rice with a splash of Bacardi light rum which does the job at the initial rice toss-in stage. The add-ins are incorporated about 5 minutes from the end. A bunch of yellowing flat parsley gives up some green parts to make a couple tablespoons of fresh chopped parsley. Plus the usual parmigiano and black pepper finisher.

2. The basic idea of asparagus and shrimp together came from the orecchiette Campbell cream of shrimp soup asparagus [combo](#). Ms_ani was impressed.
3. You can do this with baby shrimps in a can too. With or without any kind of mushrooms. And if you have a leek, that too.
4. Oh, before you incorporate the asparagus, take the tougher ends and food process them with a little water to add a greenish tinge to the creamy risotto end product. To spread the flavor a bit more.

variation: lemon asparagus risotto

1. 2005. Looking for a slight variation we pulled a trusted [risotto author](#) from the shelf (*Risotto Risotti*), and found this simple idea. Again just onions instead of leeks. Then just add a few tablespoons of lemon juice and some lemon zest (we used a left over half lemon for the zest and cheated by adding to its limited juice output by adding some from a yellow plastic container) at the beginning of the water addition phase. Since we are limiting simple carbs at this point, we only use 3/4 c arborio rice with the bunch of asparagus (about a pound?). After cooking the asparagus in the asparagus pot, we cut off the tougher ends and stuck them in the boiling rice water combo and then ground them up with a hand blender to add asparagus flavor to the gooey rice mixture. We then cut up the rest in half inch pieces and reserved them till the end of the cooking phase and then dumped them in to heat through again and then finished it off with plentiful parmigiano and freshly ground black pepper stirred into the pot and an extra hit on the serving.

second anniversary surprise

ingredients/instructions

Fettuccine, freshly prepared, tossed with:
 chopped zucchini, spinach, celery, and leek
 sautéed in vegetable oil [blanche spinach first, then chop]
 spiced with:
 garlic, oregano, and fresh dill, salt and pepper.
 Add touch of cream at the end, toss in fettuccine.

October 19, 1993 Redcliffe Tavern, Redcliffe Quay, St John's Antigua

Dear Bon Appetit,

The Redcliffe Tavern in the heart of St John's, Antigua serves a great pasta: fettuccine tossed with zucchini, spinach, celery, and leeks. Although the chef explained roughly how to make it, a printed recipe would save us a lot experimentation to get it right.

Thanks, bob and ani

[No reply.]

asplkris.htm: 31-aug-2005 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

potato leek soup not from a can

Seeing as how the subject of canned potato and leek soup has already come up, it's worth realizing that unfamiliar as it might be (Campbell's certainly doesn't make it) and in spite of the funny impossible-for-us-average-Americans-to-guess-its-pronunciation -except-if-we-heard-it -before-seeing-it french name you may find associated with it if you browse cookbooks for potato leek soup ["Vichyssoise" = "vishee-shwah", "ah" as in doctor holding down your tongue, say "ah"], it is a snap to do from scratch even without thinking ahead as long as at least one good sized leek is on hand. And it doesn't even have to be fat city—a healthy version tastes great too. [Nix that heavy cream!]

This lite version comes from a woman's magazine, found by accident when several years of several such mags went through the dr bob "maybe someday there will be enough time to look at these recipes after they go into the big recipe clipping box" editing session prior to house moving. [Actually the house stayed put. We moved.] The magazines easily gave up their food sections under the knife, at least those pages looking mildly interesting. [Too bad there was never time to check them out as they arrived in the mail.]

ingredients

what they said

12 oz leek, trimmed, rinsed, chopped

1 T olive oil

2 C pared, cubed potatoes

1 clove garlic, crushed

1 C low sodium chicken broth

2 C low fat milk

1 t salt

dash each of cayenne pepper, nutmeg

what we [ms_ani] did

we had 2 leek trunks in the fridge. chopped the greens seem to be useless so we disappeared them immediately, one 6oz, one 11+oz. we cut off the root end of the 11+oz trunk. good enuf.

we use extra virgin for everything

we are guessing pared means peeled here

we used 2 medium cloves

we personally imported NO MSG veggie broth cubes from Italy until finding imported paste in a can here

we were down to 2 percent milk when this was written, now 1 percent, how about you?

dr bob is often suspicious of this ingredient but what the heck, ms_ani wildly adds while bob advises caution just a touch

instructions

1. Sauté the chopped leeks in olive oil over low heat for 5 minutes.
2. Add the potatoes, garlic and broth, and bring them to a boil. Then cover and simmer for 10 minutes, until soft.
3. Puree in a blender [use a hand blender].
4. Add the milk and seasonings. Mix some more.
5. Heat without letting boil. Serve.

notes

1. From McCalls Magazine, April 1992.
2. Healthy Food Analysis: Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 294 calories, 12g protein, 50g carbohydrate, 6g fat, 5mg cholesterol 920mg sodium
3. Yikes! does that mean 1 t salt is like 3700 mg? How much salt is too much? Everybody talks about it but nobody ever really empowers us with numbers, at least ones that we remember.
4. We used our manual vegetable slicer dicer on the leeks. And about 3 medium red potatoes. We squashed the garlic and then chopped it. For the broth we just put the cube in 1 cup of warm water and dumped it in mostly still intact. The blending part had to be done half a batch at a time, with one cup milk each pass, since blenders are not usually big enough [but the hand blender makes this step much easier].
5. Actually we lied on the last part, step 4. They said chill it and serve cold! And make a green pea puree [6 ingredients, more work!] to swirl around for extra flavor. Already we've made the big step to not open a can and they want us to double the labor investment—like making not one but two soups from scratch! Forget it. One is our limit. We just dabbed some hunks of nonfat plain yogurt into our serving bowls with freshly ground pepper. Yum. Excellent. And so easy. Especially when you have a partner who likes doing soups all by herself [but dr bob did the leek prep!].

risotto and fagioli (beans and rice?)

Getting closer to the big move. Supplies on hand diminishing. Need to lighten our load by using up some of those that remain. Plus we don't want to go back out into the night to some supermarket foraging for food ideas when it's already suppertime. A quick assessment of possible ingredients is made. We still have a good stock of arborio rice and dr bob remembers a bean risotto photo from one of the package recipes that resides in the big recipe clipping box [not consulted out of laziness]. And there are some cans of kidney beans both red and white that never seem to get used. We decide to go with the white ones—also called cannellini. From the fridge some plum tomatoes with disturbing black marks, a dying green pepper, some canned artichoke hearts from the cabinet. The picture begins to take shape. The following ingredient list develops as we follow our noses.

ingredients

base

- 1 1/2 c arborio rice
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 T olive oil, about
- 1/2 c white wine

veggies/beans

- 1/2 green pepper, chopped
- 3 average plum tomatoes, black spots removed if present
- 1/3 left over regular tomato (you can use another plum one)
- 4 artichoke hearts, chopped
- 1 20oz can cannellini
- 1 veggie broth cube, or equivalent

finishers

- 1/2 t salt, or so
- 2 T fresh parsley, chopped
- 1/2 c freshly grated parmesan and romano cheese
- freshly ground pepper to taste

instructions

1. Start teapot of water boiling. About 4 c water.
2. Sauté onions first, then add pepper, then tomatoes and artichoke hearts.
3. Stir in rice. Add wine. Stir about.
4. After it evaporates, dump in the cannellini with the first hit of boiling water and the broth cube. Salt to taste. Do the usual water treatment.
5. When al dente (about 20 min of rice/water phase), remove from heat. Add parsley, cheese, freshly ground pepper.
6. Serve with good bread.

notes

1. So how does it turn out? A success, for our taste anyway. Very reminiscent of pasta e fagioli. But more rewarding since we faked it with random kitchen remnants and our imagination.

risefag.htm: 2-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

risotto with leeks, mushrooms, and chicken

Let's cut right to the chase:

ingredients

base

- 2 c arborio rice
- 2 medium leek trunks, chopped finely
- 3 T olive oil, about
- 2 plum tomatoes, chopped
- 1 4oz can chopped mushrooms (or fresh mushrooms)
- 1 5oz can white chicken, drained
- 1/4 c Marsala wine
- 1 veggie broth cube, or equivalent

finishers

- freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 T butter
- 1/2 c parmesan cheese

instructions

1. Sauté leeks in oil, add tomatoes, cook 5 minutes, add chicken and mushrooms, 2 more minutes, stir in rice, add Marsala, let evaporate, start adding boiling water, broth cube. Continue usual risotto 20 minute water absorption phase.
2. Finish by removing from heat and adding the butter and freshly grated black pepper and parmesan cheese.
3. Serve.

notes

1. This was a quick improvisation [yikes! canned chicken? where did that come from?] but tasted pretty good. So we did not want to forget it.

lkmshcrs.htm: 2-aug-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

chestnut stuffing

Thanksgiving again. Like most (middle North) Americans, dr bob sees a whole turkey only once a year. And the big question each year is: what kind of stuffing to stuff the bird with? Some people seem to call the stuffing "dressing" but we have a slight problem with this. When most people we know are dressing, the dressing materials end up on the outside of their bodies, not in various digestive and excretory system cavities as occurs in the case of turkeys and other large but not-in-a-position-to-complain fowl. [Later knowledge acquisition: "dressing" is in fact "stuffing" on the outside, i.e., not in the bird, so this makes sense after all.] Whatever we call it, many agree that it is perhaps the best part of a turkey dinner, especially in combination with the killer gravy and obligatory mashed potatoes keeping it close company.

This year [that year, after the fact] dr bob spotted a chestnut stuffing recipe in a woman's magazine he'd never seen before at a supermarket checkout line of course. Listed on the cover under the obligatory article about married sex. Roasted chestnuts are a big Mediterranean tradition, one fondly recalled by the transplanted Lebanese-Armenian in-laws as well as by dr bob from his Italian winter season visits, during which street vendors hawking these freshly roasted nuts are a common sight in Rome. But responding to recent training by ms_ani to limit food magazine gathering, it was left at the checkout. Until the stuffing question surfaced only days later at the in-laws. Chestnut stuffing, it seemed, was an idea ready to join our common tradition. But where was that recipe...? Armed only with a vague memory of the magazine cover and supermarket chain, an investigation of all the checkout isles of two different supermarkets finally turned up the target publication.

Although the recipe called for white bread slices (!!), dr bob had every intention of doing either a whole wheat bread substitution or using a supermarket bread cube stuffing "mix" package found in abundance at this time of the year. But in the "healthy foods" supermarket there was a large display of whole wheat dressing boxes which sold us after a moment's hesitation about just what the product was. Nothing but whole wheat bread cubes, it turned out, when the boxes were opened.

The original title of this was "**chestnut sage stuffing**" but ms_ani has a thing about sage. She dislikes it. So the small amount in this recipe may or may not have found its way into our rendition. [Oops, it's rosemary, not sage, that she hates. Simon and Garfunkel memories must have interfered with my mental banned spice list.] As a stuffing recipe, this called for a 12-14 lb turkey to fill, but in later years, a lot of bad P.R. has turned us off of stuffing the bird, so we end up in the dressing category where the size of the cavity is irrelevant. It is never big enough anyway. On our first run through we used 2 5oz (145g) whole wheat dressing (bread cubes) packages and 2 c vegetable broth, but this was not enough to supply the demand, so we increased the quantity for the followup Easter turkey (hey, immigrants are free to invent their own traditions), with enough left over for a 9 in square baking pan outside the turkey. For some reason we also used hazelnuts and walnuts on Easter after the chestnuts for Thanksgiving, maybe just for a change, but certainly invalidating the name of the recipe of course. We also found the broth called for by the original painfully inadequate, so increased it drastically to satisfy our desire for moist stuffing.

ingredients

what they said

1 lb white bread, about 16 slices
 1/4 c chicken stock or canned broth

saute items

1 large onion, chopped
 3 cloves garlic
 6 T butter

nuts

2 c roasted chestnuts (15.5oz can whole chestnuts)

spices

1/2 c fresh parsley, chopped
 2 t dried sage
 1 1/2 t dried marjoram
 1/2 t ground nutmeg
 1 t salt
 3/4 t pepper

what we did

1 14oz (400g) bag herbed seasoned stuffing
 2.5 - 3 c vegetable broth

2 onions, chopped
 1 medium bunch celery, chopped finely
 5 cloves garlic
 3 T butter
 3 T olive oil

2 c roasted chestnuts (15.5oz can whole chestnuts) or:
 .65 lb blanched filberts (no hassle)
 .65 lb walnut pieces

1/2 c fresh parsley, chopped
 2 t fresh parsley, chopped
 2 t dried marjoram
 1/2 t ground nutmeg
 1 t salt
 3/4 t pepper

instructions

1. If you use bread as suggested then start instead by cutting it into 1/2 in cubes and place in a large bowl. Otherwise just dump the bread cubes of choice into a large bowl from the package.
2. Prep the veggies and then sauté them in your choice of fat until soft, stirring occasionally (about 5 min).
3. Break the chestnuts into pieces and add to the bread cubes.
4. Add the sauté mixture and spices and stir until well combined.
5. Pour in the broth and mix until the bread is moistened.

notes

1. The magazine was [First for Women](#), new on the scene in '93 but still not on the web in '01.
2. [Illustration](#) available.
3. July 31, 2004. Final stop of the Simon and Garfunkel Old Friends Tour at the Colliseum,

Rome. 600K people along the Fori Imperiali stretching all the way to Piazza Venezia. bob and ani are there with Milvia. What a memorable night.

chstnts.htm: 11-aug-2004 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

not exactly mashed potatoes

After the stuffing decision, the next question was how to mess with the traditional mashed potato recipe so that it could no longer be called simply "mashed potatoes". Addition of other root vegetables seems to be a good choice for inclusion in this category. We had seen quite a few not exactly mashed potato recipes in our food magazine browsing and ms_ani had settled on one for the big event (T-day). Unfortunately it could not be located at the last minute and some fast thinking creativity was called upon to save the day. We had these parsnips in the fridge as the leading candidate for the secondary root vegetable. Though we'd never eaten them before, they seemed to pop up in quite a few of the altered mashed potato recipes. They look like fat albino carrots, which distinguishes them from their similar root relative the turnip, which is also foreign to our diet, though not because of any conscious decision, just the inertia of habit.

ingredients

root vegetables or close relatives

- 6 large potatoes, peeled, cutup
- 1 lb parsnips, peeled and chopped
- 1 leek, chopped fine
- 2 cloves garlic

additives

- butter
- salt and freshly ground pepper
- milk

instructions

1. Boil the potatoes and parsnips together in salted water until soft, about 15 minutes at full boil.
2. Sauté the leek and garlic in some butter until softened.
3. Mash the potatoes with electric beaters, adding just enough milk to soften the result but not so much that it begins to flow. Then combine the sauté mixture and pepper with the mashed tubers. More salt is probably inadvisable at this point.

notes

1. This is a judgment call on the quantity of milk. It depends on how big and how many potatoes you have. You have to have some experience in this or just add a little at a time. And the amount of butter depends on your health objectives for this particular dish.
2. This simple recipe was hiding after the chestnut stuffing recipe in our original paper archives where it was overlooked until webified.

not just bean soup (carrots!)

When dr bob was a kid, [Campbell's](#) Bean and Bacon soup was his favorite. He used to slurp up the liquid part, carefully saving the beans for a squishy white bread bean sandwich. Even better than the ketchup sandwiches of the time. Those were the days. It never occurred to him that one could actually make soups from scratch. Or that one should read the label on those canned soups. [Salt city!]

Of course growing up brought an awareness that one could make soups without a can opener, but that it was still probably too much effort. Only recently was this myth shattered by experience. The dr bob cooking team, led by the initiative of ms_ani, began with some great and incidentally healthy cream soups from the 15th anniversary edition of [The Moosewood Cookbook](#).

However, ms_ani was sick with the flu on this one occasion soon after [The Big Move](#) to the new corporate headquarters. dr bob knew soup was a good idea, and offered to hunt and forage out to a local supermarket for some of the stuff. But easily renounced this suggestion (laziness, what else?) at ms_ani's rejection of the offer (out of guilt at being responsible for his contemplated journey). Then bob remembered the latest women's magazine food special snatched at the checkout line—where a bean and potato soup had caught his eye during his speed scan for potentially promising recipes (ignoring the mandatory article on sex). Inventorying the required ingredients, only celery was missing. No big deal—just increase the carrots! And he did it, with some minor modifications, all in a pretty painless 40 minute time slot. The result: delicious, recalling childhood memories of the old bean soup days but with a new twist. Carrots. Thus justifying the \$3.50 spent on the mag, which after closer examination only yielded two soup recipes as the realistic usable harvest, one still left untried.

ingredients

4	medium carrots
2	celery ribs
2	medium cloves garlic
2 T	butter
4 c	vegetable broth
3	medium potatoes
2 T	fresh dill, chopped
1 15oz can	cannellini beans
1/2 c	sour cream / plain yoghurt
1 T	all purpose flour
1/8 t	pepper
	salt to taste, if desired

no frill web instructions

[Consult the illustrated [hand printed recipe](#) of the vanity press paper edition for the elaborated version with two illustrations: (1) carrots vs beans on the scales, with rabbit, thumbs up and (2) the trouble with spaghetti]

1. Food process the carrots and celery, then sauté them in melted butter with pressed garlic in an 8 quart nonstick pot.
2. Meanwhile heat the broth, then add it to the veggie mixture with the coarsely chopped potatoes and dill. Simmer covered for about 20 minutes.
3. Stir together sour cream or yogurt, flour, salt and pepper, and add them to the pot with half the beans. Puree with a hand blender or in batches in a regular blender.
4. Add remaining beans. Cook and stir until heated through.
5. Serves 4-6. Leftover soup can be used as a pasta sauce like an Alfredo sauce.

notes

1. **AND PASTA SAUCE?** Sure. If it's pretty thick, it makes a great cream sauce for pasta. If you have a couple bowls left over, maybe a cup and a half or two, add it to some(*) al dente cooked pasta with some parmigiano and freshly ground pepper. We used a small open curled pasta, gnocchetti sardi, but this could work with cavatelli or orecchiette or even long pasta like fettuccini or spaghetti. Health wise, it crushes classic "Alfredo sauce". By the way, freshly ground pepper is also a good idea on each serving in the more traditional soup mode. And if you caught the "h" that slipped into the yoghurt/yogurt above, it's optional. We checked. Though we still lose points for inconsistency.
2. (*) 1 pound, the standard US dry pasta packaging size.

carrotbn.htm: 2-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

1994

bad egg tiramisu

One of the many casualties of Reagonomics was the system of regulatory agencies protecting the American public. Among which is the one charged with safeguarding our food supply. A minor component of which are the eggs found in every supermarket and convenience store. Eggs which though usually safe, are showing an increasingly significant and dangerous trend towards being occasionally unsafe. Better to err on the side of safety. Uncooked beaten egg whites are out for now. Uncooked egg yolks are out for now. Tiramisu calls for both. What to do. What to do.

The drbob cooking team has hands on experience with this dish dating back to the year the Gipper himself took office (that's 1980 for you history nonbuffs) while bob was out of the country. Meanwhile it has become very trendy in the States. And naturally the team smugly prides itself in having been way ahead of the times. [At least once.] But one detail we never got straight was the alcohol component. The real thing is hard to get even in Italy according to one of our reliable Italian mom sources. Our original instructor (the daughter) [see the dedication to this book] substituted blackberry brandy. And we've used rum. Both are suggested by various official recipes. The other route is dry Marsala wine in the zabaione variation ("zaa-ba-yo-nay" as in bad-bob-yo!-nay, see below), apparently the route taken by the packaged single serving frozen portions one often finds in Italy, as we have observed with our obsessive adult American habit of reading the packaging of everything we eat. This cooks the egg yolks, solving half the egg problem. Replacing the beaten egg whites with whipped cream solves the other half. [Although with some effort, one can [do the egg white thing safely](#).]

The upside of trendiness is more widespread availability of the key ingredient—mascarpone cheese (not!)—compared to our early days trying to recreate this on the western side of the Atlantic. It is flown in from Italy at great expense (though domestic production is growing) so for most of us, this is still just an occasional homemade dessert. But beware of aging mascarpone. It leads to a grainy textured mousse instead of the silk-like smoothness only fresh mascarpone can give. In the interests of truth in advertising, mascarpone, a full fat dairy product in the cream cheese creme fraiche family, is richer in fat than almost any other comparable dairy product. So don't get addicted.

Here's the revisited version of tiramisu, previously spelled as [tiramesu](#) (in some Italian dialect) from the original ladyfinger back of the package recipe in Italian.

ingredients

mousse

- 4 egg yolks
- 1/2 c sugar
- 2 - 4 T rum or blackberry brandy or tiramisu liqueur or even dry Marsala wine
- 1 lb or 500g fresh mascarpone
- 1/2 - 1 c whipping cream

non-mousse

- 300g ladyfingers
- 1 "cup" freshly brewed expresso coffee diluted by 1 c warm water

2 - 4 T same liqueur here (optional)

topping

2-3 T high quality cocoa or grated bittersweet chocolate (fine)

instructions

[Aside: First we fire up our super capuccino machine given as a wedding gift by drbob's Rome research group. In the early days of tiramisu making we used one of those couple of bucks priced espresso pots we kept for Italian visitors. But then a colleague took advantage of the dr bob nonprofit importing service to get his own high class [Pavoni](#) Europiccolo, rather overpriced here in the States, somewhat at a bargain when purchased in Italy for US export, relatively speaking of course. So when the request for a wedding gift suggestion came soon after from the group in espresso land, the answer was ready, complete with model and store purchasing information. Suddenly espresso supremacy at not cost (to us). Though bob was not a coffee drinker at the time.]

1. One big dose of espresso is required. We press through more water to dilute it for the dunking activity. Any route to an extra "long" espresso that works is acceptable.
2. Next we do a tiramisu liqueur substituted zabaglione. You beat together the egg yolks and sugar a few minutes till it turns from the ordinary dark yellow yolk color to a very light shade. This is done in the top half of a double boiler, which is then placed in the bottom half of the double boiler already boiling away. Add your choice of liqueur and keep beating for about 10 minutes till it thickens and you are convinced all possible freeloaded bacteria are well done. [It should read 165° if you have a thermometer.] Then put in the freezer for rapid cooldown.
3. The whipping cream replaces the uncooked beaten egg whites. Put a bowl and the beaters in the freezer to chill for at least 10 minutes. This may or may not help whipping the cream, but we read it somewhere and figure it can't hurt. Then whip the cream. Half a cup is probably enough—no need to overdo the killer ingredients. Then beat the mascarpone a bit and mix in the cooled zabaglione. Fold in the whipped cream so you don't lose the fluff.
4. Assembly time. Now you need three 100g plastic wrapped ladyfinger packages. We like to use a springform pan since our collection of such pans is not seeing many cheesecakes lately. The 10 1/4 in (26cm) diameter pan works well. Take each ladyfinger and dip in a shallow bowl with the diluted espresso with or without extra booze. Roll it around quickly, then remove it and place in the pan. Make one layer. Cover with half the mascarpone mousse mixture. Repeat.
5. Leave in the refrigerator at least 24 hours but preferably 48. It takes time for the flavors to mix between the mousse and espresso soaked ladyfingers, which really takes longer than a day. Sure it's hard to wait that long but the sacrifice is worth making.
6. Before serving, remove from the refrigerator and dust lightly with some high quality cocoa or finely grated bittersweet chocolate. The ideal texture of the dessert when ingested is "soft".

notes

1. Booze components: too much or not enough? This is a controversial question. dr bob likes the light delicate touch. ms_ani wants more. Some recipes advise excessive amounts.

Others omit it entirely, probably prohibition holdouts. Remember that the power of this dish is in its subtle balanced blend of flavors. Few desserts can compete with this one when done properly.

2. Tiramisu liqueur? The [Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board](#), not usually known for its taste in alcohol, scored a one time buy of "tiramisu" liqueur imported from Italy from some obscure producer. We had some in one of the few Italian restaurants in Philly that we trust, where it was offered free as an after dinner drink when the new owners were fresh out of Rome. Now this Italian custom has disappeared like the tiramisu liqueur has from the state liquor stores. But we jealously guard our one bottle, which is sort of like Bailey's but tastes like tiramisu. Good stuff but not available to the general public. Sorry. [48 proof Italian specialty liqueur produced by G.M. Sommacompagna (VR) Italy and imported to the USA by [Winebow](#), Inc, NY, NY or Shaw Ross Importers, Miami, FL; can be ordered from PA State Specialty Stores]
3. bob, a coffee drinker? For most of his life he never touched the stuff. Not even coffee ice cream. Approaching middle age, he decided maybe it wouldn't hurt to try it in Italy. After years of waiting for friends while they had theirs. Only capuccino. At first. Then Armenian coffee. Thought it might help those evenings when bob's eyes started glazing over too early. After a while, those Italian capuccino's actually started tasting good, though it was hard to find a decent one in the US. Then the coffee revolution occurred here, and decent coffee was much more accessible. And those chilled mocha summer drinks! How things change.
4. Then bob got addicted to [Starbucks'](#) bottled mocha [frappuccinos](#). Fortunately he found them for a dollar a pop by the case at [Costco's](#) warehouse store. He tries to be a moderate user.
5. Oops, did we forget the [photos](#)? [Perugina](#) bittersweet chocolate has become our favorite topping.

eggplant fava bean pasta

Familiar scene. Coming home from work again. After three consecutive nights of creative cookery. And feeling lazy. For a moment we were considering dropping in on the in-laws, but ms_ani had said she had to do homework from her night course in statistics. Which dr bob never liked by the way. And to come, eat, and run might make them suspect we were just coming for the food and not the company. Of course it's both, but no need to increase potentially damaging speculation. Fortunately the dr had snagged an eggplant on the supermarket drive-by run the night before. And for protein, since we are part-time vegetarians and maybe not getting enough, the thought tuna-from-a-can entered our minds. But while checking out the cans, the middle eastern canned cooked fava beans popped into sight—even better since they don't come from something with a face and besides belong to a highly rated food category—legumes. Which when matched with grains makes complete protein. Or something.

ingredients

sauté group

- 1 medium eggplant, peeled and cubed
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 T olive oil

everything else almost

- several cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 can (14oz) cooked small fava beans
- 1 can (35oz) pomodori pelati (peeled italian plum tomatoes)
- 1 small can (2.2oz) chopped olives
- 1/2 c hot water
- a few slivers of roasted pepper
- black pepper to taste
- red pepper to taste (not too much)
- salt to taste
- 2 T fresh chopped parsley

except for the pasta

- 1 lb penne

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when ready, salt and dump in the pasta. Cook al dente.
2. Meanwhile, sauté the onion and eggplant in the olive oil.
3. Add everything else (except for the pasta) and cook until the pasta is ready.
4. Mix half in with the penne and save the other half for another lazy night.

notes

1. This has a subtle attraction. Not an immediately sexy taste, but a satisfying gets you back for a big second helping flavor. We probably served this with freshly grated parmigiano,

since this is routine for almost every pasta dish we consume.

egpfpst.htm: 22-jan-2000 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

not quite eggplant parmesan

This is one of our perennial favorites that we keep on doing every once in a while. And which was forced into our menu when claes the pasta-hating swede would occasionally visit last century. Since our primary cuisine (pasta/risotto) was not an option.

This is just slightly more interesting variation of an eggplant parmesan recipe, which itself is not written in stone anyway. We found it in [The Classic Vegetable Cookbook](#) (p.132: *gratin of eggplant*)

ingredients

eggplant

3 medium eggplants, peeled, cut crosswise (or lengthwise) into 1/2 in slices
olive oil to coat

sauté group

3 T olive oil
2 onions, finely chopped
2 stalks celery, finely chopped
1 sweet pepper (red or orange)
2 cloves garlic, pressed
1 lb fresh mushrooms, cleaned and chopped

sauce maker

26 oz can chopped plum tomatoes
1 bay leaf
3 T fresh parsley, chopped
salt and pepper to taste

the parm

1 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Peel and slice the eggplant and brush with olive oil, coating all its surfaces, or use spray olive oil to reduce the amount of fat needed.
2. Broil on two cookie sheets (since there are so many disks), turning over once, and switching the rack positions if they don't both fit on the same top rack of the oven.
3. Meanwhile prep the veggies. Food process the onions, celery and pepper together and sauté in the olive oil.
4. When softened, add in the garlic and sauté a bit, then add in the mushrooms and continue cooking till they are softened.
5. Then add the tomatoes and spices and cook covered about 10 minutes, then uncovered about 10 minutes.
6. Check the seasoning (salt and pepper).
7. Layer the eggplant and sauce in a [baking dish](#). Start with tomato sauce, then a layer of eggplant, then sprinkle parmigiano over it. Continue, ending with the remaining sauce and finally a cheese sprinkle.

8. Bake in preheated oven at 350° for 30 minutes or until the top is golden.

notes

1. Looks like we added the celery and a sweet pepper to this recipe and dropped the parsley (only 2 T anyway), although when we do buy celery for some recipe, the rest usually goes bad before we can think of something else to do with it. If none is on hand, forget it. And the amounts of eggplant and tomatoes are only suggestive. The "big cans" of pelati are sometimes 28 oz, sometimes more, and occasionally we go with fresh plum tomatoes. We like the smaller Italian eggplants, more of which are needed. And be generous with the parmigiano. Grate more if necessary.

nqegparm.htm: 18-may-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

baked baked eggplant pasta

The eggplant gets baked twice, get it? First by itself, then in the baked pasta dish. Baking is a more healthy way of doing eggplant than letting it soak up all that oil in the traditional comfort food frying method. Instead, some flavor is retained by smearing the eggplant with good olive oil before baking, contributing to the possibility of living longer to enjoy the eggplant later in life. No guarantees, but hedging your bets is a wise practice.

ingredients

the eggplant

1 large eggplant
olive oil

the sauce

1 medium onion, chopped
2 T olive oil
3 oz portobello mushrooms, chopped
1/2 c white wine
1 large can tomato puree
freshly ground black pepper
salt to taste
touch of cayenne red pepper
2 T fresh basil, chopped

the pasta

1 lb rigatoni

the assembly

2/3 c parmigiano cheese, grated
1/4 c bread crumbs

instructions

1. Peel the eggplant and cut crosswise into 1/4 in slices, then the bigger disks into quarters and the smaller disks into halves. Rub olive oil on both sides of each piece and place on a foil lined baking sheet and broil a few minutes until it browns without burning.
2. Start pasta water boiling.
3. Start the sauce by sauteeing the chopped onion in the olive oil until translucent, then add the chopped mushrooms, mix and cook a few minutes. Add the wine and let evaporate. Add the tomato sauce and spices, except for the basil. Cook about 20 minutes. Near the end add the fresh basil.
4. Somewhere in the middle of the pasta sauce the pasta water was boiling and the rigatoni went in. [Its a good practice to read ahead.] Cook until very al dente since more cooking will take place in the oven. Drain. Add a few spoons of sauce to the pasta.
5. Put some breadcrumbs on the bottom of a casserole dish and some sauce. Now layer with pasta, eggplant, and cheese and sauce, about 3 layers. Top off with some whole basil leaves reserved from your initial basil stash. Bake 30 minutes at 350°.

notes

1. enjoy?

bbegppp.htm: 2-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

not exactly mashed potatoes revisited

We tried this one again from memory, hoping to improve the result with spontaneity. It worked, partly because two different recipes merged into one due either to faulty neurons or inspired creativity. Later the original [not exactly mashed potatoes](#) recipe mysteriously disappeared leaving only this second iteration for the record and its original line in the table of contents. [It was hiding under another recipe in our paper recipe archives.] We continued down the path of adding extra veggies including our frequent favorite leeks that traditional mashed potato fans would find disturbing before trying, but make the mashed potatoes interesting by themselves without having to drown them in lots of fatty gravy or dead animal parts.

For the target dinner count of 6, our initial estimate of the red potato component proved to be clearly inadequate, so we hastily did up some more regular potatoes to add quantity. Fortunately time was not a problem or the result would have been. Lately we have been seeing a lot of the trendy new potato Yukon Gold in the mags and on menus, but not where we shop. If you know more about potatoes than us (easy), adapt.

ingredients

root tubers

about 10 small red potatoes
about 4 medium more traditional ones
1/2 lb (8oz) parsnips, peeled

sautéables

4 small leeks (or equivalent)
2 large garlic cloves, finely chopped or pressed
2 T olive oil
some white wine

enhancers

some milk, we use 1 percent
freshly ground black pepper
1/4 c freshly grated parmesan cheese
1/8 c bread crumbs
no stick cooking spray (olive oil)

instructions

preparation:

1. Wash the potatoes (your favorite type) and remove unsightly skin imperfections and stem remnants. Cut into small cubes and bring to a boil just barely covered with salted water. About 15 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, clean the leeks, chop off the greens and tip and slice finely, then chop. (or food process.)
3. Chop up finely two garlic cloves and sauté with the leeks in some olive oil which will then prove inadequate so throw in some white wine to finish. (More healthy?)

execution:

1. Add some milk (this is a judgement call) and mash the potatoes partially, with electric hand beaters for example.
2. Add the leek garlic mixture and freshly ground black pepper "to taste" and finish the job.
3. Then put in a casserole dish and sprinkle with breadcrumbs and then parmesan cheese. Then lightly spray with olive oil veggie spray to moisten (can you tell we are not professionals?) and then broil in the oven to brown the topping.

notes

1. Watch carefully or the results may be unpleasant.

more mashed potatoes in the oven

We keep improvising this recipe, sometimes throwing in some carrots for color. Here is another variation.

ingredients**tubers**

- 4 large russet potatoes
- 2 average looking parsnips

sautéables

- 1 c onion, celery, leeks sautéed in olive oil

enhancers

- 1/3 c yogurt
- 1/4 c milk, maybe slightly less
- 2 T butter
- 1 clove garlic, pressed
- salt to taste
- pepper to taste
- 2 T parmesan, grated, on top

brief execution

1. Boil the potatoes together, with skins.
2. Then beat with electric beater and add remaining ingredients except for the parmesan which goes on last.
3. Bake 30 minutes.
4. If not slightly crusted, broil briefly.

notes

1. It seems like we do this differently every time we try it.

still more mashed potatoes in the oven

Somehow this continued to evolve and stabilize roughly to the following garlic leek turnip baked mashed potatoes recipe.

ingredients

tubers

mixture of Yukon golds and small red potatoes or whatever
2 turnips

sautéables

1 large leek sautéed in olive oil
lots of pressed garlic to taste (10 cloves?)

enhancers

1/3 c yogurt
2 T butter
salt to taste
pepper to taste
2 T parmesan, grated, on top

brief execution

1. Boil the potatoes together, with skins, after cleaning.
2. Then beat with electric beater and add remaining ingredients except for the parmesan which goes on last.
3. Bake 30 minutes.
4. If not slightly crusted, broil briefly.

notes

1. All the ingredient quantities must be adjusted to taste and to the amount of potatoes used, left unspecified above. One can optionally mix in some more parmigiano in the beating stage.

mashed potatoes 2002

We had some leftover [tsatsiki](#) sauce from an in-law event, a rather stiff yogurt cucumber paste like the consistency of labne, the drained yogurt. While cruising the local supermarket produce section for interesting add-ins, a small broccoli head looked good for some veggie color, and a jar of roasted red peppers seemed another likely candidate to go with the tsatsiki. It turned out pretty tasty, although the extra salt from ms_ani may have been a decisive contributing factor. Why are we so addicted to this mineral?

ingredients

potatoes

6 medium red skinned potatoes

puree

1 small head of broccoli florets

1 skinned roasted sweet red pepper from a jar

1/3 c tsatsiki sauce (stiff) from a plastic container

2 large cloves garlic, pressed

2 T milk

a touch of cayenne red pepper

salt and pepper to taste

topping

several T breadcrumbs to thinly coat top

several T freshly grated parmigiano cheese to sprinkle over it

olive oil spray to dust the topping and coat the baking dish

instructions

1. Prepare the potatoes, removing unsightly marks and protrusions, but leaving the skins.
2. Pressure cook the broccoli until dead, say 4 minutes at full steam.
3. Then puree everything but the potatoes in a blender.
4. Next boil the potatoes in the usual fashion. This time we pressure cooked them since the pressure cooker was already to go. Without salt. Made up for by ani's spice adjustment later. When done, drain.
5. Hand mash the potatoes and then mash in the pureed other stuff until smoothly incorporated. Call in the spice expert to adjust the spices.

notes

1. We actually had one Yukon gold potato in the mix. When the cut up potatoes began looking more than adequate, the second Yukon was spared. Potato experts probably could advise us on what potatoes are best for mashing. But we would probably not know the difference anyway.

risotto with radicchio and mushrooms

When you find yourself making a dish repeatedly, you get the idea that maybe it's worth writing about. Of course we also find ourselves writing about many dishes that we don't repeat, but that's besides the point. In fact the first version of this recipe we saw on a TV cooking show and after trying it, definitely weren't thinking of repeating it, let alone write about it.

But thanks to a routine gynecological visit waiting room discovery, it got a second chance from a food magazine article about hotel food on [Ponza](#), our favorite Italian island not far from Rome where the suppliers of our motor driven flat pasta machine have often shown us wonderful Italian hospitality. (Eliminating our need for Ponza's hotels and their food.)

We improved this recipe by adding some ordinary looking fresh mushroom remnants lying around the fridge. Too bad radicchio is so outrageously priced these days.

ingredients

what they use

and our comments/additions

base

1 1/2 c finely chopped onion	about 1 large onion, we like onion
1/2 stick = 1/4 c = 1/8 lb =50g unsalted butter	bob said "Wait, cut down the butter!" but it was too late
1 lb radicchio, sliced thin	our head weighed in at 10 oz = 5/8 lb 1/2 - 1 c fresh mushrooms, chopped, all we had at the time, could be increased

rice/broth

2 c arborio rice	so we only did 1 1/2 c here to compensate for the reduced radicchio
optional 1/2 c white wine here	why not?
6 1/2 c low salt chicken broth	we use noMSG veggie broth, about 2 cubes or packets or 2 heaping teaspoons paste

finishing touch

1/2 c freshly grated parmesan (plus some at table)	we always grind some fresh black pepper into our risotto
freshly grated nutmeg to taste	who has real nutmeg on hand to grate? sprinkle it in from the spice jar, pretend you know what you're doing

instructions

If you're already familiar with risotto, the ingredient list practically says it all. The instructions

are standard.

1. Saute the onion in the butter (you can reduce here somewhat to lower fat content, maybe partially substitute with olive oil) and then add the radicchio and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. About halfway through this phase, add the faster cooking chopped mushrooms.
3. Meanwhile bring about 7 cups of water to boil in the teapot.
4. Next stir in the rice, coating well with the mixture. You may add a half cup white wine at this point and evaporate it off (a few minutes).
5. Then add a cup or so of the boiling water, and the veggie cubes/packets/paste. As the liquid reduces pour in a cup or so at a time. Stir occasionally. Total water phase is about 20 minutes.
6. Make sure the rice is fluid enough at termination. If not add a bit of boiling water. Then stir in a half cup OR MORE of freshly grated parmesan and some freshly ground black pepper.
7. Serve immediately with additional pepper and parmesan sprinkled/ground of top of each portion.

notes

1. Make the full 2 cups of rice since this is great leftover.
2. By the way the hotel/restaurant is called [Grand Hotel Chiaia di Luna](#) after the nearby beach of the same name, which we think means crescent moon (the shape of the beach) but neither of our Italian dictionaries list the word "chiaia" so it might be the local Ponzese dialect. [Thank [Gourmet Magazine](#), June 1994, p.144. We searched their online archives, but this one "risotto with radicchio" (no mushrooms) did not make it into cyberspace, although a similar one of this name turned up in its companion magazine [Bon Appetit](#) May 1997.]

risrdmsh.htm: 21-may-2000 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

portobello mushroom (and leek!) soup

Speaking of frequently repeated recipes, this one we never get tired of. Great intense flavor and yet it's a snap to make. Perhaps the best discovery of our "year of the leek", in which we were surprised by this previously unfamiliar veggie on our [second anniversary Carribean dinner](#), after which our new leek awareness led us to notice and try a number of satisfying recipes. This one also introduced us to the portobello mushroom, which has been acquiring recognition as a trendy Italian appetizer that we were able to try free in a food fair demonstration. Saving us the expense of the trendy Italian restaurant from which it came.

ingredients

1/4 c (= 1/2 stick = 1/8 lb = 50 g) unsalted butter
5 leeks (white and pale green parts only), chopped (about 3 c, small leeks maybe)
1 medium onion, chopped
10 oz portobello mushrooms, chopped (about 4 generous cups, but we only used two 4 oz prepackaged cut mushrooms)
1/4 c all purpose flour (but we often only have "better for bread" flour lying around in wait for our bread machine)
3 c chicken stock or canned low-salt broth (we only use MSG-free veggie broth cubes/paste)
4 T dry sherry (this forced us to go out and buy cooking sherry)
2 c half and half
1/4 t cayenne pepper
ground white pepper to taste

instructions

1. Start with the veggie preparation. Cleaning and chopping the leeks, onion, mushrooms. We peel the mushrooms but the brushing option is also allowed.
2. Then we get the hot water boiling in the teapot for the broth. 3 1/2 c to allow for some evaporation and produce a little more soup.
3. Then melt the butter in a large (nonstick is better) pot over medium heat.
4. Add the leeks and onion and sauté about 10 minutes till tender. Add the mushrooms and sauté 5 minutes. Reduce heat to low.
5. Add the flour and cook until the mixture thickens, stirring occasionally, about 3 minutes.
6. Gradually stir in the stock (boiling water, first adding the veggie broth cube/paste) and 2 T of the sherry.
7. Bring to a boil while stirring, then reduce the heat again and simmer about 10 minutes until thickened.
8. Stir in the half and half. Simmer about 10 minutes until slightly thickened. Then stir in the cayenne pepper and season with white pepper and salt.
9. At this point you can stall for time if you're doing advance preparation. Cover and refrigerate up to 4 hours ahead they say. We say leave yourself a half hour or so.
10. Finish off by stirring in the remaining 2 T sherry, bring to a simmer and serve. With freshly ground black pepper.

notes

1. The white pepper is to avoid the appearance of dirt in your soup, which is what using black pepper as a finisher doesn't do. Notice that black pepper is not in the official list of ingredients. We just don't care.

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

left over stir fry

This recipe is mainly inspirational, since the odds of having this combination of leftovers around the kitchen ever again are practically zero. Of course, with the dr bob anything goes substitution policy, that shouldn't stop anyone from using this recipe as a general guide.

The leftover whole beef piece shish-kebob had caused dr bob's sleeping stomach a little consternation the night his brother-in-law made it. The dr is apparently a real red meat wimp from years of preferring more politically correct nutrition. So chopping it up into small pieces seemed the perfect way to ingest it as a leftover. The parsnips were slowly dying since the alternative mashed potato recipe from which they were left over. The half red onion was a Vidalia or other sweet onion substitute from the spring onion risotto. The zucchini we had gotten for grilling with garlic olive oil on the grill (where else?) but already had some. The leftover summer greens were in danger of expiring from lack of attention. The basil happened to be growing in the kitchen (our first crop) but was rather sparse by this early fall date. Carrots and shallots are always on hand, and lately celery too. The parsley was an offshoot of the Armenian-Lebanese cookout, but a frequent presence as well.

ingredients

- 1)
 - 3 T olive oil
 - 1/2 leftover red onion
 - 1 shallot
- 2)
 - 2 small parsnips, chopped
 - 1 carrot, chopped
- 3)
 - 1 zucchini, chopped
 - 2 small stalks celery, chopped
 - maybe 1/2 c white wine, preferably leftover
- 4)
 - about a cup of leftover beef shish-kebob, diced into small pieces
 - 1 small slice leftover cooked ham, diced into small cubes
- 5)
 - a handful of mixed summer greens, chopped
 - some fresh parsley, chopped
 - a couple of fresh basil leaves
- 6)
 - about 1 cup leftover spring onion risotto
 - freshly ground black pepper

instructions

1. So first the onions and shallots get sautéed in the oil in a big frying pan. We used our stainless steel one this time, bought incredibly cheap as a discontinued item in a home

store chain that soon after discontinued itself.

2. Then add the parsnips and carrots, rather hard vegetables. Cook a while.
3. Then the celery and zucchini.
4. By this time a little wine helps out since the oil has been sucked into the veggies. Maybe a second shot when that evaporates. Let 'em cook a while.
5. Then add the meat. Let it warm up.
6. Then throw in the basil, parsley, and chopped greens. Toss around a bit.
7. Presto! Serve with freshly ground black pepper. And some plain yogurt on the side.

notes

1. We ate it all in one sitting. It was that good.

lftovrsf.htm: 6-aug-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

another leftover dish (pasta)

Again this one is just for creative inspiration. Our new refrigerator, not even a year old, stopped cooling and was down 6 days before the repair process ended. We lost a lot of food but managed to save some in our recycling bin with convenience store ice and old rug pieces and blankets for insulation. (After which we bought an insulated ice chest.) The frozen chicken breasts were obviously not going to survive this treatment so we wanted to cook them the first night. Except we had a few other frozen meats as well and weren't up to eating them all at one sitting and living to tell about it. (Which brings up memories of the weekend in the mountains of Austria in a barn apartment with Michelle and Uli for which each thought the other had shopped for the veggies so each brought only various red meats for the grill, and we had only that for every meal. Never again.) The food truck business in-laws said don't worry, just boil the chicken and it will keep even without refrigeration for a short time. [Remind me not to have their grilled chicken sandwich next time I do free lunch at the truck.] In any case with limited refrigeration it survived in its boiled form. And we survived the 6 days without a working refrigerator. A valuable experience for reminding us how dependent we are on our modern conveniences.

The recipe ready chicken turned out to be great for adding to improvised recipes. Like this one. But don't wait till your fridge breaks down to try it or some reasonable facsimile.

ingredients

- 1)
 - 2 - 3 T olive oil
 - 3 shallots, chopped finely
 - 8 oz fresh white mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
- 2)
 - 2 leftover boiled chicken breasts, chopped into small pieces
 - 1/2 c (approx) white wine
 - salt, to taste
 - freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3)
 - 1 oz ~ 1 T roasted sweet pepper spread (kopanisti)
 - 1 4-oz jar sliced pimiento
 - 1/4 c white wine
 - a touch of cayenne red pepper
 - ~ 1/2 t paprika
 - 1/2 c leftover white rice
 - 1/4 c leftover spinach sautéed in garlic
- 4)
 - 1 lb cavatelli

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when ready, throw in the salt and pasta and cook al dente.
2. Meanwhile, sauté the shallots and mushrooms in the oil.

3. Toss in the chicken pieces, cook a bit, then toss in the wine and evaporate.
4. Season with salt and pepper
5. Add in the rest of the ingredients and heat up.
6. Mix together with the cooked pasta and serve.

notes

1. Parmigiano here? Experiment.

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

spontaneous risotto

The dr bob supply cabinet ran out of the boring white rice leaving behind only at least 45 minute cooking without prep time brown rice and it was home from work ready to eat time. Risotto promises great flavor in the mouth in less than 30 minutes flat. A little prep time, a little sauté period, under 20 minutes boiling, finishing touches, chow time.

Apparently we liked this leek, carrot, celery, and cheese improv or we would not have recorded it.

ingredients

sauté group

- 1 onion, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced lengthwise
- 1 leek, chopped
- 3 T butter
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 carrot, food processed into bits
- 2 celery stalks, food processed with the carrots

rice

- 2 c arborio rice
- 1 mushroom veggie broth cube, or the equivalent
- 5 or 6 cups of boiling water

finishers

- 3 T gorgonzola, chopped
- 3 T taleggio, chopped
- 2/3 c freshly grated romano cheese
- freshly ground pepper to taste

instructions

1. Start the water boiling in a tea kettle to be ready to add a bit at a time to the rice.
2. Sauté the shallots, garlic and leek in the butter and olive oil.
3. Add the carrot and celery bits and sauté them a minute or so.
4. Stir in the arborio rice and cook a minute.
5. Then add in a cup of boiling water and the veggie broth cube or equivalent.
6. Stir and add 1/2 c boiling water at a time for the 18 minute risotto cooking phase.
7. Finish by removing from the heat and mixing in the cheeses and black pepper.
8. Serve immediately.

notes

1. Once the water starts boiling, turn down the heat to low for the water or you will evaporate a large fraction before finishing. Like for all the other risotto recipes.

spontris.htm: 22-jan-2000 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

1995

scandinavian yellow pea soup

Swedish friends have heightened our awareness of Scandinavian cuisine. For example, those weird celery roots you find in the supermarket that are clearly not roots of celery—that's a typical Scandinavian ingredient. [Apparently this obvious root takes its name from its celery-like taste.] We've used it once but this time took the easier celery route. Thanks to the increasing popularity of IKEA, we didn't have to search for dried yellow peas, for the typical Scandinavian soup of the same name, although later Fresh Fields moved in and made this ingredient readily available. We had some on hand waiting for the day our woman's mag recipe could be put to the test. We'd already tried the no-frills recipe from a Scandinavian cookbook—this one seemed much more interesting with leeks, potatoes, rutabagas. A sure thing. Unfortunately we overlooked the small detail of overnight soaking.

how to avoid thinking ahead with dried beans/peas

Instead of soaking dried beans/peas overnight in cold water covering them by several inches and then draining the next day, you can be like us and do the pressure cooker alternative. Clean and rinse the dried legumes and put 6 to 10 cups of water (2.5 qts) per 2 cups (about 1 lb) legumes in the pressure cooker. Cook at low heat 5 minutes. Then remove from heat, lose the pressure, drain in a colander and rinse under hot tap water. We only realized this trick reading our pressure cooking book while we were faking it with an improvised technique which sort of amounted to the same thing, almost.

how to have a ham bone on hand

This recipe execution began with the free cooked smoked ham ani got from her company at Christmas. We would have preferred a real bonus, but seeing as how we got the ham, and had the ham, and now had the ham bone, we were ready for some kind of ham bone based soup like this one. The real recipe actually calls for a ham hock or smoked pork shank (?), but it's good to be flexible in the kitchen—the first step towards creativity.

how much?

By cross-referencing all our legume soup recipes, we learned that one pound of dried beans is about 2 cups. Our digital scale was only doing metric readouts and not very well since the weight seemed to fluctuate by plus or minus 10 percent, so this was useful information. It took us many years to finally dispose of the scale. The typical corresponding amount of water is 10 cups, which if you have one of those glass 4 cup equals 1 quart graduated kitchen liquid measuring things (what are they called?), equals 2.5 quarts, though some recipes go low at 2 and others high at 3. We did a 2.5 and added a cup at the end before serving to thin it up a bit.

how to save time

Use a pressure cooker. This is (was) the nineties. Who has time to wait hours for soup? An 8 qt pressure cooker. A supercooker works better for interrupting the steam.

what stuff to use:

ingredients

1)

1 lb or 2 c yellow peas, whole or split
1 lb ham hocks or 1/2 c finely chopped ham or 1 ham bone from a free ham
1 onion, finely chopped
1 T chopped fresh or 1 t dried thyme
10 c water

2)

2 c diced potatoes
2 c diced rutabaga (yellow turnip)
1 1/2 c chopped leek
1 T salt (?)

3)

1 cup hot water
freshly ground black pepper to taste

4) options

add some carrots
add more leeks
hold the rutabaga

instructions

1. Do the pressurized or the overnight presoak as explained above.
2. Then pressure cook the first set of ingredients for 30 minutes.
3. Depressurize and add the second set of ingredients. Pressure cook 10 minutes.
4. Depressurize and puree a few cups in a blender and return to the pot with about a cup of hot water to thin it a bit. Add the freshly ground pepper.
5. Keep on warm 5 minutes to make sure it's hot enough to serve.

notes

1. Watch out. During the second phase we had the heat too high without thinking since the steam rocker maintains the correct pressure independent of the heat, but of course does not control the direct heat transfer to the bottom of the pot. We burned the bottom layer a bit and had to transfer the soup minus the burnt layer to a new pot. Not fatal. Be flexible.
2. This is similar to [red lentil and rice soup](#).

puglia pasta and black beans

The evening before both turning twice the age at which one normally takes the GRE (Graduate Record Exam) and retaking them in solidarity with ms_ani, dr bob faces a problem they have been frequently avoiding in the past unpleasant test preparation month, namely cooking something tasty and healthy at home instead of eating outside prepared food that although sometimes tasty, was probably not very healthy as a regular thing.

Pasta with beans would satisfy the protein requirement that considerably more effort with some frozen chicken breast would meet. Half a can of black beans were left over from a previous such attempt with rice. To be matched with some great Puglia pasta, cicatelli, never heard of 'em before, but looking like a longer twisted version of cavatelli and lovingly made by the Cara Nonna (dear grandma) pasta factory and overpriced at the urban gourmet food store where the shopping team spotted them.

ingredients

- 1 lb cicatelli (or any cavatelli-like pasta)
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 large onion
- 1 red pepper
- 1 large carrot
- 2 stalks celery
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 8 or so fresh plum tomatoes, chopped
- 10 leaves fresh basil, chopped
- 1 T dried chives
- 2 t hot paprika
- salt
- freshly ground pepper
- 1/2 or 1 can black beans
- 1/2 c parmigiano

instructions

The experiment proceeded as follows. The new food processor recently acquired much later in life than necessary got all the veggies. First the onion, red pepper, carrot, and celery all got processed together. Meanwhile the pasta water got started. [And the pasta later dumped in at the boiling stage with salt, who knows how much—we always just throw that in casually.] Saute'd the first batch of veggies with the olive oil in an 8 quart nonstick pot. And threw in the chopped garlic.

Meanwhile the tomatoes go into the food processor next and are roughly chopped. After about 10 minutes, maybe less, in go the tomatoes to join the saute party. Then the basil, chives and spices, and the beans. Let it go for another 10 minutes. Finish by adjusting the salt and pepper, mixing in the pasta and adding the parmigiano. Is this brain food or what?

notes

1. Don't ask about the GRE's. These tests should be outlawed.

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

mixed bag pasta sauce

Most of the early recipes that were thought good enough to record, but which did not have time for some inspired little chatter about them, were mercilessly deleted in 2002. A few survived by chance, who knows why. This one sounds fun.

ingredients

- 1 onion
- 4 garlic cloves, pressed
- 2 T olive oil
- 10 oz sliced white mushrooms
- 1 shaved carrot (or 1/2)
- 1/3 c sliced olives
- 5 or 6 plum tomatoes, chopped
- salt and pepper to taste
- cayenne red pepper to taste
- red pepper flakes to taste
- 1/3 c light cream
- 2/3 c grated romano cheese (we were out of parmigiano?)
- 1 lb orrecchiette or farfalle or ...

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and do the pasta.
2. Meanwhile, saute the onion and garlic in olive oil.
3. Add in the sliced mushrooms. Stir around a bit.
4. Then the carrot. Soften.
5. Then the olives, tomatoes, salt and peppers.
6. After say 10 minutes, add 1/3 c light cream.
7. Drain the al dente pasta and combine the sauce with the pasta and cheeses.
8. Serve.

notes

1. No notes either.

fettuccine con spinaci

Here is another story-less recipe, but it survived because it is a winning combination.

ingredients

2 lb spinach, cooked and chopped
1 1/2 T butter, 1 T olive oil or 2 T olive oil
4 garlic cloves, pressed
8 oz veggie broth
1/2 c milk + arrowroot (or light cream if fat is not an issue)
pepper and salt to taste
1 c freshly grated parmigiano
touch nutmeg
1 lb fettuccini

instructions

1. Boil pasta water and cook al dente.
2. Meanwhile, prepare the spinach and cook it down with just the water left on it from rinsing. Chop.
3. Sauté the garlic in olive oil / butter until just softened.
4. Then stir in the veggie broth and dairy component, salt and pepper, nutmeg.
5. Drain the al dente pasta.
6. Combine the sauce, spinach and pasta, and the cheese of course.
7. Eat.

notes

1. No notes again.

fetspnch.htm: 27-may-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

turnip risotto

Turnips. I always see them sitting there in the supermarket. I read about them. And once in a while I buy a few. But then they just sit there in the fridge. The problem is that they don't speak to me. I must be turnip deaf.

So they were sitting in the fridge when ani called me across the continent for advice on what to feed my fussy brother-in-law. [Correction: one of my fussy brothers-in-law.] She listed some of the fridge tenants of the moment. Ah, those turnips. Risotto. They spoke to me. "Do me this way." Red pepper for color. Zucchini for good measure. Yeah. Veggie vibes.

I got the leftovers after my flight home. Excellent. Why are there so many good ways to do risotto?

ingredients

base

1 1/2 c arborio rice
2 T butter
1 onion, chopped
1/4 c wine

veggies

1 zucchini, chopped
1/2 red pepper, chopped
1 turnip, chopped
1 t (heaping) veggie broth stuff

finishers

1/2 c parmigiano
pepper, freshly ground to taste

instructions

1. First chop all the veggies. Except for the onion, make 'em into little cubes, maybe 1/4 inch on a side, though the red pepper won't have this depth. Or julienne 'em. No hard and fast rules here.
2. Then sauté the onions in the butter. Then the red peppers a few minutes. Then the zucchini, likewise.
3. Then dump in the rice. Mix and sauté 2 minutes, then add the wine and let evaporate. Maybe 1 minute or two.
4. Then do the water treatment. An already boiling 4 or 5 cups of water in a teapot contributes first a cup to the mixture. Then as it is absorbed, stir in another cup or part thereof, depending on your patience. Repeat until you reach about 20 minutes of water treatment. Check for al dente rice.
5. Mix in the parmigiano and pepper.
6. Serve immediately.

notes

1. We are now turnip convinced. We stick them in lots of places now, where they contribute a decidedly noticeable positive flavor to the mix. Give them a shot. Listen to them. Then eat them.

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

vegetarian mushroom bacon stuffing

Vegetarian with bacon? We forgot to buy the bacon. Didn't miss it.

ingredients

sautéables

- 3 c chopped celery
- 1 medium to large onion, chopped
- 1 large leek, chopped (maybe 3 cups?)
- 3 T olive oil

more plus spices

- 1 lb white/portabello mushrooms, chopped
- 1 1/2 T dried sage leaves
- 2 t dried thyme
- 1 t salt
- 3/4 t ground black pepper

broth

- 2 1/2 c vegetable broth, heated (1 c canned vegetarian, 1 1/2 c from concentrate)

bread/finishers

- 8 oz whole wheat stuffing pieces
- 8 oz ordinary stuffing pieces
- 2 large eggs
- 1 1/2 t baking powder

instructions

1. Since there is no bacon fat to sauté the veggies, try the olive oil alternative. Soften those celery bits (about 10 minutes).
2. Then add in the mushrooms and spices and continue another 10 minutes or so until they are tender.
3. Mix this stuff into the bread cubes in a large pan.
4. Mix in the broth until evenly wetted down.
5. Beat the eggs and baking powder and stir them in well. Add some more broth if the stuffing seems a bit dry.
6. Dump into a buttered/cooking sprayed/otherwise greased large rectangular pan and bake in preheated oven about 1 hour until cooked through and golden brown on top.

notes

1. Apparently this comes from [Bon Appetit](#) November 1995. With some slight modifications other than forgetting to [bring home the bacon](#).[!]
2. Choose your baking pan wisely since there is a good chance the oven will already be a bit crowded by the presence of a large turkey, and they have to spend quality time together in there.

vmshstf.htm: 31-oct-2000 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

1996

musa dagh malanga soup

At various times culminating in World War I, the Armenians had some [serious problems](#) with the Turks. The Turks say the same about the Armenians, but the bodies on the ground and in the rivers were usually Armenian. One community [Musa Dagh](#) was lucky enough to have a nearby coastal mountain with an easily defended access path that enabled them to hold out till a rescuing French Navy ship arrived on the sea side. The French later resettled many of them in a little town called [Anjar](#) in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon (not the town in Kansas, geographic center of the continental United States), where they were able to continue making their widely unknown but fabulous malanga chick pea soup, a Musa Dagh tradition that might otherwise have vanished except for that mountain and some hardheaded Armenians. Some of whom, thanks to another ugly Middle Eastern conflict, ended up as dr bob's inlaws in America (the United States of). So that you too can now enjoy this wonderful dish. Provided you have some Puerto Ricans around. They seem to be the only Americans who actually know what a malanga is and provide the food distribution system with a target market demand.

What is a malanga?

A big hairy brown root vegetable with a white interior, used like a potato in Puerto Rican cuisine, though resembling a coconut more than a tuber. And brought to upscale continental Americans (Lebanon, KA, remember) by the 90's "Nuevo Latino" cuisine, news of which filtered down to the dr bob cooking team in the food section of the local paper, complete with a poor quality color photo of the super tuber. Apparently from what our local clan malanga forager says, there are a number of imposter malangas to be found at the only local malanga supplier, so some skill is required in the hunt.

The Arabic word is "elaas", while the Armenian word is "goulougas". If you are lucky, enough humans from one of these three ethnic groups live near you to make malangas appear somewhere in your food distribution system. Usually in the winter season when this soup really hits the spot.

Isgouhi makes it happen for us.

ingredients

1)

- 1 c dried chick peas
- 1 lb lamb shoulder or stew meat
- 1 t salt
- 1/8 t black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- water to cover

2)

- 2 lb malangas
- 1 lemon, juice from
- ? t salt (to taste)
- water to cover

3)

- 1/2 - 1 c yogurt (thin - thick)
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 T tomato paste
- 1 T sweet red pepper paste (optional)
- 2 c water
- 1/2 lemon, juice from
- 1/2 t salt
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 1/4 t red pepper

instructions

1. Soak the dried chick peas overnight in water. When ready to make the soup, drain.
2. Bring the meat to a boil and then drain and rinse to eliminate the scum which forms.
3. Put the meat and chick peas in the pressure cooker with the group 1 spices and just cover with water. Bring to a boil, remove the scum which forms on the surface, close and cook at full steam 10 minutes. Allow to cool down until pressure releases and remove contents temporarily to another pot.
4. Meanwhile peel the malangas and cut into roughly 1 inch by 1 inch by 1/2 inch irregular chunks, rotating around the malanga twisting the knife as you cut into it to snap off pieces one at a time.
5. Then cover with water, add juice of 1 lemon and some salt, and let sit.
6. Beat the yogurt and egg in a small bowl until very smooth [adding a well beaten egg to the yogurt helps prevent it from separating when boiled], pour it into the pressure cooker and add the remaining group 3 ingredients, mixing until smooth.
7. Add the drained malanga pieces and just enough water to cover the malanga.
8. Bring to a boil uncovered to prevent yogurt separation, then cover and cook 10 minutes at full steam. Allow to cool down until pressure releases. Malanga should be firm and not mushy.
9. Open the pressure cooker and add the meat and chick peas and heat 5 minutes uncovered.
10. Remove from heat and serve.

notes

1. When the day finally came for Isgouhi to do the malanga soup class in our kitchen (you never get it right until you do it yourself in your own environment), we had forgotten to soak the chick peas overnite. In fact we didn't even have any on hand since we always kept taking them to her kitchen for her to use. So we had to make a special early morning trip to the market. Apparently only 7 hours of soaking are sufficient. And since the malanga bob found [Philly 69th St Pathmark] was so big [a foot long but we forgot to weigh it: see the super-tuber photo], the double recipe we made wouldn't fit back in the pressure cooker simultaneously at the last step, so the final boil was done in our 12 qt pasta pot. Leftover city.
2. More [info](#) about malangas, including photos, is available.
3. Reviewing the recipe later with the cook's other daughter led to more revisions, so we decided to do a second class again in our own kitchen. Every time this recipe is executed,

there are changes in procedure! Isgouhi used 2 pressure cookers to speed up things (this is not one of the changes we mean), but we revised for the 1 pot approach. Maybe one day this process will converge. Putting Mediterranean mom cooks into reproducible recipe format is not an easy task.

ps (taro root!)

Looks like the joke is on us. The name "taro root" does not seem to be in use in the supermarkets that market malangas to us, so barkev naturally thought that malanga was the word used here for the "true malangas" that he recognized from the Middle East, but it later became clear from a more diligent internet search that barkev's true malangas are really [taro root](#), which is found and used in all parts of the world [taro = taro root = dasheen = coco = cocoyam = eddo = Japanese potato = baddo = elephant's ear = old cocoyam = sato-imo, according to [The Cook's Thesaurus](#)], although unknown to the American public at large. But taro root doesn't make a nice alliteration (repeated first letter words) or rhyme like the name of the soup that we have used for years, so we'll just leave it be.

malangas.htm: 9-may-2003[[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

armenian chick pea tomato pasta soup

This is another Armenian soup often made by Isgouhi in the same class as the [malanga](#) one, but without a hard to find key ingredient. I got her to dictate this recipe to me 3 different times over the course of a few years, but each version had some variations. The following is a compromise. There is a good reason why this is frequently served. Healthy and tasty. Sorry about the meat.

ingredients

- 1)
 - 1 c dried chick peas (= 1/2 lb dried) or 1 can wet peas
 - 1 - 1 1/2 lb lamb shoulder or stew meat (even beef)
 - 2 bay leaves
 - 2 t salt
 - water to cover, plus some
- 2)
 - 1 lb baby shells, cavatelli (2 c?) precooked al dente
- 3)
 - 2 T tomato paste (heaping = 3oz)
 - 2 lemons, juice from
 - 6 cloves garlic, pressed
 - water to cover
 - 1/2 t allspice
 - 1/2 t black pepper
 - 1/2 t [Middle Eastern red pepper powder](#)
 - 1/2 t salt
- 4)
 - 1 - 4 T butter
 - 6 cloves garlic, pressed
 - 2 T dried mint

instructions

1. Soak the dried chick peas overnight in water. When ready to make the soup, drain.
2. Bring the meat to a boil in an uncovered pressure cooker with 1 t salt and 1 bay leaf, boil 5 min, and then drain and rinse to eliminate the scum which forms. Discard first bay leaf.
3. Add the chick peas, 1 t salt, and the second bay leaf to the meat in the pressure cooker and just cover with water, plus a little bit. Bring to full steam and cook 15 minutes covered.
4. Mix the tomato paste with a little water in a saucepan and stir in the lemon juice and spices and then pour into the pressure cooker.
5. Bring the soup to a boil uncovered and then add the pasta. Boil 5 minutes uncovered.
6. Meanwhile saute the butter, garlic, and mint separately until the garlic and butter is a light golden brown color.
7. Add to soup and boil 5 minutes more. Remove from heat and serve.

notes

1. This still needs some feedback from the chef.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

armcpps.htm: 17-jan-200\5 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

french apple tart

ms_ani would like to go to France and spend some time there but that's not gonna happen anytime soon. [Famous last words: an impossible to refuse airline deal sent us on a long weekend direct flight to Paris one month later, but still, a few days is not what she had in mind.] She would also like to start doing French cooking. Much easier. So we picked up a small [French bistro cookbook](#), every dish beautifully photographed. The [French apple tart](#) popped out at us. Sweet pastry crust, vanilla bean pastry cream, thin sliced apples neatly arranged in a circular pattern. Only two problems: no vanilla beans and no tart pan with removable bottom. The first was solved at a local supermarket in the bottled spice section but WHOA! Over three bucks for a couple long bean pods in a spice jar. As for the second we had no time to get to a cooking supply for the affluent store so we improvised—we used a cheesecake springform pan. Not perfect but good enough to fill in till the right pan came along, which it did soon after.

Of course American apple pie prejudice lowered dr bob's expectations for this French flattened version, but let's face it—there must be some reason the average French restaurant can charge so much for its product. This tart is actually good and not overwhelming like a superpacked American pie, especially when you add the obligatory vanilla ice cream / frozen yogurt. dr bob was looking for nonfat frozen yogurt but only found lowfat vanilla bean ice cream. Only 20% calories from fat! And a great combination with the French tart of course.

Two steps precede the assembly / baking phase of this project, both of which may be done in advance (like the day before): 1) pastry cream (cooled) and 2) sweet pastry dough.

ingredients

pastry cream (crème pâtissière) [makes 2 cups, need only 1]

- 4 egg yolks
- 1/2 c sugar
- 1/3 c plus 1 T all purpose flour
- 2 c milk
- 1/2 vanilla bean (pod), split in half lengthwise

sweet pastry crust (dough ball)

- 1/2 c (4oz = 1 stick) plus 1 T unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into pieces
- 1/2 c confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1 egg
- 2 c all purpose flour
- 1/8 t baking powder

apple topping

- 3 - 5 Granny Smith apples (we only seem to use 2)
- 1 T sugar
- 1 T cinnamon
- 2 T unsalted butter, melted

instructions

pastry cream

Combine the egg yolks and sugar in a large bowl and whisk or beat until thoroughly combined. Add the flour and stir until smooth. Set aside.

Combine the milk and vanilla bean in a large saucepan over high heat and bring to a boil. As soon as it begins to boil, remove from the heat and remove the vanilla bean, scraping the seeds directly into the milk with the tip of a small sharp knife.

Whisk half the hot milk into the egg mixture in the bowl and return the saucepan to high heat. As soon as it begins to boil again, pour the bowl stuff into it, whisking constantly.

Stir over high heat with a wooden spoon until the mixture is smooth and then return to a boil and boil while stirring for 2 more minutes.

Remove from the heat and press plastic wrap directly onto the surface of the hot cream to prevent a skin from forming. Cool completely before using. Makes enough for 2 tarts. Make one, wait a while, make another.

sweet pastry dough

This is not a health food product. If your butter is still frozen like ours (we keep it in the freezer), you can paper thin cut it cross-wise (we use a super knife picked up at a home show, used to cut steel hammers for effect in the demo) and combine with the sugar using a manual pastry blender. If soft, then beat with an electric mixer on low speed until smooth, about 3 minutes.

Then add the egg and beat until creamy.

Using a rubber spatula, fold in the flour and baking powder just minimally and then beat on low until the dough is evenly mixed and clings together, about 2 or 3 minutes.

Shape the dough into a flattened oval, wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours (up to 2 weeks). Bring to room temperature (allow an hour here too) before using.

sweet pastry crust: ball to pan

As previously noted in our early days (bavarian apple torte), these sweet pastry crusts are not user friendly. A floured pastry cloth is indispensable here to keep your beautifully rolled out crust from self destructing when transferring to the tart pan (even worse with the high sides of a cheesecake pan!)

Once you've rolled it out to the approximate diameter needed for the 10 inch (25cm) pan plus sides, very carefully loosely roll up the pastry from the pastry cloth to your floured cloth covered rolling pin and then unroll on the pan. Or if you have the magic pan, you can put the flat bottom on the rolled out dough and overturn and place in the sidewall support structure.

Any side breakage can be repaired by hand by just pressing overrun pieces into gaps. Trim the

extra dough even with the top of the sidewalls of the magic pan if you've got one and refrigerate.

apple prep

Preheat oven to 375°.

Core and peel the apples, then slice lengthwise very thin. Mix with the sugar and cinnamon.

tart assembly and completion

Get the crust out of the fridge and spread the cooled pastry cream evenly over the bottom (about 1/8 in deep). Then arrange the apple slices on top in concentric circles and brush with the melted butter.

Bake about 50 minutes until golden brown and slightly caramelized (the sugar).

Serve warm or at room temperature.

notes

1. There is always more dough than you need after rolling out any tart or pie crust(s). This recipe leaves enough dough for another sizable tartlet that can be used to experiment with new coverings. Gather it back together into a ball and roll it out again. This can be dropped in the middle of a glass pie plate, and the edges can be convinced to form some kind of crude edging. Whatever compromise you can work out with the excess dough is acceptable, since the alternative is more Western society waste. Let your imagination direct the effort here. The pastry cream recipe is also generous, so as long as you don't go overboard in piling it on (remember how rich it is), you'll have enough extra for the tartlet.
2. For example, crumb up a scant tablespoon or so of walnut crumbs in the blender and sprinkle over the pastry cream layer. Scatter on some of those pine nuts that you never know what to do with. Gently place small triangular cross cut pieces of the thinly sliced apple between the pine nuts. Shake a touch of cinnamon and sugar over it. Paint on what melted butter remains from the big tart. Maybe sprinkle on a bit more of the walnut crumbs.
3. Be careful to watch the tartlet during baking since its exposed edge crust will brown much faster than its protected big tart companion. We didn't watch, but it wasn't a disaster. Next time will be perfect.
4. [Illustration](#) available.

veggie bowties I: the joy of food processing

For years we did without. [Perhaps because we had not yet bought a house, and after we did, because we had.] Somehow buying the [big name food processor](#) outright seemed an extravagance. And any other one would never satisfy our amateur cooking ambitions, the typical ad campaign brainwashed consumers that we are. So we waited. Until the temptation came within reach—a seemingly pretty good sale price for the slightly reduced power version of the classic model—and we grabbed it. Happy little food processors we became. Except that our laziness prevented us from fully exploiting the processor potential. The two extra full disk cutting options. One with the big "extremely sharp blade" warning sticker still stuck on the shining metal. Until a dr bob mom visit, during which the question came up about using the slicer blade. The sticker came off. Some potatoes got sliced. Wow.

So back to the topic at hand. Veggie pasta sauces are a snap with the food processor. Just mine the refrigerator for its veggie deposits in the lower drawers. Assortments are good for this. First the onion, then the secondary items. Not quite like opening a jar, but jars just don't cut it, usually.

ingredients

pasta

1 lb bowtie pasta (farfalle)

veggie process group

1 celery stalk

1 carrot

1 turnip

2 green onions

1 large garlic clove

sauté starters

2 T olive oil

1 onion, chopped

1 red pepper, chopped

sauté intermediaries

2 small zucchini, sliced crossways

8 oz white mushrooms, chopped

finishers

1/2 c veggie broth (1 t veggie concentrate plus water)

salt to taste

pepper to taste

1/2 t paprika

2 T fresh parsley, chopped

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when ready throw in the bowtie pasta and cook al dente. Meanwhile:
2. Food process the food process group together, after cleaning, peeling, whatever seems

appropriate.

3. Sauté the onion and red pepper in olive oil.
4. When a bit softened, throw in the food processed group and combine.
5. Add in the zucchini and mushrooms.
6. When softened, add in the veggie broth and let simmer on low heat for a while until the liquid reduces a bit.
7. Add in the finishers.
8. Combine with the pasta. Serve with freshly grated parmigiano and black pepper.

notes

1. We were on a roll so we tried a variation ([next recipe](#)).

vegbow1.htm: 6-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

veggie bowties II: farfalle alla caponata (more joy)

Our only record of this is a printout of a February email to an Italian mom friend, casually informing her that no Caribbean vacation was in the works (spring break was coming up) but instead our first European long weekend vacation, in [Stockholm](#). It all started at the table eating nadereh's homecooked Iranian food when ani mentioned this [SAS](#) really low season promotional weekend package to Stockholm, a city dr bob knew well from professional collaboration with dr kjell and dr claes. She'd spotted it in the Sunday paper. Of course initially bob had said something like "What, are you crazy?" though more diplomatically put at the time, but when Cyrus said, "Why not?", bob thought, yeah, why not? Early childhood training to reject offers of good stuff with a polite no thank you cracked. Maybe it wasn't so crazy after all. Ani is an American industry wage slave, with 3 weeks max vacation per year, so we don't have the time for long fun vacations, what with the mandatory Italian summer visits and occasional Lebanon trips. So we went. And ani met kjell and claes's families on a bright sunny snow and ice weekend in the city and surroundings. A quick mix of big city excitement, friendship and family, beautiful urban and country scenery, walking on the frozen lakes and city not-a-river but looks-like-one water body, window shopping, European otherness, a visit to the Nobel dinner castle. Memories.

Later followed by Paris, where we ran into more ani relatives (by chance being visited by ani's brother's childhood friend from Anjar then living in Texas) whose Armenian-Lebanese home cooking surpassed everything French we'd found except possibly lunch at [Fauchon](#), recommended by another Iranian couple who'd already done the city. And then Munich, where bob had spent 9 months after his year in Italy, visiting [piero](#) and accidentally catching Luigi, an old Rome connection /roommate from bob's [HS CFA](#) days. Having friends and relatives scattered around the globe definitely has its advantages.

ingredients

pasta

1 lb bowtie pasta (farfalle)

veggie process group

1 celery stalk

1 red pepper

2 green onions

sauté starters

2 T olive oil

1 onion, chopped

sauté intermediaries

1 eggplant (big), peeled and cubed

1/2 c black olives, chopped

2 t green jalapeño pepper, chopped

finishers

1 28oz (big) can pomodori pelati (peeled plum tomatoes)

salt to taste

pepper to taste

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when ready throw in the bowtie pasta and cook al dente. Meanwhile:
2. Food process the food process group together, after cleaning.
3. Sauté the onion and red pepper in olive oil.
4. When a bit softened, throw in the food processed group and continue sautéing.
5. Add in the eggplant and continue sautéing.
6. After cooking a bit, add in the pelati and cook about 15 minutes on low to medium heat.
7. Then season with salt and pepper.
8. Combine half the sauce with the pasta, freeze the other half with a dated post-it to use at a later date (we usually forget what goes in the freezer).
9. We served this with freshly grated pecorino Romano.

notes

1. Remember, never overwhelm pasta with too much sauce.
2. The e-mail noted that this was great for lunch the next day. Microwaved in Rubbermaid.
3. It must have been rita. The Italian mom friend. She never commented on our improvisation. How should we interpret that?

vegbow2.htm: 6-aug-2001 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

pork chops with portabello mushrooms and roasted peppers

We always keep some frozen meat in the freezer. Generally it is consumed not with advanced planning but with sudden need—requiring a microwave quick thaw and improvised preparation. This recipe is a slight variation of the cook's mom's Armenian meat treatment ("[cow in red wine sauce](#)"). Pretty tasty, assuming it's okay to admit liking stuff that once had a face. Served with [Armenian rice](#) with almonds. The cook had some wine. And fell asleep in front of the TV. A Friday night collapse. Meanwhile the bob channel surfed onto [Xena, warrior princess](#) uninterrupted until. The mother-in-law calls to announce the Miss USA pageant that we are missing. bob makes the big sacrifice.

ingredients

- 4 pork chops
- 2 T olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- 4 small portabello mushrooms, chopped
- 1/2 c red wine
- 2 t tomato paste
- 1/2 c water
- 4 oz roasted peppers, about 4 pieces from a jar
- salt and pepper to taste

instructions

1. Brown the pork chops in the olive oil in a pressure cooker and set them aside.
2. Add garlic and sauté without browning.
3. Add mushrooms, sauté a bit and then add the wine and evaporate it.
4. Then put back the pork chops and add the roasted peppers.
5. Dissolve the tomato paste in the water and add.
6. Check the seasoning and then pressure cook about 15 minutes over medium heat.
7. Release pressure and serve.

notes

1. Ani, maybe you should check this version over?

produce bread: bananas, pumpkins, zucchini?

It's not bread. It's not cake. Just what is it?

When dr bob was young, cakes were [Betty Crocker](#) or [Duncan Hines](#) from a box. Mom made 'em. The bob made 'em. They never had produce in them. Lots of sugar and high fat icing. Bread was white, full of air, and easily returned to the dough ball state by imaginative kid hands. Not to mention often found in the company of peanut butter and jelly or bologna and cheese. Fortunately at some point in life, things changed. bob evolved into a higher plane of cake consumption.

And then things changed again. With a warning shot across the bow from the updated food pyramid. These produce breads we stumbled upon by chance are less damaging than the traditional versions and seem to be better off for it.

The first was a random save from our massive recipe harvest of years of multiple women's magazines sold to ms_ani in a telephone marketing package deal, who finds it hard to say no on the phone. The second came in a checkout counter impulse buy and got its first trial thanks to a pumpkin pack can grabbed for a Thanksgiving day cheesecake never made. Oops, not! It was from our next stage in life food magazine *Cooking Light*, which we now seem to use more than *Bon Appetit*, though both continue to roll in the door month after month and stack up in our cooking library with lots of post-its marking interesting recipes that rarely get a trial run.

Quite by accident a partial categorization of these cake-breads came from a bob's mom's visit. "Quick breads", she said. Sure enough there is a short explanation in the *Joy of Cooking*, even a section heading in *Betty Crocker* (but no hint there of what distinguishes a quick bread from a cake). Regular breads rely on yeast to rise, while quick breads just use baking powder (which Laurel's kitchen tells us destroys the B vitamin and thiamin) and perhaps baking soda—quick since no waiting around for rising time is involved—just pop 'em in the oven. Comparing cakes and quick bread recipes shows one obvious difference—cakes have more flour, sugar, and eggs per unit fat content. Could our cooking library be too specialized that we don't have other sources of info on this topic? Do we need more general cooking tomes? Can we e-mail one of those TV chef's?

notes

1. Produce. As in fresh produce. Which refers to fruits and vegetables. Maybe this is an Americanism. If you think about the word a while, you wonder what it has to do with fruits and vegetables. Must not be in many non-native English speakers' vocabulary.

dried cherry banana bread

ingredients

dry group

2 c all purpose flour
1/2 c whole wheat flour
1/3 c cornmeal
1 t salt
1 t baking powder

wet group

2 c mashed ripe bananas (about 4), food processor does the job
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1/3 c buttermilk
2 T butter, melted
2 T vegetable oil
1/2 c sugar
1/2 t allspice
1/4 t cardamom
1/4 t cinnamon
1/8 t cloves

addins

1/2 cup dried cherries

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Grease and flour a 9x5 inch loaf pan.
3. Soak cherries in 1 c boiling water 5 minutes, then drain.
4. Combine the dry group in a large bowl.
5. Combine the wet group in a medium bowl (we food process the bananas), then stir into the dry group bowl until just moistened.
6. Stir in the cherries.
7. Pour into the loaf pan and bake 60 to 70 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.
8. Cool in the pan on a rack 10 minutes, then remove from the pan and cool completely.

notes

1. If you cut into 18 1/2 inch slices, each slice gets you:
Cal 165, Total fat 4g, Sat fat 1g, Chol 28mg, Sod 177mg, Carbs 30mg, Prot 3g.
2. Options. Hitting a supermarket for supplies in a winter snowstorm, some produce items impersonating 3 ripe peaches talked their way into the shopping basket. Although they turned out to be deceptively not what they appeared to be, they made a great alternative dried cherry replacement here. Peeled, pitted and sliced up like apples headed for a pie, we also used brown sugar in the wet group and since we ran out of cornmeal while emptying the box, we substituted about half with semolina (seemed like our only alternative) and added 2/3 c plain nonfat yogurt to ensure some degree of moistness. Not bad.
3. We made this over and over again until the next version muscled its way into our favorite spot.

another banana bread

This was the March 97 cover recipe for [Cooking Light](#) with the hook "our most *apeeling* banana bread" (p. 110). It is less dense and comes with the name Jamaican banana bread never explained in the accompanying article "bananas reveal their dark side" by the author abby duchin dinces (all lower case like dr bob). The recipe includes a shredded coconut topping we made once (in spite of bob's skepticism towards shredded coconut) but the extra effort did not seem to deliver enough extra payoff so we never bothered again. Leaving a bag of partially used shredded coconut in our fridge until the next century and then some. We like this a lot too.

ingredients

creamed mixture

2 T stick margarine (butter!), softened
 2 T tub light cream cheese, softened
 1 c sugar
 1 large egg

flour mixture

2 c all-purpose flour
 2 t baking powder
 1/2 t baking soda
 1/8 t salt

banana mixture

1 c ripe banana, mashed (food process it!)
 1/2 c skim milk
 2 T dark rum or 1/4 t imitation rum extract
 1/2 t grated lime rind
 2 t lime juice
 1 t vanilla extract

addins

1/4 c chopped pecans, roasted
 1/4 c flaked sweetened coconut

topping

1/4 c packed brown sugar
 2 t margarine (butter!)
 2 t lime juice
 2 t dark rum or 1/8 t imitation rum extract

topping addins

2 T chopped pecans, roasted
 2 T flaked sweetened coconut

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 375° F. Coat an 8x4 inch loaf pan with cooking spray and set aside.
2. Creamed mixture group: In a large bowl, beat together the margarine (butter!) and cream cheese at medium speed, then add the sugar, beating well, then the egg, beating well again.

3. Flour mixture group: Combine all this stuff and mix well.
4. Banana mixture group: Combine all this stuff and mix well. You can just throw it all in the food processor like we do.
5. Alternately add first the flour mixture and then the banana mixture a bit at a time, mixing well each time, ending with the flour mixture.
6. Stir in the pecans and coconut.
7. Pour batter into the pan and bake for 60 minutes.
8. Let cool in pan 10 minutes, then remove and cool slightly on a wire rack.
9. If you decide to prepare the topping, combine the topping stuff in a saucepan and bring to a simmer, then cook 1 minute stirring constantly and remove from the heat.
10. Stir in the topping addins and spoon the result over the loaf.

notes

1. 16 servings (1/2 inch slices) leads to the following single serving info:
Cal 187 (26% from fat), Fat 5.4g (sat 1.5g, mono 2.3g, poly 1.2g), Prot 2.9g, Carb 32.2g, Fiber 1.1g, Chol 15mg, Iron 1mg, Sod 105mg, Calc 55mg. Of course this discounts any rich icecream/frozen yogurt you might be tempted to serve it with.

banana-walnut-oatmeal bread

As the new century unfolds, health concerns multiply and bob turns to daily oatmeal intake as one measure in fighting cholesterol. 2004 brings another Cooking Light recipe for banana bread, to which bob could not resist adding the miracle food "walnuts", often found in the company of banana bread anyway. Ani found the recipe and made the first move, with some health upgrades in the flour and sugar ingredients suggested by bob together with the nuts. Then we made it repeatedly several times in succession. We were suitably impressed.

ingredients

dry stuff

- 1 1/2 c all-purpose flour (upgrade: 1 c white whole wheat flour plus 1/2 c all-purpose flour)
- 3/4 c sugar (upgrade: use unrefined cane sugar called turbinado or "Sugar in the Raw")
- 1 1/2 t baking powder
- 1/4 t baking soda
- 1/4 t salt
- 3/4 c regular oats (we just used oatmeal).

wet stuff

- 1 c mashed ripe banana (about 2 large)
- 1/3 c buttermilk (= 1/3 c powdered buttermilk in the dry stuff, 1/3 c water in the wet stuff)
- 1/4 c vegetable oil
- 1 t vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten.

instructions

1. This is really easy. Sift the flour and baking powder and soda and salt into a large bowl, then mix in the sugar and oats. That was all the dry stuff.
2. Then put all the wet stuff in a food processor and process.
3. Combine the dry and wet stuff together and pour into a loaf pan sprayed with veggie spray.
4. Bake at 350° for about 55 minutes in a preheated oven until a wooden tooth pick comes out clean when inserted in the center.
5. Cool 15 minutes in the pan on a wire rack, then invert and remove from pan and cool completely.

notes

1. [Cooking Light](#), September 2004, p. 164: (reader recipes) "A new classic", recipe by Kay Rothschild for banana-oatmeal loaf. We simplified the instructions. So easy that we do it over and over.
2. Now that we have a digital camera, we have an [illustration](#).
3. Nutrition info for the original recipe (no nuts): 1/12 loaf = serving slice: Calories 192 (28% from fat); Fat 6 g (sat. 1.1g, mono 1.5g, poly 2.9g); Protein 3.8g; Carb 31.4g; Fiber 1.3g; Chol 38mg; Iron 1.2mg; Sodium 154mg; Calc 52mg.

pumpkin bread

Still to do.

ingredients

instructions

- 1.

notes

- 1.

zucchini bread

Still to do.

ingredients

instructions

- 1.

notes

1. Hmm. We don't seem to be finding the right pumpkin or zucchini bread recipes for these slots.

prodbrd.htm: 8-sep-2004 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

no way creme d'artichauts (cream of artichoke soup)

Another family dinner. Fussy male in-laws on the guest list. What to make. Why not start with an irresistible cream soup? Beautifully photographed in the newly acquired [French cookbook](#). Yes. Artichokes have a certain class about them. But what's this [Armagnac](#) they call for? Substitutable by cognac or any good quality dry brandy?

Off to the state store we go in search of a cooperative clerk to broaden our knowledge of unfamiliar hard liquor. Finally we locate the target item. Whoa! Catch that price tag. What is this stuff? The [Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board](#) employee chokes at the inquiry. No idea. No alcohol encyclopedia. No CD-ROM to consult. No interest in satisfying the customer. Hey, we're just cooking with the stuff. We grabbed the cheap brandy on the bottom shelf.

The artichokes we popped out of a can. Broke in the food processor slicing blade on the potatoes. Food processed the rest normally. Cut down the killer cream. Toasted the hazelnuts. Puréed with the [Euro-hand-blender](#)-what-a-toy way easier than the [Vitamix](#) super blender routine. Dinner is served. Pass the bowls. Finally the moment of truth. The king of fuss and his junior assistant. Just a taste we timidly suggest. Met immediately with blocking hand motions and matching who are you kidding facial expressions from the king. Wrong color soup. Or something.

This soup is super. You don't need fresh artichokes. No Euro hand blender or super blender or food processor required. The French can do it by hand. Maybe we could too.

ingredients

base

1/3 c olive oil
1 white onion
3 celery stalks

stock

1 14 oz can artichoke hearts
1 large potato, peeled
4 c vegetable broth

flavor upgrade

1/3 c hazelnuts
2 t salt (or to taste)
1 t white pepper
3/4 c heavy cream
3/4 c evaporated milk
1/2 c Armagnac, cognac, or dry brandy

instructions

1. Sauté the coarsely chopped onion and celery until golden brown (8-10 min) in olive oil.

2. Add drained artichokes, coarsely chopped potato, vegetable broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, cover and simmer until thickened slightly (about 45 min).
3. Meanwhile, toast and skin hazelnuts: spread in a single layer on a baking sheet and toast 5 minutes in a preheated 400° F oven, then rub the nuts against each other in a kitchen towel to remove as much of the skins as possible. Cool and chop coarsely.
4. Puree the soup with a hand blender or in batches in a regular blender. Add the remaining ingredients and bring to a simmer over medium heat.
5. Sprinkle some chopped hazelnuts over each serving.

notes

1. The 3/4-3/4 mix of heavy cream and evaporated milk was a compromise with health considerations. 1-0 or 0-1 ratios or any 1 1/2 total cup combination is acceptable depending on your whim. We used nonfat evaporated milk.
2. For the broth we use a vegetable broth paste, about a heaping tablespoon for the 4 cups.
3. White pepper is only so the soup doesn't look dirty. Black pepper is fine if you don't have the white.
4. Shouldn't there be some clever endnote?

postscript

Years later we learned through our only friends in Yerevan that Armenia has a [long tradition](#) of making cognac/brandy (although the French don't seem to like use of the word cognac for foreign production), and one version of Armenian cognac/brandy is called [Ani](#), a few bottles of which have been hand transferred to us in Europe by Vahe, with the original Russian Cyrillic lettering on the label, through which one can still decipher the name Ani. Cognac is a very particular and usually superior form of brandy and judging by the price tag of what we see in our State Stores, Armagnac, a similar style brandy, is even more particular. For the record, Cognac is a town in France, and if your cognac is not produced from nearby grapes, an army of French lawyers will be on your case. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and resulting economic distress mixed with corruption in Armenia, the French simply bought out their Armenian "cognac" competition, according to our Ani supplier, making sure its labels read "brandy" instead. If not entirely true, it still makes a good story.

hot asparagus and red potato salad revisited as a pasta sauce

Yes, we like pasta. But we have to admit that a large factor behind it so often is its flexibility. Fridge/pantry-excavation pasta sauces don't require advance planning. This time the star player was a nice bunch of asparagus. Risotto would have been a good move but we'd done that the night before. Soup would have been another, but under after-work primal-feeding-urge influences, soup seemed like a long term goal.

Happy memories off the hot asparagus and red potato salad suggested a spontaneous conversion. Well, not entirely spontaneous—we did stop along the road home for some red potatoes—but not even a block out of our way. The cannelloni were volunteered as a stand-in for the missing meat/fish item. Another vegetarian by default night.

ingredients

- 1)
 - 5 small red potatoes
 - 1 lb thin asparagus
- 2)
 - 2 T olive oil
 - 1 leek, finely chopped
 - 4 garlic cloves, pressed
- 3)
 - 2 small zucchini, chopped small
 - 2 small yellow squash, chopped small
- 4)
 - 2 t balsamic vinegar
 - 2 t Dijon mustard
 - 1/2 c reserved asparagus water
 - 1 19oz can (540g) cannelloni
- 5)
 - 1/2 c light cream
 - 1 t salt
 - freshly ground black pepper to taste
 - 1/2 c parmigiano
- 6)
 - 1 lb farfalle (butterfly pasta)

instructions

1. So bob took the lead here with the creative development. The potatoes were started boiling after cleaning and chopping to half inch cube equivalent chunks and the asparagus were cleaned and mounted in their vertical pot, both for about a 10 minute boiling run, while the pasta water was started.

2. Pressing the garlic in the olive oil and throwing in the chopped leek started the sauté phase,
3. followed by the kitchen helpers chopped squash add-in, previously prepared. Softening the squash about 5 minutes without burning it,
4. a few shakes of vinegar and the mustard join forces and then some of the asparagus water to loosen things up again.
5. Meanwhile the asparagus is done and requires chopping into 5/8 inch pieces (no rulers needed) reserving the tips for the final assembly.
6. Incorporate the drained potatoes, the asparagus pieces, some more asparagus water, the cannelloni, and continue heating.
7. Near the pasta al dente drain time, add the cream and salt and pepper.
8. Finally add the drained pasta, the reserved asparagus tips, the cheese, and mix it up well.

notes

1. Then the moment of truth. These experiments, although always ingestible, don't always beg to be immortalized in print. And was that a few too many shakes of the balsamic vinegar? Drum role. The first bite goes down. YES! A big success. But those folks who **only** buy the tomato-based ready-to-eat-just-heat sauces in a jar—they'll never understand.
2. We had to add the word "**only**" since we're occasionally guilty of picking up jars too. But to their defense, quality has improved drastically in some of the new offerings inspired by an elevated interest in more authentic Italian food products than the market used to offer.

asprpps.htm: 7-aug-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

cheesecake al limoncello

Italians love cheesecake, like Americans love [tiramisu](#). The difference is that they don't adopt foreign dishes like we do. So whenever the dr bob cooking team is persuaded to do a cheesecake in Italy, it is a big success, but not one which inspires imitation by the locals.

[Limoncello](#) is a lemon ("limone") [liqueur](#) made in the Italian islands of Capri, Ischia, and Ponza scattered from Naples towards Rome and no doubt in many other places there as well, given that Italy is blessed with both an abundance of lemons and a well known priority for alcohol in its liquid consumable traditions. The team acquired a bottle in Capri years ago with baking in mind, but it never found its way out of the refrigerator where it is always ready to be served in its mandatory chilled state, should we ever remember that it can also be imbibed directly without prior insertion into some labor intensive dessert.

A trip to Naples with a follow-up visit to [Ponza](#) reminded us of its potential baking possibilities. Limoncello seemed to be enjoying a wave of popularity in Italy at the time, so when on very short notice a cheesecake was requested, it seemed like a logical choice for a new experiment in the killer dessert department, without having to fuss with actual fresh fruit, obvious choices for which were not readily available. With the amount of cream cheese that materialized in the original Naples improvisation, only a low profile cake was possible. Encouraged by the success of the simple no-frills version, a standard sized normal height three layer version was planned for a big 39-at-one-table-43rd-birthday-party-seafood-based-antipasto-and-pasta- blowout extravaganza on Ponza, with desserts contributed by some of the guests, among which was the dr bob team entry. Finding ourselves somewhat embarrassed by the wave of compliments for our creation, somehow miraculously divided up among most of the guests, we downed a second piece of the mascarpone cream cake (generously cut larger than the first!) to show our enthusiasm for the closest competitor. We survived.

Of course this recipe was inspired by the legendary [Mother Wonderful hazelnut cheesecake](#), but since the local copy of the complete "[What, ME Cook?](#)" book was not kept in a prominent and immediately accessible location ("somewhere in the house, but I don't know where," loosely translated from the Italian), we had to go with an extrapolation from the three singles "[No Excuses Left Cheesecake](#)," "[Simple Soft Touch Cheesecake](#)," and "[bob's Converted Lindy's Strawberry Cheesecake](#)" all stashed together in one of the host's few cookbooks, having been obtained by letter in the early days before aggressive book distribution of the entire edition by dr bob vanity press. Naturally never used.

In the expanded version on Ponza, the vague memory of mixing plain yogurt and [Fiorello](#) (a mascarpone-creme-frais-like Italian product, see "Cheesecake Supplement for English Speaking Italians") to produce a sour cream substitute for the topping was confronted with the hard reality of availability with only fruit flavored yogurt, so mascarpone, the magic ingredient of tiramisu, took its place.

The cake was actually baked in plug-in-the-wall electric oven just big enough to fit the 22.5cm (9.5in) springform pan borrowed from Annamaria and equipped with a temperature setting, unlike most Italian ovens. We started out a bit high to get going and saved the cake just in time from getting too browned by turning it down to 180° C (about 350° F). Thinking that by using the

electric coils both above and below for more uniform heat distribution turned out to be a miscalculation, since the pseudo-sour-cream layer ended up getting broiled, but in spite of its somewhat golden brown highlights, the taste was not affected, as testified to by the army of guests who wiped it out.

ingredients

versione bassa (Napoli)	versione alta (Ponza)		US version
crust			
75g	125g	burro fuso	1/4 c = 2oz = 4 T = 1/2 stick melted butter
100g	150g	Mulino Bianco Grancereale	1 c graham cracker crumbs
50g	50g	Saiwa Lingue di Gatto oppure Parmalat Nussli	1/2 c vanilla wafers or hazelnut cookies
0 Cu	2 Cu	zucchero	2 T sugar
batter			
450g	800g	Philadelphia (formaggio fresco)	4 8oz cream cheese
150g	300g	zucchero (1.5 tazze)	1 1/2 c sugar
2 Cu	4 Cu	farina	4 T flour
1/4 cu	1/4 cu	sale fine	1/4 t salt
1/2 cu	1/2 cu	buccia di limone	1/2 T lemon zest
3	4	uova	4 eggs
1 Cu	8 Cu	limoncello	1/2 c limoncello
topping			
	150g	Fiorello (latticino cremoso)	2 c sour cream
	250g	mascarpone	
	3 Cu	zucchero (normale o a velo)	1/4 c sugar
	1 cu	limoncello	1 t limoncello
a piacere	spolverata di zucchero a velo		

units

Cu = cucchaio = T (tablespoon)

cu= cucchiaino = t (teaspoon)

c = cup (holds 1/4 liter)

instructions (italian)**La Crosta**

Sbriciolare i biscotti, mischiarli col burro, e premerli nel fondo della teglia col lato toglibile (24cm circa), e 2.5 cm lungo il lato nella versione alta. [Si puo' mettere un po di buccia di limone anche nella crosta. Biscotti del tipo "digestivo integrale" vanno bene qui.]

L'Impasto

Sbattere il formaggio e lo zucchero insieme finche' l'impasto diventa soffice. Poi aggiungere le uova, una alla volta senza sbattere troppo, e poi gli altri ingredienti di questo gruppo. Versare l'impasto nella teglia e metterlo nel forno gia' a temperatura media (circa 180° C) per un ora circa finche' il centro della superficie della torta non diventa solida.

Il Topping

Versione bassa: Lasciarlo raggiungere la temperatura ambiente e metterlo nel frigo per almeno 2 ore se non di piu'. Cospargere la superficie con zucchero a velo quando si serve.

Versione alta: Togliere la torta dal forno per riposare 10 minuti. Mischiare bene gli ingredienti dal gruppo 3 e spalmarli sulla superficie della torta e rimetterla nel forno per 10 minuti circa. Lasciarla raggiungere la temperatura ambiente e metterla nel frigo per almeno mezza giornata.

instructions (usa)**crust**

Crumb the cookies, mix with the graham cracker crumbs and melted butter, and press the mixture in the bottom and about an inch up the sides of a 9.5in springform pan.

batter

Beat together the cream cheese and sugar until smooth and fluffy. Add in the eggs one at a time without excessive beating to avoid removing the air, followed by mixing in the remaining group 2 ingredients. Pour into the pan and bake at 350° F for about an hour until the center of the surface is somewhat solid.

topping

Remove from the oven and let rest 10 minutes. Mix together the sour cream, sugar, and limoncello and spread evenly over the top. Bake another 10 minutes, remove and let cool to room temperature. Refrigerate at least half a day before serving.

notes**1. NO FAT CREAM CHEESE**

With the millennium drawing near, America's obsession with fat has finally led market forces to provide us with no fat cream cheese and sour cream to neutralize our nutrition guilt factor when consuming totally unhealthy rich desserts like this. [Note, however, that the nonfat product [PHILADELPHIA Free](#), which is packaged exactly like the killer cream

cheese version, does not have the words "cream cheese" written anywhere on the package.] We decided to go with the fake stuff twice already on this particular cheesecake. Both times the batter looked rather grainy compared to the smooth consistency of the real thing, but after baking it seems to turn out fine, except possibly for the baking time. One hour just doesn't seem to set the center of the cake, making a clean geometrical wedge serving presentation improbable. Maybe increasing baking time by 15 minutes will do the trick. We also chose low fat sour cream. The nonfat version is also acceptable here. Of course full fat products won't kill you if this is an occasional treat. Go for it.

2. **GARNISHING**

When recipes say to reserve a few berries, nuts, whatever, for garnishing (translation: cute food presentation decoration for the eye and not the stomach), we ignore the advice. Perhaps we are partly guilty of a "garnishing is for wimps" mentality, kind of like the anti-nut attitude of our early baking days. [See [apple bavarian torte](#), for example.] This time our sister-in-law foiled our no-frills unveiling of the cheesecake to our guests by commandeering the cake and placing 1 split strawberry with greens unhinged open at the greens in the center and 4 more pairs of separate split halves with greens at 8 equally spaced locations at the perimeter, with 4 blueberries filling each of the 8 gaps in between and 4 more at the tips and sides of the center split strawberry. Even we were impressed enough to take several photos [see the [illustrations](#)] of the spectacular result, perfectly blending the red, white, and blue of the US of A with the bianco, rosso e verde dell'Italia [white, red, and green of Italy]. But not enough to do it ourselves of course.

3. **PS**

This recipe would not have been possible without two wonderful friends, Laura of Napoli and Emanuela of Rome, two women who have touched bob's life in very different ways with lasting impact.

summer pasta

Not cooking the pasta sauce means less heat in the kitchen. If it's summertime, heat in the kitchen is not desirable. Thus was born summer pasta.

Cooking the pasta in advance and serving it cold is another trick for minimizing kitchen heat, but this requires advance planning. This option is usually ruled out for folks like us, and besides, the result is then called pasta salad, not summer pasta. A whole other cooking topic.

By coincidence a supermarket checkout magazine rack snatch the day before this creation (reinforced by the current month of one of our regular cooking mag subs) had a summer pasta recipe that the dr bob cooking team actually contemplated doing. The highlights: skinning the tomato routine x-marking the ends with a knife, dropping into boiling water, then ice water, then peeling, then seeding ...

ms_ani said "What for? The skins are good for you."

Another tedious kitchen technique deep-sixed just in time.

We never noticed the skin or the seeds.

So the scene of the creative process: four for dinner and we were already late returning from work. And it was summertime. This recipe only takes as long as the pasta water takes to boil and al-dentize the pasta.

Our ingredient list is only suggestive, but the tomatoes and basil are mandatory. If no lactose intolerant guests are present, you can complete them to their natural trio with real mozzarella, not some supermarket impersonator, also chopped. The chick peas were a nice addition that just happened to be on hand. Use your imagination.

ingredients

pasta

1 lb farfalle (bowtie pasta)

chunky stuff

6 plum tomatoes, chopped

1 c basil leaves, chopped finely

1 green onion, chopped finely

1/4 red pepper, chopped finely

1 7 3/4 oz can (~1 c) cooked chick peas

1 1.1 oz can (~1/2 c) sliced black olives

1 1/2 T capers

nonchunky stuff

1/2 c? olive oil

salt and pepper to taste

instructions

1. Start the boiling process, then work on the veggie prep. Tomatoes first. We cut them in half just missing the stem scab, then notch out the scab on the one side, slice lengthwise into thin strips (max 3/8 inch), then crosswise to generate the requisite chopped tomatoes.
2. Fresh basil is not difficult to come by in the summer. But how do you measure it? Enough leaves (stems removed) to fill a cup unpresseed, maybe, then chop finely. We use our mezzaluna here. The two-handled half-moon knife that is more like a crescent moon than a half if you ask us (and even if you don't). The green onion and red pepper are quick.
3. Then open the cans. Toss in a few forkfuls of capers. Oil, salt, and pepper. Let it sit till the pasta is ready.
4. Then drain the latter and mix with the former. Not bad for so little effort.

notes

1. One last thing. You are allowed to do this out of season.

sumpasta.htm: 21-mar-1998 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

blueberry buckwheat pancakes

Buckwheat.

Alfalfa. Darla. Spanky. Our Gang. [The Little Rascals](#).

Buckwheat is a largely unfamiliar grain that in American culture has wierd word associations with a generation of Hollywood kids who grew up even before we were born, as well as with pancakes. Even with the added boost in name recognition from this historical film connection, it is an underused food item not only in the US and Italy but also in our own kitchen. For years now we've had several boxes of [pizzoccheri](#) (buckwheat pasta noodles from northern Italy) sitting untouched in our supply closet. They are hard to find over there and in specialty stores over here, so we tend to hoard them, waiting for that special occasion to use them with their traditional recipe. A special occasion which just hasn't been materializing like it is supposed to.

On the other hand the dr bob refrigerator supply department always has buckwheat flour on hand ready to add its unique flavor to our whole grain bread machine products. And to this very tasty breakfast treat we occasionally make when blueberries are not more outrageously priced than our subconscious food budget Nazi allows us to fork over for them (usually summer). Buttermilk, another ingredient with a strong pancake word association, is also a staple we always have in stock in powdered form for our bread machine production.

For us "pancakes" means only one thing—buckwheat pancakes, and this recipe from our largely unused food magazine archives is one of the reasons we still continue to subscribe and impulse buy them. For those rare jewels that say to us "Make me, make me" when we actually happen to be listening. And we make them. And make them again. And again.

Contrary to popular belief, one does not need a pancake mix box to make pancakes. They are a snap to make from scratch. Using a nonstick frying pan, or better yet, two in parallel for quicker results, the grilling is easy too. We rub the center of the pan with the end of a stick of butter before each single pancake is plopped down, rolling the pan a bit to help it spread out. One per pan so they don't crowd each other. And then we stack them on a plate on the stove using a deep bowl as a cover to keep them all warm until all the batter is used up. ms_ani likes them with the traditional maple syrup and butter treatment, while dr bob goes with a light powdering of confectioner's sugar and some exotic jam or jelly like guava or mango or papaya, but even strawberry goes well with the blueberries ([dulce de leche](#) too!). Either way, we are satisfied customers.

ingredients

small batch larger batch

dry

3/8 c	3/4 c	unbleached all purpose flour
1/4 c	1/2 c	buckwheat flour
1 T	2 T	sugar

3/4 t	1 1/2 t	baking powder
1/4 t	1/2 t	salt
1/8 1/4 t		baking soda
wet		
1 c	2 c	buttermilk (powder+water)
1 T	2 T	vegetable (or olive) oil
1	2	large eggs, separated (yolks+whites)
pan items		
		melted butter (judgement call)
3/4 c	1 1/2 c	fresh blueberries
9	18	approximate yield

instructions

1. Mix group 1 (dry) ingredients in a large bowl. Stir in group 2 (wet), except for the egg whites which first require electric mixer beating in a medium bowl until medium firm peaks form. Then gently fold the whites into the batter.
2. Heat a large nonstick pan or two over medium-high heat and lightly brush with melted butter or rub with the butter stick. Drop batter in 1/4 c amounts (only suggestive!) into the pan and spread to 4 inch circles. Sprinkle 5 or 6 blueberries over each round (sometimes we just dump them all directly into the batter first) and cook until the upper side is covered with small bubbles and the bottoms are golden (the color helps you regulate the heat), about 1 minute. We flip them over for about 10 seconds to make sure they are really done. Then brush or rub the pan with butter and repeat until the batter is gone.

notes

1. The blueberries can be substituted by chopped strawberries, or other suitable fruit, but then you have to change the name of the recipe. Of course.
2. Sometimes we just skip the fruit and do the pancakes plain. And one time while making the small recipe, the larger recipe white flour amount went in by mistake. Much fluffier pancakes but otherwise no problem.
3. This recipe entered the dr bob cooking school with [photos](#).

as american as apple pie

Tarts (the baked kind) exist everywhere in Italy—they're called crostata's—but pies are apparently against the law (culinary law) since, like cheesecakes, they cannot be found in the country, despite its longstanding love affair with "l'America."

And of all pies, apple pie is the American icon (not the clickable kind) most often listed after "mom" and "the flag" and sometimes still used in the phrase "as American as apple pie." Of course outside the USA it might be a good idea to remember that even North America has a lot of Americans who are quite different from what you find in the 50 states and lesser known US territories. [Canadians, Quebecians (might become necessary), Mexicans, etc.] However, this may be besides the point.

So why look at apple pie here? Well, the dr bob team makes an apple pie every once in a while, so having the recipe ready is not a bad idea. The real reason is that an Italian couple who had spent some time in the USA asked for a recipe for it.

We generally follow the traditional style [recipe](#) from our first cookbook, the American cooking classic [Betty Crocker Cookbook](#), published and regularly updated this century by the baking products company responsible for the nearly daily slices of box cakes in dr bob's childhood [prepared cake mix in a box—just add water and eggs to make the batter, bake in round pans, ice as a layer cake].

However, we use some tricks from other sources.

Making a fruit pie is serious stuff compared to making a cheesecake, for example. The irony is that many people have this totally mistaken impression that cheesecakes are so complicated, yet will turn out fruit pies for every traditional American holiday. The cheesecake crust you just press in the pan, you mix up the batter and dump it in and bake it. Pie crust requires working the fat [FAT!] into the flour, adding the moisture a bit at a time until it achieves some magic consistency, forming a ball of dough, waiting while it matures in the fridge, then working the dough into a flattened circle without breaking it up, then transferring into the plate without destroying it. Then there is the fruit filling prep, which with apples is a bit tedious. The assembly. And finally the baking. But American moms always did this as though it were a genetically encoded skill (though one which seems to be disappearing from the species).

[in progress?]

chick pea greens

After a bad G.I. year, dr bob went to Italy for 2 summer months. Admittedly the lost weight was beginning to find its way home before departure, but a daily double dose of healthy usually vegetarian Italian cuisine coupled with lots of walking put the system back into perfect working order. Lunch and dinner—pasta or risotto with fresh veggies, fresh real mozzarella, cooked veggies on the side. Usually a big hit of sautéed fresh greens. Chicory, escarole, spinach. Available almost universally in Italy's food service industry, from corner lunch bar to full blown restaurant. bob's weight returned to its previous equilibrium value.

Back in the US, this kind of food is just not available. The daily magic greens were history. In theory they could at least be done for dinner at home but the hectic American routine doesn't seem to lend itself to this end very well. Sure, bob tried all of the available greens. No chicory. But escarole, kale, curly endive, collard greens, Swiss chard, and of course the already familiar (fresh) spinach and broccoli rabe.

Yeah, we tried 'em all after re-entry. But nothing seemed to rival the stuff in Italy until this improvisation. The idea came from a supermarket cooking mag impulse buy. The recipe after the eye catching wild mushroom turkey stuffing. Thanksgiving was on the horizon. The recipe suggested mixing numerous greens into a single green thing. We had fresh spinach and kale on hand. About to marry in a quickie ceremony. Joined on the honeymoon by chickpeas to boost bob's protein intake. We tried it. We liked it. We'll do it again soon.

ingredients

- 2 bunches fresh spinach
- 1 large bunch kale
- 2 T olive oil
- 2-3 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 leek, chopped
- 1 can cooked chick peas
- 1 lemon, juice of
- freshly ground pepper
- salt to taste

instructions

1. Wash and cook the greens in a very big pot with just the water clinging from the rinsing, until they meet the fate of the Wicked Witch of the West in the [Wizard of Oz](#), namely melt down to a limp mess in the bottom.
2. Drain and then sauté with the garlic and leeks in olive oil, starting the latter two first until softened and then mixing in the greens. After a bit of shuffling around, add in the chick peas and let them warm up a bit.
3. Add the lemon juice and salt and pepper at the end and serve.

notes

1. There should be some. Notes.
2. Like G.I. = gastrointestinal, having to do with the digestive system, which when not functioning properly, is a real drag, requiring intervention by the G.I. guy, usually unprofessionally ignorant of nutritional considerations and likely to prescribe long term pharmaceutical solutions.

chkpgrns.htm: 10-aug-2005 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

fettuccine zuffredo

Finding ourselves with about a pound of pasta sheets left over from a recent lasagna mission, we ran them through our electric motor driven pasta roller machine to flatten them first to the thinnest (most thin?) setting and then fettuccine-ize 'em. Finally fresh pasta for the mother-in-law who had been after us for some time for this. But how to match these magic carbohydrate ribbons with the creamy sauce they scream for without resorting to the classic but deadly alfredo sauce?

A little consultation with [Marcella](#) sparked memories of a heavenly zucchini carbonara-like spaghetti concoction served out of a rustic cave/bungalow/porchlike trattoria on the beach (Chiaia di Luna) at [Ponza](#), our favorite Mediterranean getaway island near Rome. Unlike the fancy hotels in the port, recipes from this operation have a low probability of showing up in [Gourmet](#) magazine like the [radicchio risotto](#) we have already reported on, so we are their only hope for a promotional plug. [Not worth much.]

One minor problem. No zucchini on hand. A quick call to the brother-on-law before departure saves the day. He'd bring 'em along. We just happened to have a bunch of fresh basil going bad in the fridge, about a half a cup was salvageable. And fresh Italian parsley too. The only detail that remained: the choice of egg yolk salmonella evasion tactics. Cooking the beaten egg yolk in a béchamel (white) sauce would provide the cream sauce component of our dish.

Ready?

ingredients

pasta

1 lb fresh fettuccine

zucchini stuff

2 T olive oil, some white wine

4 medium zucchini, food processed finely

1/2 c fresh basil, chopped

1/2 c fresh parsley, chopped freshly ground pepper

salt to taste

cream sauce

2 T butter, melted

2 T flour

1 c lowfat milk

1 egg yolk

1/3 c freshly grated parmigiano

1/3 c freshly grated romano

instructions

1. First food process the zucchini into mush and cook down for about 10 minutes in a large nonstick pot with the olive oil. They shrink by a factor of two in volume. Turn down the

heat to low and add some white wine if too dry so it won't burn. Mix in the chopped basil and parsley. [We used the mezzaluna on them.]

2. Beat the egg yolk with about 1/4 c milk and separately mix well the rest of the milk with the flour. Wisk the latter into the melted butter and thicken, about 5 minutes. Then wisk in the egg-milk mixture until smooth. Stir until the possible salmonella passengers are history. Reduce the heat.
3. Meanwhile the pasta water is coming up to steam. When it starts rolling, dump in the fettuccine (preceded by the salt, which we never mention). It should only take a few minutes. Check for the al dente state. If you can time this so that the pasta is done roughly just after the sauce, so much the better.
4. Drain the fettuccine but don't shake out the water. Pour immediately into the zucchini pot and mix it up. Then pour in the bechamel sauce and continue mixing. Finally the grated cheese joins the party. Serve immediately since it has a tendency to stiffen quickly if left to sit. Our guests were pleased.

notes

1. One danger of cream sauced pasta dishes, or in fact any sauced pasta dishes in America, is that they can often be described as "sauce with some pasta" instead of "pasta with some sauce." Moderation is not only healthy, it's in good taste. Don't overwhelm your pasta.
2. Another simpler variation of this arose when bob was too lazy to do the bechamel sauce and we still had some panna da cucinare a lunga conservazione left from the summer trip to Rome (cooking cream in small nonrefrigeratable cartons that has a long but not long enough shelf life: it always ends up being expired by the time we use it up). 2 medium zucchini food processed with the grating tool, 1/2 large leek food processed normally and sauteed together in 2 T olive oil for some 10 minutes and then 200 ml of panna mixed in and heated, then the burner turned off awaiting the pasta. Since we used store bought fresh garlic-parsley fettuccine, we did not add garlic to the sauce. We did not drain the pasta too thoroughly so that it would add some liquid to the sauce when mixed together, with 1/2 c parmigiano mixed in as well, and served with freshly ground black pepper. Good. Probably the panna could be substituted by some other quick solution like light cream. Too bad to have to rely on fat.

carrot cake cheesecake

Thanksgiving coming up soon. Pumpkin raisin breads and other holiday season veggie breads tempting us at every turn. Haven't made carrot cake for quite a while. Why not try something new? Instead of just cream cheese icing on top, why not a cheesecake? This kind of unorthodox combo layered creation had never been sighted by the dr bob cooking team anywhere in their recipe browsing activities. Perhaps a bad sign. Maybe it had been tried and failed and thus never made public? Probably many times. There should be a "don't try this because..." section in cookbooks to spare us the trouble of experimenting with a sure disaster. "Seems like a good idea but..." On the other hand, maybe people are just too conservative to boldly go where no one has ever gone before. To bravely explore new culinary worlds. To step beyond the limits of current kitchen culture?

So we do the experiment. Basically a bottom only graham cracker crust with a half small carrot cake recipe topped by a half simple soft touch cheesecake filling both from the dr bob archives, slightly modified by ineffective nutritional second thoughts and current flavoring ideas.

Serving time. It looks pretty good. But a little low. Did the hidden carrot cake layer rise inside? The moment of truth arrives. The first cut. Hmm. It cuts nicely. And the first piece slides right out. Seems like everything baked successfully in combination. Now the taste test. The first forkful moves up ... and in ... and ... YES! SUCCESS!

This was brilliant. Why didn't somebody ever think of this before? Perhaps like Post-Its, somebody had to be first.

ingredients

crust

1/4 c butter, melted
 1 c graham cracker crumbs
 1/4 c brown sugar

carrot cake layer [3/4 size halved and modified]

1/2 c veggie oil [or 3/8 c + 2 juicy prunes]
 3/4 c sugar [or Sucanat unprocessed sugar]
 1 1/2 eggs, beaten
 3/4 c flour
 1/2 t salt
 3/4 t baking soda
 3/4 t baking powder
 1/2 t cinnamon
 1/4 t nutmeg

1 c carrots, peeled and grated

1/3 c	walnuts, crumbed
1/8-1/4 c	raisins soaked in:
1/8 c	Frangelico hazelnut liqueur
cream cheesecake layer [simple soft touch cheesecake, halved]	
2 8oz	packages cream cheese (light)
1 14oz can	sweetened condensed milk
1 1/2	eggs, beaten
1/4 t	salt
1/4 c	lemon juice [2 T limoncello]
the topping	
1 T	toasted hazelnut crumbs

instructions

the crust

1. Start by nuking the half stick of butter in the microwave on high about 50 seconds. Or do it the old fashioned stovetop way.
2. Mix the graham cracker crumbs and brown sugar and then mix in the melted butter. Dump into the bottom of a large springform pan (we used a 10 1/8 = 26cm pan) to get a lower more elegant result.
3. Shake the crumbs around to spread them out and then press them down with a flat object, like a 1 cup measuring cup.

carrot cake layer

1. Begin soaking the 1/8 – 1/4 c raisins in the Frangelico.
2. Peel about 3 medium carrots and food process them into fine bits. Or grate them finely the old fashioned way.
3. Ignoring the tedious instructions of the original recipe, start the batter by pureeing 2 juicy prunes in 1/4 c oil in the handblender attachment cup or elsewhere, in a pathetic attempt to reduce the fat content. Dump in a large bowl.
4. Beat 3 eggs separately. We used the handblender attachment cup, since it was already out.
5. Flour is presifted these days so there is no need to sift the dry ingredients together onto the oil mixture. Besides if you substitute Sucanat for the sugar, it won't sift in since the particulate size is too big. Mix it in. However, a sifter does do a good job of scattering the other dry ingredients. Incorporate them one way or another and beat all this stuff together with an electric beater.
6. At this point if you did not read ahead, it will appear that something has gone wrong. This is not a batter but a dust bowl. We FORGOT THE EGGS. Before realizing this we added in another 1/8 c oil. Next time add half the egg mixture earlier, like in step 5. But either way it doesn't seem to matter to the batter.
7. Now beat in the carrot bits. Chop up the walnuts but not too finely. The handblender attachment cup works well here too. Beat them in. The walnuts.

8. Finally mix in the raisins and Frangelico. Looks like carrot cake batter now.
9. Pour into the springform pan and shake it around. Spread evenly with a spatula. Set aside.

cream cheesecake layer

1. Beat together the cream cheese and sweetened condensed milk. Then add the remaining egg mixture, salt, and limoncello (or lemon juice) and beat until smooth. And everybody says cheesecakes are difficult!
2. Pour slowly over the carrot cake layer.

the topping

1. Sprinkle about 1 T of toasted hazelnut crumbs evenly around the top of the cake using your thumb and two adjacent fingers in a repeated imitation of pinching salt.

the baking and fridging

1. Preheat your oven to 350° F sometime earlier than this. Bake for 50 minutes. Then check to make sure the center of the cheesecake layer is done. If so, turn off the heat and open the oven door at an angle so you can still walk around the stove doing your other kitchen activities. For about 30 minutes. This is probably unnecessary.
2. Then remove and let cool on a rack for an hour or so.
3. Then refrigerate. We did this after lunch and it was done and chilled nicely for the after dinner dessert.

notes

1. Pretend this was your own creation. Your baking reputation will surely improve.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.
3. [The Cheesecake Factory](#) arrives at [King of Prussia Mall](#) summer of 2002, but it takes an accidental weekday evening mall visit the next winter before we finally find no huge line and long wait to get into the place, in fact no line at all and we are finally ready to see what all the fuss was about painlessly. Big serving meals arrive, leaving little room for comfortable cheesecake tasting afterwards, but bob scrutinizes the showcase and decides to go for Craig's Crazy Carrot Cake Cheesecake to compare with his own experience. [Too many C's, there can't really be a Craig behind this...] It too is big, but delicious, and miraculously easy to finish. It's a more blenderized version than ours, with bits and pieces of carrot cake uniformly distributed in the cheesecake instead of layered. Next time we'll share one entree. As we leave, about 30 people are lined up, making us feel like we'd really been lucky with our timing. How long will it take to make it in again? ... stay tuned.

1997

mocha/cappuccino/whatever pudding cake

Sometimes unpleasant little episodes in life can have long lasting pleasant consequences. Waiting time in a urologist's office, for example. Magazines to browse, what's this "[Cooking Light](#)" magazine? Browse, browse, browse, whoa ..., jackpot! Look at this mocha pudding cake. [Imagine terrific killer chocolate dessert photo.] Creamy pudding on the bottom, a tender brownie-like cake on top. Served warm with vanilla ice milk. Food orgasm.

"*Mr Jantzen, ...*" Back to business.

But this was too good to leave in a doctor's office waiting room and never see again. bob asks for a photocopy. And sends away for a subscription, starting after the eye-opening Jan/Feb 93 issue. Opening up a world of healthier food ideas that has proved far more utilizable in our kitchen than our other food mag sub, with our increasing awareness of the importance of nutrition in our lives.

Four years pass. Need a dessert for a lactose intolerant guest. Cheesecakes ruled out. A chocolate dessert might be the thing. A perfect opportunity to try that amazing chocolate pudding recipe. Hmmm. Where is that photocopy?

No time to excavate the entire dr bob cooking team food archives. Fortunately a few issues back, [Cooking Light](#) has a new pudding cake recipe, easily located. What? Cappuccino pudding cake? Close enough. Fortunately in the intervening four years, bob had bitten the bullet and opened up his life to coffee products. In the old days he would not touch coffee, coffee ice cream, or coffee anything. [Well, Kahlua was an exception proving that there was hope in modifying this behavioral aberration. And mocha was a backdoor entrance for coffee in some dishes that avoided direct coffee confrontation. And of course bob was an old [tiramisu](#) hand in spite of the coffee ban.] Doing the coffee initiation in Rome made it easier, since street cappuccino's are universally great there. Then Armenian coffee. Then gourmet coffee took hold in America and bob was ready. [Frappucinos](#), mocha blasts, lots of goodies.

Bob Dole had also made talking about himself in the third person socially acceptable for other bobs. [Ran against incumbent US President Bill Clinton in 1996. Time is not kind to the losers.]

So we made a few minor changes to accomodate our guest and available resources. Stiff layer on the bottom. Coffee sloshing around on top, it was certainly the strangest cake we've ever put into the oven, but it performed its inversion trick as advertized. And the result lived up to the expectation. Appropriately described by that special superlative dessert word: decadent.

Here are both recipes and our forced modifications of the second one required by the circumstances. The nutritional serving data are for 9 servings.

ingredients

Mocha Pudding Cake
Cooking Light
Jan/Feb 93, p.60
[Jun 98, p.106]

Cappuccino Pudding Cake
Cooking Light
Oct 96, p.74

CPC modifications
Winter 96-97

1)

1 c all purpose flour
2/3 c sugar
1/4 c unsweetened
cocoa
1 1/2 T instant coffee
granules
2 t baking powder
1/4 t salt

1 c all purpose flour
2/3 c sugar
2 T unsweetened cocoa
2 t baking powder
1/4 t salt

2)

1/2 c 1 percent lowfat
milk
3 T vegetable oil
1 t vanilla extract

1/2 c evaporated skim milk
1 t vegetable oil
1 t vanilla extract

1 percent lactaid milk

3)

veggie cooking spray

1/4 c semisweet chocolate bits

1/4 c grated bittersweet
chocolate

4)

1/3 c sugar
2 T cocoa

1 c firmly packed dark brown
sugar
1/4 c unsweetened cocoa

5)

1 c boiling water

1 3/4 c hot water
2 (.77oz) envelopes instant
cappuccino mix or 1/4 c other
flavor

2 pumps of 1 espresso serving,
plus hot water totalling 1 3/4 c

6)

1 c plus 2 T vanilla ice
milk [=16+2 T]

9 T frozen vanilla yogurt

Nutrition Info

calories 221
[25% from fat]
protein 3.5g
fat 6.1g
[sat 1.7g, mono 6g,
poly 2.3g]
carb 38.2g

calories 247
[11% from fat]
protein 4.2g
fat 4.2g
[sat 1.5g, mono 0.5g, poly 0.4g]
carb 52.4g
fiber 0.3g

fiber 0.4g	chol 1mg
chol 3mg	iron 2mg
iron 1.3mg	sodium 123mg
sodium 154mg	calcium 175mg
calcium 90mg	

Interesting how the numbers changed with a few more years of increasing interest in healthy eating.

instructions: [mocha/cappuccino]

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Combine group 1 ingredients in a bowl and stir well.
3. Add group 2 ingredients, stirring until smooth. [CAPPUCCINO: stir in chocolate bits or grated bittersweet chocolate.]
4. Spoon batter into [MOCHA: 8 in square baking pan coated with veggie spray / CAPPUCCINO: 9 in square baking pan].
5. Combine group 4 ingredients and sprinkle over batter.
6. MOCHA: Pour boiling water over batter.
CAPPUCCINO: Combine water and coffee mix, stirring to dissolve, and pour over batter. DO NOT STIR.
[BOB MODIFICATION: or add elongated espresso here.]
7. Bake [MOCHA: 30 min / CAPPUCCINO: 40 min] or until the cake springs back when lightly touched in center.
8. Serve warm, topped with [MOCHA: 2 T ice milk / CAPPUCCINO: 1 T frozen yogurt / BOB: generous scoop of vanilla ice cream or frozen yogurt or Kalua/Frangelico/Tiramisu liqueur flavored whipped cream]
[Try serving your piece with only one or two level tablespoons of an ice cream product!]

notes

1. It's been a long time since the days we used to occasionally make chocolate chip cookies, so there were no chips on hand for this adventure. However, since our tiramisu topping choice had just been upgraded from cocoa to grated bittersweet chocolate, some of the latter was ready to go instead. We grated what seemed like a quarter cup onto a plate, and then picked it up to dump into the batter. POOF! It exploded into the air over several feet of kitchen counter and floor. [Static electricity.] Enough fell back onto the plate and counter to carry on.
2. For some reason, our overstuffed kitchen has no square baking pan, which if 9 inch on a side divides nicely into 9 squares each 3 inches on a side. We used a round glass dish and scooped the cake glop out with a flat ice cream scoop. Hard to describe the serving size. And we naturally exceeded the recommended frozen yogurt portion. Screw the numbers! [Easy to say with a Cooking Light recipe, eh?]
3. This recipe turned up in Cooking Light for the third time in the nineties (the fourth time if you count one of its repetitions in the best recipes of the last decade collection) with slight variations as Mocha Fudge Pudding Cake, October 1999, p.151, but shuffled the grouping

of the ingredients in such a way that makes it difficult to add another column to our table. Still holding the line at nearly only 11 percent calories from fat though. Based on these publication statistics, it must be pretty good, eh?

mcwpudck.htm: 8-dec-1999 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

fresh penne with zucchini, leek, arugula, etc

Through no fault of our own we have two electric extruder pasta machines (in addition to our motor driven flat pasta roller machine). One bought in dr bob's youth at the foothills of Mount Vesuvius with the help of an Italian mom's [daughter](#) and lugged back to the US with a heavy and annoying to use voltage transformer, the original Pastamatic. And more recently a Christmas gift Cuisinart. The latter having the distinct advantage of direct wall outlet plug-in. If we ever get our closet reorganized, both will be easily accessible, but for now only the newcomer can be extracted without extra effort.

Still under the influence of the preceding rughetta roman summer (rughetta = arugula), memories of a zucchini-rughetta lunch bar pasta inspired us to try this combination, crossed with nostalgia for [Ponza](#) penne on the beach ([zucchini "carbonara"](#)). Although fresh fettuccini are terrific, the pasta shape didn't seem appropriate for the sauce, so we hooked up the penne disk instead. Wacking off the penne cleanly was a bit of a trick. A few got mangled, but it didn't seem to matter. By coincidence we had just picked up a 2/3 lb container of hand dipped ricotta at [Fresh Fields](#). While hand dipping candles, or strawberries in chocolate, we can easily imagine, our cheesemaking ignorance limits us to guess that this means that its probably not the plastic stuff you usually find in the supermarket. It would have made a perfect addition to this pasta sauce had we thought of it. We didn't. Next time though, definitely.

ingredients

pasta

- 2 c white flour
- 1 c semolina
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 t salt
- 170 ml egg water mixture
- 1 electric pasta machine
- or 1 lb dry penne

sauce

- 4 small zucchini
- 1/2 leek
- 1 clove garlic, pressed
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 egg
- 1/4 c half and half
- 1/3 c parmesan cheese, freshly grated
- freshly ground pepper
- 1 c loosely packed arugula, chopped finely
- [2/3 lb ricotta, superior quality]
- salt, to taste?

instructions

1. Make the fresh pasta according to your machine's instruction manual. This is supposed to make 3/4 of 3/2 lb pasta. [Can we still multiply fractions? That makes a bit over 1 lb, for those of you who need a hint.] If you are not in the home pasta maker business, buy a lb of fresh penne rigate (ridged) or break out a box of the dry stuff. Start the water boiling.
2. Food process the zucchini and leek (we used the greener half), then saute in olive oil with a pressed garlic clove.
3. Beat an egg and mix in the half and half. (Or any cream-like product, including evaporated milk?, would do here. We just had this on hand, and it could be replaced by some pasta water if the ricotta is used). Set aside. Grate the cheese. Chop up the arugula. We used our mezzaluna here.
4. "Butta la pasta." Toss the fresh pasta into the boiling water and watch it carefully. Once it boils again, it will only take a few minutes to cook. Check with al dente tests.
5. When ready, drain the pasta minimally and dump into the greens mixture over low heat. Pour in the egg mixture and stir around, hoping the raw egg will cook enough in contact with the hot pasta like in a carbonara sauce, enough to reduce the chances of food poisoning of course. We are not clear on this point and accept no responsibility for your experience with this problem. So far we have been lucky.
6. Mix in the freshly grated parmesan and then the arugula and freshly ground pepper, and if you remember, the ricotta. Serve immediately (it ages in minutes!), topping each serving with some more freshly ground pepper.

notes

1. What, no notes again?

fpwzlae.htm: 11-oct-1998 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

wild mushroom stuffing/dressing

Food & Wine Magazine, November 1996, p.126 [Stuffing if it goes in the bird, dressing if it stays out]

With the increasing trendiness and subsequent availability of unusual mushrooms in the nineties [in the USA, land of choice (consumer and otherwise)], it was only a matter of time before some food magazine hit us with a stuffing recipe like this one. Always on the lookout for new ideas in this department, our food radar is on full alert status when November issues hit the stores. Big roasted turkeys on the cover are a good tip-off, but more subtle seasonal icons are also effective in grabbing the consumer's attention. At least this consumer.

Only a few modifications here. Our romance of the decade with leeks forced its unrequested appearance here and although it doesn't make sense to have qualms about chicken broth while ingesting lethal amounts of poultry and fat laden gravy and accessories, always replacing chicken/beef broth by veggie broth is a veggie commitment we stick to. And heavy cream always trips our fat conscience so in an attempt to compromise we replaced some of it with milk the first year, but said what the heck the second year and went full fat. [We didn't actually say that—it's just an expression that seemed to fit the literary moment.] In fact the cream can be left out altogether to make this kosher or whatever, as done by one of our friends whose hot shot budding teenage computer head son failed to download our recipe, so she winged it on our voice communication summary. We actually used one less cup of broth than recommended the second time through, when ms_ani relented on her thyme veto and we used fresh stuff we found just in time, together with the missing criminis [we used fewer shitakes]. And eggs had been doing better in the intervening year in the court of public opinion so we relapsed to the original recipe there. Of course these are dairy so if the cream goes, so do they.

We are stuffing whimps. Too much bad press. So we should technically call what we do dressing. But we don't. After all, how many hungry guests care about the distinction? [Rhetorical question.]

ingredients

what they said

1:

6 T unsalted butter
1.5 lb mixed fresh mushrooms,
 tough stems removed, mushrooms

cut into 1 inch pieces

2:

what we did

6 T unsalted butter
1/2 lb white mushrooms

1/2 lb portabello mushrooms
2/3 lb shiitake mushrooms
 (no crimini at store)

4	medium shallots, finely chopped	4	medium shallots, finely chopped
4	large garlic cloves, minced	4	large garlic cloves, minced
4	large celery ribs, finely chopped	4	large celery ribs, finely chopped
1	medium onion, chopped	1	large onion, chopped
1 T	minced fresh thyme	0	thyme (none fresh, ani veto)
		1	large leek, halved lengthwise, sliced finely crosswise
3:			
1 c	cup dry white wine	1 c	dry white wine
5 c	cups chicken stock	5 c	veggie broth (2 T Plantaforce concentrated low sodium bouillon + 5 cups water)
	salt and freshly ground black pepper		salt and freshly ground black pepper
4:			
1 lb	loaf peasant bread, cut into 1/2" cubes toasted until dry	1 lb	herbed stuffing bread (16oz)
		1/2 c	brown rice, cooked
2 c	heavy cream	1 1/2 c	heavy cream
		1/2 c	milk
1/4 c	cup finely chopped fresh flat leaf parsley	1/2 c	finely chopped fresh flat leaf parsley
3	large eggs, beaten	4	eggwhites + 1 egg, beaten together

instructions (no frill)

1. Precook brown rice according to package/cookbook.
2. Saute cleaned chopped mushrooms in 3T butter in large nonstick pot.
3. Food process group 2 ingredients all together and saute separately in 3T butter in large nonstick pot.
4. Add group 2 ingredients to group 1 pot with 1 cup wine and simmer until almost evaporated. Season with salt and pepper. Add 2 cups veggie broth (already boiled) and simmer until liquid reduces and thickens, about 13 minutes.
5. Mix bread cubes with parsley and then with remaining 3 cups of veggie broth. Add in mushroom veggie saut mix. Stir in cream and milk, then the egg mixture. Stir in rice.
6. Bake covered 1 hour at 325° F, in two oblong aluminum baking dishes or one bigger [11 in x 14 in] such dish. If desired, uncover after 45 minutes and bake 30 minutes or so till crust forms on top.

notes

1. This recipe was so well received at Thanksgiving that an emergency request for it went out by e-mail for a big dinner party in Baltimore just before Christmas. It was again a hit, if we

are to believe the reports.

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

fridge eviction butterflies

We always keep a lot of dry pasta on hand. It keeps. The fridge on the other hand, doesn't. Or rather its tenants don't. Every once in a while eviction is required. If early enough, the rousted occupants can be put to some good use other than adding to the rising landfill problems of our nation.

ingredients

- 1 lb butterfly pasta
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 1 leek, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 small zucchini, food processed together with
- 1 carrot
- 1/4 red pepper, chopped
- 4 plum tomatoes, food processed to mush
- 3 green onions, food processed
- 2 t capers
- 2 T parsley, chopped
- salt, freshly ground pepper to taste
- touch of cayenne red pepper

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and cook the butterflies al dente (don't forget the salt).
2. Meanwhile, prep and chop the veggies, food process the rest.
3. Cook it all up in a big nonstick pot until it looks right.
4. Combine with the pasta and eat.

notes

1. Good enough to record the ingredient list, but the details are a bit vague.

febtrfly.htm: 31-oct-2000 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

adzuki beans etc risotto

Just a few days before this food event, dr bob heard this [public radio](#) discussion about how the reality of the meatpacking industry is that there is no humane way of converting animals to food and people who think otherwise are just fooling themselves. We were planning a fish kebob family dinner but there was this rib-eye steak sample and promotion thing at [Fresh Fields](#) that converted us to rib-eye steaks. Small ones. They were well received. One was left over. We slipped it into this risotto. Probably didn't contribute that much to the overall taste. Probably wouldn't be missed. Then this would be an acceptable vegetarian recipe. And we'd be guilt free for a meal. The [adzuki beans](#) were supposed to be the meat substitute, anyway.

ingredients

sauté-ables

- 3 T olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/4 red pepper (sweet)
- 3 c portabello mushrooms, cleaned and chopped
- 2 scallions, chopped
- 2/3 leek, chopped

toss-ins

- 1 1/2 c arborio rice
- 1/2 c white wine
- 1 can adzuki beans (15oz = 425g)
- 2 t veggie broth paste
- salt to taste
- black pepper to taste

finishers

- 1/4 c chopped fresh parsley
- 1/3 c parmesan cheese

instructions

1. The usual risotto treatment. Sauté up the sauté-ables, toss in the rice and mix it up for a minute, then add the wine and evaporate it, then toss in the remaining toss-ins and cook with the boiling water addition at regular intervals for about 20 minutes until rice is done, then stir in the finishers.

notes

1. A bit terse, but how many times can you say the same thing?

fusilli pasta medley

We'd been out to dinner the night before at an American seafood restaurant in Philly. They had an interesting sounding seafood penne pasta special so we tried it. It was okay, but just not quite right. A major problem was that the penne were not coated by the sauce, which was just abundantly dropped on top. In authentic pasta, a minimal amount of sauce is usually used to coat the surface of every piece of pasta—pasta shape and texture are in fact linked to the type of sauces which best accommodate each other in this sense. And the combination of ingredients in the sauce didn't seem to blend together into a flavor enhanced mixture.

So ms_ani rummaged through the fridge for something to throw together for a fresh pasta sauce, fusilli was the shape choice, and came up with this. It was far superior to the restaurant and the light bulb went on signaling part of the reason why—the sauce coatability, in contrast with the previous night's experience.

ingredients

pasta

1 lb fusilli

sauce

2 T olive oil

1 leek, chopped

2 cloves garlic, pressed

1/4 sweet red pepper, chopped

2 zucchini, chopped

2 mushrooms, chopped

5 fresh plum tomatoes, pureed in food processor

1/8 t cayenne red pepper

salt to taste

finishers

1/4 c fresh basil, chopped

black pepper to taste

freshly grated parmigiano to taste (1/4 to 1/2 c?)

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and cook the fusilli al dente with the usual amount of salt.
2. Meanwhile, do the veggie prep.
3. Then saute the leeks in olive oil till softened
4. Add the garlic, and stir around a bit, then the red pepper, zucchini, mushrooms and tomato puree. Cook for about 10 minutes and stir in the chopped basil.
5. Combine the pasta and sauce and mix in the black pepper and parmigiano.

notes

1. After all this coating chatter, make sure the sauce gets well acquainted with the fusilli before serving.

fslimdly.htm: 2-nov-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](#)]

apple cinnamon rice pudding

This recipe is the culmination of a collage of memories. Years ago when dr bob was a relatively young thirty-something wide-eyed American visiting Milan one oppressively hot August in the company of another eclectic food fan and friend, they stumbled onto this cute little bookstore restaurant "La Libreria non Liberia" (loosely translated: "The Bookshop, Not!"). There was a vegetarian mini-menu, but the only thing that stuck in long term memory was a wonderful apple rice pudding of some sort. Bob later wrote for the recipe but never got a response. The shop disappeared by the time of the next return visit.

Then there was dr bob's addiction to Whitney's apple raisin yogurt that spoke to a similar culinary desire, minus the rice. The free market cured him of that by eliminating first the flavor choice and then the product and finally the company itself, which did not survive the merger mania of the late 20th century. Curiously a flavor combination that bob would not have ever tried by choice because of the raisin combination but when offered it by his childhood next door neighbor turned flavor chemist friend dennis (no [menace](#)), he was pleasantly surprised. Just goes to show you how important outside influences can be.

Later in life, bob was comparing all the plain rice pudding recipes he could find in the cooking team library. The cookbooks were stacked together, one inside the other, opened at the rice pudding page waiting for the right moment to act. Which never came. The books were reshelved. A contributing factor may have been indecision on the basic rice pudding question: to bake or just stovetop it all the way? The baking part often required putting the pudding bowl into a pan of boiling water, which sounds like unnecessary effort. Yet was this the secret behind really creamy rice pudding? Or a false hope? Meanwhile a local entrepreneur began marketing this really yummy creamy rice pudding in all the area supermarkets. Just pay the money and enjoy. Of course that seems like cheating in a way. And how do we share our love of rice pudding with distant friends in distant lands?

A credit card free offer of a 6 month sub to another cooking mag we had been occasionally grabbing, *Eating Well*, was hard to refuse. And difficult to terminate. Clever marketing. So three cooking mag subs contributed to the information overload of the end of the millennium at dr bob central. Until the newcomer crashed and burned in 1999. Substituted by *Food and Wine* for a while until we worked up the courage to cancel. Anyway, the apple cinnamon rice pudding recipe arrived just in time for a cookout dessert contribution. And forced the issue of bake or no bake. Bake. Not as much of a hassle as anticipated. But not as creamy either. Maybe we over baked it?

ingredients

rice base

- 1 1/2 c water
- 3/4 c short grain rice, like arborio
- 1/2 t salt
- 2 c 1% milk

egg mixture

1 c 1% milk
2 large egg yolks
1/4 c pure maple syrup
2 T packed light brown sugar
1 t pure vanilla extract

fruit components

2 tart apples, like Granny Smith
1 t fresh lemon juice
1/2 c raisins

garnish

ground cinnamon

instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 375°. Coat an 8 in square baking dish with cooking spray.
2. In a 2 qt saucepan, bring the water to a boil and then add the rice and salt. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the water is absorbed, about 10 to 12 minutes.
3. Add 2 c milk to the rice and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 8 minutes. (Discard any skin that forms on the surface.)
4. In a medium bowl, whisk the egg mixture components until smooth.
5. Peel and coarsely grate the apples. Place them in a small bowl and toss with the lemon juice.
6. Remove the rice mixture from the heat and stirring constantly add about 1 c to the egg mixture. Then scrape this back into the rest of the rice mixture, stirring constantly. Add the raisins and grated apples.
7. Scrape the mixture into the prepared baking dish and place it in a shallow roasting pan and pour enough simmering water into the roasting pan to come halfway up the sides of the baking dish.
8. Bake the pudding for 35 to 40 minutes, or until barely set.
9. Serve warm or chilled, dusted with cinnamon.

notes

1. [Eating Well](#), October 1997, p.26. I wonder where (if?) extinct magazines are archived in the world?
[It was resurrected a few years later with 4 seasonal issues per year.]
2. This was a recipe doctored (Rx) item, lightened from a yummy high fat favorite recipe of a reader. For six servings, the original had per serving 9 g fat, 325 cal, the lightened version 3 g fat, 270 cal: *7 g protein, 3 g fat (1.4 sat), 55 g carbo, 280 mg sodium, 76 mg chol, 1 g fiber.*

creamy potato mushroom soup

The brother-in-law didn't show up for dinner Tuesday night like he said he would. We called at work to remind him but he was in a different store location. We had done the meatloaf prep the night before and the mashed potatoes too. Everything was ready, including enough leftover eggplant-zucchini parmesan to pass for a veggie dish. Fortunately bob's mom dropped by unexpectedly, so by chance all was ready for her. However, there were plenty of leftovers for the next night. To be sure, bob thought a cream soup appetizer would stretch the menu enough for the brother-in-law's second chance dinner. Or is that brother's-in-law? We never remember.

Five cooking magazines were lying around the living room, with a number of cream soup possibilities. The big question to be decided was: heavy or healthy? (Heavy cream and lots of butter or no cream and little butter.) The light recipes called for cremini mushrooms so the mushroom selection was set. Off to the store, where organic milk was discovered, and some heavy cream was grabbed to keep our options open. It was fall break (mid-semester week vacation) so dr bob was off duty and a mid afternoon supermarket stop was no problem.

Bob peeled four mushrooms before mom suggested maybe washing was sufficient. The cooking library corroborated this point of view: "the flavor is all in the skin." Now they tell us. So the rest got cleaned only and the potato brush and mushroom brush got added to the "to get" list. Years of mushroom skins remained a tedious memory.

ingredients

what they said ([Cooking Light](#), Sep 97)

solids

2 bacon slices
4 c cremini mushrooms, chopped
1/2 c shallots, chopped
3 1/2 c Yukon Gold potatoes, cubed

liquids

1 14.5oz can fat-free chicken broth, divided
[16oz = 2 c]

2 c 1% lowfat milk
2 T sherry

spices

1/2 t salt
1/4 t pepper

what we did

-> 2 T butter
1/2 lb [= 3 1/2 - 4 c]
1/2 c
5 medium generic potatoes [4 c]

3 c boiling water
 plus 3 t veggie broth paste

2 c [1% is our default]
2 T cooking sherry
1 T dry Marsala wine

1/2 t
1/4 t

instructions

1. We eliminated the "crisp then crumble the bacon" start to this recipe. bacon is not something we keep around the house after the bad rap it's consistently gotten over the years. And just 2 slices? It doesn't come in 2 slice packages very often. Pancetta on the other hand, is cut to order, so we occasionally have some of that on hand for Italian cooking. We suspect that it may be less damaging than the usual bacon product but are not sure. However, none was on hand this time.
2. Since there were no bacon drippings in the pan where the bacon had not been, we used butter to saute the mushrooms and shallots until soft, adding a small hit of Marsala towards the end of the suggested 5 minute saute period. We were unable to decide between using cooking sherry or the Marsala wine which another (Italian) recipe called for, having consulted our cooking library. Real sherry we dislike, as we do most sweet liqueur/wines (as in port wine, not cream liqueurs), so that was out of the question. Alternately tasting the cooking sherry and Marsala, neither one recommended for sipping, we decided in favor of Marsala but not on the first trial of the recipe, so we went with the cooking sherry. As a minor compromise, some marsala crept into the mushroom saute though.
3. So the softened mushrooms and shallots are set aside now. Add the potatoes and broth to the nonstick 6 qt pot and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat, and boil 12 minutes or so until the potatoes are tender.
4. Transfer the potato mixture to a food processor and process until smooth.
5. Return to the pot and add the milk, mushroom mixture, sherry, salt and pepper. Cook over medium heat about 10 minutes until thoroughly heated. [The crumbled bacon was used as a garnish on the soup bowl portion at serving time in the original recipe.]

notes

1. Actually we boiled the potatoes first, then drained them and then combined them with the boiling water plus broth paste and half the mushroom shallot mixture and dumped it in the food processor with the milk. This turned out to be a mistake, since although it successfully pureed the stuff, fluid dynamics began to work when bob loosened the blade and it began overflowing internally though the blade cylinder opening (since the fluid level was higher than the top). We only lost about 1/2 cup on the counter (leaving us with a 1/2 cup to spare because of the added broth). A valuable lesson for future food processor practice. We put everything back in the nonstick pot where we sauteed the mushrooms. Meanwhile ms_ani, the hand blender specialist, entered the scene complaining about the cook not waiting for her to hand blend it instead, and took over damage control. Maybe next time we will follow the instructions, except for continuing to add half the mushroom saute to be pureed with the remaining stuff for more flavor.
2. Yukon Gold potatoes? We've seen them in a few cooking mag recipes lately and on one trendy restaurant menu so far, but not yet in the potato isle at the supermarkets we frequent. Maybe at some future date.
3. Some future date. They finally showed up.
4. And we later bought the mushroom brush, but ms_ani still usually insists on peeling.
5. A few years later dr bob did a web search on his legal name (vanity or justified curiosity?) and among the hits was surprised by seeing this recipe title show up, which for sure should not have contained the search string. Checking it out, it turned out that the original recipe web page had somehow gotten overwritten by the table of contents file in a web site update snafoo [mistake] a year earlier. Restoring the web page from the original text file while consulting the paper edition showed that the potatoes had been left out in

transferring the recipe to the original web page! So dumb luck and the incredible magic of web search engines led to this rather crucial correction in the revised version.

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

brownie cheesecake torte

The moment the dr bob cooking team spotted this cover recipe* in a stack of mail waiting after another summer trip to Italy, we knew we had to make it. Claes the pasta hating swede gave us the excuse we needed a few days later on a rare trip from where else, Sweden. We made it in the morning so it was waiting for us after then mandatory [Jim's](#) cheesesteak (4th and South, Philly) straight from the airport followed by the first of many (mostly action) movies. Of course the real thing is not as overwhelming a sight as the incredible cover photo, but the noncooking team members seemed suitably impressed, independent of the amazing low fat composition. The dr bob cooking team's judgment was more reserved, perhaps jaded by too many now distant memories of a variety of full fat killer chocolate cheesecake combinations. Nonetheless, with its high flavor low fat ratio, this cheesecake is not one to let slip away in the information glut we're all swimming in these days.

Unfortunately the \$20,000 prize winning check the creator walked off with must have tilted the side of the brain responsible for the serving and maintenance instructions, since there were none. Nothing about refrigeration before or after serving. Perhaps they assumed it would be eaten in one sitting by the anxiously awaiting intended recipients as soon as it hit room temperature. We refrigerated it and served it cold. Numerous times. In small slices. Fat or no fat, no need to overdo it.

We e-mailed the cooking mag about the unresolved heat transfer aspects of the cheesecake problem. No surprise—they didn't respond. ms_ani did the second run through soon after, giving us the opportunity for fate to intervene with experimental evidence on the question. The remainder of the cake softened up pretty well after 4 hours in the car trunk on a late august afternoon when we extracted it for dessert at home after eating chinese. (Out.) Tastes much richer when soft. The crust was especially soft and pliable, nearly still in its dough state—perhaps because bob had forgotten the carrot baby food and had improvised with some previously opened fermenting pitted prunes from the closet (about 7 or 8?) that we pureed in our hand blender attachment with some hazelnut oil we'd picked up but never used, until they were sufficiently liquefied to replace the baby food? Or so we thought. But the same was true in successive renditions with the baby food. Must contribute to the rich chocolate sauce impression that it gives when served at room temperature?

On our third attempt we forgot to spray the pan first with cooking oil spray and even though it was a nonstick pan, it stuck. Since it was nonstick, we could only use a sharp plastic utensil to hack off the crust. We didn't lose much. But the bottom brownie crust looked more like chocolate glue than brownies, evidence that the prune puree substitute was not at fault in the second attempt.

We have made this cheesecake many more times, more than any other single recipe. Must be the low guilt factor.

* [Cooking Light](#), August 1997, p.71. Contest winner: Pricilla Yee. [Also online](#), but no mention of Pricilla.

ingredients

crust

1 15.1 oz package low fat fudge brownie mix
 [read "Nestle's Snackwell's"]
 2 t instant coffee granules
 1/2 t ground cinnamon 1 4oz
 jar carrot baby food
 cooking spray

batter

1/2 c sugar
 4 t all purpose flour
 1 t vanilla extract
 1 8oz block Neufchatel cheese, softened
 1 8oz block fat free cream cheese, softened
 2 large egg whites
 2 T skim milk
 1 T skim milk
 2 T sugar
 2 T unsweetened cocoa

serving extras

chocolate syrup (optional)
 fresh raspberries (optional)

instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 425° F.
2. Combine the first 4 ingredients in a bowl. Firmly press the mixture into the bottom and about an inch up the sides of a 9 in springform pan coated with cooking spray. Set aside.
3. Combine next 5 ingredients and beat at medium speed with a mixer until well blended. Add the egg whites and 2 T milk and beat well. Combine 1/2 c batter, 1 T milk, 2 T sugar, and cocoa in a small bowl, stirring well. Then spoon the remaining original batter alternately with the cocoa batter into the prepared crust. Swirl together using the tip of a knife to achieve a pleasing marbled pattern.
4. Bake at 425° for 10 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 250°. Bake 45 minutes more or until almost set. Cool completely on a wire rack. Garnish with chocolate syrup and fresh raspberries, if desired.

notes

Makes 12 servings, in usual wedge slices. Per slice:
calories 277 (24% from fat), fat 7.5g (sat 3.8g, mono 2.3g, poly 0.9g), protein 7.9g, carb 44.1g, fiber 1.3g, chol 18mg, iron 1.6mg, sodium 338 mg, calc 76mg

pumpkin tiramisu

Pumpkin tiramisu? We were a bit skeptical at first but clearly intrigued. Browsing the ingredient list, it seemed like too much of a departure. No ladyfingers! No coffee! We imagined making some modifications to better fit our preconceived notion of what a pumpkin tiramisu should be. [Putting in ladyfingers soaked in coffee, for example.] But in the end we had the good sense to give it a try unchanged, and the result dispelled our reservations completely.

The recipe was another Thanksgiving supermarket food mag checkout rack snatch, the cover bait being pumpkin soup, a dish we'd like to experiment with but never get around to doing. It was an easy decision to go for it since our fabulous [wild mushroom stuffing](#) was harvested from the previous year's Thanksgiving issue of the same magazine, again to be repeated this season.

The one downside of Thanksgiving desserts is gluttony. Even after waiting a few hours after the big dinner, even a fabulous dessert like this one just cannot be enjoyed the way it should be following up exaggerated ritual food overload. Fortunately, like turkey, this can survive to the leftover stage. Better yet, make it for Thanksgiving and wait till the day after to serve it, or even for an unrelated occasion. Like the real [tiramisu](#), its flavor matures with time.

ingredients

cookie layer

2 T bourbon [or extra Kahlua, Frangelico, or tiramisu liqueur for dipping]
1 T granulated sugar
9oz package [chocolate wafers](#)

mousse

1 15oz can pumpkin puree
1/2 c dark brown sugar
1/2 t cinnamon
1/2 t ginger
1/4 t freshly grated nutmeg
1 3/4 c [about 500g or 1 lb container] mascarpone
1 3/4 c [about 16oz or 1 pint] heavy cream

topping

2 T unsweetened cocoa powder [or freshly grated bittersweet chocolate]

units

1 t = 1 teaspoon
1 T = 1 tablespoon
1 c = 1 cup (holds 1/4 liter water)

Instructions

1. In a very small saucepan, combine the bourbon with 1 T sugar and bring just to a boil. Remove from the heat. Line the bottom of a 10 in springform pan with 18 to 20 cookies,

- overlapping a few. Brush the cookies with half the bourbon syrup.
2. In a large bowl, combine the pumpkin puree with the sugar and spices. Add the mascarpone and cream. Beat the mixture on medium speed with a hand mixer until soft peaks form, but do not overbeat. Spread half the mixture over the cookies in the pan.
 3. Cover the pumpkin mixture with the remaining cookies, overlapping slightly. Drizzle with the remaining bourbon syrup, and then cover with the remaining pumpkin mixture. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.
 4. Just before serving sift the cocoa or directly grate the bittersweet chocolate over the top. Then release and remove the springform pan side and serve with a flat spatula. Actually the chocolate topping step can be done immediately in step 3 before refrigerating without adverse effects.
-

Notes

Food & Wine Magazine

November 1997, p 182: Thanks, Peggy Cullen. No website yet in 1999. [But soon after they saw the light.]

Liqueur problems

2 T of bourbon syrup is not much. And does not go very far. We dribbled a bit on the center of each cookie trying to make it stretch, but not being convinced, used some tiramisu liqueur in a cup to dip about 6 to 8 cookies that we put over the second layer of cookies. The chocolate wafers we used were not the overlapping kind, so we just laid them out touching each other packed as closely as the round springform pan allowed and then broke a few pieces to fill some of the gaps. And put a few extras around on top. After a day of aging, the cookies softened up nicely and the seed liqueur dispersed quite well into the mousse.

Whipping cream?

We were rather suspicious of the bit about whipping up this mess of ingredients and getting soft peaks. It seemed more reasonable to whip the cream separately and then fold together with the other stuff. But sure enough, it did form soft peaks. We're just born skeptics.

Illustrations

Here are the [mug shots](#).

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- overlapping a few. Brush the cookies with half the bourbon syrup.
2. In a large bowl, combine the pumpkin puree with the sugar and spices. Add the mascarpone and cream. Beat the mixture on medium speed with a hand mixer until soft peaks form, but do not overbeat. Spread half the mixture over the cookies in the pan.
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Illustrations

Here are the [mug shots](#).

chorak (armenian sweet roll/brioche)

It's the pits!

Like many traditional recipes, this one probably has as many variations as Armenian moms who bake from a mental cookbook. Isgouhi's version has earned her accolades from relatives and friends (not always reliable) and we like it (firsthand assessment) so we'll stick with her recipe. Among brioches (is that French for sweet roll?), chorak is interestingly unique because of the distinctive aromatic smell it acquires from the magic ingredient: powdered mahlab (available in middle eastern food stores), apparently extracted from the inner pit of sour black cherries according to Linda Chirinian of [Secrets of Cooking Persian/Armenian/Lebanese](#) who has a competing recipe by the way. Whatever. [Re-assess the first line of this tale.]

This is a great couple activity, although probably one which will not come up on a first date. Mother/daughter (cross-generational). Husband/wife (intragenerational?, usually). Sisters. Whatever.

ingredients

starter

2 T yeast
1 T sugar
1/2 T baking powder
2 T flour
1/4 c lukewarm water

dough

1 c = 2 sticks = 1/2 lb unsalted butter
1 c lukewarm milk
6 c flour
1 c confectioner's or regular sugar
1 t mahlab (heaping t)
1/4 t mazdaq gum + 1 t sugar
4 eggs

glaze

1 egg
1/4 t vanilla

instructions

1. Start butter melting, allowing it to cool down a bit after melted. Warm the milk
2. Meanwhile mix together the dry starter ingredients and stir in the lukewarm water in a small bowl. Cover and set aside for 10 minutes.
3. Mash together the mazdaq gum and sugar with mortar and pestle (or spoon in a bowl), if available (the sugar prevents sticking while mashing).
4. In a big bowl mix the flour, confectioner's sugar, mahlab, and mazdaq mixture, if available. Make a well in the center and put in the eggs. Beat them with a whisk or fork, then

mix in the starter mixture and then gradually incorporate the dry flour into the center by hand. Then add in the butter and mix till incorporated. Then add the milk a little at a time until we dough consistency is attained, no longer sticky. [If a helper is available, he or she can pour the milk on the dough worker's hands to clean off the clinging dough.] If still sticky add in more flour 3 T at a time until not sticky. Knead the dough about 10-15 minutes till smooth.

5. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and several kitchen towels and put in a warm place in the kitchen. Let rise at least 2 hours or overnight.
6. Knead a couple minutes, pulling the dough from the sides to the center. Let rise at least 2 hours or overnight.
7. Form into 1.5 in diameter balls, about 40.
8. Roll each ball out with the palms of both hands back and forth till nearly 18 in long. Break off 1/3 of the dough worm. Lay out the long piece and attach the short piece to its center (press together) to form a T. Then begin braiding, alternately crossing over (this is the standard 3 string braid, known all over the world mostly by women and a few enlightened men), and then fix the ends together. Put on cooking spray sprayed cookie sheets with generous spacing. [Another option is to make a little circularly swirled mound like a snake in coiled striking position, headless.]
9. Let rise another 1/2 hour.
10. Beat egg and vanilla together and brush over top of the rolls.
11. Bake in a preheated 350° oven about 20 minutes until golden brown. Check that the bottom of the rolls are not too dark along the way. It works best only using the middle rack for even baking, rather than using both upper and lower racks and switching halfway through, thus losing heat and leading to uneven baking.

notes

1. This recipe has been well documented visually by the dr bob cooking school low-end point-and-shoot zoom photography specialist. Our first start-to-finish project: [chorak moments](#).
2. Once when we were in a bit of a hurry and the recipe master was a participant, we received to green light to shorten the second rising from 2 hours to 1 hour. This did not seem to affect the results. Later this somehow became officially lowered to 1/2 hour.
3. dr bob was not informed about the masdaq gum until several renditions of this recipe, apparently some with and some without it. It is a special flavor gum marketed in the middle east by a subsidiary [Adams] of the multinational [Warner-Lambert] which employs one of bob's brothers. Small world. Maybe this is [mastic gum](#) (ristacia lentiscus), the mother of all gums? Needs more research... [For centuries the ancient Greeks chewed mastic gum (or mastiche pronounced "mas-tee-ka"). This is the resin obtained from the bark of the mastic tree, a shrub-like tree found mainly in Greece and Turkey. Grecian women especially favored chewing mastic gum to clean their teeth and sweeten their breath. Available on-line with mahlab (mahlepi?) from [Mediterranean Foods](#) or]
4. These seem to last at least a week in a sealed plastic container as they succumb to daily munching, provided that only one couple is doing the munching. Hmm. If it makes about 40 rolls, that's 20 apiece, which means about a 3 per person per day (based on double occupancy accommodations) rate. Give some away.

baked pasta with zucchini leek cheese sauce

The Mission: to produce an original baked pasta potluck supper dish calculated to favorably impress the other guests or at least not embarrass us, especially since our undeserved reputation as gourmet cooks had begun to disseminate among the crowd from whom the target guest list had been drawn (our usual dessert spot had been stolen by an earlier respondent). Using ingredients on hand. Some zucchini and arugula, both approaching the end of their usable refrigerator shelf life. Various leftover cheeses.

The cooking library was not very helpful, so we decided to wing it, rereading our [fettuccine zuffredo](#) concoction first for inspiration. But as we began the sauté-ing and pasta water boiling, we suddenly realized we had no milk. Among many other things that the almost daily seasonal christmas consumer grazing runs at the mall had prevented us from replenishing. So the team sent out a member for a quick emergency essential supply run to the closest local supermarket, upon whose return the kitchen activity resumed. The fresh red pepper, acquired to complete the green ingredients to Christmas colors, was forgotten during this first attempt.

The potluck public reaction: "pretty good" but can you really trust people to be honest about something like this? Some went for seconds, however; not a bad sign. The verdict by our in-house spice and flavor consultant: needs an extra kick. So we find the next opportunity to rework the recipe. New Year's Day with the in-laws. This time we add an extra leek, a jar of chopped sweet red peppers, some paprika and nutmeg, and another half cup of milk to finalize the recipe. Not bad...

ingredients

pasta

1 lb penne or similar tube pasta

sauté-ables

3 T olive oil

2 shallots

2 medium large leeks

1/2 green pepper

4 medium zucchini (about 4-5 c), julienne sliced

2/3 c chopped arugula

1/3 c chopped parsley (or just more arugula)

7.25 oz (205g) jar of roasted sweet red peppers

salt and pepper to taste

a dusting of paprika

béchamel cheese sauce

3 T butter

3 T flour

3 1/2 c milk

1/2 c gruyere cheese, grated

1/2 c fontina, grated

1/8 t nutmeg

topping

1/4 c bread crumbs

1/4 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Start the pasta water going, and when boiling, throw in the usual amount of salt and the pasta. Cook until al dente.
2. Meanwhile food process the shallots, leeks and green pepper together.
3. Julienne slice the zucchini and set aside.
4. Clean and chop the arugula and parsley.
5. Grate the cheeses.
6. Sauté the shallots, leeks and green pepper in olive oil until softened.
7. Add in the zucchini and continue a bit.
8. Add in the arugula and parsley and remove from heat.
9. Meanwhile make a béchamel sauce with the butter flour and milk: melt the butter, stir in the flour and gradually add in the milk. Thicken a bit.
10. Then mix in the gruyere and fontina cheese.
11. Combine half the pasta with the sauteed stuff and the other half with the cheese sauce since it won't all fit in one or the other pans. Combine in a 11x13 in baking pan.
12. Cover with the bread crumbs and parmigiano.
13. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes.
14. Broil about 5 minutes to brown the topping a bit.
15. Serve.

notes

1. Feel free to be creative with the overall mission guide. Just as long as you can eat the result.

ripped off recipe for pumpkin squash sage risotto

Ripping off the recipe

Another seasonal promotion at [Williams-Sonoma](#). Stacks of *The Pumpkin Cookbook* lined the opening display at the entrance. A quick scan yields an interesting possibility: pumpkin and sage risotto, beautifully photographed by the way. But ... we are trying to control our cookbook collection addiction. We'll just drop by again in season and jot down the ingredient list.

Good plan. Poor execution.

We're ten minutes away from the [largest retail space mall](#) in America (20th century) and we couldn't get back in time to catch the pumpkin promotion. No problem. They must have a few copies left over in the cookbook department. So the dr bob cooking spy checks it out. And out. And out. Not in any of the W-S topic slots. How could this be? Almost ready to give up, the target item drops into the field of view. Not a W-S topic book after all, but an unrelated cookbook authoring project. The spy doesn't want to be too obvious, so the list is entered into short term memory. Then at a safe distance, it is manually converted into hard copy. On a scrap of paper in the wallet. Except insufficient memory allocation space has led to the loss of half the ingredient list. Another pass. Return to a discrete distance and the list is complete.

The designated pumpkin had already been sitting on the kitchen counter for about a month. Supermarkets are full of them in the Halloween/Thanksgiving season. By the time we get around to the execution, the cookbook is on sale for 5 bucks. At that price what reason is there to not buy? We buy. Our furtive recipe stealing all for naught.

Finally the dish is done. Much anticipation. Looks good. But the flavor was somehow just not in the same league as the original photograph. What a disappointment. Such is life. If you don't try, you don't know. We'll have to try it again with butternut squash. Maybe we can save this yet.

ingredients

- 2 T olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1-2 T fresh sage
- 1 1/2 c arborio rice
- 2 c pumpkin flesh, diced (or butternut squash)
- 3 1/2 c boiling veggie broth
- 1/3 c pine nuts
- 1/3 c parmigiano
- 4 T milk
- pinch of nutmeg
- salt and pepper to taste

instructions

1. It's the usual story here. Sauté the onion and sage in olive oil until soft, then carefully fuse in the garlic without burning it.
2. Mix in the rice and pumpkin and stir around for a minute.
3. Add a cup of broth and simmer. Continue adding broth as it is absorbed until most of the broth is used, about 20 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, throw the pine nuts, milk and nutmeg in a blender and process until smooth.
5. Stir it into the risotto with the final hit of broth and simmer another 5 minutes.
6. Season to taste and serve.

notes

1. [The Pumpkin Cookbook](#), edited by Nicola Hill, Hamlyn, 1996, p.26.

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

1998

simple salmon steaks

This was our first experience with the garlic salmon combo. And the secret ingredient that made it memorable was the sweet red pepper paste, which we had on hand thanks to some of isgouhi's handmade version that we keep in the freezer.

ingredients

fish

2 lbs salmon steaks or filet (about 6 for 6 people)

marinade

1 heaping t sweet red pepper paste

1/4 t cayenne red pepper

1/4 t black pepper

1/4 t salt

5,6 cloves garlic, pressed

2 T olive oil

finisher

1 lemon, sliced crosswise into 6 pieces

instructions

1. Mix up the marinade stuff and coat all the pieces thoroughly in a baking dish and put in the refrigerator for an hour or so.
2. Place one slice of lemon on each piece of fish.
3. Bake at 350° for about 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fish pieces.

notes

1. Later we got an [independent slant](#) on this idea from nora.

baked rigatoni with mushroom, zucchini and leek tomato sauce

We kept forgetting to replace our canned plum tomatoes, so eventually we were bound to need them and be caught without. Fortunately some newly purchased fresh plum tomatoes intended for a then current food mag roasted tomato soup recipe (that we never did anyway) were available for the more immediate objective—baked pasta. We still had zucchini and leeks on our minds from the [previous pasta improvisations](#) (and a fresh supply in the fridge) and ms_ani was still in a baked pasta mood, showing no signs of waning enthusiasm, but this time she decided to go light with a tomato based sauce replacing the cheese (= fat) of those previous baked pasta experiments.

We may have been breaking the cardinal rule of good Italian cooking (keep it simple, stupid) with our multiple billing star ingredients but all of us liked the results. Regular people eating regular food. At home. That's what it's all about. At least in our income bracket. Of course in restaurants we'll take excellence if we can find it.

ingredients

pasta

1 lb rigatoni or similar tube pasta

sauté-ables

3 T olive oil

1 onion

1/2 large leek

3 cloves garlic, pressed

2 zucchini, julienne sliced

5 medium white mushrooms, cleaned and chopped

6 or 7 fresh plum tomatoes, chopped

3 green onions, chopped

1/2 t hot paprika

salt and pepper to taste

1/2 t sugar

1/4 t cayenne red pepper

finishers

1/2 c grated romano cheese

2/3 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and cook the pasta al dente with the usual amount of salt.
2. Meanwhile do the veggie food prep.
3. Sauté the onion and leek in the olive oil, then add in the garlic for a bit.
4. Next stir in the zucchini and cook a bit, then the mushrooms and cook a bit.
5. Finally dump in the tomatoes and cook down for as long as you have patience.

6. At some point before giving up mix in the green onions and spices.
7. Combine the pasta and sauce and cheeses and serve.

notes

1. Does this inspire you to improvise? Or are we just kidding ourselves?

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

roasted squash and veggie soup (crema di zucca)

In another moment of weakness (culinary voyeur that he is), bob acquired another photo-filled cookbook. A thick full page photo of cream of squash soup (crema di zucca!) sank the hook this time. Yellow squash. From the summer category of squash. But it was a winter squash season. Our lactose intolerant guest forced some other modifications here as well. Kill the cream. Pass on the parmesan. Ready the lactaid 100 (percent free of lactose presumably). Break open the butternut squash.

We consulted around for ideas. Discovered a great new vegetarian cookbook on our own new book shelf that had escaped our notice since its arrival, in which a pressure cooker recipe suggested that oatmeal might help thicken the soup. Our concoction seems rather thick on its own and so probably does not need this ingredient, but it can't do any harm. More fiber. And bob had read somewhere about roasting veggies to "bring out their flavor." So that idea was also added to the list.

ingredients

roasted veggie group

- 1 medium butternut squash, cut lengthwise in half
- 1 leek, trimmed of the unusable parts
- 1 large carrot, peeled
- 1 large celery stalk
- 1 large whole onion with skin
- 1 small whole head garlic, cut open across top
- olive oil spray
- freshly ground black pepper

broth group

- 2 c boiling water plus 2 t veggie broth paste
- 1/4 c Quaker oats
- 3 c lowfat milk (Lactaid if ...)

spice group

- 1/2 t white pepper
- black pepper to taste, freshly ground
- salt to taste

instructions

1. Place the cleaned whole veggies on a cookie sheet (we lined it with aluminum foil) and spray with olive oil and grind black pepper over them. Roast 1 hour at 350°, then food process with 1 c milk.
2. Meanwhile add the broth paste to 2 c boiling water and then the oats and continue boiling maybe 15, 20 minutes. Puree with a hand blender if oats are not convincingly soft.
3. Combine with pureed veggies and remaining milk and spices and hand blend smooth.

4. Heat through and serve.

notes

1. The day before we had had a bowl of some wonderful thick carrot bisque with red pepper sauce swirled on top. So we found a jar of red pepper paste in supplies and used that as a serving garnish. Good contrast.
2. We were happy campers after this.
3. When we reheated the leftover soup, we added some milk to loosen it up a bit, since it naturally thickens in the fridge. This thickening characteristic makes it a possible candidate for a pasta sauce. Why not?

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

fettuccine pepperedo

Not surprisingly our home pasta machines are not overworked, enjoying a leisurely lifestyle packed in the closet under the stairs. The one we never get opened in back under the landing to have more space to organize its contents. So when the rare request for homemade pasta product arrives to force us into action, we must choose wisely to take full advantage of the opportunity. Fettuccine give the biggest payoff in showcasing the freshness of the pasta, and although it's well known as a killer sauce, alfredo is the one that drives home the point, like the wooden stake in the vampire's heart. So the question is: to compromise or not, to compromise?

Well if we're going to splurge, let's check with [Marcella](#). First ingredient: 1 cup heavy whipping cream. Okay, we've got one of those in the fridge. We thought. Except that it was only half and half. However, we still had some 200 ml room temperature precious personally imported cartons of Italian cooking cream (panna per cucinare), just under a cup according to our glass metric-US measuring cup. So we substituted the heavy cream with that plus half a cup of half and half (is that equivalent to a quarter of cup of full fat content?). Since the 200ml seemed more like a half a cup at the time, and we only measured it a few days later, when we discovered that the expiration date was seven months earlier. [Actually the heavy cream was just hiding in the fridge clutter, only to be discovered behind the yogurt days later.] We survived the Italian cream, which seemed perfectly innocent.

The next modification was induced by the inertia of our original sauce choice—vodka sauce—which is a creamy smooth pink tomato sauce more appropriate for penne than fettuccine and lots more work. So how to add a pink touch to make the alfredo sauce more interesting? Maybe that jar of sweet red pepper sauce in the fridge? Or maybe pureed [Carlino's](#) roasted red peppers with lots of garlic instead, easily done in the hand blender attachment?

We used our new rounded deep 4qt professional [Calphalon](#) nonstick chef's pan that we got as a free bonus after buying some on-sale Calphalon products for Christmas gifts at [bloomies](#). What a pot! For years we've been lusting after high end kitchen cookware, but only buying it for others as gifts. Finally we broke down and went for it, and were instantly convinced by its first kitchen application that expense doesn't necessarily mean hype. A worthwhile investment if you enjoy being in the kitchen.

ingredients

what she said

sauce

2 T choicest quality butter
1 c heavy whipping cream

what we did

2 T superfat French sweet butter
200 ml panna per cucinare (about 1 c)
1/2 c half and half
1/3 c roasted red peppers and extra garlic, pureed

fettuccine

1 1/4 lb homemade fettuccine 4 egg, 4 c flour pasta load, fettuccine disk

finishing touch

2/3 c freshly grated parmigiano	2/3 c freshly grated parmigiano
salt	salt
black pepper, freshly milled	black pepper, freshly ground
1/8 t grated whole nutmeg	powdered nutmeg dusting

instructions

Check [Marcella's](#) book for her approach ("cream and butter sauce = "al'Alfredo"), easily inferred from ours:

1. Pureé the roasted red peppers with garlic in the hand blender with the half and half.
2. Put the Italian/heavy cream and butter in a large pot that will hold the pasta for tossing later and heat on medium heat, cooking briefly for a minute so that the cream and butter thicken. Stir in the red pepper pureé and heat slightly. Turn off the heat.
3. Meanwhile cook the pasta until just before reaching the al dente stage. Remember fresh fettuccine cook very quickly, and supposedly continue cooking a bit even after leaving the burner.
4. Drain the pasta and dump in the pot with the cream sauce on minimal low heat, and toss it around to coat all the noodles.
5. Stir in the parmigiano, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Check the salt. Add some if necessary.
6. Serve immediately, with additional parmigiano and black pepper grated over the serving.

notes

1. Since panna per cucinare is a rare commodity, even in our kitchen where expiration dates can present a dilemma when noticed, you can use heavy cream instead, replacing even the half and half for a total of one cup cream if you dare.

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

hazelnut cheesecake revisited: the gianduia variation

When you've got a good foundation, it's easy to elaborate on.

The dr bob cooking school welcomed an aunt-in-law from Lebanon who had never had (or made) cheesecake. Offering us a golden opportunity to try out a few modifications of the tried and true hazelnut recipe and a photo-op as well now that the team was into illustrating its modest accomplishments in the kitchen. dr bob had just picked up a Gourmet magazine with a cover story on Nutella, the Italian chocolate hazelnut spread known far and wide to gluttons, at least those on top of the international food chain fortunate enough to be served by the global marketplace of the 90's. Hazelnuts plus chocolate equals "gianduia" (John, do ya?) in Italy, which achieves its nearly lethal combination in a jar as Nutella, apparently sold in quantities exceeding that of peanut butter worldwide. Hmm... why not add a Nutella touch to the hazelnut recipe?

Lousntag's English was limited to a few words, but many more than bob's nonexistent Armenian. She clearly understood enough to participate, armed with almost a year of American television viewing and obvious kitchen sense to interpret bob's attempts at simple key word and gesture communication. Unfortunately her sister Isgouhi was a winter cold casualty unable to join the class, so the demystification of cheesecake for her would have to be delayed.

A tall crass plastic container of chocolate syrup remained in the fridge from a previous recipe, taking up precious space on the top shelf where it seemed to be more just in the way than awaiting further use. (Apparently its intended consumers don't want the discretely small size.) And a still sealed box of chocolate wafers was in storage, acquired as a possible ingredient for some other recipe that chose an alternative direction. Recipe ready hazelnuts are always in the fridge, so all bases were covered. We figured a chocolate cookie crumb crust plus a discrete hit of syrup in the filling would do the trick.

This being the 90's, the cream cheese fat content combination question had to be decided. Too much fat lightening (as in no fat cream cheese) leads to problems with the final product consistency so we went 50-50: half full fat and half one-third-reduced fat (neuchatfel), thus diluting the fat content reduction to one sixth, hardly significant, eh? And to lighten the slices, we bumped up the 9 inch springform pan to the 11 inch size to reduce the height roughly by a third as well. [Do the math: $1 - (9/11)^2 = 1 - 81/121 = 1 - 80/120 = 1 - 2/3 = 1/3$.]

The result did not disappoint. [Gross understatement.]

We followed through immediately with a half-recipe for a dinner invitation not-arriving-empty-handed offering. Providing independent confirmation of its successful marriage of flavors. Since even we have trouble disposing of a full size cheesecake, we downsized to the more discrete 7 inch pan size for the particular circumstances (5 dinner guests), cutting small slices, and only leaving the hosting couple to deal with the remaining half half-recipe cake. The height actually inflated by about 20 percent. [Do the math: $h_2^2 = h_1^2/2 \rightarrow h_2/h_1 = (11/7)^2/2 = (121/49)/2 =$

$(120/50)/2 = 6/5 = 1.2$.] Which is still about 80 percent of the full-size 9 inch pan recipe height [figure this one out yourself], so a modest slab dimension reduction remains.

ingredients

full size	half size	
11 in = 28 cm	7 in = 18 cm	springform pan
crust		
$2/3$ stick = 5.3 T = $1/6$ lb = 80 g	$1/3$ stick = 2.7 T = $1/12$ lb = 40 g	unsalted butter
1 c	$1/2$ c	finely ground chocolate cookie crumbs
$1/4$ c = 4 T	2 T	ground hazelnut crumbs
$1/4$ c = 4 T	2 T	sugar
filling		
2 lbs = 4 8 oz packages = 900 g	1 lb = 2 8 oz packages = 450 g	cream cheese
$1 1/2$ c = 350 g	$3/4$ c = 175 g	sugar
2 T	1 T	Frangelico hazelnut liqueur
$1/2$ c	$1/4$ c	ground hazelnut crumbs
pinch	pinch	salt
4	2	large eggs
2 T	1 T	chocolate syrup
topping		
2 c = 16 oz = 450 g	1 c = 8 oz = 225 g	sour cream
$1/4$ c = 4 T	2 T	sugar
1 t	$1/2$ t	Frangelico hazelnut liqueur
2 T	1 T	ground hazelnut crumbs

instructions

1. Estimate enough chocolate cookies to make a cup of crumbs in the food processor and food process them with the sugar. Meanwhile melt the butter and mix together in a bowl with a fork, or even in the food processor. Dump in the bottom of the pan and shake a bit like a gold prospector in the California gold rush days to even out the thickness of the layer. Then encourage more evening out with a large spoon and finally press evenly on the bottom (not the sides). If you overshoot in your cookie estimate so that it seems too thick before pressing [judgement call], don't use all the crumbs. Set aside.
2. Beat the cream cheese and sugar until smooth with electric hand beaters. Add in the eggs one at a time until just incorporated on low speed, and then the liqueur and pinch of salt, and finally the hazelnut crumbs. Pour into the pan.
3. Bake 50 minutes at 350° F (180° C).
4. Remove from oven for 10 minutes. Mix together by hand the sour cream, sugar, and liqueur until smooth and just before returning the cake to the oven, spread the topping evenly (jiggling it has a finishing leveling effect after spreading approximates this state)

- over the cheesecake and then hand sprinkle the hazelnut crumbs evenly over the topping.
5. Bake another 10 minutes and remove from the oven. Let cool on a rack. Then refrigerate.

notes

1. [Gourmet](#) magazine would never put a jar of [Nutella](#) on the cover. It was a very tempting gianduia mousse cake. The Nutella note was in the cover article [February 1998].
2. Purists among us may object to the kitchen math: using equal signs where "approximately equal" signs should be when we "simplify" the numbers. We are simply following a tradition we have learned from reading the bottoms of our springform pans. Our original hazelnut recipe actually calls for a 10 inch springform pan rather than a 9 inch size, but we don't own one and haven't seen them in the kitchen stores we frequent, where "9 1/2 in = 24 cm" and "11 inch = 28 cm" seem to be the standard sizes, but the actual measurements are 9 inches and 10 1/2 inches (inside diameters), an error dwarfing the approximation error in the simple number unit correspondence. Maybe the measurements refer to the outer diameter for clearance purposes. We have made a cheesecake in a toaster oven once where this was a consideration. Who knows.
3. The first time we made this, we refrigerated it after a very brief cool down period and then ate it only a few hours later. The usual "wait at least overnight" hype was proven false in this case, making this an ideal cheesecake when same day use is required by the circumstances.
4. As we age, we have begun to take the "recipe ready" phrase on our hazelnut package seriously and skip the annoying toasting on a cookie sheet step, which can lead to disaster if the crumbs are not attentively watched, since they easily overbrown, and we are not attentive watchers. Doesn't seem to make much of a difference in spite of what we have read about the merits of toasting.
5. This is really tasty but remember, moderation. Eat too much and the aftertaste will be regret and not satisfaction.
6. A few years later we tried another variation: splitting the batter and adding 1/4 c of Nutella itself to one half, laying it down first and leveling, and then gently putting the other layer on top and leveling, for a three layer cake (counting the sour cream). Not bad, but maybe the original pure hazelnut recipe is still the winner here.
7. [Illustrations](#) are available in the dr bob cooking school series.

piero's sun dried tomato pesto pasta

Instead of populating the world with more resource hogging American babies,¹ part through our peculiar life circumstances and the rest by subsequent choice, and by sharing a single almost sensible traditional passenger car, the ani and bob show realized as it was cruising into/through middle age that it was not entirely (at least financially) insane to take advantage of winter airfare bargains when airlines practically give away transatlantic tickets and do long weekend vacations in Europe. Ani being an American wage slave with precious few annual vacation days, a chunk of which are usually reserved to meeting bob during his academic summer visits to Rome, just never has the time to do real European vacations. [Dare we admit this in public? Okay, we're still guilty of abusing the world with our middle class lifestyle.] So with Philadelphia's direct European destination list growing, our winter flight choices have broadened considerably.

Munich was a logical choice. bob had spent 9 months living in its Schwabing neighborhood at the beginning of the eighties when there was still a "West" Germany officially, and as the millennium was approaching, our Roman astronomer/astrophysicist friend Piero was working at the European Southern Observatory ([ESO](#)) headquarters right next to the [Max-Planck-Institut für Astrophysik](#) in the suburb village of Garching where nonastrophysicist dr bob had been a guest, now connected to the city center by subway. Allowing us to easily buzz on out to Piero's place for our parting Saturday night dinner. The bus driver helped us get off at the right stop in town minutes from the end of the [U6](#) line, and a pizza place person helped us find his apartment building address. All in English. German internationalism.

bob confesses that he was not entirely confident of Piero's ability to deliver on this dinner thing. So when the mascarpone-filled avocado halves came forward followed by the terrific pesto pasta made with the Braun super hand blender system we'd helped him decide to buy earlier that day, bob was really impressed, as were Helene the Dutch-Brit colleague and Gordon the Canadian collaborator from Berkeley, another old stomping ground of dr bob before the prefix got added. (dr.) And of course Ani the Lebanese Armenian cooking team partner. We're apparently hopeless internationalists. The pesto had been an earlier improvisation of Piero in when he was closer to us back in America, perhaps influenced by Annette the Scotch Canadian astrophysicist companion, now in England, an annoying commute. The old dual career couple problem. Anyway, enough of this culture name dropping. This pesto recipe will be the one concrete reminder of our Munich trip that will linger on with us the remainder of our culinary days.

By coincidence Ani's Israeli colleagues Penina and Binyamin had had a bumper crop of tomatoes the preceding summer, the surplus product of which they had had the good sense to convert to sun dried form. A bit of which found its way into our supply cabinet due to their generosity. Waiting for some idea of what to do with it. International kitchen collaboration to the max.

We are regular pesto feeders. We make a big batch and freeze the extra. Comes in handy when a quick supper fix is required. Our recipe guidelines were set by Anne Willan's [Look and Cook Perfect Pasta Sauce](#) from her every recipe step, ingredient and kitchen tool fully photographed cookbook series, modified by [Marcella's](#) 1/3 Romano cheese substitution to give it more bite, supported by our Italian cooking library sources. Piero used linguini but we had not long pasta on hand, so we stuck with our usual fusilli standard initiated by Anne's choice.

¹Okay, we admit it, it's a dirty job and somebody has to do it. Just not us.
We like kids though. Are we excused?

ingredients

pesto minus cheese

1 c tightly packed basil leaves (1 large "bunch") [okay, so we never packed them into a cup to check]
2/3 c olive oil
3 T pine nuts
5 cloves garlic [we're garlic lovers]
10 sun dried tomatoes, plus 2-3 T soaking water

add the cheese

2/3 c parmigiano
1/2 c romano

finish with

salt to taste
freshly ground black pepper on servings

don't forget the pasta

1 lb fusilli or linguini

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling. Continue with the pesto process but throw in the pasta (and some salt) when the water is actively boiling.
2. Boil up water in a teapot and use it to just cover about 10 sun dried tomatoes in a bowl with boiling water and cover with a plate. Let sit about 15 minutes. Or boil the sun dried tomatoes directly for 5 minutes or so if you're in a hurry. [We started out with 5 tomatoes the slow way, but finding the resulting color factor not sufficiently in the red zone, we hurriedly readied 5 more the fast way.]
3. Wash and dry the basil in a salad spinner and pull off the leaves from the larger stalks.
4. Food process the pine nuts, garlic, and a little oil, then add in the rest oil and basil and process, and then add in the sundried tomatoes and runoff water and process, and then the cheeses and process. Use a spatula to push the pesto down from the sidewalls when necessary.
5. When the pasta is al dente (check), drain it and vigorously mix in about half the pesto sauce. You only want the slightest hint of sauce to coat all of the pasta surfaces, so no globs are left visible. Freeze the rest of the sauce for another pound of pasta another night. Check for salt and add some if necessary. A minimum sprinkling is probably warranted unless serious health issues are at stake.

notes

1. For some reason the sun dried tomatoes really give pesto an extra kick worth the additional

effort. However, if you are in a traditional pesto mood, just double the basil back to the normal amount and skip the sun dried tomatoes. Tomatoes? Tomatos? Looks like there is a little Dan Quale in all of us now, because the extra ``e" there looks funny to me. In fact it looks funny either way now. English!

2. The butter factor. Several other pesto recipes suggested putting 2 T of room temperature softened butter in the hot drained pasta and mixing it up before adding the pesto. Maybe it lubricates the pasta to help spread out the pesto? We were a bit worried with our initial pesto glob in the pasta—it did not want to deglob—so we had to add some more oil and tomato liquid to loosen the rest up a bit.
3. The veggie manual dicer/slicer. bob bought his from a street vendor in 1980 in the central Munich shopping pedestrian mall. Still there in 1998 when another buy took place for the mother-in-law. Useful little device, and ecologically sound. Until it ends up in a landfill.
4. Did we forget Hans and Hortense? German-Portuguese couple we met by chance in Munich's famous Hofbräuhaus (beer hall and low brow restaurant). Talked for hours. They missed out on Piero's gourmet dinner because they thought they might be out of place in a gathering of old friends. Their mistake. [But bob undertook a missing person search for Hortense's dear American Peace Corps friend Janice met in Niger a dozen years before but lost track of in a later relocation back in the states. Small world, but still big enough to get lost in.]
5. About the avocados. [No "e" here! Don't ask why.] Cut the ripe avocado in half lengthwise. De-pit it. Rub a few drops of olive oil on the exposed flesh of the avocado. Fill the pit hole with mascarpone cheese (not!). You can mound it up a bit over the rest of the exposed interior as well, so that you can get a bit of mascarpone with each bite. Don't do this too often but at least once is a must. [Not!, since it is not really cheese.] Thank Piero.

food, friendships (an interlude)

How did we end up at the [Hofbräuhaus in Munich sharing a table with strangers for lunch](#)? Remarkably one can trace it back to sharing a table with strangers for lunch back in the old US of A many years earlier. Sitting down to eat with strangers is not a frequent occurrence in American society. Unfortunately, since chance encounters that bring people together who ordinarily wouldn't meet can make all the difference in life. Like the chance encounter in Castel Gandolfo waiting for the train to Rome that opened up bob to a whole world of wonderful people including rita's mom's daughter's family and the famous lasagna lesson that never was. Or the later chance encounter on a seven minute stretch of [U-bahn](#) in Munich from Marienplatz ([Hofbräuhaus](#) central) with Michele and her case of mineral water from the Army base canteen at work when they were both still twenty-something. Michele lived at the stop after bob's but not wanting to press for a phone number after only a few minutes of conversation, bob got up to step out of her life forever. And she followed with her case of mineral water which bob offered to carry the kilometer to her place (next stop, remember?), starting a lifelong friendship that ended up putting a [Vitamix](#) superblender into the dr bob kitchen many years later following a chance encounter at a home show. (Michele was in her juicing phase, and had dragged her Vitamix there from Kansas. A sort of culinary Toto.) And then there was the chance encounter with Elfriede on the night train back to Munich from Rome at about the same time that has resulted in many wonderfully artistic photos over the years in her annual christmas note (see the [dr bob annual christmas card department](#)). The unsung joys of public transportation, woefully under appreciated here in the states.

We now flash back to about the time of the first edition of this lifelong "What, ME Cook?" project when early thirtysomething dr bob finally became [professor](#) bob and therefore qualified for lunch at the faculty dining lounge, also open to the grad students in the various master's programs at the university. One department, chemistry, had a doctoral program as well, boosting the number of already acquainted grad students who needed to do lunch, and so did it together. They were regulars at one of the big tables, which usually had a few extra places left.

Although memories of those early days are hazy, bob is a people guy and somehow he naturally gravitated towards this big friendly group of slightly younger academics. Sat down at a table with strangers for lunch. Made friends. Attended their occasional evening grad social parties (food, drink, dancing). For some reason once explained to bob but apparently stored in RAM rather than permanent memory, a pipeline had existed from some Turkish university that regularly pumped Turkish students into this chemistry crowd. bob befriended Ediz, an identical twin, whose sister Deniz came for a long visit from Istanbul. Coincidentally at the same time a couple of bob friends and grad students from Rome came visiting for an extended period nearby. Jürgen (German) and Adrian (Swiss-German), oddly studying physics together in Rome, following their sabbatical taking advisor to the states. Turkey and Germany are sort of an odd couple pair of nations, somehow thrown together by history. The twins had attended a German school so it was natural to introduce all these twenty-something German speaking friends. This was bob's "bringing people together" phase of life. Adrian and Deniz stuck and lasted a few years but long distance relationships are hard (see the dedication to this project). Italy being next door, he ended up with an Italian wife instead, as did Jürgen (whose wedding reception dinner in northern Italy is another incredible food tale), both importing their ladies back to their respective German speaking homelands.

Well, another odd couple of nations are Turkey and Armenia. Whose peoples share some bad blood that still lingers in their collective relationships. Fortunately individuals can be stronger than history. Ironically it was Ediz who introduced bob to ms_ani in her ms_degree chemistry days. Just the two of them at lunch sitting at a small table alone. Who knows where the gang was. And bob came along and sat down and the rest is history. It took a while for the relationship to reach the cooking partner stage, but it was worth the wait. Which included lots of Armenian and middle eastern food as a bonus, some of which we can share with you.

Postscript.

Well, with modern communication starting from the last known academic employer, a combination of voice mail, fax, and e-mail sending took place over a three week period. Since searching for a woman in the United States is a tricky business, considering the not insignificant numbers of women who are tracked down and murdered by former significant others (men), the dr bob detective department was not sure about what kind of cooperation would result. Privacy issues must be weighed first against any possible unforeseen circumstances. He did not press, but let the system grind along. In fact the system worked correctly by finding Janice and putting her into contact with dr bob through her husband (the family technogeek) by e-mail, and bob provided the final connection with e-mail/fax/tel/cellular contact info for Hortense, who again cried with happiness. dr bob felt pretty good too.

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

lentil bulgur pilaf

bob loves barley, but never seems to work it into the menu. Big bulgur, which is size number four on the [bulgur wheat grain scale](#) (1 smallest, 4 biggest), looks remarkably like barley when cooked in pilaf or soup. So when this pilaf dish appeared on his plate at the in-law dinner table, he was sure it was barley and had to be convinced otherwise. Lack of certainty about identification, however, did not interfere with the enjoyment or prevent him from (over) stuffing his face with the stuff, a frequent occurrence when tempted by tasty middle eastern/armenian mom home cooking.

ingredients

phase 1

- 1 c dry lentils
- 2 c water
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/4 t black pepper
- 2 t salt
- 1/2 t cumin
- 1/2 t red pepper (Middle Eastern!)

phase 2

- 1 c boiling water, from a tea kettle
- 1 c bulgur wheat, number 4

phase 3

- 1/4 c olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped

instructions

1. Boil together the phase 1 ingredients covered for about 10 minutes.
2. Add 1 c water and bring to a boil covered again (or add already boiling water to speed this up) and then add the bulgur and simmer on low heat until the water is absorbed (about 30 minutes).
3. Sauté the second onion in olive oil until crisp.
4. Then add the onion oil to the pilaf.
5. Serve with the crisp onion on top (garnish).

notes

1. bulgur is available in Armenian or middle eastern food specialty stores and now even in the national [whole foods](#) chain we often visit.
2. Variations of this recipe are easy. For weekday supper, we skipped the dry lentil part and started directly with the onion, seasonings, and bulgur, then dumped in a 15 oz can of cooked lentils, and a 7.75 oz can of cooked chick peas during the bulgur cooking phase. Terrific.

3. But before ani could stop him, bob, reading this recipe, started shaking in cayenne red pepper, but in fact in all of Isgouhi's recipes, when she says red pepper she really means Middle Eastern red pepper, alias Turkish pepper, sometimes called Aintab pepper after the formerly Armenian city Aintab, now Gaziantep, Turkey, as an [article](#) by famous cookbook writer Paula Wolfert describes at her website (adapted from a [Saveur](#) magazine article) turned up by a search on the keywords "Aintab pepper". Two new Armenian cookbook acquisitions from [Alice Antreassian](#) indicate that this can be reasonably substituted by 3 parts paprika to 1 part cayenne red pepper. And Isgouhi's teaspoon measure really means a heaping teaspoon from the silverware drawer and not a level measuring teaspoon. [This unit misunderstanding doesn't help in trying to reproduce a mother-in-law's cooking...]
4. It turned out so tasty that bob nearly ate [the whole thing](#) with some help from ani. With a [cucumber mint yogurt sauce](#) on the side, and a cucumber tomato salad. Yes!
5. [Illustrations](#) available.

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

lentil soup

The lentil soup recipe came soon after the lentil bulgur pilaf incident. bob had already had eaten a Saturday breakfast/lunch/whatever by the time he dropped by the in-laws for a little family shopping spree at [Bitar's](#), south Philly's Lebanese middle eastern food store, just across the block from the two most famous cheesesteak vendors: [Pat's](#) and Gino's. [Our personal favorite, [Jim's](#) at 4th and South St, is farther north.] Barkev tempts bob with an offer to heat up some homemade lentil soup, which bob tries to resist but quickly gives in to. And even goes for seconds. Good stuff. bob took the rest home for later.

ingredients

phase 1

1 c lentils
5(?) c water

phase 2

1 lb spinach, washed, chopped small
2 medium potatoes, chopped small (1/2 in)
1/2 head garlic, cleaned and pressed

phase 3

1 T tomato paste
1 lemon, juice of
1/2 t black pepper
1/2 t allspice
1/2 t red pepper ([Middle Eastern](#))
1/2 mint
salt (to taste)

phase 4

1/4 c olive oil
12 big onion, chopped

instructions

1. Boil the lentils in water for about 5 to 10 minutes.
2. Then add the spinach, potatoes, and garlic and continue boiling until lentils and potatoes are tender.
3. Then add the tomato paste and spices and boil another 5 to 10 minutes.
4. Sauté the onion until golden brown and then stir in the soup. Boil 5 to 10 minutes longer.
5. Serve.

notes

1. This is a bit imprecise. 5 to 10 minutes? 5 cups of water? Needs some experimentation. Let us know.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

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

pizzoccheri?

Pizzoccheri are a well kept secret of northern Italian cuisine, from the part of Italy at the northern border where they speak Italian with a German accent and make smelly fontina cheese. But a secret that has not escaped [Marcella](#) or the pasta cookbook author whose [book](#) we grabbed in Pier I Imports when we spotted the authentic looking recipe.

The dr bob team had been introduced to pizzoccheri, long buckwheat pasta noodles about fettuccine size but shorter, by [Piero](#), who brought them to us from Italy and showed us how to make the traditional recipe. We forgot to take notes at the time. Years later we had one box left and managed to find a one time buy of another box at our local authentic Italian products store. But we were saving them for a special occasion which never seemed to come. When we discovered them in our local supermarket, we finally decided to buy the smelly cheese and do up a box for no special occasion at all. But the Savoy cabbage took some time to locate. It finally showed up at the same supermarket and the dish was immediately green-lighted. By this time the smelly cheese was also seriously moldy, so it had to be trimmed down a bit. To our chagrin, the expiration dates were respectively 2 and 3 years earlier than the current year. Although we had a brand new box in our hands and several more boxes in stock waiting in the supermarket (not moving fast, as you might imagine), it seemed a shame to waste such a great product. We went with the two year expired box to see what would happen.

Without Piero nearby, we went with the cookbooks and our better judgment. One said half a pound of Savoy cabbage, the other 3 1/2 cups. The cabbage head we had seemed like it was heavier but we didn't stop to weigh it. Once cut up it seemed like more than 3 1/2 cups too but what the hey. We through it all in anyway. The recipes weren't very clear about how the potatoes should be cut up either. Between the two cookbooks and the 3 different brand box abbreviated recipes, we went with the "small cubes" suggestion on one. About 1 cm or 3/8 in on a side, on the average. [Note that since potatoes are not rectangular, this is only a rule of thumb.]

ingredients

boilables

- 1 lb pizzoccheri della [Valtellina](#)
- 1 T salt
- 3 - 4 medium potatoes, cut into small cubes
- 1 small head Savoy cabbage (1/2 lb?, 3 1/2 c?), cut roughly into strips 1/2 in by 2 1/2 in

sauté-ee's

- 2 T unsalted butter
- 2 T olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, sliced
- 6 fresh sage leaves, chopped [or 1/2 t dried]
- 1 leek, chopped [optional, if unavailable]

finishers

- 1/4 t salt
- freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1/2 - 2/3 c grated parmigiano

1/4 -1/3 lb fontina valle d'aosta

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling.
2. Ready the potatoes. Peel if you must, then cube.
3. Wash the cabbage and cut into strips.
4. Cut the cheese into thin slivers.
5. When the water is boiling seriously, dump in the potatoes and salt, cover, return to a boil, and continue uncovered for about 4 minutes.
6. Add the cabbage, cover and bring to a boil again, then continue uncovered for 5 minutes.
7. Add the noodles, cover and bring to a boil yet again and cook 8 - 12 minutes until the pasta is not quite al dente.
8. Meanwhile sauté the garlic, sage and leek in butter and oil until softened up a bit.
9. When the pasta is ready, drain briefly but don't shake out the liquid.
10. Return the pasta to its pot and mix in the sauté mixture, parmigiano, salt and pepper.
11. Put half the mixture in a large enough casserole dish (or a large one and a small one) and cover with half the fontina slivers. Repeat.
12. Put on the top rack of a 400° F preheated oven for 5 minutes to melt the cheese.
13. Then remove and let sit a couple minutes and serve. This is a hearty meal.

notes

1. [Marcella](#) actually prefers Swiss chard stalks (leafy parts removed) to savoy cabbage, but if necessary, one can use whole Swiss chard or even under desperate circumstances spinach according to the more flexible alternatives. However, we don't think it will be the same.
2. If the stinky fontina valle d'aosta is out of the question, regular Italian fontina or even Bel Paese may be substituted perhaps. We've never betrayed our valle d'aosta. [Although its from the Valle d'Aosta region and not the Valtellina region to the east, where they may use caseri cheese instead.]
3. Not only did we survive the 2 year outdated box, but the 3 year one as well.
4. If pizzoccheri are just a pipe dream where you live, both our cookbook references have slightly differing recipes for the fresh pasta, one with eggs, one without. But without trying it first, you'll never be curious enough to go to all that trouble, will you?
5. [Illustrations](#) available.
6. After trying the [new pizzoccheri recipe](#) with sausage a few times, we have been adding 4 links of sweet fennel Italian sausage, skins removed, diced, sautéed with the garlic and sage to add an extra kick to this dish. Increasing the comfort food index a few notches.
7. **2002 update.** This recipe is bullet proof. We find ourselves stretching it a lot each time we do it. Besides the sausage. Extra garlic, pressed into the leek sage butter oil mixture instead of just sliced. Extra sage which we always keep in the freezer ready for this dish. Maybe 12 leaves chopped. Oops, we found ourselves out of leeks when we tried this with some buckwheat gnocchetti della Valtellina we found next to the pizzoccheri on the supermarket shelf in Rome this summer. (Bosco brand from Cepina Valdisotto, usual pizzoccheri recipe on the 500g package.) So two yellow onions finely chopped stood in for them (minus the sausage, which turned out not to be left waiting in the freezer as we had thought). And instead of the broiling routine, we put the whole thing in the oven at 350°

for a while waiting for some in-laws who then did not even show up. Still great for just the two of us. With lots of leftovers. Refrigerates well. Freezes well.

pizzocri.htm: 3-sep-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

leek etc tart/quiche

Okay, we admit it. French cookbooks are glaringly absent from our cooking library, the efforts of Julia Child notwithstanding. But let's face it. French cuisine in America has always been associated with the upper crust. The most expensive, most exclusive restaurants have usually been French. [Like the one in Philly where Ira Einhorn used to hang out before they discovered Holly in a trunk in his apartment, and like the country where he turned up decades later and which tried to save him from his just reward at the hands of the barbaric American justice system.] And the low end? A cheap French restaurant in the USA seems like a contradiction of terms. Unlike Italian which cuts across all economic classes from terrible takeout pizza joints through family style pasta with "gravy" places to the snooty elite ristorante, with everything in between, good and bad.

Still almost everybody here knows that quiche is French, and although we seem to have adopted it on a scale clearly falling short of the universal appeal of pizza (how many takeout quiche businesses have you seen recently?), nonetheless it has a significant following, supposedly avoided only by the stereotypical "real (American) man". After eating a leek tartlet in a rare expensive French restaurant visit, ms_ani was inspired to try this leek tart recipe from our only French cookbook, stretching it a bit more in the quiche direction, though we make no claim to know the difference, if there is one. The original only has egg yolks, naturally the part of the egg with all the cholesterol, so she used the whites too, bypassing the separation step and the wasted whites, and she doubled the liquid dairy component when only one cup seemed a bit inadequate. Once she even made the homemade crust, but it was clearly not worth the effort, since frozen crusts seem to do the job just as well with no fuss, making it possible to do this in much less time.

This basic recipe is easily varied with ingredients on hand. We list three variations created in the dr bob kitchen to give you the general idea. ms_ani gets all the credit, but is disinclined to write up the details.

ingredients

	original	variation 1	variation 2	variation 3	variation 4
flavor stuff					
butter	1/4 c	2-3 T	2-3 T	2-3 T	2-3 T
large leeks¹	4	1	1	1	1
etc¹		4 white mushrooms	1 shallot	1/4 red pepper	1 8.5oz can artichoke hearts
			2 scallions	1/4 yellow pepper	
			1lb fresh asparagus ²	1 small turnip	

dairy

liquid	1 c milk or half&half	1 c milk	1 c milk	2 c heavy cream	2c light cream
		1 c half&half	1 c half&half		
eggs	4 yolks	3 eggs	3 eggs	3 eggs	3 eggs
parmesan cheese	3 T	3T	3T	3T	3T
spices					
salt and pepper³	to taste	to taste	to taste	to taste	to taste
fresh tarragon¹	4 sprigs	4 sprigs	4 sprigs	4 sprigs	4 sprigs
pastry		9 in frozen pie crust	9 in frozen pie crust	9 in frozen pie crust	9 in frozen pie crust
tart/quiche pan	8 in	9 in (24cm)	9 in (24cm)	9 in (24cm)	9 in (24cm)
	¹ chopped				
	² cooked, chopped, tips reserved and arranged on top at end				
	³ freshly ground pepper, of course				

instructions

1. Melt butter in large nonstick pan and saute the leeks.
2. Add the etc items and saute them a bit and let sit.
3. Spray quiche pan with veggie spray and fit the pie crust into the pan.
4. Spread the leek etc saute mixture around the bottom evenly.
5. Mix together the eggs, milk/cream/half&half, tarragon, salt and pepper, and parmesan cheese and pour over leek etc mixture.
6. Bake 35 to 45 minutes or until lightly set and golden at 350° F (180° C).
7. Serve warm.

notes

1. We like the artichoke hearts variation the best, and have also done it with broccoli, and with asparagus and mushrooms simultaneously. Use your imagination.

stazione termini fennel

They say nobody works in Rome, but this is clearly not true. Lately when dr bob hits town, time is too short and there always seems to be too many things to get done at the university, although the ultimate meaning of these academic goings on is anything but obvious. With time pressure pushing bob's mental schedule, it is difficult to make the daytime telephone connections to commit to evening socializing. Perhaps the growing inflexibility of an aging temporary American in Rome, faced with a shortening annual summer visit that can no longer accommodate all the people from his accumulated past friendships. Who to call? When to commit to an evening? The more time goes by, the harder it gets. How to explain all those skipped years?

The day draws to a close. Darkness falls. The computer session terminates. dr bob is alone. The central train station beckons. The cafeteria La Piastra run by the [Ferrovie dello Stato](#) (Italian state train company) is conveniently located at the main train station and city public transportation hub a few blocks away, so one can eat and run, busing or metro-ing off to bed in any direction. The food is not great but it is Italian, immediate, reasonably priced, and maybe even healthy, depending on the choices. No need to wait around endlessly to be served or for the next dish to arrive, alone. And an interesting mix of other customers to study. Many tourists, some Italians, of widely different origin and social status.

So one of these frequent evening dinners offered bob baked/broiled finocchio as a side dish to the meat and chicken dishes he so religiously avoids. bob usually does vegetarian in Italian restaurants. Choosing from pasta, risotto, soup, veggies, fresh mozzarella, etc. The fennel was simple. It seemed to have been baked with butter and parmigiano. bob gave it a try. Liked it. And so back in the states baked fennel was on the agenda for experimentation.

The first attempt was a baked potato and fennel gratin loosely based on a Williams-Sonoma junk mail catalog recipe that just happened along upon bob's return. heavy on cream, and apparently the baking time was too short to tenderize the fennel. The second attempt jettisoned the complications. Steaming the fennel first for about 20 minutes and then broiling it with some butter and parmigiano until browned. Tender. Tasty. We see more fennel in our future.

ingredients

- 1 fennel bulb, trimmed and coarsely chopped
- 2 T melted butter (heavy) or olive oil (lighter) or just olive oil cooking spray (lightest)
- 2 T freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Wash the fennel and trim away the celery like stuff at the top. Cut off the hard bottom and peel the layers off the bulb, cutting the pieces roughly into 2 in by 3/4 in strips.
2. Steam for about 20 minutes until tender when tested with a fork.
3. Spread them out in an oven dish, like a small quiche dish, and drizzle or spray with the melted butter or olive oil and then sprinkle with the grated parmigiano.

4. Broil for about 10 minutes until browned but not burned. (Watch frequently.)

notes

1. Feeds about 2 hungry people as a generous veggie side.
2. Rita's mom apparently does it this way layering the fennel with butter and parmigiano, but **BAKES** it, since according to rita, broiling is an American cooking technique, not Italian. Eliana's mom says you can add some béchamel sauce and finish with a layer of bread crumbs, and that in the final baking phase one can put it in the "grill position" to make a "crosticino" (crust) by browning the bread crumb topping, which sounds like broiling to me. Milvia's mom confirms the béchamel option.
3. In case you are unfamiliar with fennel, it looks like celery from Chernobyl: a big white onion like layered base of celery textured material with little green celery stalk like protrusions shooting out the top.
4. Fennel is the origin of the flavor anise and also of the national alcoholic beverage of Lebanon called Arak. The latter served on the rocks (with ice) in small glasses with equal parts water. Often offered to dr bob before dinner at the in-laws. Where it usually has more of an effect than such a small glass would lead you to believe. And then induces sleep. Fortunately dr bob travels with a designated driver. [*Oops, nevermind... anise and fennel are not from the same plant.*]
5. bob's stazioni termini dining was later raised to a new level by the Jubilee Year 2000 renovations in Rome that brought the [Autogrill](#) Ciao' cafeteria style restaurant to the train station. Fast slow food of remarkable quality.

fennelst.htm: 7-aug-2001 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

bowties with fennel and leeks

Fennel is another one of those veggies that are not exactly exotic but which most ordinary Americans have never themselves consumed as a vegetable. And don't know anyone who has, if asked. Yet supermarkets seem to sell it to someone. And cooking magazines acknowledge it as a legitimate ingredient. And now that our fennel radar is up, we are beginning to notice it more and more.

The e-mail call went out for help on the baked fennel recipe from real Italians who are more fennel aware. [It's a global food world these days.] And a copy went out to dr bob 's mom for light reading. And with her fennel radar up, she found this one in a women's magazine while waiting in a doctor's office. It took a week to find the right moment to give it a try. But when the right moment came, the team was slightly unprepared. No tomatoes. So dr bob made an emergency quick supply run to the nearest supermarket while ms_ani got started. And finished by his return except for the chopped tomato topping. But she assured him that she followed the recipe almost exactly apart from the agreed upon substitution of the missing light cream by a little Italian cooking cream package newly expired and remaining from the summer pre-return flight food shopping spree in Rome a few months before. And except for the standard animal to veggie broth substitution. And except for, well, we'll get to that. So into the oven it went, and out it came, and it was. Terrific. bob wolfed down two big platefuls. So did ani, but slower. With plenty left over for another dinner later in the week. Thanks, mom.

ingredients

the official list

4 medium leeks [1 1/2 lbs]
 2 medium fennel bulbs [1 lb each]
 2 garlic cloves, minced
 1 T sugar
 1 lb bowtie (or gemelli) pasta
 salt
 1 c chicken broth
 1/4 c heavy or whipping cream
 1/4 t fresh ground pepper
 1/2 c grated parmesan cheese
 1 ripe medium tomato, diced 1/4 in

our list

1 big leek
 1 big? bulb fennel
 2 garlic cloves, minced
 1 T sugar
 1 lb bowtie (or gemelli) pasta
 salt
 1 c veggie broth
 1/4 c Italian cooking cream
 1/4 t fresh ground pepper
 1/2 c grated parmesan cheese
 1 ripe medium tomato, diced 1/4 in

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling. Preheat the oven to 400°.
2. Clean the leek(s): get rid of the hard green ends, the root end and any tough outer layers, then slice part way down the stalk along the "seems" at the green end down past where the sand/dirt is hiding and rinse well, and drain. Then slice thin cross-sections and finally

chop. [The original recipe called for cutting each leek lengthwise and then crosswise into 1/4 in wide slices, but we like it chopped finer.]

3. Heat 1 T of the oil in a 12 in nonstick skillet over medium heat and then cook the leeks about 15 min until tender and golden, stirring often.
4. Meanwhile (in between stirring leeks?), trim the top and bottom of each fennel bulb and slice lengthwise in half, removing and discarding the hard core (an unfortunate meeting of words that will probably choke web chaperones accessing this page). Slice the half bulbs crosswise into thin slices.
5. After about 15 min add the fennel, garlic, sugar and remaining 1 T oil to the leeks and cook about 20 min until the fennel is tender and golden, stirring often.
6. Meanwhile, cook the pasta when the water comes to a boil (add salt, follow package instructions). Then drain and return to the pot.
7. When the leek-fennel mixture is tender, add the broth, cream, pepper, 1/2 t salt and all but 2 T parmesan and boil 2 min.
8. Spoon pasta into 4 qt casserole, add the leek-fennel mixture and mix well. Sprinkle the top with the diced tomato and the rest of the parmesan. Bake covered 20 min till hot and bubbly. Garnish with fennel fronds if you like. [Useless final step.]

notes

1. [Good Housekeeping](#), October, 98. [Mom went to the public library to find the magazine again, and after this was finished, we found the [original recipe](#) on their website. Clarifying a couple points from the hastily scribbled down notes converted to e-mail.]
2. Yields 6 main dish servings. Each serving: About 460 calories, 15 g protein, 77 g carbohydrate, 11 g total fat (4 g saturated), 2 g fiber, 17 mg cholesterol, 560 mg sodium.
3. Excellent choice for real pasta lovers.

lkfnlpsta.htm: 17-apr-1998 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

capepperonata calda?

Another veggie dish was needed to round out yet another traditional thanksgiving dinner. Turkey breast, our first bird compromise but one which maximized what the crowd wanted without leaving excessive leftovers, then chestnut stuffing, garlic leek mashed red potatoes and porcini turkey gravy. Baked fennel but not enough. Stuffed grape leaves from the mother-in-law. Clearly a bit more color was in order and something substantial to fill out the menu without encouraging excessive consumption, always a problem for this meal. Caponata, the Sicilian eggplant dish, suggested itself from bob's memory of some variation he vaguely remembered having once, maybe in Naples, perhaps confused with pepperonata, the sweet pepper analog. As an American unconstrained by Italian food rules, merging these memories in a new improvisation was no problem. Checking out two traditional Italian recipes by Americans who'd lived in Florence provided the outline for a cold dish one referred to as a "relish". But both had wine vinegar in them, the first ingredient to be vetoed by bob for the warm version. One even had roasted red peppers in it, but not enough for bob's taste. The spices were adjusted by the mother-in-law specialist. The result was not only a hit at thanksgiving, but was quickly repeated soon after with equal enthusiasm.

ingredients

3	small diameter eggplants (for fewer dark seeds)
	olive oil for frying
2 - 3	large stalks celery, chopped coarsely
1	large onion, chopped coarsely
3 T	olive oil
6 - 7	plum tomatoes, chopped
2 T	(heaping) tomato paste
0.4 lb	garlic saturated roasted red peppers, chopped (about 3/4 c)
4 1/4 oz (119 g)	chopped ripe olives
3 T	capers
1 T	sugar
	salt (to taste)
	freshly ground black pepper (to taste)
1 T	lemon juice
	optional hint of cayenne red pepper

instructions

1. Peel the eggplants and slice crosswise into 1/2 - 5/8 inch thick sections. Put them in a colander salting each layer and put a weighted plate on top to press them for 20 minutes or so. Then rinse, dry, and cut roughly into cubes.
2. Sauté the eggplant cubes all together in a large pot.

3. Meanwhile sauté the onion and celery in olive oil about 10 minutes.
4. Then add the tomatoes, tomato paste, red peppers, olives, capers, and sugar and cook on medium heat for about 20 minutes.
5. Add the eggplant cubes, salt, pepper, lemon juice, stir well and heat through if the eggplant was done earlier, then remove from heat.

notes

1. Serve warm.
2. You can substitute real fresh green Italian (or otherwise gourmet) olives (maybe a third of a cup of de-pitted chopped product) for the canned olives we had on hand the first time we tried this, as we did the second time.

capepper.htm: 18-apr-1999 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

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.

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. Scaldate abbondante acqua, al
bollire salatela e unitevi le patate e i
broccoletti. Fate riprendere il bollire 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](#)]

2000

y2k

the cooking channel strikes

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

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

bob and ani do lunch (well)

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

wine outlaws (again)

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

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

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

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

dr bob: ahead of his time?

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

ps

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

fresh pasta with aglio, olio e prezzemolo

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

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

kazan kebob (stuffed eggplant kebob)

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

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

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

ingredients

eggplant

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

kebob filling

3/4 - 1 lb ground beef

1 medium onion, chopped

1 c fresh parsley, chopped

4 - 5 medium cloves garlic, pressed

1 large or 2 medium tomatoes, chopped

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

2 t mint

1 t allspice

2 t paprika

1/8 t cayenne red pepper

1/4 t meat tenderizer

2 t salt

3/4 t black pepper

1 1/2 T tomato paste

1 lemon, juice of

sauce

5/8 c water

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

pizzoccheri mano a mano

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

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

notes

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

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

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

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

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

fettuccine al tartufo (with mushroom truffle sauce)

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

lightening up (the tartufo sauce)

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

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

notes

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

urbani update

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

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

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

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

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

yogurt mint soup (with kibbeh)

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

soup ingredients

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

mango yoplait cheesecake

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

crust

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

base

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

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

topping

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

instructions

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

notes

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

mango (= aam) lassi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

pasta

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

sauce

1 lb fresh asparagus, tough ends trimmed

1 t finely grated fresh lemon zest

1/4 c extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 c freshly grated parmigiano

salt and pepper to taste

optional bread crumbs and scallops

1.5 c bay (or sea) scallops

1/4 c bread crumbs

instructions

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

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

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

notes

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

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

lemon garlic cream sauced farro fettuccine

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

notes

1. Was that too terse?

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

pasta and potatoes

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

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

pasta e patate (quella si' che merita!)

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

Buon appetito!

Translation:

pasta and potatoes (this is really worth it!)

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

last few minutes of cooking.

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

notes

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

e-mail from rome

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A presto.

Eliana

or in other words:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Soon,

Eliana

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

goat cheese and sundried-tomato mashed potatoes

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

garlic sauteed spinach

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

parmesan crusted halibut

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

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

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

lamb stew (*keshkeg*) herriseh

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

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

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

notes

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

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

salsa tartufata on the road

or Rome Fiumicino: the 7am departure story



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The answer: Business Class.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Window seat. Business class.

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

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

Postscript

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

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

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

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

dr bob's luggage imports

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

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

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

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

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

hamburger helper bulgur pilaf with cool cucumber sauce

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

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

ingredients

phase 1

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

phase 2

- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped

phase 3

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

side sauce

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

cumin mixed-meat miniburger/balls

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

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

ingredients

meatballs

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

tomato sauce

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

leftover armenian rice with fake meat stirfry

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

butternut squash rutabaga puree

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

escarole with white beans and garlic

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

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

notes

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

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

strawberry mango (dulce de leche, whatever) yogurt cheesecake

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

bottom only crust

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

batter

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

thin topping

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

dulce de leche cheesecake: the upgrade

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

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

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

ingredients

bottom only crust: 10 inch crowd pleaser

3/4 c graham cracker crumbs

1/2 c hazelnut crumbs

1/4 c sugar (optionally unrefined)

6 T = 3/4 stick butter, melted

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

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

batter

4 packages 8oz cream cheese

1 c sugar

3 T flour replaced by cornstarch

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

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

1 T Frangelico

4 eggs

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

topping

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

1/4 c sugar

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

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

5. [Illustrations](#) available.

post mortem

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

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

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

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

batter additive: no hazelnut liqueur this time

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

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

the verdict.

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

2006 update: the saga continues

[prune yogurt debuts in America.](#)

2001

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

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

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

instructions

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

notes

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

4. [Illustrations](#) available.

postscript

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

the mushroom option

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

season!]

the switch

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

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

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

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

carrot celery chestnut soup

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

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

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

ingredients

roastables

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

sautee-ables

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

simmerables

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

finishers

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

waiting for gabriella's lasagna no more

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

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

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

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

ingredients

pasta

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

bechamel sauce

8 to 9 c milk

2 sticks = 16 T butter

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

Bolognese meat sauce

meat saute group

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

food process group

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

sauce group

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

cheese

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

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

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

Feeds about 16 people.

wfglsgn3.htm: 16-aug-2006 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

chocolate chip cookies: the comparison test

traditional tollhouse versus puffed-up lower fat

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

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

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

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

ingredients (comparison test data)

trad 1/2 trad puffed

dry stuff

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

wet stuff / sugar

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

finishers

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

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

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

marinate?

1 lb chicken breasts
salt and pepper

flour it

flour
touch of salt, pepper, paprika

saute it

2 T olive oil

moisten it

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

instructions

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

yogurt-garlic sauce

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

action:

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

notes

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

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

potato salad from isgouhi's mom

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

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

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

ingredients

root group

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

additional liquid group

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

garnishing

2 T chopped fresh Italian (flat leaf) parsley

instructions

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

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

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

notes

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

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

san pietro e paolo purple pizza (crema di radicchio)

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

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

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

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

ingredients

[to be found]

instructions

1. [to be found]

notes

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

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

garlic salmon filets

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

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

ingredients (for 4 adults)

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

instructions

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

notes

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

garlic beer tilapia for two

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

1. Press the garlic clove into a nonstick pan.

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

notes

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

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

scrambled eggs and armenian sausage (sujuk)

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

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

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

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

ingredients

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

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

instructions

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

notes

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

ravioli with sage butter cream sauce

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

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

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

ingredients

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

strawberry tiramisu

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

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

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

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

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

ingredients

puree group

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

batter group

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

cake layers

- 24 imported crisp ladyfingers (savoiard cookies)

topping

- bittersweet or semisweet chocolate shaving (1 oz)

instructions

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

notes

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

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

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

spinach risotto

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

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

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

ingredients

1)

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

2)

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

3)

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

instructions

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

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

notes

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

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

mixed winter squash puree

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

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

ingredients

above ground veggies

- 2 acorn squash
- 1 red kuri squash

below ground veggies

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

spices

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

instructions

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

notes

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

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

2. [Illustration](#).

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

2002

crème brûlée blues

creme brulee (let's just drop the accents!) had been an occasional restaurant treat on the dr bob menu later in life, but the thought of 2 cups of heavy cream and 8 eggs in one dessert was a powerful incentive for a health-conscious aging bob to avoid actually making one himself. Still this did not prevent him from noticing a hazelnut creme brulee recipe in the newspaper, filing it in the cooking archives, and remembering exactly where it was stored for a sizable chunk of a decade. Once the secretary of the modern languages department next to math somehow crossed bob's path and mentioned creme brulee, so bob brought her a copy of the recipe. She never made it of course.

Way back in the mid nineties, bob and ani made a little road trip out to Napa Valley while visiting the Bay Area (on the excuse of academic business no doubt). The first winery on the road entering the valley is [Domaine Chandon](#), the American wing of Moet-Chandon famous for its Dom Perion champagne, one bottle (1983) of which hung around for one decade after the bobandani merger (a wedding gift from a guest who should have been there as the best man) until finally on New Year's Eve 2001(2), the decision was made to use it, since the right occasion never seemed to arrive. But to chill it bob stuck it in the freezer over at the sister-in-law's and forgot about it. It froze. No big pop was the first indication. A little came out to taste. bob stuck it in a pot of water to hasten the thaw, but the damage was done. Flat. What is that expression... pearls before swine? Oh well.

Back to Napa Valley. This winery had actually donated a whole lot of pretty good sparkling wine (you can't call it champagne if it wasn't made in that region of France) at cost for the toast at a [scientific meeting](#) the summer before. The missing wedding guest had struck the deal for a big international GR (that's general relativity) meeting at Stanford named after a friend of Einstein, but that's another story. So it was lunch time and the winery had a French restaurant. Not cheap but what else do a couple of DINKS have to do on their first visit to Napa Valley besides taking the wine tour (we did). So not only was this lunch really terrific, but bob went for the creme brulee filled crepe with fresh berries dessert that left a lifetime impression on both ani and bob, even though ms_ani is not much of a dessert person.

Then there is the little matter of a weakness for kitchen gadgets. Kitchen torches started showing up in the late nineties basically for the sole purpose of glazing an occasional creme brulee. Which bob was not going to make, so had no need for. This time it was ani who fell for it. A little dinner for a coworker and her husband and recent addition to their previously carefree existence. We're in [Williams-Sonoma](#) after lunch, the Saturday of the dinner. Ani goes for the torch, bob picks up a little overpriced [all about creme brulee book](#). Browsing the book, it is clear that it is already too late to follow the timing suggested by the recipes, but so what.

Reaching home, the hazelnut creme brulee recipe is extracted, the torch instruction recipe is read together with the book base recipe and some cross-merging is done. First downsizing the 8 eggs to 4 as was suggested by the book, which also claims that whether you use half-and-half (10.5%), light cream (18%), whipping cream (30%), heavy cream (36%) or double cream (48%), it will not affect the taste. And following the "loosely cover the water bath containing the creme-brulee mini-dishes with water half way up there sides with aluminum foil" instruction that came with the torch recipe, proceeded. The result would need a quick cool down since time was

running out. The timer sounds. The oven door opens. The aluminum foil is turned back... only to reveal a [water creme brulee mixture](#) that was the same inside and outside the mini-dishes. Couldn't have been a worse unforeseen disaster. Bob scooped enough of the creme brulee lumps into one mini-dish to salvage [at least one](#) for experimenting with the torch later. And went off to the French pastry shop for a substitute dessert.

Later we realize that W-S sold us the torch without warning us that it contained no fuel, so even if we had not been derailed by one fate, another would have caught us anyway. Turns out you have to buy a little canister of the butane fuel in a cigar store. Later in the week we held our noses long enough to make the buy at the local mall and return to fill the torch. And did the glaze thing. Not so hard. The result was edible, but somehow the expected strong hazelnut taste just wasn't there. Maybe another time.

We adjusted the recipe downwards in health impairing ingredients, based on the typical recipes found in the book, which suggests 8 eggs for 2 c heavy cream.

ingredients

original hazelnut recipe:

2 c heavy cream
 1/3 c half-and-half
 10 large egg yolks
 1/2 c blanched, toasted hazelnuts, coarsely chopped
 pinch of salt
 1/2 c granulated sugar
 1 T vanilla extract
 1/2 c hazelnut liqueur
 1/4 c light brown sugar for glazing

our modification:

2 c half and half
 4 large egg yolks
 1/4 c hazelnut fine crumbs
 pinch of salt
 3/8 c sugar
 1 T vanilla extract
 1/4 c hazelnut liqueur
 1/4 c light brown sugar for glazing

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. In a medium saucepan combine the cream and half-and-half or just use all half-and-half hoping to minimize the fat damage, and scald it. That means it just starts to expand but don't let it overflow.
3. Add the hazelnuts (maybe this will calm it down), remove from heat and allow to cool to room temperature. Once cool, reheat to a scald.
4. Meanwhile combine the yolks, salt, sugar and vanilla in a large bowl and whisk until the color lightens, sort of like doing zabaglione.
5. Slowly add the hot cream with the nuts while continuing to whisk until smooth.
6. Add the liqueur and strain through a fine sieve.
7. Fill your 4 custard dishes to about 1/4 in below the top edge or 6 (to 8?) ramekins (traditional creme brulee dishes) to a bit less below the top edge since they are only about 7/8 in deep (and 4 in in diameter).

8. Place the dishes in a hot water bath (see below) and set in the lower third of the oven.
9. Cook until lightly tanned on top and a skewer inserted into the center is hot to the touch, about 25 to 30 minutes.
10. Remove to a rack to cool.
11. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.
12. To serve, evenly spread the brown sugar across the top of the custard for browning with the torch. Observe your torch instructions for doing the torching, and beware of the alcohol component which is inflammable so be VERY careful...
13. Allow to cool a few minutes by rechilling before serving.

notes

1. Philly Inquirer, March 9, 1994. Four servings, full fat maxi-cholesterol version per serving: *Cal 691!*, *74% from fat*, *Fat 57 g*, *Prot 10 g*, *Carbo 37 g*, *Cholest 685 mg*, *Sodium 114 mg*.
2. The standard creme brulee recipe seems to be for 2 cups of your choice of cream product, but for 4 people, a half recipe is fine for 4 ramikins.
3. A hot water bath means a baking dish of some kind with a paper towel in the bottom (prevents sliding), which you place the creme brulee dishes in and fill half way up their sides with warm water.
4. The brown sugar is supposed to be dried...by spreading out on a baking sheet and putting it in the oven at 300° for 5 minutes. Then remove and cool. Finally put in a small zip-lock plastic bag and crush the sugar with a rolling pin. Store extra in an airtight container in the fridge. Sounds like a hassle. Granulated sugar is easy.
5. DINK = double income no kids.

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

black bass dick's way

We're fish novices. We told him so. But we know food jargon. So when we asked Dick what to do with the black bass filets at the Ardmore Seafood counter in the Eastern Main Line Farmer's Market in Suburban Square one Saturday afternoon, he gave us the long story and we took it all in attentively. Fish with service. Great fish according to Dick. He cleaned each fillet for any remaining bones.

So the story was a simple butter capers and white wine sauce, fish started in pan and finished in the oven, served with freshly squeezed lemon juice and some balsamic vinegar spiced black bean sauce on the side. It was enticing. We went for it.

ingredients

2.8 lb = 7 cleaned (deveined) black bass fillets = 28 bucks
[5 to 7 oz per person]
salt and pepper
butter, olive oil for sautéing [just enough, not too much]
1/4 c capers
1/2 c white wine
more butter (2--3T)
lemon quarters for serving

instructions

1. Clean the fillets by rinsing in water and then pat them dry with paper towels.
2. Salt and pepper them.
3. Sauté 2 fillets at a time in a nonstick pan with some olive oil and butter, flesh side up first only 2 minutes, then skin side down 2 minutes or less (it starts to curl up).
4. Then remove to a baking pan (glass or ceramic) coated with cooking spray. Repeat until all fillets are done. We used 4 +3 in two 8x12 in ceramic dishes.
5. Add the capers and the wine and evaporate off. Then add 2 T butter. Melt. This part is the deglazing step.
6. Pour the caper butter sauce over the fillets and put in a preheated (350°) oven for 5 minutes max to finish cooking the interior.
7. Serve with freshly squeezed lemon (each recipient can handle this part) and some balsamic vinegar laced black bean sauce on the side.

balsamic vinegar laced black bean sauce

1 28oz can black beans, drained, sort of rinsed
4 t balsamic vinegar
1/4 t cayenne red pepper
1 T olive oil
salt to taste

1. Puree in a food processor.
2. Put in a small ceramic oven dish with cover.
3. Leave in the oven during preheating and fish baking to warm it up.
4. This could be a little more flowing in texture. Wonder how you could achieve that?

notes

1. Dick had suggested serving this on a "bed of black bean sauce", but we did not want to freak out our in-laws and we didn't make enough anyway so we just served a heaping tablespoon on the side. Eating the fish and sauce in the same bite loses the fish flavor so it is best ingested with alternative forkfuls. The black beans could be easily used for other purposes since they are pretty tasty this way.
2. Excellent. Thanks, Dick.
3. We served this with fresh penne and vodka sauce first and thin asparagus and brussel sprouts on the side, after a prosciutto di san daniele and gallia melon appetizer. So we turned off the oven and opened the door a bit while we were occupied with the appetizer and pasta courses. Did not do damage.

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

little armenian rings (easter cookies: *zadgva kahke*)

This is a tasty little treat that is not too sweet, but satisfies the munchy craving nicely.

ingredients

dry stuff

- 5 c all-purpose flour
- 1/2 c sugar
- 3 t (heaping) baking powder
- 1 t mahleb

wet stuff

- 1c milk (water if no milk around), slightly warmed
- 1 c butter (2 sticks), melted
- 1 c vegetable oil

finisher stuff

- 1 egg, beaten

instructions

1. Mix together the dry ingredients.
2. Combine the wet ingredients.
3. Mix the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients.
4. Let rest for a half hour or more.
5. Make 1 inch diameter dough balls.
6. [Roll each one with flat open hands](#) until it is about a 5 or 6 inch long cylinder and make it into a little doughnut by twisting it into a ring and pinching the ends together.
7. Place equally spaced on cookie sheets.
8. [Brush with beaten egg](#).
9. Bake in a preheated 300° oven for 20 to 25 minutes until [golden brown](#).

notes

1. [Secrets of Cooking](#) has two variations of this theme, both with sesame seeds but Isgouhi dropped the seeds because they get in your teeth. The same reason I rarely eat popcorn.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

pascale's quiche lorraine

quiche lorraine was apparently born in the [Alsace-Lorraine](#) regions of France bordering on Germany. These two regions are often linked together, Alsace the richer one on the border and Lorraine the poorer one just inside, probably since the pair kept getting stolen back and forth between the two nations in their numerous wars. The capital city of Alsace is Strasbourg, pascale's hometown, so she is probably a reliable source for an authentic version of this well known classic which she served to us in her tiny little Paris apartment in a cheap lightweight Teflon-coated 30cm (12in) diameter quiche pan. One of which she helped us acquire before returning home. The recipe came later by email but required some translation / modification.

- Here is the receipe of the Quiche Lorraine:

Mix together in a bowl :

200 g of shredded mozzarella (in france you would take: gruyère)
300 g ham cutted in very small cubes
150 g "lardons" (I don't know the translation, may be you know Ani ...)
300 g of white mushrooms cutted in small pieces

and transfer onto the pie crust in the tefal baking plate

In the bowl, mix together :

4 eggs,
15 dl of milk
30 dl of heavy cream
1 spoon flour,
salt, pepper and grounded nutmeg

Pour the mixture onto the pie and bake it at 200° Celsius. Than Enjoy it
!!!!

I miss you

love
Pascale and Arnaud

We'll overlook the mozzarella remark and forget about the untranslatable lard ingredient, clearly more fat anyway. So here is what we actually did with this input.

ingredients

crust

1 frozen pie crust round, thawed

flavor additives

8 oz = 1/2 lb gruyere cheese, grated

4 - 6 oz = 1/4 - 1/3 lb ham, cubed small
8 oz = 1/2 lb white mushrooms, chopped, sauteed in:
2 T butter

custard

4 eggs
2 c light cream or half and half
1 T flour
1/2 t nutmeg
salt and pepper to taste

instructions

1. Prepare the pie crust in the bottom of the quiche pan as directed on the package (prebaking about 15 minutes at about 425°).
2. Meanwhile grate the cheese, chop the ham, clean and chop the mushrooms and saute them in the butter until soft.
3. Mix together the custard ingredients in a large bowl.
4. Arrange the flavor additives evenly on the pie crust bottom and then pour the custard mixture over them.
5. Bake about 30 minutes at 400°.
6. Test for doneness by inserting a knife or other sharp instrument into the center of the quiche. Done when it comes out "clean".
7. Serve immediately.

notes

1. [Illustrations](#) available. Very tasty. We'll be doing more quiche after this.
2. Get your ham at the deli counter. Ask for a 1/4 in slice of a high quality precooked ham. That should be about right. No need to have too much pig in your quiche.
3. Impatiently waiting for the email recipe, we gave a try to an appealing recipe from [epicurious.com](#) which seemed typical: 6 eggs and 1 2/3 c cream/milk, so we were surprised that only 4 eggs are really necessary with a bit more liquid. Of course, having reduced the cholesterol, one can also lower the fat in the liquid component as well. You probably can get away with using all lowfat milk instead.
4. This can be done the day before and reheated in the oven for later serving. The microwave is ruled out if you use a metal quiche pan as we did, but not if you use a ceramic pan instead.
5. Serves 6–8 if not the entire meal.

vegetarian option

We [later](#) tried this as a vegetarian dish by replacing the onion by one leek and the ham by chopped red (half) and yellow (half) sweet peppers. A very tasty alternative that surprised bob's skeptical expectations of ani's ingredient switch. The leek substitution emerged from our love for the [leek tart](#). And the fact that we had a leek and no onion when this transformation took place the first time. Flexibility feeds creativity?

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

cappuccino cheesecake

Over the years as coffee became more and more to bob's liking, the idea of doing a cappuccino cheesecake lingered in the back of his mind but somehow the thought of just adding instant espresso powder to the cheesecake batter seemed a bit unacceptable, for reasons that were not easily put into words. We've shown our eager willingness to take shortcuts on many occasions in the past, but this one just wasn't happening. Until the seductive food photography of a luscious specimen on a deep chocolate high top crust caught bob's eye in a quick in-store scan of the latest William-Sonoma oversized seasonal food magazine [Taste](#). This was the one.

A suitable Saturday night target dinner soon presented itself. Friday afternoon the head chef tears himself away from his office a few hours early in a rare escape from workaholism. Home to memorize the needed ingredient list for items not on hand. Off to the local supermarket, once a local family owned chain but recently gobbled up by one of those ugly mega-corporate food chains that shut off bob's supply of recipe ready hazelnuts in no short order. Home with the catch, bob finds that once again not writing down a list has proved to be a mistake—the instant espresso "preferably Medaglio d'Oro"—had slipped his mind. Back to the stealth Safeway (it retained its local name) and no instant espresso powder of any kind! 5:30pm and 30 minutes till closing at Carlino's—maybe they'd have something authentic. But Friday traffic from hell is in full swing in the suburbs and after a false start east confirming the hopelessness of the attempt, bob turns west towards the upscale supermarket alternative—maybe they have something acceptable.

Along the way it occurs to him that he could grab a treat of oven-ready prepared escargot (snails) from the French pastry shop which had recently been offering a few French imports not in the usual pastry/bread/chocolate lineup of the business. Yeah, but how do you get those little suckers out of their shell after you bake them, he asks. Easy. Use a pickle fork. Back on the road bob realizes he forgot to carefully read the handwritten sign of baking instructions: "Back at 350° for ... minutes." Absentmindedness strikes again, but if it hadn't struck the first time, there wouldn't be any snail passengers at this point. We'll just have to fake it.

The moment of truth arrives. Will this upscale store have some decent substitute for the Medaglio d'Oro espresso powder? A miracle. No substitute needed. There it is. And bob grabs a jar of caramel sauce he spots just in case as a backup.

This cheesecake seems to have an alarmingly high amount of butter and fat as cheesecakes go, but it is not a recipe to compromise on with lower fat shortcuts, at least not before doing it once to see how it's really supposed to turn out. The story continues in the instructions.

ingredients

crust

2 sticks = 8oz = 1/2 lb cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
1/2 c sugar
1 1/4 c all-purpose flour
1/4 c rice flour

1/2 c cocoa powder
large pinch salt

batter

3 8oz pkgs = 1 1/2 lb cream cheese, softened
1 c sugar
4 eggs
1 lb = 2 c sour cream
2 T instant espresso, preferably Medaglia d'Oro

caramel glaze

(another stick of butter was here along with some heavy cream)
skip this in production: just buy some caramel sauce (fat free!)

serving touch

high quality cocoa powder dusting

instructions

1. This [overthick crust](#) is really a thin dense brownie-like layer base that you can do ahead of time. At least that's what it looked like when it exited the oven. Williams-Sonoma tell you to get out your standing mixer with the paddle attachment, throw all the crust ingredients in and mix at low speed until the dough "comes together" (like the Beatles' song no doubt). Everybody with one of those big expensive standing mixers with a paddle attachment in your kitchen, raise your hands. Okay, the rest of us, read on.
2. We pulled one stick of butter from the fridge and the other from the freezer. Cold and colder. To get started bob fed the butter sticks down the tube into the food processor with the slicing blade which worked pretty well except that the resulting slices all stuck together again. On to plan B. bob figured one of those multiple wire hand flour and fat pie crust dough blenders could cut up the butter and then chop it into the flour mixture which had already been whisked together in a large bowl. But the butter is apparently still too cold to yield easily to this solution. bob insists. After a long struggle, the butter ends up chopped evenly into the flour mixture as hoped so he begins working the dough with one hand squeezing and turning. But there was no way this dough was gonna "come together". Still too dry. The standing mixer must have to work a miracle to reach this state.
3. bob adds 1/4 c cold water sprinkling it a bit at a time with the one hand squeezing and turning, squeezing and turning. Patiently. It starts coming together. Finally it arrives. A big chocolate dough ball.
4. Preheat the oven to 300°.
5. Next they say "roll the dough" into a 9-inch spring-form pan base. As in roller pin rolling, huh? No way. Memories of the similar [bavarian apple torte](#) sugar dough crust's failure to cooperate immediately come to mind decades later. bob just plops the blob down in the pan with the sides attached and gently convinces the dough to flatten out evenly with one hand pressing the flesh, finishing it off with the chicken breast [pounder](#) on a stick. [See note below.]
6. Bake the crust 30 minutes. Remove and let cool completely, say about 30 minutes. Doesn't it look like a low rise brownie? [At this point bob went on his espresso powder mission.]
7. Now for the batter. [Re-preheat the oven to the same temperature again if too much time passes between these steps.] Dump the sugar in a large bowl and add the room temperature cream cheese. Those of you with the standing mixer can figure out how to let it do the work. The rest of us, beat the cream cheese and sugar together on low with electric beaters

- until smoothly blended together.
8. Add the eggs one at a time, beating each one into the batter until it disappears.
 9. Beat in the sour cream and espresso on low until smooth. What a beautiful shade of cappuccino color, and the espresso powder really does dissolve nicely. Quality stuff?
 10. Pour the batter over the crust in the spring-form pan and jiggle it to a smooth level surface with a spatula.
 11. Get out one of those old used [aluminum baking pans](#) from the Thanksgiving stuffing. To be on the safe side we put the spring-form pan on a large square of oversized aluminum foil and scrunched up the sides to make it waterproof. Then place it in the baking pan and put in the oven. Pour hot water in the pan until it reaches halfway up the side of the spring-form pan. Slide the rack into the oven and close.
 12. Bake 1 1/4 – 1 1/2 hours. To test doneness, "gently shake the pan". The cake should be set from the center to the edge, but not dry. Touching the center is also allowed. [It took us 1 3/4 hours of baking time to be convinced.]
 13. Remove and let cool at room temperature for 30 minutes. Then refrigerate at least 1 hour. [Overnight!] Check out that beautiful baked cheesecake surface. Must be the water-bath lower temperature baking.
 14. Almost serving time. At this point you are supposed to make the brown sugar/ butter/ cream caramel glaze. We say skip it—caramel sauce is much better. We did it like they said and the result was pretty ugly. When it cooled, a lot of fat separated on top like aged gravy, and what was underneath looked like sludge. The taste was not there either. We dumped it.
 15. Be careful when you remove the sides, running a knife around the edge first to free the cake. No sour cream topping to cover up cracks if the surface sticks to the side as you expand them away as almost happened to us, but we were able to free the one stuck part.
 16. Dust the surface with cocoa in one of those powder shakers. Serve with caramel sauce drizzled over the slice and on the side.

notes

1. The first thing you will notice if you don't read ahead to this note is that the crust sticks to the pan bottom like superglue. It is difficult to cut through all the way to the pan and if you have a nonstick pan, you don't want to cut the pan surface. Instead use parchment paper to line the bottom before putting in the crust dough. Trace out the pan bottom on the paper and cut it round exactly to fit, then put the pan sides on and then the dough in. This way you can easily remove the cheesecake entirely from the pan and put it on a wooden cutting board when ready to serve. Check out a [slice](#). Or the [source](#) of the slice.
2. You will need a very thin sharp knife to cut the pieces cleanly. By coincidence the ultimate cheesecake knife had just arrived in the mail via an internet purchase: a [crystalized titanium 6.5 inch chef's knife](#) [Boker brand]. Since the cake was half gone by this time a week later, bob was able to wedge a spatula under the crust and get most of it out of the pan intact and onto the cutting board. This knife is so amazing, and so perfect for slicing through a cheesecake including hard crusts. It is the thinnest knife you can imagine and the cake hardly notices it going through.
3. We had bought caramel sauce in a jar and it was highly viscous (did not flow easily). By the second serving night, the light bulb went off (brilliant idea) and we popped the open jar (metal top, you know) into the microwave for 30 seconds on high. Loosened right up. We spooned it over the plate easily. Being warm was also a nice touch. If you buy it in a

- plastic container maybe you can just squeeze it out instead. [Yes, this is the way to go.]
4. So what is the verdict? The guests at the initial serving raved. Not too sweet they said (obviously not cheesecake fans). Fantastic. (Okay, we're improvising the comments from memory.) But bob's first impression recalled coffee ice cream from the days before he opened up to coffee. Straight coffee ice cream is still not a favorite. This has a strong coffee taste. But a week later the cake tasted even better to ani, and by this time even bob was convinced. Just took a little time to be won over. And the aging really did seem to improve the flavor. If you like cheesecakes and like coffee, go for it.
 5. The [original recipe](#) is on-line at Williams-Sonoma [recipe from *Layers of Delight* by Emily Lughetti, photos by Anna Williams, *Taste*, Spring 2002]. But trust us, we are true amateur cook recipe testers. Learn from our experience.
 6. [Illustrations](#) available.

2006 update

Four years later Paul makes the request again for his birthday. [Actually a few other requests had been made in the intervening years, but the cheesecake team had gotten a bit out of practice and and was not delivering product so easily anymore.] A few nights before, the evening after-work cake execution deed is started. But no cocoa in the cupboard! bob goes out to Whole foods for a superior European brand. A 30 minute delay. All the dry stuff is in the Kitchenaid mixer, but bob forgot to read ahead. Sour cream in the batter, but of course no sour cream on hand. Ani takes over and turns on the mixer while bob goes back out to a local Wawa for the dairy product. Upon return, she does not report any troubles. The bottom layer is successfully in the pan, and goes into the oven for 30 minutes and then into the refrigerator for say 15 minutes while the batter is mixed. The clock is running so in goes the batter and back into the oven in the biggest roasting pan we have, wrapped in foil to prevent the water bath from seeping in. An hour and 3/4 or so. Then out and into the refrigerator.

The dusting of the surface with cocoa we left until serving time, doing the individual slices. A few eaters complained of too much dusting on the top. Maybe the dry cocoa at serving time should be kept to a minimum. But check out the beautiful cappuccino coloring of the [unadorned cake](#). The water bath seems to prevent cracking very nicely. Sometimes a hassle is worth the price.

pretty good cauliflower leek gratin

[Cook's Illustrated](#) takes a sort of physicist approach to cooking. They focus on a small number of recipes in each issue and completely tear them apart, test many variations, and draw analytic conclusions from the process about the best way to proceed and why. Usually bob snags it on impulse when he sees a topic that touches some food nerve. It should really be a subscription mag but the dr bob team is already unable to deal with the current load. Best New York Cheesecake was the hook that got bob to pull the issue with this recipe. Leeks are a dr bob cooking team weakness and cauliflower is a substantial veggie favorite that needs partners. This one showed promise.

Oscar night 2002 provided the occasion to implement while the issue was still current, an unusual event in an endless post-it marking process of recipe after recipe that life never seems to allow time for revisiting. Ani was busy with a work presentation, so it was a solo effort. Living up to its expectation, accompanied by a wonderful Cuvee `Le Charnay' Menetou-Salon by Jean-Max Roger, a French white wine we'll probably never see again, picked for us by our wine outlaw facilitators at the [Princeton Corkscrew](#). Coincidentally a major location for the current Oscar contender in six categories. Princeton that is. Princeton math in particular. A story bob knew something about from firsthand experience.

We modified this recipe out of laziness, taking a shortcut with the topping, reducing the cream fat content and therefore disqualifying our version as "the best ever". But "pretty good" is not a bad alternative for us impatient amateurs.

ingredients

- 1 large cauliflower, trimmed into small pieces
- 2 T unsalted butter
- 1 medium shallot, mince (about 2 T)
- 3 small leeks, cleaned and chopped finely
- 1 T all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 c light cream
- pinch nutmeg
- pinch cayenne
- 1/8 t freshly ground black pepper
- 1 t minced fresh thyme leaves
- 1/2 c gruyere cheese, grated
- breadcrumbs to coat top
- 2 T parmigiano
- spray olive oil to dampen breadcrumbs

instructions

1. Boil pasta water in the usual pot, add 1 T salt, and throw in the cauliflower pieces as if they were pasta. Cook about 3 or 4 minutes until tender but still crunchie inside (al dente?). Drain and rinse under cold water in a colander until cooled down (to prevent them

- from continuing on to a mush state). Leave them there for now.
2. Sauté the shallot and leeks in butter until softened, about 2 minutes.
 3. Add the garlic and cook about 30 seconds.
 4. Stir in the flour until combined, about 1 minute.
 5. Whisk in the cream and bring to a boil.
 6. Stir in the spices and gruyere cheese until incorporated. Remove from heat.
 7. Gently stir in the cauliflower (so you don't pulverize it) until evenly combined and then dump into a baking dish.
 8. Sprinkle with the parmigiano, then a coating of breadcrumbs and spray with olive oil spray to wet down the breadcrumbs.
 9. Bake in a preheated 450° oven for 10 to 12 minutes until golden brown.
 10. Serve immediately.

notes

1. The Best Cauliflower Gratin, by Julia Collin, April 2002, [Cook's Illustrated](#), pp.18–19, leek variation.
2. [A Beautiful Mind](#), Oscar for Best Picture 2002. [Film](#) by Ron Howard (Best Director) with ex-Gladiator Oscar winner Russell Crowe as the Nobel prize winning mathematician John Nash from the [book](#) by Silvia Nasar. Read the book.

cauleekg.htm: 28-may-2002 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

san pietro e paolo purple pizza (crema di radicchio)

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

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

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

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

ingredients

[to be found]

instructions

1. [to be found]

notes

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

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

mint baked potato wedges

Dining out life in Philly and on the Main Line has been getting better and better. We're crazy about the herb spiced [grilled octopus](#) served at [Dmitri's](#) two Mediterranean/Greek restaurants in the city and recently grilled octopus moved out to the burbs. Lourdas Greek Tavern right in the heart of Bryn Mawr in the space that used to house the business (Print Out Press) that for many years photocopied the dr bob annual christmas card before it went bust and bob moved on to Kinko's. Okay, the grilled octopus is not quite the same as Dmitri's but like they say: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush..." or something. Anyway the French fries in this place are addictive—dusted with dried mint flecks and probably too much salt.

This inspired us to try to catch that flavor in our own home baked potato wedges. Potato experts would know which potato is best for wedge baking but we had no clue. We went with the upscale hype for Yukon Golds, cleaning the spots but leaving most of the skin intact. Then cutting in half lengthwise and then cutting lengthwise triangular wedges. We snagged the potatoes after a 30 minute wait for 3 whole red snappers, cleaned, 12 bucks total, not a deal to be found out on the Main Line. It was the Memorial Day weekend Snow Crab sale at the 69th Street Pathmark, The People's supermarket. \$1.99 a pound, 50 cents extra per pound for steaming right there on the spot, regular, mild or spicy. bob waited patiently for the crab crowd. Years of training by Italy seems to have paid off.

ingredients

6 or 7 Yukon gold potatoes, cleaned, spots removed
olive oil
dried mint
salt and pepper
Middle Eastern red pepper (or paprika)

instructions

1. Prep the potatoes and boil them in salted water about 8 minutes.
2. Drain and put in a large bowl.
3. Coat with the spices, all eyeballed to taste, and just enough olive oil to do the job. Mix up so the stuff gets spread around evenly.
4. Bake in your oven at 350° for long enough to finish the cooking and brown them a bit.

notes

1. This is all kind of vague, huh? Next time bob will have to take a more hands on involvement in production. But experiment a little. The [result](#) was really good, although the [fish](#) looked a bit ugly. Must be the fish heads, eh? Go easy on the salt.

risotto ai fiori di zucca (risotto with zucchini flowers)

"all things must pass"

— george harrison (passed, 2001)

Festa di San Pietro e Paolo 2002 minus two (days). A Thursday evening. Rome got cheated out of a weekday holiday this year since June 29 falls on a Saturday. The streets seem rather quiet for late June in Rome as bob goes foraging for dinner. Porta Pia appears to be a popular (in the sense of "common people") neighborhood in the evening, absent all the white collar lunch crowd that makes midday so lively. The terrific fast-serve great-food lunch place at the beginning of via Nomentana (Primafile, number 7) that brought white collar bob back for dinner reverts to a normal restaurant pizzeria in the evening. For lunch it is bustling with activity, supplying choices of nearly every vegetable on the market deliciously prepared, some pasta salads, cheeses, fruit, some dead animal/fish dishes and a few super-quick fresh hot pastas on demand. A killer chocolate cake next to the register. At dinner it is still almost empty at 8:30pm. Plan B, find the risotto from last summer a couple blocks away. Al Padavano ("Venetian, Roman and seafood specialties", via Bergamo 50-52-52A). Also nearly empty. But the target risotto listed on their permanent all-season menu is still there and this is the season for zucchini flowers. Yes, they have it.

This summer bob hit the street with a cheap just-on-the-market first day purchase Motorola cell phone to plug into the Italian communication network. More important than arriving with luggage. Which rejoined bob after a short trip from Paris to Copenhagen two days later. Followed by a quick trip to Elba, including boat ride with swimming and relativity talks. Etc. Finally bob stabilizes back in Rome and calls everybody on the short list. Without much immediate success. Everybody is busy with their own lives, which complicate with age. The old days have passed. [bob eats alone](#), again.

So Mario (the simpatico waiter), how is this risotto put together? Easy. The short story is that it is a small variation on risotto alla milanese (that means "with saffron" in this context). You do a standard recipe (see below) while making a "soffrito" of finely chopped zucchini flowers in butter or oil, and just before the rice is done, you add in the soffrito and get them acquainted while still on the burner. Then remove, add parmigiano. Done. The hard part is finding the zucchini flowers in the US. Good luck. If you score, this recipe is terrific stuff. If not, well, ignorance is bliss...?

We've never seen this anywhere else in Italy and only one US cookbook was found with a recipe, but somewhat more complicated. [[Simply Tuscan](#) by Pino Luongo]. For even less cash, bob gets the recipe, the dish, a quarter liter of house white wine (mistake, since when combined with the current heat wave, it induces excess sweat gland activity), bread, water and a regrettably large portion of heavy eggplant parmesan. 20.50 Euro, about 20 bucks. bob leaves a 2 Euro tip, that's about 4 thousand lire, unthinkable large in lira for Italian tipping norms, but these little coins seem so insignificant. And bob is happy about the food find.

The next day bob spends 30 minutes in line at his bank at the university. It's the last day to

exchange lire for euro, and bob was stuck with 105 thousand lire from the previous summer, the changeover having occurred in his absence. With an Italian bankcard in his possession for years now, waiting in line at the bank was a distant memory, but one which was ready to repeat itself with out of the ordinary bank activities like this one. This euro thing is great. With current near parity between dollars and euros, price translation is unnecessary. Armed with 50 bucks from the dead currency, a few extra meals are financed.

Saturday, the Festa arrives, and Rome Gay Pride Day supplies the party. A big parade from Piazza della Repubblica (near Stazioni Termini, the main train station) to the famous Bocca della Verita (mouth of Truth). A dancing horned devil-dressed spokesperson shouts on the loudspeaker from a truck float: "They say we are against Nature!... Well, then ... better (to be) against Nature!" Met with cheers from the dancing masses in tow. They sure know how to have a good time. Too bad the world is still such an intolerant place.

Evening arrives. Bob's call for a social encounter never comes so he heads off for the open air free films at the Pantheon, Piazza Navona and Piazza Farnese all clustered together in the heart of old Rome without dinner. Arriving closest to the first, minutes before the film starts just after 9 o'clock. A classic film of short black and white episodes from the early 1960s with Vittorio Gassman (1922-2000) and Ugo Tognazzi directed by Dino Risi. *I Mostri* (1963). Perfect little doses of Italian comedy. The call finally comes (cell phone of course) and the family arrives just after the halfway point intermission traditional in Italian cinema. We wander over to Piazza Navona where Gassmann is visible on the far end but in color this time. Bob manages to get a tartufo nero at [Bar Tre Scalini](#). Known throughout the world except by Romans. Not exactly the dinner he had in mind but tasty nonetheless.

What a wonderful evening for street social life hardly imaginable back in the States. Isabella (4) and Sofia (6) are having their first late Roman evening on the town. While waiting for Dad to arrive with the car near midnight, they discover an air vent which [balloons up their pink dresses](#), and remain fascinated for the longest time.

ingredients

rice base

- 1 c arborio rice
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 T butter
- 1/3 - 1/2 c white wine
- 1 12.5 mg packet powdered saffron
- 1 optional heaping teaspoon veggie broth paste or powder

finishing touches

- 1/3 c fresh parsley, chopped
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1/3 - 1/2 c parmigiano, freshly grated

option 1: zucchini flower addin

- 8 – 16 zucchini flowers, washed, stems and pistils removed

option 2: cheese cubes

- 1/2 c small cubes of fontina val d'aosta and/or asiago or similar cheese

instructions

1. Start 4 cups of water boiling in a teapot to supply the rice when needed.
2. Prepare the onion and saute it in the butter until soft.
3. Mix in the rice, stir around a bit, then throw in the wine and evaporate off, a couple minutes max.
4. Then add in the first cup of boiling water and the saffron. One packet is enough to turn the rice a bright yellow.
5. Continue to do the risotto thing, adding additional water say a 1/2 or 3/4 c at a time when needed, for about 18 to 20 minutes. Optional veggie broth concentrate may be added as well.
6. Do the al dente taste test. When ready, turn off the heat and mix in the finishing touches, including a hit of boiling water if needed.
7. If you cannot find zucchini flowers, you can stop here and call it *risotto alla milanese*, or add option 2 cheese cubes immediately before serving (since the heat quickly causes them to melt, and it is better if they still seem like blobs when eaten). If your company arrival time is uncertain, you can halt the process 5 minutes before reaching the al dente state and simply restart to finish it off when you want to serve it.
8. If by some miracle you score some zucchini flowers, chop them up and saute them in the olive oil only a minute in a separate pan (they are already soft) and then mix them in at the finishing stage. Literary integrity requires fair warning: this part remains guesswork until we find some zucchini flowers ourselves.

notes

1. We discover risotto ai fiori di zucca also on the menu at Armando's at the beginning of via Tiburtina before the trip is over, later have lasagna with fiori di zucca at the Festival at Castel Santangelo after tripping on the curb while cell-phoning to Isabella and Sofia's parents inside and nearly breaking an elbow on the adjacent building corner, and then pizza with fiori di zucca some other night. And at home we find a variation of this risotto recipe (no saffron) in our [very first risotto cookbook](#) on the shelf of the dr bob cooking team library. Maybe we should get to know our collection better.
2. Judith and Norma based on real experience suggest instead to add the zucchini flowers a few at a time as the rice is cooking (more precisely a third after 5 minutes, another third after 10 minutes, the last third with the finishers). Maybe someday we'll get to try both approaches and compare, but this second route is clearly easier (and requires less fat, sorry Mario).
3. Well, Philly fans, fiori di zucca can be found after all right here at home in the USA. Scanning the [Best of Philly](#) entry this year for [Carlino's](#), phone number right there, dr bob calls 'em right up and talks to Joe the produce buyer and asks the question—and the answer is yes! One or two day's notice. Twice a week delivery. 20 bucks for a box of 50 that turned out to be 40 when they arrived a few days later, but still a bargain at 50 cents apiece for a rare treat. Carmel brand edible flowers shipped from Israel by [Agrexco Ltd](#) in this growing global economy. Thursday pickup for Saturday night dinner. The box said keep at 0 degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit), but our fridge which is a bit above freezing kept them fine.

addendum: [fried zucchini flowers](#)

So we gave 10 away to marybeth without whose encouragement we would not have undertaken this search which met immediate success, leaving 30 for fried zucchini flowers and risotto. The fried zucchini flowers we did in advance so we would not be slaving over the stove when our guests arrived, and reheated them in the oven as an appetizer when they finally did show up. Not quite like in a pizzeria in Italy but then the cooks are not socializing with the clients there either.

The only authentic recipe we had in our cooking library was a couple sentences long in [Roma in Bocca](#), slightly mistranslated into english. Basically remove the pistils, carefully open and stuff each flower with a piece of anchovy and a cube of mozzarella cheese, then prepare a thick batter with flour, water and salt, dip them in and fry in lots of very hot oil. For the actual quantities, [marcella](#) at least had the batter described but did not bother to stuff the flowers. She says gradually add water to the flour until it reaches the consistency of sour cream, not very precise. We used a cup of flour and about 3/4 cup water and managed to do about 8 flowers with it, then repeated for another 8, trying to glob as much batter on as possible since in the frying stage the coating seems to thin out dramatically. marcella says salt the flowers immediately after pulling them out of the oil, but we just put some salt into the batter. The fine salt grains did not seem to want to stick anyway when we did a test shake over the finished product.

And marcella is also more explicit about the flower prep: don't soak the flowers, but very gently and quickly rinse them and then pat them dry with paper towels, and leave about an inch of stem to help with dipping and dropping into the hot oil. We forgot to remove the pistils but they were not noticeable in the finished product. We cut a medium mozzarella ball lengthwise into 1 cm square cross-section strips for the stuffing, and nixed the anchovies that we are not terribly fond of. It seemed to take forever for them to turn golden brown (maybe 15 minutes) as she suggested they should be before removal, but we were patient. Eventually they came around. We were able to do about 6 at a time in our 6 quart nonstick rice pot filled about 3/4 inch deep with vegetable oil.

We saved one wrapped flower to put in the freezer to see how long it would last. Those flowers that lost their stems in the prep process plus the rest were reserved for the risotto. About 13 all together if our count is right. We cut off the green bases and removed the pistils, and then cut them lengthwise into 3 strips. We coarsely chopped half of them and left the rest intact, adding them at 3 stages during the rice cooking as suggested above, leaving the whole ones towards the end. ani dumped in our usual quantity of veggie broth paste before bob could stop her, but the dark brown addition did not diminish the bright yellow color of the saffron, and probably improved the taste. Which was good. Unfortunately the digital camera was accidentally set for a minimovie, which has terrible resolution, so a useful photo of the colorful finished dish doesn't exist. The original [Roman restaurant dish](#) will have to do.

reverse european weekend pasta: orecchiete with zucchini and arugula

The early dr bob lined-paper recipe-log notepads had quite a few pasta improvisations that had no storyline attached. Good enough to remember but no catchy hook for entertainment value. They finally met official death with the first dr bob cd tying-up-loose-ends campaign in 2002 after years of being carried along hopefully in the table of contents listing. Several orecchiete recipes were among this crowd. Perhaps even as good as this one. Which was inspired by the summer of 2002 six week dr bob Rome trip with no ms_ani visit to break up the long separation.

Regular trips to Rome financed by somebody's academic research funds provide the dr bob cooking team with new kitchen ideas for back home. Interesting ingredient combinations registered for later first hand application. At least those that the team can actually remember after the trip. And recently crossing the mid-century mark has not done any favors to bob's already diminished memory capacity. This trip bob remembers a side dish combo: boiled potatoes, artichoke hearts, and cooked green fava beans warmed together in a skillet with butter and served. Fava beans look remarkably like our own familiar lima beans but apparently they are distinct and preferred in the Mediterranean. They come wrapped in an extra layer inside the pod that requires additional labor to remove. And then there was that penne pasta dish with zucchini and rughetta, the roman name for arugula, the stuff which is now readily available in the states for some years now but which is rounded, while the real thing over there has jagged edged leaves and is supposedly more potent.

Did we mention that Big Pharma is wrecking ani and bob's constitutional right to the pursuit of happiness through a sane vacation policy? Or was that in the Declaration of Independence? Something we should probably remember after all the visits to Independence Hall we've made with friends from out of town. Come to think of it, as burbites from the Philly Main Line we also qualify as out-of-towners. Anyway, getting back to the point, for nine years ms_ani worked for Small Pharma (biotech). With three weeks vacation per year from the start. Then she moved up to Big Pharma and got cut back to two weeks with a 5 year waiting period to get back the stolen third week and some fraction of a lifetime more to ratchet that up to 4. Did we also mention that when you examine the details, a US vacation week is really only 5 days, so this 2 weeks means 10 lousy days. Did we also mention that Big Pharma makes about 3 times the average profit of American industries and owes its production success to a highly sophisticated work force in research and development? Wouldn't it make sense to keep these worker bees happy? And nobody except the top brass seems happy with this retro vacation policy, although with some poetic justice, 2002 seems to be the year that the top brass class is finally being caught with their pants down while conning everybody to rip off the system. This probably won't help the vacation problem go away though.

This ongoing vacation conflict came to a head with the 2002 annual dr bob summer visit to Rome. 3 vacation days already used up on one long spring break weekend visit to Paris for the quiche recipe [acquisition](#) (2 days) and one short weekend to Rome for our [first cooking school student's](#) wedding to Adele (1 day). [Weekend trips to Europe may seem a bit crazy, but what can a wage slave do when given no alternative?] Only 7 days left and ms_ani decides to pass on the usual mid trip visit to bob this summer and save 5 for a fall break nobody-to-see, no-

schedule-to-follow Caribbean beach vacation. As opposed to her everybody-to-see Italian vacations involving trains, buses and boats moving us around in a desperate attempt to maintain our many friendships there.

After 4 weeks the 4th of July (Thursday) long weekend arrives and the prospect of waiting another 2 weeks still for a reunion simply elevates itself to the status of cruel and unusual punishment. The only solution? The reverse European weekend trip. Fly back unannounced to surprise ms_ani. And cook up some delicious pasta while in town. Air France had the low budget weekend special through Paris. Half what bob paid for his indirect flight high season flight to Rome through Paris booked months in advance (since the direct flights were sold out at reasonable fares). And bought less than 24 hours before departure. Which was the same [7am flight](#) bob had had some previous experience with a few summers before, but this time armed with his own European cell phone needed for the 4:50am taxi reservation, although still trapped in a window seat due to Air France's continued unreasonable preflight seat reservation policy.

Back at home base, looking for a light dinner concept for two, bob remembers the zucchini and arugula. And impulse buys a companion ingredient (orange bell pepper). And some red onion borrowed from the salad idea acquired from Guido the night before in Baltimore (see below). The bell pepper came to mind from the leek and red and yellow pepper vegetarian substitution for the ham in Pascale's quiche recipe that had been realized the day before as well. And which bob had silently objected to thinking the pepper might be too heavy when in fact it turned out great. A splash of wine thrown in for good measure from the chilled French white already being sipped by the cooks. Served with the arugula and shaved parma tomato salad. Another success. This time with an accompanying story line.

ingredients

- 2 T olive oil
- 1/4 c red onion, chopped finely
- 1 medium orange (or red or yellow) pepper, chopped finely
- 3 medium zucchini, quartered lengthwise, then sliced thinly.
- 1 plum tomato, liquified by a hand blender
- salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1/4 c white wine
- 1/4 c pasta water
- 3/4 c finely chopped arugula
- 1 lb orecchiette, cooked al dente
- 1/3 c parmigiano, freshly grated

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when boiling, throw in some salt and cook the pasta al dente. Farfalle, fusilli or penne or some other short pasta would also work here.
2. Meanwhile, wash and finely chop the arugula.
3. Chop the red onion and optional color choice bell pepper.
4. Wash and cut the zucchini as described.
5. Sauté the onion and pepper in olive oil until both are softened.

6. Then add the zucchini and some salt and pepper.
7. After 10 minutes throw in the optional wine and evaporate off.
8. Puree the tomato and incorporate. Continue cooking.
9. Throw in some pasta water stolen from the pasta in progress and continue, say 20 minutes total from the zucchini insertion point.
10. Stir in the arugula and combine with the al dente pasta and parmigiano.
11. Serve with extra grated parmigiano and freshly ground black pepper.

notes

1. Reverse European weekend: Friday midday arrival, Monday afternoon departure. Ani calls in sick Monday, encouraged by bob as on other occasions where a special day was needed. You gotta do what you gotta do, in defense of individual rights.
2. Big Pharma. You could read about its evils in the cover article of the April 9, 2001 [The Nation](#) by spy novelist John Le Carre' if they weren't themselves so greedy about charging for access.
3. **Arugula and shaved parmigiano tomato salad:**
A handful of arugula. Washed of course. 2 plum tomatoes or the equivalent, chopped, then marinated with olive oil and a balsamic vinegar and 1/8 c finely chopped red onion. Combined with the arugula and shaved parmigiano when ready for serving. Simple.

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

moist red baked chicken alla nora

There is no single chicken [alla nora](#). She uses no recipes, measures no ingredients, and likes to try different spice mixes. bob liked this one and asked her to at least list what went into the mix with a vague indication of the amounts that only had suggestive value. And then soon after attempted a recreation. Kind of like all the cold fusion people who went into action after the first big announcement. Except for the measure of success. The resulting chicken, while not exactly the same, was still good, and that's all that counts in the kitchen. Cold fusion, on the other hand, well, the cake did not rise in anybody else's kitchen so to speak.

ingredients

meat

2 lb skinless chicken (about 3 unsplit chicken breasts)

dry stuff

salt and pepper to taste

1/2 t allspice

1/2 t cumin

1 cinnamon stick

1/4 t oregano

1/4 t thyme

1/8 t cardamom

2 cloves

1 bay leaf

1/8 t cayenne red pepper

wet stuff

1 T sweet red pepper paste

1 T tomato paste

3 T olive oil

1/4 c lemon juice (from 1 or 2 lemons)

1 t vinegar

6 cloves garlic, pressed

oven prep

1/2 c water

instructions

1. Clean the chicken. Remember that some unacceptably large fraction of US mass market chickens come home with salmonella contamination.
2. Mix the dry stuff in a large bowl and then add in the wet stuff and mix together well.
3. Slime the chicken around in this marinade (use your hands), cover with plastic wrap, and marinate in the fridge for a few hours.
4. Put the chicken in a baking dish and add the water, then cover tightly with aluminum foil.
5. Bake in a 350° preheated oven for 1 hour.

notes

1. Nora used hot red pepper paste, which we like most other Americans did not have, so we substituted the sweet red pepper paste plus cayenne red pepper powder.
2. This was so tender and moist, it just fell apart with the fork. Yum!

chknnora.htm: 16-aug-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

lemon garlic green beans

Green beans. They can be so boring. We often glance at them longingly in the produce section wondering what we could do to make them more interesting. Memories of frozen green beans boiled and heaped on the plate from childhood make us turn away.

Actually there is a pretty good Armenian/Middle Eastern vegetarian main dish "*fasoulia*" or "*fassoulia*" made with tomatoes like a casserole that we often have at the in-laws and which occasionally ani makes at home, but other than that, our imaginations are coming up short. And they can be included in homemade nicoise salads, we've even done that. But as a principle ingredient of a side dish, we were ready to try this one from the *Bon Appetit* Too Busy to Cook section. Which means it is quick and easy.

ingredients

- 1 lb green beans, trimmed
- 1 T olive oil
- 1 T grated orange peel
- 2 t grated lemon peel
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/4 c veggie broth
- 2 T (1/4 stick) butter

instructions

1. Cook beans in large pot of boiling salted water until crisp-tender, about 4 minutes. Drain well.
2. Heat oil in heavy large skillet over medium-high heat.
3. Add orange peel, lemon peel, and garlic and stir 1 minute.
4. Add broth and simmer 1 minute.
5. Add butter and beans. Toss until beans are heated through and sauce coats beans, about 2 minutes.
6. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

notes

1. [Bon Appetit](#), June 2002, p.149. Green Beans with Citrus Butter Sauce. Thanks for sharing, Michael Hunter. He says 4 to 6 servings.
2. The original called for chicken broth but why ruin a perfectly good vegetarian recipe with liquified animal parts?
3. We had maybe half a pound of green beans on hand, we didn't weigh them, and no oranges to harvest fresh peel from. So we used a teaspoon of dried grated orange peel and the peel from one big real lemon. For that we have one of those nifty [Good Grips](#) citrus peelers that make what is called "zest", so in fact it is called a [lemon zester](#). And we used two pretty big garlic cloves for the half dose of beans cuz we love garlic. Pretty interesting...

lggrnbns.htm: 19-aug-2002 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

ravioli with fat free arugula cream sauce

bob is a food voyeur. keeps reading all these restaurant reviews, and philly is a pretty good restaurant town so they keep on coming. always something new. sometimes he even gets to try some out. but mostly they remain a distant dream. ravioli with arugula cream sauce, just a phrase in passing in some review, who knows what food destination. no clue what it might be. but it stuck in bob's mind. unusual since his memory is not one of his strong points. absent minded professor image to live up to. not hard for bob to do.

anyway, the fridge is usually stocked with at least one package of exotic stuffed ravioli from the local authentic [Italian family](#) food source. with a backup [version](#) from Trader Joe's in the pantry not requiring refrigeration, for when the Carlino supply is temporarily out.

a little spice package of arugula gets grabbed at the supermarket. an already opened pint container of fat free half and half waiting in the fridge. fat free half and half—seemed too good to be true when bob spotted it by chance the week before. and no recognizably dangerous ingredients listed on the container. seemed okay for the first pasta sauce application. why not arugula cream?

so what might arugula cream be? never hurts to consult the cookbook library. for any kind of cream sauce with green leafy things pulverized together. nope. so... what to do. well, arugula pesto is lots of pulverized arugula with some pine nuts, parmigiano and a little garlic thrown into the mix. and we put freshly ground black pepper on practically every dish of pasta we chow down. sounds like the lineup we can use for the cream sauce, light on arugula since we only had 2/3 oz, which might have been like a half a cup of whole leaves if you didn't press them to the bottom. half a cup of fat free half and half. turn on the blender. already done. hmm.

ingredients

- 1 lb high quality stuffed ravioli
- 1/2 c fat free half and half (substitutable by any cream product of any fat content)
- 2/3 oz arugula, maybe 1/4 c loosely packed if you imagine it already chopped up a bit
- 2–3 T freshly grated parmigiano
- 1 garlic clove
- a hit of freshly ground black pepper

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and cook the ravioli (with salt, how much is never clear to bob, he just dumps some in) as directed until al dente.
2. Meanwhile dump all the other ingredients into the blender and blend until smooth.
3. Pour into your 4 qt nonstick chef's pan or equivalent and put on minimum heat for just long enough to warm the cream a bit.
4. Drain the ravioli and dump into the cream sauce. The heat from the recently boiling ravioli will finish the job on the sauce.
5. Serve immediately.

notes

1. The sauce has a lovely light green color. And no accompanying fat laden cream guilt baggage. But if you can't find the guilt free stuff, remember it's only half a cup, divided in two or three servings depending on how hungry you are, go with light cream and sleep easy.
2. Not bad for such a quick improvisation. We'll do this again.

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

caribbean butternut squash soup

Turning 50 seems hard to imagine when you are young, but slowly it creeps up on you. Thirty something is still clearly young, and forty something is really middle age but by a stretch of the imagination you can still think you are young. However, hitting the half century mark is an inescapable sign that the young days are over. And time for a colonoscopy. Lots of bad stuff can happen down there in the second half century. Better to know as soon as possible.

Colonoscopy prep means flushing out the system the night before. Drinking a gallon of terrible stuff over a few hours time that does the job. And to make that easier, bob decided to do a primarily liquid diet the 3 days counting down to the event.

Just back from Barbados, where a Caribbean pumpkin soup recipe had caught his eye in a cookbook (which was not purchased to avoid adding to the inactive cooking library section, but an ingredient list got memorized and written down), soup seemed a good bet for the liquid diet, so it got put on the agenda. Butternut squash seemed like a good substitute for the pumpkin and the coconut milk seemed like a creamy way to avoid the fat of real cream, and it even came in a low fat version that reduced the fat even more. And the recipe had leeks, a good hook considering bob's weakness for this veggie. But caramelized and used as a topping. Hmm, easier to just throw them into the soup earlier. They were. But a special trip was required for the curry powder. Turned out that the cupboard only had cumin, one of the key ingredients of curry.

Well, the moment of truth. A little plain lowfat yogurt dribbled here and there in the bowl as a topping. bob takes a taste. The verdict: pretty good stuff. A success. We'll have to use more of this lite coconut milk in the future.

ingredients

bakeable stuff

1 butternut squash, split in half lengthwise

sautee stuff

2 T butter or olive oil

1 medium onion, food processed

1/2 big leek or 1 small leek, food processed

2 cloves garlic, pressed

2 medium potatoes, food processed

1 t curry

1 t salt

1/2 t pepper

liquid stuff

3 c veggie broth

1 c coconut milk

topping stuff

lowfat plain yogurt

instructions

1. Cut the butternut squash in half without stabbing yourself or slicing off important body parts. These guys are pretty hard and do not want to cooperate. Be very careful.
2. Bake the squash placed cut side down in a baking pan at 350° for 1 hour. Remove from oven and let cook until you can remove the skin and the seeds. Set aside.
3. Sauté the onion and leek in a deep nonstick pot with the butter/oil and the salt, and when soft, add the other spices, the potato and squash and the veggie broth. Simmer for about 30 minutes so the potato will cook and a little extra softening up of the rest occurs.
4. Add the coconut milk, adjust the spices to taste, and heat through.
5. Serve with dollops of yogurt in each bowl, freshly ground black pepper to taste.

notes

1. Converted from pumpkin soup recipe in *Caribbean Cooking*, [Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook](#), with nice photographs of each recipe.
2. [Thai Lite Coconut Milk](#) produced in Thailand for [Andre Prost Inc](#), Old Saybrook, CT 06475. Turns out they have a whole bunch of [soup recipes using coconut milk](#). The [coconut dill carrot soup](#) looks worth trying soon.

cbntsqsp.htm: 30-oct-2002 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

celery stew (ersatz⁴ khoresh)

For many years we enjoyed regular home-cooked Persian food, courtesy of our good friend Nadereh. There were certain dishes that were really special, but seemed to require obscure ethnic ingredients that invariably were found in D.C. where there is a concentration of Iranians to buy them. bob's interest in these dishes even led him to buy two cookbooks by one of the most visible [Iranian cuisine cookbook authors](#) writing in English, who also lives in D.C. Which found a comfortable home on the shelf in the cooking library, but did not see any use. Until Nadereh moved to D.C. for a job opportunity. And only months later for the same reason, even Afsaneh moved away, who had at least presented hope of producing Iranian meals for us, although they had only materialized during her infrequent mom's visits. While we were happy that these moves meant positive changes in their lives, they left a big hole in our hearts ... and in our stomachs.

One evening quite by accident, we stumbled into action. Ani had tried to make [basmati rice](#) the night before, with potato slices on the bottom, and some saffron on hand thanks to a few packages of Italian saffron that we had reserved from the many hundreds we had imported for Nadereh over the years as a much cheaper alternative to US sources of the spice. All the while bob was complaining since he did not understand why rice almost by itself was worth putting on the plate. Prejudiced by his heavy risotto habit.

So the next night we had no clear plan of action for dinner or once-mobile entree ingredient, but the leftover rice and lots of newly acquired vegetables, some of which were for a Martha Stewart red lentil chestnut soup recipe that she refused to publish on the web like all the other TV cooks (but that is another story). Which is how the key ingredient, celery, happened to be on hand. And this sparked Ani's memory for the celery stew recipe in one of the cookbooks: celery and mint khoresh. The once-mobile ingredient (chicken or meat) had to be substituted; cooked favas stepped up to the plate. With some chopped artichoke hearts and carrots thrown in for good measure.

ingredients

sauté stuff

- 2 T olive oil
- 5 small celery stalks, chopped about 1 in long
- 4 small carrots, peeled and chopped about 1/2 in long
- 1 onion, coarsely chopped

spices

- 2 T dried parsley (1/2 c fresh preferred, coarsely chopped)
- 2 T dried mint (1/2 c fresh preferred, coarsely chopped)
- salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 12.5mg packages of saffron powder

additives

- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 lime, juice of
- 1/2 c water
- 1 15oz can turnip greens

- 1 15 oz can cooked fava beans
- 1 15oz jar artichoke hearts

instructions

1. Clean the celery, carrots and onion and chop them as directed.
2. Sauté the sauté stuff until softened/browned a bit in the bottom of a pressure cooker.
3. Stir in the spices, and garlic (so it does not get burned if you had added it earlier), lime juice and the can/jar contents, including liquids unless too objectionable, in which case they should be replaced by a bit of water, just enough so the pressure cooking works.
4. Pressure cook 10 minutes at full steam.
5. Serve over saffron rice of some kind.

notes

1. We were pretty impressed with this accidental but very successful first exercise in almost Persian cooking.
2. Bob took one bite and decided to immortalize the dish with a [photo](#).
3. Thanks for the inspiration, Najmieh Batmanglij. [A Taste of Persia](#), p.122.
4. *Ersatz* (adjective): "replacement; substitute or synthetic; the word usually suggests inferior quality." Oops, well, "usually" is not "always". But since *khores* as explained by Najmieh seems to be a stew that requires a once-mobile (i.e., dead animal) ingredient, this adjective is appropriate for our vegetarian version here.

celstew.htm: 13-dec-2002 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

chocolate hazelnut torte

Supermarket checkout line. bob spots a food magazine special supplement entitled *Healthy Cooking* with a cover recipe of an inviting dense chocolate slab dripping with an overflowing chocolate sauce topping and hazelnuts in the name: chocolate hazelnut mousse torte. A chocoholic with a weakness for his favorite [dessert nut](#), and it's healthy too? How could bob resist?

So the recipe was in the mental to do docket. All that was needed was an excuse. Which ani provided. Restless to bake something one evening, the first idea that comes to her mind lacks essential ingredients. So bob suggests this one. Some ingredients are also missing, but nothing that can't be faked without doing damage. After getting started together, bob realizes that chocolate was not what she had in mind and has to finish solo. Poor spousal communication typical of males.

No applesauce left for the fat substitution. It doesn't last forever, and we'd finally cleared that out from supplies. But a jar of carrot baby food turned up waiting for the next [brownie cheesecake torte](#) (it had been waiting quite a few years already) that turned out to be exactly the required half cup. And only a few double chocolate chips left, but lots of high quality bittersweet chocolate to substitute them, roughly broken up in a guesstimate amount that was a bit hard to compare with the original 8oz units. But the exact amount is not critical here. And the extra chocolate sauce topping? Who needs it. A dusting of confectioner's sugar will do the job, improving the health stats a bit more and saving more work. And what does this have to do with [mousse](#)? We know mousse, and there was no mousse here.

ingredients

crust

- 1/2 c recipe ready chopped hazelnuts (or the equivalent)
- 2 c chocolate wafers
- 4 T melted butter
- nonfat cooking spray for coating the pan

chocolate mixture

- 1 c lowfat milk (we use 1% but the nutritional analysis allowed for 2%)
- 1 3/4 c sugar
- 3 T coffee liqueur, like [Kahlua](#) (we were out! and used [Godiva Cappuccino liqueur](#))
- 1/4 c vegetable oil
- 8oz chocolate chips (or equivalent solid chocolate)

flour mixture

- 1 1/2 c flour
- 1/4 c cocoa powder
- 1/2 t salt
- 1/2 t baking powder

cake finishers

- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 c applesauce or 1 jar carrot baby food

2 t vanilla

topping

sprinkle confectioner's sugar over each piece at serving time, using one of those little covered cans with holes in the top if you have one

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. Blend or food process together the nuts and roughly broken up cookies. Then combine with the melted butter in a bowl and press evenly into the bottom (only) of an 8 or 9 in diameter spring-form pan coated with cooking spray (we used a 9 in pan to spread this baby out a bit more, smaller pieces, better health). Set aside.
3. Combine the chocolate mixture ingredients in a saucepan and melt them together on low heat, then stir one last time and set aside to cool.
4. Sift together the flour mixture ingredients in a large bowl and set aside.
5. When the chocolate mixture is cool, whisk in the egg, applesauce or carrot baby food, and vanilla and then stir in the flour mixture until smooth.
6. Pour into the crust filled pan and bake for 30 minutes, or until a toothpick jabbed into the center comes out with a few moist crumbs attached? [We baked this an hour and the center was still mush.]
7. Remove and cook in the pan for 1 hour or refrigerate overnight.
8. To serve, remove the side from the pan and sprinkle each serving with the optional confectioner's sugar and serve with a complimenting ice cream flavor on the side, which of course blows up the nutritional data if you are not careful.

notes

1. The nutritional information includes the chocolate glaze resulting from whisking together 1 c sugar, 1 c cocoa, 1 1/4 c 1 % milk and 2 t vanilla over high heat until boiling then cooking on medium heat for 3 minutes—oops, remove from heat and then add the vanilla, sift through a strainer?—then cool in the fridge with the surface covered by plastic wrap until slapping on the cooled cake, a possible option:
14 servings, per serving: 373 cal, 5g prot, 55g carbo, 2g fiber, 17 g fat, 7g sat fat, 187mg sodium, 40mg cholest.
2. [Healthy Cooking](#), December 2002, cover recipe, p. 57.
3. We'll have to replenish our [Kahlua](#) supply soon. And browsing the [Godiva](#) site reveals a [motherload of killer recipes](#). Life is too short.
4. Apart from a quarter wedge sacrificed to the in-laws (small pieces remember?), bob got to do this one [piece by piece](#) until it disappeared. With [Ben and Jerry Karamel Sutra](#) ice cream on the side. Yumm.

garlic cumin long pasta

Some recipes work well right out of the box so to speak. No missing ingredients, no changes to make. Satisfactory results obtained.

This one is simple and quick and comes from a married French-Italian guy born in Morocco living in Paris and contributing to an American healthy cooking magazine. Another bob, but although we recall one classic French film in which the ill-fated hero was an [unlucky petty criminal named Bob](#) (later remade by Hollywood), there aren't a whole lot of French or Italian Bob's—this one goes by the name of Robert, but probably with a funny pronunciation. The cumin is the Moroccan touch. Which we happened to have on the spice shelf, probably a decade old but the shelf life of spices is not something many people pay much attention to, including us.

ingredients

pasta

12 oz long pasta: spaghetti, linguini, tagliatelle or fettuccine

sauce

1/2 olive oil

1/2 c chopped fresh Italian parsley

1 T ground cumin (is there any other kind?)

1/2 t dried crushed red pepper

finishers

salt to taste

freshly grated pepper to taste

freshly grated parmigiano to taste

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when ready dump in the salt and pasta and cook until al dente.
2. Meanwhile mix the sauce ingredients together and set aside.
3. Drain the pasta when ready, reserving about 3/4 c cooking liquid.
4. Return the pasta to the pot over medium heat and dump in the sauce and toss around to coat the pasta for about a minute, adding 1/4 c of the reserved cooking liquid at a time if dry, until it seems right, you'll know.
5. Add salt and pepper to taste and serve with parmigiano on each serving or just dump some of that in too and serve.

notes

1. Okay, we did have to substitute some dried parsley for the missing fresh parsley. Small detail.
2. [Illustration](#).
3. From Robert Colombi, *Too Busy to Cook?* section, [Cooking Light](#), December 2002,

p.214–215. He used spaghetti.

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

fettuccine with zucchini and mint (mojitos!)

Mint was one of those things that entered dr bob's life with ms_ani. It was always in her family's homemade salad dressing but it wasn't so obvious until the new sister-in-law [nora](#) arrived from the old country and kicked it up a notch ([Bam!](#)). Salad dressing is something we never buy. We just put together some olive oil, freshly squeezed lemon juice, some pressed garlic, freshly ground pepper and dried mint that we now keep a big stash of in the kitchen, and mix it into the salad greens, tomato, cucumber (avocado if in season) and we're in business. Nora increased the mint level enough to get bob to notice that it was there and ever since he's been following her example. Of course mint is also a key ingredient in our favorite [yogurt soup](#), or even in [yogurt drink](#) (basically plain yogurt watered down with water and some salt and dried mint factored into the equation) often found in various middle eastern cuisines. And at the in-laws when Isgouhi's spaghetti with a spare tomato meat sauce just barely coating every little spaghetti is served, on the side comes a little plate of bright green dried mint flakes to sprinkle over it with your fingers—who would have ever thought of such a combination? But it works.

On the down side there is peppermint candy, something bob never liked, and chocolate mints! What a waste of good chocolate. Apparently peppermint, spearmint and mint are all in the same family, but what a difference it makes what you do with the stuff.

For example, 2001 was the year of the [mojito](#) in philly ([Philly Mag Best of Year](#) August 2001 through July 2002, so we were not that far behind), apparently a local manifestation of a worldwide trend. Several authentic Cuban cuisine restaurants opened in the city and word got out. We were quickly informed by friends Afsaneh, Geraldine and Ellen, an international trio of ladies with good taste and more social radar than us, who replicated the drink they'd experienced in a bar for us to try at home (fresh crushed MINT, lime juice, sugar, rum, soda water, ice: the web is full of [recipes](#)). Soon after, following a particularly heavy movie in center city, we stopped in [one](#) of those restaurants for a drink to chill out a bit, trying the authentic real deal and staying on for a terrific dinner after checking out the tasty menu and the day's specials. The local newspaper also noticed the drink, providing us with a [mojito fish recipe](#) to try and then pass on to the AGE trio in reciprocity. This all happened at the same time *Cooking Light* provided us with an appealing mint and zucchini fettuccine recipe. We'd already noticed the [zucchini-fettuccine affinity](#), so with the mint radar up, this recipe became a high priority action item. We accompanied it with mojito salmon on the side, which turned out not to be as [photogenic](#) as the pasta.

ingredients

- 1 lb fresh fettuccine
- 1 t butter
- 8 c 1/2 in cubes zucchini
- 4 garlic cloves, pressed
- 1/4 c fresh mint, chopped
- 1/2 t salt
- 3/4 t freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 T olive oil

1/4 c freshly grated parmigiano

instructions

1. Start the pasta water boiling and when ready throw in the pasta and some salt. [Leonora says omit the salt, but missed that remark and don't see the point. Add less salt later to taste.]
2. Meanwhile saute the zucchini and garlic in butter in a large nonstick pan for about 4 minutes or until softened. Over medium high heat but don't burn the garlic!
3. Stir in the mint, salt (to taste) and 1/4 t pepper.
4. When al dente drain the pasta.
5. Combine the zucchini mixture, pasta and oil, tossing to coat the pasta well.
6. Sprinkle with parmigiano and the rest of the black pepper. It is okay to exaggerate with the parmigiano as we often do.

notes

1. From Leonora Morales (Santiago, Chile), [Cooking Light](#), June 2002, p.188. She's been to Italy many times and like bob decided to emulate their pasta-with-vegetable dishes back home (she suggests the occasional option of adding fresh tomatoes and pine nuts). We're glad she shared her experiment with us and we're happy to share it with you.
2. Nutritional information for 6 servings (1 1/2 c per serving):
CALORIES 258 (20% from fat), FAT 5.7g (sat 1.3g, mono 2.9g, poly 0.9), PROTEIN 9.2g, CARB 42.4g, FIBER 7.1g, CHOL 45mg, IRON 2.4mg, SODIUM 312mg, CALC 64mg.
3. Of course ani and bob polished most of this off the first night by themselves. We are suckers for pasta.
4. [Illustrations](#).

fetmintz.htm: 1-may-2003 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

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](#).

ccaulsp.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. Dont 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 northeasterner transplanted 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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: 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.

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

2004

hazelnut, limoncello, pistachio gelato!

Somehow in the minds of the dr bob cooking team, a real self-freezing ice cream machine had always remained in the category of delayed acquisitions for some remote future date, one of those upscale toys that was an indulgence whose time had not yet come. Which is the beauty of gift giving (receiving!). Out of the blue someone decides for you that the time has come. We had done so as a wedding present for close friends in Italy, after another close friend had taken the plunge herself, researching the best product and verifying the claims with personal experience, and we got a purchase deal (still a considerable pile of lira at the time) from another close friend whose parents had a small appliance store, but soon after marrying, reproduction began and the gelato experience was cut short by the arrival of [two delightful little girls](#), more fun than making ice cream but of course a lot more work.

And without an ice cream machine, you can't really experiment with ice cream recipes. So when bob was browsing in Borders some years ago and spotted the newly issued paperback [Under the Tuscan Sun](#) which marked the beginning of a wave of American fascination with farmhouses and country living in Tuscany, and leafed through it and spotted a hazelnut gelato recipe introduced with superlative hype by the author Frances Mayes, he snatched it up without any immediate plans for execution, although clearly with the intention of one day trying it himself. The whole cooking team read the book, but still this did not push the ice cream machine buy-me button. We did, however, eventually get our [weekend](#) in a farmhouse on a hill in Umbria, as a guest of our first ice cream machine advisor, when we finally were initiated into the mysteries of [pizza making](#).

Then Christmas 2003 arrived, and our dessert-garnishing on-line-shopper [sister-in-law](#) surprised bob with a web-researched best-buy ice cream maker. It was only a matter of time before the hazelnut gelato dream was realized. The first two holiday batches were vanilla and chocolate, since the finicky nieces and nephews, like most American kids below a certain age, wouldn't accept any other flavors. Then we were free to try hazelnut, with a little experience already under our belts. The adult focus group we tried it out on loved it. And repeated compliments more than necessary, going so far as to hint they would gladly accept any overproduction that might occur in the future. A winning strategy for them since we like to please.

And the move from hazelnut (Frangelico) to limoncello, a simple switch of our two favorite Italian liqueurs that proved successful with [cheesecake](#), was the obvious next step. And we couldn't resist the urge to meddle a bit with the details in the modification. While guessing wildly on the amount of limoncello to go with. Looks like we guessed right. More adulation. If only we can figure out how to reduce the fat someday soon...

So the next flavor choice was ani's favorite ice cream flavor: pistachio, which is a favorite Middle East nut. It took a long time for bob to distinguish pistachio from mint ice cream because they both were light green, and mint, though prized in salads and savory dishes by everybody on the dr bob cooking team now, has been on the dr bob dessert blacklist for life. Eventually bob caught on. After tasting a delicious version of pistachio at a new area gourmet gelato storefront Capogiro which even bob had to admit tasted better than his choices, we had to try it ourselves. A Google search leading to [RecipeSource.com](#), and a separate check of [Epicurious.com](#) guided us in our modification to include a teaspoon each of almond and vanilla extract, with a touch of

cardamom from on-line reader feedback to the [Bon Appetit recipe](#). Another success story.

ingredients

hazelnut gelato	limoncello gelato	pistachio gelato
3 egg yolks	3 egg yolks	3 egg yolks
3/4 c sugar	3/4 c sugar	3/4 c sugar
1 T Frangelico	1/4 c limoncello	1 t almond extract
	1 t lemon zest (zest from 1 small lemon)	1 t vanilla extract
2 c [= 1 pt] half and half	2 c [= 1 pt] half and half	1/4 t cardamom
1 c heavy cream	1 c heavy cream	2 c [= 1 pt] half and half
juice and zest of 1 lemon		1 c heavy cream
3/4 c hazelnuts, toasted and chopped/crumbed		3/4 c pistachios, finely crumbed
		1/4 c pistachios, roughly chopped

instructions

1. This is a two stage recipe: cooking the custard and cooling, then mixing in add-ins before inserting into the ice cream machine.
2. For the hazelnut gelato, coarsely chop (Frances) or finely crumb (us) the hazelnuts (or divide and do both) and spread out on a cookie sheet and bake at 350° F watching closely until they just turn brown. They turn color quickly once they start and too easily burn shortly thereafter. Set aside.
3. For the pistachio gelato, finely crumb 3/4 c of the unsalted, shelled and peeled (buy them that way) nuts, and coarsely (but not too coarsely) chop the remaining 1/4 c. We put them in a zip-lock bag and used our chicken breast pounder to get the right size.
4. Prepare the lemon zest and for the hazelnut gelato, the lemon juice. Skip this for the pistachio gelato.
5. Wisk or beat together the egg yolks and sugar in the top of a double boiler as though making [zabaglione](#). We found it easier to add the liqueur or extracts/cardamom at this stage to compensate for the extra sugar that stiffens up the mixture. (Frances recommends adding it later with the heavy cream.) The yolks should turn light yellow as in the zabaglione process. It might be a good idea to reserve half the sugar until the next step so the mixture does not lose its liquid state and become too thick. For the pistachio gelato, mix in the finely crumbed pistachios so that their essence cooks into the mixture.
6. Heat up the half and half until it is warm but not scalding (microwave!) and put a half cup into the egg mixture to then add back to the half and half mixture without shocking the eggs from the heat. Or just gradually add it in while continuously beating with electric beaters.

7. Then place the top into the double boiler (preboil the water) and cook beating or stirring constantly until the mixture thickens slightly without boiling. We check that the temperature elevates over 160° F but this seems to be easier to reach than thickening, which takes about 10 minutes. Ani has shown that towards the end one needs to use a wooden spoon to feel the thickening reach the desired point.
8. Cool in the freezer about 30 minutes, covering first with plastic wrap.
9. Remove from the freezer and mix in the heavy cream and remaining ingredients in the nut cases.
10. For the limoncello case, strain the mixture to remove the lemon zest and any lumps for a final smooth consistency. Press hard through the strainer to get the most out of the dregs.
11. Pour into the ice cream maker and process according to the manufacturer's instructions. We set our Lello Gelato machine timer on 40 minutes on the recommendation relayed by our sister-in-law from customer feedback she found while surfing. Maybe 35 is enough. Check near the end of the time period.

notes

1. [Under the Tuscan Sun](#), by Frances Mayes, paperback edition 1997, p.136.
2. Gelato by Lello, no company website yet.
3. Capogiro Gelato, 13th & Sansom, Philly Center City.
4. [Illustrations](#) available.

postscript

This basic recipe can easily be converted into many other variations with a little imagination.

- **lingonberry (-guavaberry) gelato**

bob's [favorite cheesecake flavoring](#) was the next choice. In the limoncello gelato, replace the limoncello and lemon zest by:

- 1 T lingonberry syrup plus 1 T [guavaberry liqueur](#)
or 2 T of lingonberry syrup
- 1/2 to 1/3 c (about 175g) lingonberry preserves
[lingonberry products available at [IKEA USA](#)]

The color is a weird shade of pink, but delicious.

braised pork chops

2004 has been a slow year so far for the food blog. South Beach struck the dr bob team in February. Only gelato had made it to the lineup in January (with frequent variations and repetitions following) but half the team can't even eat it. [Taste, yes!]

March arrives. Spring Break too. And another night of hitting the supermarket on the way home from the Ivory Tower. The other white meat is calling bob's name. Pick me, pick me. The cheap asparagus find from the night before is already done and waiting when the protein entree shows up in the kitchen. bob leaves the execution to ani, who does a bang-up job of imparting taste to the thin cut pork chops. Improvising with our Marsala wine from past experience. Coincidentally the title article in the day's weekly newspaper food section is "Worthy of BRAISE", which is what she did without seeing the paper. Five chops. Two apiece. One left over for another day. Easy. Low carb. Low fat, sort of?

ingredients

1/2 - 3/4 lb thin sliced boneless pork chops
salt and pepper
flour
2 T olive oil
2 cloves garlic, thin sliced
1/4 c Marsala wine
1/4 c water with 1 t tomato paste dissolved in it.

instructions

1. Season the chops with salt and pepper on both sides.
2. Flour the chops, shaking off excess.
3. Brown the chops on both sides in olive oil in a nonstick skillet.
4. Add the garlic, wine and diluted tomato paste.
5. Cover and cook on low heat for about 15 to 20 minutes, or more depending on the thickness of the chops.
6. Serve.

notes

1. Simple. But good enough to remember.
2. [Illustration](#) available.

bob jantzen '74: 30th reunion?

After almost 30 years of post-college life, I have finally acquired a self-freezing ice cream machine only because a sister-in-law thought I might like it and decided that Christmas of 2003 was the right time to act. It had always seemed like too much of an indulgence, even though it's really only a matter of a couple hundred buck investment, hardly anything for a kidless professional couple like us. Who at this age are now destined to only be uncle bob and aunt ani to some actual nieces and nephews and some close friends' children where we get the honorary titles.



aunt ani, real nephew shant, uncle bob (2003)



limoncello gelato (with a little help from zia irene in puglia)

So why are so many of those who are now running the nation, including some of our classmates, seeking more wealth and power than they need or deserve at the expense of the many underpowered and underwealthy of the world while I was still waiting for my ice cream machine? How did the idealism of the 1960s turn into what we are living through now? Where is the caring and fairness that is supposed to underlie the "Judeo-Christian" foundations of our nation?

I came from a working class family and followed my interest in math to Princeton, but got sidetracked into physics with the help of David Derbes '74, then veered back towards math via general relativity which landed me a lifelong connection with Rome (via Remo Ruffini, from John Wheeler's relativity group in the 1970s) that has enriched my life considerably. Graduate school took me to U.C. Berkeley to another Princetonian, Abe Taub *35, just before his retirement. And after 5 years of wandering postdocs including Chapel Hill, Rome, Munich and Cambridge (MA), the math department at Villanova University provided a comfortable academic home, permitting a continuing part time academic life in Italy and bringing Ani and her Armenian-Lebanese heritage into my life.

In 2000 I made a small contribution to holding on to some of Princeton's history by putting on-line *The Princeton Mathematics Community in the 1930s: An Oral History Project*, which I stumbled upon after Abe's death in 1999: <http://www.princeton.edu/mudd/math> .

And since we all need a little humor to help lighten up the harsh reality of our world (and everybody has to eat), I continue to grow our humorous on-line cookbook for those who care to drop by my part of the internet:

<http://www.drbojenterprises.com>

If you have any reflections to share about any of this, I'd be happy to hear from you.

30reunion.htm: 9-mar-2004 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

chicken marsala

Having proven himself with the manly task of digging into shale to plant some shrubs as a border for our new paver-stone patio behind our modest town home, bob forgoes exercising on the Tony Little Gazelle machine after work, leaving it to ani for a change, who in turn skips her Pilates for a short token run on the Gazelle. Leaving bob to deal with the thin sliced chicken breast and 99 cent a pound seasonal asparagus (cheap in 2004!) snatched on the way home. Chicken marsala was already on his mind after a previous evening's report on a restaurant visit by his mom about a veal marsala dish that was slightly off. We can do better was the intent, with chicken slightly more healthy and less guilt-laden as a choice considering the horror stories of how young cows are mistreated to produce commercial veal. At least this time. We still do veal. We're inconsistent.

We'd already done Marcella's veal marsala recipe a few times in the past. The distant past since the details were no longer stored in accessible memory. Instead of pulling out her book bob looked into the approach taken by the food scientists at the [America's Test Kitchen](#) Cook's Illustrated magazine kitchen, in particular in their cookbook *Classic Italian*, a group effort led by the team member with the classic Italian grandmother who inspired him all the way into the food business. But their recipe had pancetta, mushrooms, tomato paste, they advised sweet Marsala (we prefer dry, based on untested prejudice against sweet wines in general, not particularly relevant in cooking). We had no pancetta or mushrooms and did not have tomato paste in our vision. Their advice about garlic, lemon juice and keeping the chicken warm in the oven while doing the more complicated sauce did help us with the simpler route we were looking for though.

So we threw together an amateur [mojito](#) with superfine Splenda (sugar substitute) since we were out of superfine sugar and this year sugar is bad anyway (carb awareness kicks in nationwide), hence the Splenda on hand for ani. Fresh mint was the third key buy on the way home. A little mojito mix and Bacardi light rum and we were in business, using a not-meant-for-shaking tall traveling coffee mug with a couple of small drinking and air holes in the removable top that had to be covered with two fingers during shaking. Over the sink. We prepped the asparagus first before doing the grilled asparagus with parmesan, again not following the recipe in *Classic Italian*. We're food rebels. But not without a cause.

The chicken came together pretty well, while the asparagus was finished off in the broiler (oven). Oops, no pasta or rice or potato to keep them company. Banned from regular consumption by the new food order. And we were too lazy to put a salad together. A few reheated brussel sprouts help out, and some whole wheat pita bread for bob, with more size to feed than ani. The Marsala, especially with the lemon-garlic accent, is a real success. Who would have thought? [We're all bozos on this bus](#), but sometimes the clowns get the job done.

ingredients

- 3/4 lb thin sliced chicken breast (ours had 5 pieces)
- salt and pepper
- flour to coat
- 1 T butter

2 T olive oil
2 T Marsala wine
juice of half a big lemon
2 cloves garlic, pressed

instructions

1. Rinse and pat dry the chicken with paper towels.
2. Sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper and then coat with flour (refined, white, but so little, who cares). Set aside.
3. Heat the oil and butter and then brown the chicken in two shifts since only about half will fit in the nonstick frying pan at a time.
4. Put the first chicken batch in a glass pan in the preheated warm oven while you do the second batch.
5. Remove the second chicken batch to the glass pan and add the wine and lemon juice and reduce a bit, then press in the garlic and toss around a minute or so.
6. Put the chicken back in the pan and let simmer a few more minutes on low heat.
7. Then serve, pouring a little of the sauce over each serving.

notes

1. Oh yeah, the asparagus. After the half cooking by the usual asparagus pot boiling halfway up the stalks treatment, we drained them and put them in a glass dish and sprayed them with extra virgin garlic flavored olive oil and tossed them around a bit to coat, grating in some parmigiano to taste and tossing a bit and then grating a bit more for good measure. Was there some salt and pepper tossed in too? Probably. All inserted into the broiler under careful watch. Browned a bit so you could tell they were close to fire. Yum.
2. I'm not sure of the relevance of that bozos on the bus remark, but it seemed appropriate at the time. It comes from an old weird 1970s comedy album by [Firesign Theater](#) that stuck in my head for all this time.
3. Some may question our assumption that [chickens don't count](#) while small cows do, in our substitution of chicken for veal. Yup, we're inconsistent there too.
4. No pictures were taken since it seemed so easy, but then ani raved about the chicken and bob was surprised at the terrific flavor of the asparagus besides feeling good about the way the chicken turned out, by which time the plates were half-eaten and decidedly unphotogenic. Next time.
5. The next time we did try it with veal, but definitely not as tender.
6. Then we spontaneously invited the in-laws, 7 adults and some kids on a late Sunday afternoon and did the chicken again. They liked it.
7. And then we did it again, and took some [photos](#).
8. We later tried it with thin slices of turkey breast that have appeared in our supermarkets, and ani through in some fresh chopped parsley as a garnish that added a nice little bit of color to the dish. And sliced the garlic instead of pressing it. Tasted great.

garlic yogurt sauce

This is a terrific sauce for eating chicken with. Since it has such a strong taste, any simple baked or grilled chicken will do. Whether it is Armenian or just general Middle Eastern in origin is not clear but there are variations in the whole region of the Eastern Mediterranean. This one comes from a lesson for bob delivered by Nora. Apparently labor saving devices like food processors or hand blenders are not allowed here. The old-fashioned mortar and pestle is not so difficult to use anyway.

ingredients

2 T vegetable oil
1/4 t salt
2–3 garlic cloves (to taste)
1 t lemon juice
1/2 c plain yogurt (dilute to taste).

instructions

1. With mortar and pestle, slowly grind the pressed garlic with the salt making a paste for about 5 minutes. Don't be fooled by the apparently small amount of garlic/salt mixture in the bottom rim of the mortar.
2. Then begin adding the oil 1/2 t at a time, incorporating smoothly, alternating with a few drops of the lemon juice, until both are used up.
3. When a nice paste is formed, add the yogurt.
4. Check for salt.
5. Dilute with more yogurt if too strong for your tastes.
6. Use pestle in larger bowl to smooth out the sauce until silky smooth.

notes

1. [Illustrations](#) available.

grlcsaus.htm: 7-sep-2004 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

sour cream apple blueberry walnut pie

The inspiration for this combination pie comes directly from an article in a women's magazine that bob caught by chance in a doctor/dentist's office on the 14 super foods that can contribute to a more healthy cuisine for those of us Americans who are not only aware of what agribusiness and the food industry is doing to our national health but are ready to act locally to attempt to save ourselves from an eventual possibly unpleasant end should we make it that far. In fact this was a review of a [new book](#) that bob eventually ordered from Amazon after an eccentric food conversation with a colleague lead to the rediscovery of the book title and author with his help. Blueberries and walnuts are on the short list.

But it was really the free product sample at the Costco warehouse store that set the wheels in motion for the 2004 Thanksgiving dessert project. Dried blueberries? They look like purple raisins but they taste like blueberries. Sold! The fresh blueberry season is way too short, and although you can usually get them for 3.99 for a pathetically small plastic container-full out of season, the bob is not quite in the income bracket where that sticker price means nothing. Dried blueberries year round for his oatmeal with flax meal, banana, walnuts and fruit yogurt! Microwaved up with the oatmeal, they even loosen up a bit with the moisture. What a lucky find. One that bob would never have seen on his own wandering the isles impatiently searching for some other target acquisition. Free product samples really work.

The second contributing factor was the whole grain issue. 2004 had to go down in the books as the year of the new carb awareness craze. bob put refined white flour on his hit list. Aim for complex carbohydrates, like whole grain flours, yeah, that was the thing. And since bob loves baked goods, especially at the in-laws, whole wheat pastry flour had to be tried in whatever ways it could substitute for the killer white stuff. But someone had to lead the way in experimentation. Buying the stuff for the mother-in-law was not enough. The bob had to rejoin the ranks of the baking public that he had been away from too long, cheesecakes excepted.

So when the dr bob cooking team was relieved of the bird prep and supporting players activity for Thanksgiving, and stuck instead with the dessert job, it was only a matter of time before the pie idea came together. Sour cream, on the surface, might seem to defeat the possible health benefits of the other ingredients, but this seemed like the time to try nonfat sour cream in spite of our reservations about possible dangerous chemicals allowing such a product to be faked. Of course interpreting the container ingredient list requires a food expert and these guys are never around when you need them. Yogurt (another super food) might be a better substitute, but its baking with fruit properties were a possibly ruinous unknown factor that we did not need to introduce into the mix at this late time in the T-day countdown. The day before.

Pie crusts were something bob had mastered in his early single days, doing nice woven lattice topped apple pies for a few special occasions. But it had been years since we'd had any hands on experience with pies. Some new kitchen toys were ready: a pretty sleek black Good Grips rolling pin from Oxo and a silicone coated fiberglass Made In France Roll'Pat counter pastry mat that allows "dough to be rolled out effortlessly". Effortlessly that is, unless you absentmindedly approach this task without any recent experience.

After deliberating on the two whole wheat pastry dough recipes at the Bob's Red Mill [website](#) for

some time, bob discovers a much simpler no-frills recipe right on the package as he prepares to execute the dough prep step. But one recipe on the website said something about refrigerating for 12 hours first, and having already learned the refrigeration trick in earlier times, this seemed like a good way to get that out of the way the night before. Unfortunately the little part about letting it sit an hour after removing from the fridge escaped bob's attention. The bottom crust was pretty stiff and seemed a bit hesitant to roll out easily like the hype said, but persistence got it out to the required diameter. However, no quick release! It had to be peeled off tediously, which it allowed without actually breaking although a few really sticky spots thinned out the dough as it pulled away. Meanwhile a cell phone spouse check from ani allows her to remind bob about room temperature dough, so he gets the brilliant idea of a brief microwave defrost cycle to warm up the top crust dough a bit. Fatal error, almost. The dough turned into superglue, so the rolling pin was useless. Not one to give up, bob simply presses it out with his hands. He's planning a lattice top anyway, so it doesn't have to be perfect. Indeed it is far from perfect since this one tears up in the peeling process. Not to worry. Carving out almost strip-like segments with the parmigiano cheese wedge tool, and giving up the weave complication, a jagged lattice top manages to get laid down in bits and pieces. The result looks great! Never admit defeat as long as there is hope for an alternative exit strategy. In the kitchen that is.

The filling required some web surfing to figure out how to marry the super food combo with sour cream apple pie. Eventually one from Epicurious that is actually in a cookbook in our library suggests itself as good start together with the adjustments from the other recipes that had popped up. Seems to work out okay. But the crust clearly needs some practice and maybe some modification. Not as flaky as advertised. But as ani suggested and bob initially rejected, warming your slice 30 seconds in the microwave before slapping on the ice cream is a good idea.

ingredients

flaky whole wheat pastry dough [or substitute your favorite less problematic dough]

- 2 c Bob's Red Mill organic whole wheat pastry flour
- 1 t sea salt
- 3/4 c unsalted butter, chilled (1.5 butter sticks = 12oz)
- 5 to 8 T ice water

filling dry stuff

- 3 T flour, whole wheat pastry flour if you are brave
- 1/3 c sugar in the raw
- 1/4 t salt.

filling wet stuff

- 1 c nonfat sour cream, full fat sour cream or plain nonfat yogurt
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 t vanilla extract.

filling fruits and nuts

- 5 Granny Smith apples, halved, cored, skinned and food processed with the slicer blade
- 1 lemon, juice of
- 1 c dried blueberries
- 1 c walnut baking pieces (finely chopped size)

facilitator

- vegetable oil spray

instructions

1. Start with the dough prep. Sift the flour and salt into a large bowl.
2. Cut the frozen butter sticks into 1/8 in thick slices if you keep your extra in the freezer like we do. If not cut your refrigerated butter sticks into 1/8 in thick slices. A good sturdy bread knife will do this job nicely in the first case. Many knives will fill the bill in the second.
3. Dump the butter slices into the dry stuff and tediously cut it up with a pastry tool for working chilled butter or other fats into flour. What is that called? You can stop when the result resembles a course meal with pea-sized lumps.
4. Then add 2 T of water and begin working the dough together a bit still with the pastry tool, then adding a T of water at a time until it looks like it might be on the verge of allowing a dough ball to form. Proceed carefully with both hands kneading it into shape so that the water fat and flour come together and form into a dough ball.
5. Cut into two pieces and flatten out into disk shapes. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 30 minutes.
6. Remove from fridge and let sit 30 minutes.
7. Then attack with your favorite method for rolling out the bottom pie crust.
8. If successful try to release from your working surface and transfer to the 9 or 10 inch pie plate, sprayed first with cooking spray to help release the crust later on. We use dark glass. Set aside.
9. Prepare the apples and dump them into another large bowl and mix them up with the juice of one lemon with your hands just for good measure. The food processor tip came from user feedback at the [Epicurious](#) web site. It makes the apple slices uniformly thin for thorough cooking and saves the extra work of slicing them up by hand.
10. Dump the filling dry stuff into still another large bowl, or maybe the same large bowl as above if you are a fanatic about cleaning during the creative process. Bob is not. Ani is.
11. Combine all the other filling wet stuff and dump in the apples and dried blueberries and mix up well.
12. Pour into the bottom pie crust working the apple slices into more efficient stacking patterns with your hands, leveling off the contents.
13. Sprinkle the walnut pieces over the top and spread around with your hands. Pat down nicely.
14. Roll out the second crust and if brave, do a lattice top. Good luck.
15. Bake in a 350° F oven for about 45 minutes with four strips of aluminum foil protecting the edge crust. Then remove the strips and continue baking another 10 minutes or so, and if your whole wheat crust still looks like it is not ready, turn up the heat to 425° F and finish it off for another 10 minutes. Watch it though. No need to screw up your end product because of carelessness at the last step.
16. Remove and cool, then refrigerate. Remember this has egg and sour cream inside, so even if you might think about leaving some pie types out at room temperature for extended periods, this one should be stored in the fridge.
17. Serve with vanilla or almost vanilla ice cream or frozen yogurt, no excuses. For our mandatory topping, we made our usual homemade ice cream recipe using 1 T of tiramisu liqueur as the flavoring, reminiscent of an old Ben and Jerry's White Russian flavor (we subbed the Kalua at the last minute with the more complex coffee-plus-extras flavoring in our last almost finished tiramisu bottle).

notes

1. [SuperFoods Rx](#), Steven Pratt, M.D. and Kathy Matthews, William Morrow Publishers, 2004.
2. [Stoneridge Orchards](#) Whole Dried Blueberries. Convenient 14oz resealable zip-lock bag. Under 8 bucks at [Costco](#) nationwide in fall 2004, but later disappeared. But once aware of the existence of this category of product, the cooking team immediately spotted it at Trader Joe's as a regular item under the generic Trader Joe label. What a jewel that chain is!
3. [Trader Joe's](#) California Walnut Baking Pieces. Convenient 16 oz resealable zip-lock bag. Reasonable.
4. [Bob's Red Mill](#) whole grain products. Like the flax meal we inject into our oatmeal.
5. [Oxo Good Grips rolling pin](#).
6. World Cuisine [Roll'Pat counter pastry mat](#).
7. [Illustrations](#) available.

scabwpie.htm: 30-jan-2005 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

not quite barley risotto

The original intention was a low rice / high veggie ratio risotto to fit into our new low carb guidelines, but ani vetoed the rice before starting her sorely needed after-work nap. Okay, bob thinks to himself, why not try bulgur as a substitute for the arborio, a pretty white (= refined and therefore perhaps less desirable nutritionally) rice, and after all, one often sees barley "risotto" in food mags, and big bulgur looks like pearl barley, but it is healthier (we think). Sure enough there was an untouched (but also unmarked) plastic bag of the pearl barley look-alike in the pantry, so the experiment was set. Except it turned out to be whole wheat kernels instead as determined by our middle eastern grain expert after bob woke her up to eat the completely prepared dinner he'd whipped up during her sleep time. Whole wheat kernels don't seem to have their own distinct short name, but are apparently closely related to bulgur but less processed (no cracking), hence better? They are used in making the very tasty Armenian porridge-like slop called [herriseh](#), one of our earlier recipes from the post Y2K year where the distinction between uncooked "shelled wheat" and cooked "cracked wheat" (=bulgur) had already been recorded and forgotten by bob.

It turned out pretty tasty with the shelled wheat, which ani noted were still "al dente", an observation bob missed in his enthusiasm, perhaps resulting from trying to fake the cooking time from bulgur recipes which already has a head start from pre-cooking. We'll try something similar again with bulgur. Pearl barley would also be an acceptable substitute. We've gotta do something since the recent reduction on risotto production in our daily cuisine has left a big hole, and bulgur can certainly be expanded out of its narrow range of pilaf recipes in traditional Armenian cooking to fill the gap.

We'd picked up a bag each of baby spinach and baby arugula the day before, and some white mushrooms and roasted red peppers to add to the mix of a colorful dish. We ultimately decided to do the spinach as a side dish, quickly wilted in a pot with a bit of water and then sautéed with olive oil and a half clove of garlic, while tossing in a cup or so of the arugula into the "risotto" towards the end. For protein, a couple of thin flat John Dory fish filets fresh from the local farmer's market, salt and peppered, then a few minutes for each side on a grill pan, with a bit of lemon squeezed over the second side. The three dishes came together quickly for a tasty nutritious home-cooked meal, totally from scratch. With minimal packaging to contribute to America's burgeoning landfills. What more can you ask?

This recipe was done for a two person big/little portion division (bob/ani), one helping, no leftovers. Doubling the ingredients, except perhaps the olive oil, would be a more natural recipe size.

ingredients

basic grain starter

2 T olive oil

1/2 onion, finely chopped

1/2 c shelled wheat, cracked wheat = bulgur large cut, or pearl barley (for which the recipe name must then be modified)

salt and pepper to taste

1.5 c boiling water (use a teapot) plus 1 t veggie broth paste

mushroom prep

1 T butter

1 T olive oil

4 medium white mushrooms, brushed and chopped

flavor and color additives

1/4–1/2 one roasted red pepper, diced

1 c (roughly) of (prewashed) baby arugula

Middle Eastern red pepper powder to taste, or substitute hot paprika, or paprika plus a dash of cayenne.

instructions

1. This is a standard risotto exercise, except with appropriately varied cooking time (longer for shelled wheat, perhaps shorter for barley) for the rice substitute. Start some water boiling in a teapot.
2. Sauté the onion in olive oil until softened in a flat bottomed nonstick pot.
3. Stir in the "not rice" and let it absorb the oil and onion flavor for a minute.
4. Combine boiling water plus concentrated veggie broth together in a glass measuring thing and pour into the pot.
5. Meanwhile having pre-prepped the mushrooms quickly, sauté them for a few minutes until they look right (judgment call) and toss them in with the quickly diced roasted red pepper and red pepper powder of your choice.
6. Let simmer for 20 to 30 minutes (30 for the shelled wheat, 20 or less for the others).
7. Do the al dente test, but make sure the kernels are not chewy. No problem cooking these past some magic moment. It's not pasta.

notes

1. Feel free to be creative in changing the ingredient lineup. The main idea is to use a more complex carb in place of the traditional arborio.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

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

2005

fennel fish again

We'd already had some experience with [fennel and fish](#) before and it was good, but a little labor intensive. SO when this newspaper quickie recipe appeared, bob was motivated to act. The recipe flipped its way out of the paper into pole position on the kitchen counter in the (overflowing with good intentions) cookbook holder jammed with printouts and clippings, most victims of the perpetual problem of American life, lack of time to plan actual implementation. Halibut and fennel, an H fish. Unfortunately bob's memory being what it is for detail, at least for certain details, when looking for the H fish at the local farmer's market there were only haddock fillets and no halibut. Of course if he'd thought about it, he would remember from experience that halibut is a big fish quite unlike haddock filets, but hey, this could work with lots of different fish.

Since our discover of [fennel at the Rome central train station](#), we've been keeping it in our food radar crosshairs, picking it up for raw additions to salads as well as an occasional baked (though pre-boiled) delivery. This time we got our our rarely used Titanium chef's knife to thinly slice it up before boiling to soften it up a bit before finishing it off with parmigiano in the oven. It did the job. No doubt another less glamorous knife would have sufficed.

We opened up a white wine hand carried from Italy for the last step, but in our makeover, that step was aborted. The wine was a good partner for the finished dish though. And a big salad. It doesn't take much to whip up a good home cooked meal from scratch. Who's buying all that packaged prepared food at the supermarket? More to the point, why are they buying all that packaged prepared food at the supermarket? Hmm. Let's not get sidetracked on politics here.

Go find a fish and some fennel and try out some version of this recipe.

ingredients

fennel precursor

- 2 fennel bulbs, stalks removed and fronds reserved
- 1 T butter or olive oil
- 1/4 t coarse (sea or kosher) salt

fish stuff

- 3 halibut steaks, about 8oz each or any mild fish—steaks or fillets—including swordfish, snapper, trout or whitefish (what, no haddock?)
- 3/4 t coarse (sea or kosher) salt
- 1/2 t cracked pepper
- 1/4 t ground red pepper
- 2 T butter or olive oil

fish topper/finisher

- 1/2 c grated parmigiano
- 1/4 c Pernod (see below) or dry white wine (or broth for alcohol avoiders)

instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F. Heat a medium pan of water to boil.
2. Wash, trim and slice up the fennel bulbs into thin pieces, setting aside some of the cleaned fronds for garnish if you appreciate food aesthetics.
3. Boil the fennel 10 minutes and drain. Toss in a bowl with the remaining precursor ingredients and set that aside too.
4. Meanwhile (that means in parallel) season the fish with the fish spices. Heat the butter over medium high heat in a large oven safe skillet and then add the fish and cook until lightly browned on one side, about 3 minutes.
5. Arrange the fennel around the fish and sprinkle the fennel with parmigiano.
6. Roast (in that oven) until the fish is almost cooked through, about 7 minutes.
7. Transfer the fish to a platter and keep warm.
8. Reheat the skillet over high heat and add the alcohol, stirring to scrape up the browned bits from the pan, and cook 1 minute.
9. Spoon this sauce over the fish and garnish with the fennel fronds.

notes

1. Nutritional content per serving, assuming it feeds 6 people: 261Cal, 27g Prot, 6g Carb, 13g Fat, 67mg Chol, 682mg Sodium, 2g Fiber.
2. Pernod? It's that [anise family](#) of hard drinks again (ouzo, arak, sambuca, etc). Feel free to try one of these instead.
3. Courtesy of Knight-Ridder New Service, dedicated to excessive profits over fourth estate responsibilities, Philly Inquirer, January 6, 2005, Halibut with Fennel and Parmesan by Carol Mighton Haddix. Carol reminds us that fennel is one of those overlooked vegetables. We quite agree. And she characterizes this combo of mild fish and fennel with parmesan as quick and elegant. You decide.

fenlfsh2.htm: 20-nov-2005 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

lemon yogurt blueberry pistachio pound cake

This is a recipe makeover. Ani spotted the original in Bon Appetit (bob is a 20 year subscriber by this point) and together a few health conscious changes and flavor upgrades came of joint conferencing between the participating cooking team team members. The team has been big on blueberries this year, discovering dried blueberries to substitute overpriced out of season fresh blueberries for daily breakfast intake (and it's one of 14 super foods!), while bob has become a whole grain crusader.

Splenda came onto the scene as a possibly healthier alternative to existing sugar substitutes already on the market, or maybe it was just a clever marketing campaign that really worked well. We first tried half Splenda and half natural turbinado sugar and then went 100% Splenda to see if it would stand up to the hype in the baking arena. Whole wheat pastry flour was another recent find but it remained unclear whether wheat flour or whole wheat pastry flour is better for baking. We pretended it did not matter and went with the pastry flour since it was on hand. Nuts are also good for us, and make quick breads and pound cake tastier. Ani is partial to pistachios, and there were some aging bags in the cupboard that were just not going away, so we volunteered them as a flavor upgrade to keep the blueberries company while the latter were providing a high color contrast with the lemon yellow cake in which they're imbedded. Later we tried mixed dried berries from Trader Joes: blueberries, cranberries and strawberries, also good. We kept making this cake repeatedly. Must be a keeper too.

The original recipe was plain, how boring. Although it did have a marmalade [= jam for us regular folks] glaze, which we vetoed. As for ingredient ratios we finally settled on half all-purpose flour, half whole wheat pastry flour since 100 % of the latter made the cake a bit dense, and half and half Splenda and turbinado (or regular) sugar too since we did not do independent testing of the ratios.

ingredients

dry stuff

- 1 1/2 c all purpose flour [we do 3/4 white, 3/4 whole wheat pastry flour]
- 2 t baking powder
- 1/4 t salt

wet stuff

- 1 c plain yogurt [she said whole milk, we use nonfat yogurt]
- 1 c sugar [we use half turbinado sugar and half Splenda sugar substitute]
- 3 large eggs [we use happy chicken eggs]
- 1 t packed finely grated lemon peel
- 1/4 t vanilla extract
- §
- 1/2 c vegetable oil [canola oil is healthier than generic veggie oil]

add-ins [our addition]

- 1 c raw pistachios
- 1 c dried or frozen blueberries or mixed dried blueberries, strawberries and cranberries

glaze [our subtraction]

1/4 c lemon or orange marmalade
1 t water

instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350° F after centering a rack vertically in it. [Ours is close enough, a little low though not centered.]
2. Butter and flour a 8.5x4.5x2.5 inch nonstick loaf pan. [We use that easy new cooking spray with flour product, although its residue seems to stick tenaciously to the top edges of the pan even through vigorous scrubbing. Hmm, food for thought. Traces of serendipitously formed superglue?]
3. Sift the dry stuff into a medium bowl.
4. Combine the wet stuff, except for the oil, in a large bowl and whisk until well blended.
5. Slowly whisk in the dry stuff.
6. Using a rubber spatula, fold in the oil.
7. Fold in the add-ins.
8. Transfer the batter to the waiting pan and place on a baking sheet and then into the oven.
9. Bake about 50 minutes until the cake begins to pull away from the edges and passes the cake test: insert thin knife or tooth pick into the center and if it comes out "clean", pull the cake, otherwise give it some more time.
10. Cool on a rack 5 minutes and then make sure the sides are loose and turn it over onto the rack to remove from the pan. Cool completely.
11. We never even considered doing the marmalade topping: stir marmalade and water in a small saucepan over medium heat until it melts, then brush the hot mixture over the top of the cake and let it cool and set. Maybe we should try it one day.
12. Slice crosswise to serve. [Duh...is there any other way to slice pound cake?]

notes

1. [Bon Appetit](#), February 2005, p.91. "When French women bake", by American expatriate Dorie Greenspan.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

lmnygtck.htm: 28-apr-2005 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

eggplant appetizer

One of our Iranian friends Farouz made this for us and we like it so much and tried it herself from a brief verbal description of the recipe. And it turned out just as good as we remembered it. How often does that happen?

We used it as an appetizer with whole wheat pita bread pieces and the leftover as a sauce in a leftover chicken with spicy white garlic sauce for a quick pita lunch wrap. No matter how it found its way into our digestive track, it was savored at entrance.

ingredients

- 3 narrow Italian eggplants (about 10oz ~ 300g) or the equivalent
- 2 T olive oil
- 1/4 t salt (adjust to taste)
- 2-3 cloves (to taste)
- 2 plum tomatoes
- 1/4 t allspice (ME if available)
- freshly ground pepper (to taste)
- cayenne red pepper (to taste but not too much!), just for an edge but not heat
- parsley

instructions

1. Prepare the eggplants. Clean and cut into 3/8 in ~ 1 cm cubes with skins. Clean and chop the tomatoes.
2. Heat the oil in a small nonstick pot. When sufficiently hot, dump in the eggplant and salt.
3. Sauté a couple of minutes stirring around and then let them simmer covered but not sealed tight until they are nicely softened, maybe 30 minutes. Overcooking is better than undercooking here.
4. If the tomatoes are not juicy enough, add in a tablespoon or two of water.

notes

1. Like red traffic lights in Naples, this is just a suggestion. You may vary with your whim. We love eggplants prepared in many Mediterranean and Asian ways. This is our way to share that love before the main course.

egpltapp.htm: 20-nov-2005 [[what, ME cook?](#)] © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

not quite maqloobeh (upside down rice)

This is a traditional Jordanian dish ([Palestinian?](#)) that got bob's attention when Isgouhi had a fantasy moment and expanded the pine nut contribution to include pistachios and sliced almonds as well. These nuts and the cinnamon provide the hook for this chicken and rice combo dish, "upside down" since it is traditionally served by inverting the contents of the pot in which it is cooked onto a serving plate. Yumm. Sounds a little trite to use such an unsophisticated word here but it seems deliciously appropriate. Bob planned to get Isgouhi to teach him the tricks in his own kitchen, but the teacher failed to show leaving the team no recourse but to go ahead after a phone chat for the particulars. Of course when she does it, she makes a family size recipe (twice this one) which has enough bulk to nicely invert on a plate to make an attractive bit of food art, dressed up with delicate placement of the nuts onto the resulting mound.

ingredients

chikun base

- 1 lb chicken breasts
- water to cover
- 3 c water
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 5 peppercorns

nut prep

- 1 c total of sliced almonds, pistachio halves and pieces, pine nuts
- 2 T butter

rice

- 1 c Uncle Ben's long grained rice (we used brown rice for this nontraditional experiment)

spice mix

- 1/4 t allspice
- 1/4 t ground cloves
- 1/4 t cinnamon
- 1/4 t pepper
- 1/4 t salt

instructions

1. Cover the chicken breasts with water, bring to a boil, boil 2 minutes and then remove from the heat and dump the water. [This cleans up the chicken.]
2. Add the 3 c water, cinnamon and peppercorns. Bring to a boil and boil 15 minutes.
3. Remove chicken and cut up into small pieces and set aside, leaving the liquid and spices in the pot until later.
4. Brown the nuts in a nonstick rounded chef's pan about 10 minutes and then remove and set aside. We used our 5 quart chef's pan.
5. Next brown the chicken in the remaining butter (browned) briefly (after all it is pretty cooked by this point).
6. Return the chicken water to the chef's pan and add the rice and spices and bring to a simmer and cook covered for 45 minutes for brown rice, 20 minutes for ordinary rice. Let

sit for 10-15 minutes with the heat turned off. Sprinkle the nuts over the mound after inverting on a serving plate so the chicken ends up on top.

notes

1. Why don't our recreations look as good as the original?
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

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

far breton

Prunes...in the US we don't even call them prunes anymore because of the irrational bias Americans seem to have against this super fruit that has an association with better body-plumbing functioning, body-plumbing which by nature shares digestive and out-of-norm sexual functions, and in puritanical America, this association is bad on both counts. In the new century the headliner on the package is "dried plums", as if we didn't know any better, and underneath in smaller letters with low contrast in color compared to the background is the dreaded translation: prunes. dr bob loves prunes but even he doesn't pick them up in the supermarket and he doesn't know why. Every once in a while a buy is made, but then remains in the fridge forever due to absentmindedness, a fairly obvious dr bob character flaw, noted often by ms_ani. In Europe or even Korea or almost any other country, you can even find one of dr bob's favorite yogurt flavors: prune! Really, in yogurt it is totally yummy. And has beneficial digestive system effects occasionally needed when traveling. The European Dannon company even makes "bio-active" prune yogurt for super results, although we are not exactly sure what those results are. Here in the third millennium US yogurt market, each company is splitting its yogurt line into 5 or 6 different versions: regular, low fat, nonfat are the traditional ones, sometimes custard or creamy, but now also whipped, carb or heart friendly, full fat super creamy, plus yogurt drinks that never used to compete with the solid yogurt shelf space which is still the same size set by second millennium standards. Drastically insufficient. So the flavor range in each separate yogurt line is pitiful. But this is a bit of a digression.

This is a rustic French prune custard cake typical of the Brittany region of France, which struck ms_ani's fancy in a recent Bon Appetit article on how all French women seem to be able to cook and bake standard simple but surprisingly rewarding dishes with a minimum of effort. While not blowing up to blimp size as a result of course. Too bad so little French cinema makes it to America so we can see these ladies in action more often. Although the kitchen is not the first room you think of when musing about French cinema.

Even though the effort level for this cake is low, it is a two stage recipe since for some reason the batter is supposed to chill 3 hours minimum before combining with the prune mixture and baking and hour, so you have to allow for this. Reading the recipe thoroughly before starting is a good idea, one which often does not find its way into practice in the dr bob kitchen. But which never seems to be a fatal error. In our first attempt, bob got out the food processor instead of the blender (absentmindedness, since the blender is not only out of sight, but out of the kitchen). When the batter started overflowing through the center blade tube, this distinction led to a quick remedial action, requiring a little extra added milk to replace the lost fluid after transferring to the super blender. The pulsing of the flour into the batter was a casualty of this mistake. Could it really make a difference? [The author says yes, too vigorous incorporation encourages gluten formation, which in turn toughens the finished cake. We'll see.]

As for the pan choice, bob thought a springform pan would be easier for cake removal, while ani voted for a glass baking dish. bob insisted. ani countered with the suggestion to wrap the bottom with aluminum foil to prevent leakage. bob said "nahh..." A little bit of batter began seeping out under the edge on the cookie sheet but bob guessed it would not amount to much before the heat stemmed the flow. However, by having inverted the bottom of the pan so the rim was underneath to enable easy access to the edge of the cooked cake for removal above, standard cheesecake

practice by now, the side of the springform pan created a nice well underneath that filled completely (1/4 inch deep) and baked rock solid onto the ungreased cookie sheet out of sight of the controlling chef eyes. Apparently cheesecake batter is sufficiently thicker than this batter to not present such amusing byproducts. Which soaked a day before we had the courage to try to scrub it off. Maybe we should have used the glass dish, or at the very minimum tightly wrapped the bottom and edge with foil and consider spraying the cookie sheet with cooking spray just in case. This is the danger of overconfidence matched against too much willingness to accept it.

Success, confirmed by a French expatriate lady from Paris who had once been to Brittany and tasted a local rendition of the dish. We'll be making this again and again. Of course Geraldine actually knows where Brittany is on the upper coast of France, whereas the cooking team has to [Google](#) it to have a clue. Americans are notorious for poor geography skills. Even enlightened ones like us, to some extent.

ingredients

batter

2 c whole milk [we used nonfat, all we ever have on hand these days]
3 large eggs [from happy chickens, why not?]
1/2 c sugar [we used sugar in the raw = turbinado sugar]
5 T unsalted butter, melted, cooled
1/4 t vanilla extract
1/8 t salt
3/4 c all purpose flour

prune mixture

1 c small or medium-size pitted prunes [bite size!]
1/2 c water
1/3 c raisins [we used extra moist baking raisins]
1/4 c Armagnac or other brandy

topping

powdered sugar

instructions

1. Batter.

Combine all the batter stuff except for the flour in a blender. Blend one minute.

2. Add the flour and pulse just until blended, scraping down the sides.

3. Cover and chill in the jar at least 3 hours and up to 1 day.

4. Prune mixture.

Combine the prune stuff except for the alcohol in a small heavy saucepan and cook over medium heat until the fruit is softened and the water is almost evaporated, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes.

5. Turn off the heat and pour the alcohol over the fruit and light with a long match, avoiding first degree burns.

6. Let the flames burn off, shaking the pan occasionally.

7. Transfer to a small bowl and cool completely. [Cover and let stand at room temperature. Can do a day ahead.]

8. **Combine and bake.**
Preheat the oven to 375°F. Butter an 8-in diameter cake pan with 2-in sides [we used a spring-form pan, see warning above]. Line the bottom of the pan with parchment paper [like the cheesecake routine!]. Butter the paper. Dust it all with flour, shaking off the excess [we used the cooking-spray-flour mixture]. Place on a baking sheet [leaks!].
9. Re-blend the batter about 5 seconds until smooth and pour into the pan. Drop the prunes and raisins into the batter, evenly distributing them.
10. Bake on the baking sheet until the sides are puffed and brown and the center passes the usual cake test: stab with a knife and if it comes out "clean", it's done. About 1 hour.
11. Cool completely on a rack.
12. **Finish off.**
This is a bit tricky with a double inversion. Place a piece of parchment paper on a flat plate and sift powdered sugar onto the paper. Run a knife around the outside edge of the cake to loosen from the pan. Then invert the cake onto the paper, releasing the cake from the pan. Peel off the bottom paper already there and place the serving plate over the cake and invert again. Dust the top with additional powdered sugar.
13. The author says this makes 8 servings, but you can cut more to auto-portion-size American guests. On second thought, 8 is about right.

notes

1. [Sunsweet](#) seems to be the major player in the dried fruit sector. Their prune packing boasts "3x better than fresh fruit" backed up by specific details in a bar graph comparison of its [nutrition density index](#) ("dried plums rule!") with other common fruit, plus [web testimonials](#) (everything has URL's these days!) about life changing benefits from ordinary folks...
2. [Sunmaid](#) owns the raisin market. Every supermarket has their red boxes with the maiden on the front, although it would probably be hard to pick her out of a lineup if she weren't on the box.
3. [Bon Appetit](#), February 2005, p.91. "When French women bake", by American expatriate Dorie Greenspan.
4. Brittany (= Bretagne) is the northwest corner of France (for the direction-challenged: upper left on the map), a peninsula-like outcropping that sticks out into the Atlantic.
5. Danone is a Paris-based multinational, parent of our Dannon. Its [Activia](#) line of yogurts comes in Vanilla, Strawberry, Prune, Peach & Fibre, and Sweetened Plain and is available next door in Canada! And they did not even have a revolution.
6. bob never would have tagged this recipe with a Post-it for later consideration, which shows how important cooperative learning is. Together the cooking team is greater than the sum of its parts. Minus a little pigheadedness in one of its members.
7. [Illustrations](#) available. The food photo in the magazine was prettier than ours. Oh, well. Better luck next time.
8. **PRUNE UPDATE:** In part thanks to this recipe, at ms-ani's request we have now added [prune mini-bites](#) to our daily breakfast ritual. And finally in 2006 [prune yogurt arrived in America](#).

bob's breakfast oatmeal

dr bob, a once aspiring mathematical physicist reduced to teaching unenthusiastic undergraduates that dreaded C-word (calculus), came from working class roots. Before going off to his carpenter/builder day, Dad always used to make himself a big bowl of Quaker Oats the old fashioned way, with boiling water on the stovetop. Occasionally bob would go for some weekend farina, a much smoother product, but that lumpy oatmeal never really appealed to him. Later in life another dreaded C-word changed this attitude. Not the Big C, but its little brother "cholesterol", elevated levels of which can lead to fatal heart disease. Or maybe not.

But in spite of the truckloads of oatmeal Dad ingested over his adult life, that dreaded cholesterol took him out anyway, although he had a 13 year reprieve after the first heart event at 53, a milestone year which is just around the corner for bob. And the family physician had counseled some action at the mid-century mark before moving on to Beverly Hills for a better life in a place other than "Pennsylvania—the state that loves you back" while continuing to increase malpractice insurance premiums. Apparently one of the many problems that afflict our backward state.

[Just saying no](#) to cholesterol lowering drugs from Big Pharma, bob decided to try to make some nutrition adjustments. Since ani was also cutting back on bad carbs, compensating for this reduction was already going in the right direction, but with all the press oats had been getting for a decade, giving morning oatmeal a try seemed like more than just a throwback to a family tradition: it seemed like a good choice to help balance the diet. Even the US official food pyramid was finally realizing which way the wind was blowing in the new millennium.

Starting with the package recommended dose of 1/2 c, for which all the nutrition info is calculated, bob found it too much once dressed up with the half-banana and fruit-flavored yogurt (usually peach) topped off by another cholesterol weapon: walnuts. Too filling, after taking into consideration the 5 g fiber toasted whole wheat muffin (plain) and the glass of juice. Lowering to 1/4 c cuts the benefits from the oats in half, but 1/4 c is better than zero. It seems impossible to actually eat all the daily recommendations from the food pyramid anyway: the alternative is to try balancing out what does actually get ingested on a regular basis.

After a year of higher fiber intake and better average carb quality and increased regular exercise on the gazelle machine, the new cholesterol numbers had only moved in the right direction a few points. What to do. Back to bob's original physician, who suggests a relatively new test: the carotid artery scan. Bad cholesterol numbers are only a POSSIBLE indication of trouble ahead. Without any other negative indicators (besides a father who dropped at 67 and his father who dropped at 63, at least saving themselves from the need for long term care insurance), there was no guarantee that the arteries were clogging up. The carotid arteries in the neck are big and accessible to an ultrasound examination coupled to high tech physics-intense machinery that checks out the situation. Like the canaries in the coal mines, but PETA friendly in that no animals need die in the testing. The test clears bob to continue just saying no to cholesterol lowering drugs. For now. But this oatmeal regimen is pretty tasty. No going back.

ingredients

1 T dried blueberries
1/4 c organic oatmeal oats
1 heaping T flaxseed meal
1/2 c cold water
1/2 banana [ani gets the other half]
1/2 container (6oz or 8oz container) fruit-flavored nonfat yogurt
2 T walnut pieces
optional strawberry pieces.

instructions

1. Dump in some dried blueberries in the bottom of the cereal bowl.
2. Dump in the oatmeal and shake in some flaxseed meal eyeing the measurement.
3. Shake them up until the ingredients shuffle together randomly.
4. Add two of the same 1/4 cup measures of cold water, to not throw off the microwave timing (warmer water = shorter time = greater danger of blowing up the oatmeal).
5. Place the bowl on a plate and cover with a plastic microwave cover and insert into the microwave.
6. Microwave on high 1 minute 20 seconds, or the time determined by trial and error for your microwave so that the oatmeal does not explode out of the bowl.
7. Remove and deposit the yogurt evenly over the top, leaving some oatmeal showing around the border.
8. Cut your half banana dropping the discs into the yogurt evenly. Add prepared cored and chopped strawberries if available. Sprinkle with some walnut pieces.
9. Eat while giving the morning paper a once through. Complement by fruit juice and vitamins and the highest fiber content whole wheat muffins available. [Trader Joes.]

notes

1. Fresh blueberries on top are a nice touch when not outrageously expensive. If you are feeling special, you might throw in some pistachios and slivered almonds. All these nuts are good for you in moderation, even if the walnuts make top billing by entry into the 14 superfoods list with oats and yogurt. Kiwi is another occasional option.
2. The dried blueberries mush out sucking in some of the water as the oatmeal cooks. A nice touch only discovered by chance after a year of this routine. A decided improvement.
3. Flaxseed is apparently way better than oats and many familiar fruits in its nutritional benefits. It adds a nutty taste to the oatmeal.
4. On the weekend, bob does up a 1/8th cup dose for ani, who is not big on breakfast, so this portion reduction helps keep her stomach from overloading.
5. [Illustrations](#) available.

boereg (cheese filled phyllo)

This is a universally favorite Armenian dish so many variations exist in the particular choice of ingredients, but the overall result is pretty standard. Having had it all her life made by other hands, Ani followed her mom Isgouhi's instructions once she decided it was time for her to try it out herself. Got it right on the first try and continued to practice successfully. It is really straightforward. And becomes addictive. Melted cheese, the magic component of the philly cheesesteak, married to paper thin buttery phyllo dough. Comfort food, probably better not to analyze the nutritional profile.

How to pronounce this word? It sounds like "burak" (*boo-rack*) to bob's untrained ear. Muenster or feta cheese seems to be the common ingredient in its many variations of mixed cheeses, some of which include cottage cheese. Adding spinach to the cheese layer(s) is another option.

ingredients

- 1/2 lb (lite) muenster cheese
- 1/2 lb (fat free) feta cheese
- 1/2 lb (lowfat) mozzarella cheese
- 1 t salt
- freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 T flour
- 1 egg
- 1 1/4 stick butter (1/4 lb plus 1/16 lb), melted
- 1 lb phyllo pastry dough (about 18 12" x 17" sheets)
- 1 c (nonfat) milk

instructions

1. Get the phyllo dough out of the freezer an hour before assembly time, but do not open the package. Work with it quickly once you do open it since it dries out quickly.
2. Grate the three cheeses with a large hole grater and mix them together with one hand and mix in the salt, pepper and flour and egg with a spoon. Set aside.
3. Meanwhile melt the butter and spray the roughly 11" x 17" baking pan with veggie spray.
4. Unfold the phyllo dough sheets and begin assembly. There are typically about 18 sheets roughly 11" x 17" in a 1 lb package. Start with one sheet on the bottom. Use a brush to roughly coat the sheet with butter minimally, being careful to get the edges done well so they don't dry out during baking. After this first layer, you are on your own.
5. The simplest sheet layering configuration is just to put one layer over the next (brushing with butter each time) until you stick the cheese layer in the middle (9 plus 9), or half the cheese mixture at the two points equidistant from the top and bottom (6 plus 6 plus 6), BUT somehow there was an alternating overlapping sheet tradition that continued over to our first attempts at doing this recipe explained below in a note.
6. Once finished with the layering, take a thin sharp knife and cut in half both ways and then in half again lengthwise, but divide each of the widthwise halves into thirds, making a 6 x 4 pattern of almost 3"x3" cheese squares.

7. Dribble the cup of milk evenly into all the grooves between the squares so that it will be absorbed by the internal structure of the pie.
8. At this point it can be refrigerated overnight so that it can be baked just before serving.
9. When ready, bake 30 to 40 minutes at 350° until golden brown.
10. Remove and let cool about 10 minutes before serving so nobody burns their mouth while ingesting.

notes

1. Leftovers are great for many days. Refrigerate. When ready to go for it again, microwave 20 to 30 seconds on high (experiment here, depending on how many squares you heat up).
2. Our initial fold over maneuvers were a bit absurd:
 - For example, after the initial full bottom sheet,
 - then take two sheets lapped halfway meeting in the center and hanging over the left and right sides of the pan in landscape orientation. Brush with butter.
 - Put another full sheet across (brushing each sheet with butter) and keep repeating these alternating layers 3 times having started and stopped with a full sheet across the pan, until about 10 sheets (7 layers, with 3 sheets overhanging the sides on the left and right) are down.
 - Then spread half the grated cheese mixture evenly across the pan.
 - At this point it is pointless to continue trying to explain. See the [two cheese layer configuration diagram](#). Which is actually somewhat a mathematical problem, especially in the case of two cheese layers.
 - At the end it is probably preferable to have a final full sheet so that the precutting before baking it not prejudiced by the accidental mid-lap meeting of two halves.
 - Bob reasoned that the long side is open and it causes no problem, so what is all this hassle accomplishing? Ani was convinced and we buried the tradition.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.

perugina baci cheesecake

Back in the 1970s, when dr bob was still just [mr bob](#) coming of age during the [Woodstock nation](#) (yes, bob was there), unlike the past few US presidents of both parties, he did no illegal drugs, so any comments made here comparing sugar addiction with societally disapproved drug use are only theoretical and have no actual experience to back them up. "They say" that drug highs are less easily attained with repetition, leading users to try stronger and more powerful substances on their path to self-destruction.

Fortunately the consequences for the more socially accepted sugar addiction of those of us with a pronounced weakness for dessert time are less severe (usually). The dr bob cooking team experience grew out of this obsession of the younger dr bob, when he acquired his cheesecake specialization, a dish he had never even known as a kid. As time went by, a reputation grew, but being an amateur, it became more and more challenging for him to raise the bar. And his own tastes became dulled by the increasingly sophisticated flavor combinations, requiring feedback from the target audience to judge the outcome of each new experiment since relying on his own assessment was becoming unwise.

Of course with increasing age, health considerations have seriously restricted the actual production and ingesting of our cheesecake creations, so the occasional exercise of knocking off another cake has become a minor blip on the nutrition profile. The most recent such blip appears to have been a success based on the testers' unsolicited superlative reviews. The [Mother Wonderful hazelnut cheesecake](#) has served as a stepping stone for many of our own imaginative variations over the years, and this time we were almost considering getting back to basics and doing it straight up. But the little part of us that seeks praise from others kept us mulling over how it might be kicked up a notch for the occasion. And the box of [Perugina Baci](#) hazelnut-filled chocolate kisses sitting on the counter from a duty-free purchase of a recent friend visiting from Italy eventually provided the answer. Sacrifice a handful of those delightful little foil-wrapped sweets for a possible right stuff move in the baking sector. The whole hazelnut on top inside each kiss doesn't cut very well, but the pieces don't have to be pretty since they get hidden in the interior of the cake. Brilliant. It worked. So well that instead of relegating it to some minor upgrade remarks on the original recipe, we elevate it to its own entry at a level that it certainly deserves.

For those of you who are still unfamiliar with these Italian chocolate nut combinations, run do not walk to the nearest place of business that offers the product. With our frequent Italian airport duty free browsing, we have almost become immune to their allure, but never forget that they deserve first place ranking among the category of BIG FOOD delivered chocolate sweets. They even come with little fortunes like Chinese fortune cookies as an added bonus. And they make great gifts for travelers to grab in many European airports. We speak with the authority of low budget Euro-trash wannabees.

ingredients

crust

1/4 lb butter (1 stick)

3/4 c graham cracker crumbs
1 c ground toasted hazelnuts

batter

2 lb cream cheese (4 8oz packages)
1 1/2 c sugar
pinch of salt
4 T Frangelico liqueur
4 large eggs
1/2 c ground toasted hazelnuts
10 Perugina Baci roughly chopped

topping

2 c sour cream
1/4 c sugar
1 t Frangelico liqueur
2 T ground toasted hazelnuts
1 Perugina Baci garnish

instructions

1. Preheat your oven to 350° F.
2. Find some recipe ready hazelnut crumbs if you can. We had a discontinued Trader Joe's untoasted crumb product that we cheated with by skipping the toasting treatment and sure enough one of our sensitive tongued tasters detected some trace of bitterness however so slight in the finished cake. Next time we will toast the little suckers first spread out on a cookie sheet, watching them to make sure they do not burn, say 10 minutes in the preheated oven. However, if you must, start with at least skinless whole nuts and crumb them up and toast, but if all else fails do the whole [hassling with hazelnuts](#) routine. [Spread in a single layer on a baking sheet and toast 5 minutes in a preheated 400 degree F oven. Then rub nuts against each other in a kitchen towel to remove as much of the skins as possible. Cool and crumb.] Make sure you can make the approximately 1 2/3 c crumb quota for this recipe with enhanced hazelnut crust.
3. Carefully unwrap and roughly chop the Baci and set aside.
4. Trace the bottom of a 10 in spring-form pan on parchment paper and cut carefully the circle and insert in the assembled pan.
5. Melt the butter (1 minute on high in the microwave), mix together the graham cracker and hazelnut crumbs with the butter, and press along the bottom only of the same 10 in spring-form pan.
6. 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 hazelnut crumbs (1/2 c).
7. Pour half the batter into the crust and spread around evenly. Carefully place the Baci pieces evenly across the top, then seal their fate with the rest of the batter, which can be jiggled slightly to level off.
8. Bake about 1 hour in a preheated 350° F oven until the outer edges begin turning a golden brown, necessary for visual impact later.
9. Remove for 10 minutes.
10. Mix the sour cream, sugar, and Frangelico and slowly spread over the center of the cheesecake, carefully avoiding the outer half inch or so of boundary to make a better

impression with the taste testers, sprinkling with hazelnut crumbs just before returning it to the oven for 10 minutes.

11. Remove and chill overnight at least before serving. Don't try to cut through the central Baci, but only up to it at as you work your way around it. Unfortunately the dental floss division scheme is not applicable here since the bits of Baci will not accommodate the floss. Use a sharp very thin knife.

notes

1. Oops, looks like [Perugina](#) suffered a multinational corporation corporate takeover by Nestles. Globalization fallout, not doubt.
2. By the way, if context did not convince you already, "bacio, plural: baci" is the Italian word for "kiss." As candy we Americans are more familiar with the Hershey product ("candy kiss") and like everything, it has its own [history](#).
3. After years of buying Perugina Baci at the Rome Fiumicino duty free shops for returning home presents, Perugina introduces a down-sized small bite version of the Baci product, not Bacetti but "Piccole delizie quotidiane" (= little daily pleasures, loosely translated) and no little love notes either, and we pick up five 500g bags when we spot them in 2006. No mention of them yet on the out-of-date slowly-loading [European Nestles web site](#).
4. A better discovery yet on the same trip from the new [Perugina Nero](#) (i piacere del fondente = the pleasures of dark chocolate) collection based on dark chocolate (to take advantage of the latest health trends in chocolate): Frutti delle Americhe. Anacardi, arachidi, noci del'amazzonia ricoperti di cioccolato fondente extra (cashews, peanuts and Brazil nuts, dipped in [unsweetened chocolate](#)?). We were immediately addicted, but only brought back three 150g packages and gave away two to friends! Nestle USA is still clueless about this fantastic product line. Looks like we will have to wait another year to restock.

more of nora's baked chicken

The annual fall return of the parents-in-law from Lebanon arrives. We decide to cook up the Saturday night dinner so Isgouhi doesn't have to work with fresh jet lag the day after. Baked pasta: whole wheat penne with onions, red pepper, a portobello mushroom cap and a pound of hot Italian sausage, and 3 small cans of pelati puréed in the Vitamix. Some parmigiano of course. Green beans sautéed with garlic in olive oil for a side dish. bob wanted it in the salad but everybody else objected. Nora brought this baked chicken. One lick of the spices on the surface and bob knew it was a keeper. Easy bake, no fuss, packed with flavor.

Nora has an innate taste for spices and their combinations and affinities, something which bob does not possess, and for which reason ms_ani is an indispensable partner in the kitchen. This is not the first time nora has impressed bob with simple baked chicken, but the magic ingredient is still one of those Middle Eastern combo spices, allspice, which is sort of like the American allspice but not exactly, although there seems to be no mention of what any possible difference might be on the web.

ingredients

- 1 lb chicken breasts
- 5 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 lemon, juice of (2–3 T)
- 4 T veggie oil
- 1 t Middle Eastern allspice
- 1 t sweet red pepper paste
- 1 t oregano, crushed with fingers
- 1/4 t cardamom
- 1/2 t salt (to taste)

instructions

1. Combine all the ingredients after the chicken into a marinade and marinate the chicken breasts for 1 hour.
2. Bake 45 minutes in a 400° oven.
3. Serve.

notes

1. yum?
2. bob mixed his green beans and almonds into the salad. Excellent.
3. nora's [first chicken recipe recorded here](#) used allspice with cinnamon and cardamom.
4. [Illustrations](#) available.

beets and goat cheese

Beets have never been a favorite veggie of anyone we know. They are a kind of in-your-face tuber-like plant product with strong taste and serious color issues that set it apart. Americans have weird Thanksgiving dish associations with beets where only the color is a dead giveaway of the source of the food ingredient. Russians make borsch soup out of them, delicious by the way, and again the color is unmistakable. No other food item comes close to that color. Sometimes they are found cooked and sliced up in salad bars. Apparently they are really healthy for us, which is the reason bob has acquired a taste for them at the salad bar in recent years by always adding a few into the mix when available. Just in time for the trendy beet recipes that started impinging on our consciousness in 2005. Ani never took the healthy salad addition advice from bob, but maybe the food network opened her mind enough to risk trying a trendy beet dish in a restaurant situation. Or maybe she trusted her sister who had already been converted and produced some plain cooked beets at a family dinner, and they turned out pretty tasty. Then a sophisticated beet dish turned up on the menu at a local relatively new but very positively reviewed restaurant: cooked beets with an orange vinaigrette topped with goat cheese finished in the oven with a little form to keep each portion vertical and elegant.

So Trader Joe's found a ready to use beet product and made an exception to offer it with its brand name instead of the generic Trader Joe label: steamed and peeled baby red beets (is there any other color?). We snatched it up. But a few nights passed before the occasion presented itself to try a knock off of the restaurant dish. Bob is home exercising on the Tony Little gazelle (20 minutes only, bob is a wimp these days) when traffic reporting in his NPR ear-feed alerts him to massive gridlock on all local roads because of a tractor trailer accident on I-76 blocking totally the city-bound traffic, causing gridlock spillover to all the local roads, promising to make ani's commute home a bit lengthy, so a ready dinner would be in order upon her arrival. How thoughtful, bob.

A little salad to fill out the veggie quota and some chicken tenders done up in a way inspired by Rachel Ray's previous night's show for the major protein item (sorry, chickens) and the deed is done. As for the beet dish, no oranges around, so lemon will have to do. A little hit from a yellow plastic container did the trick. And vinaigrette... hmm, isn't that like a mixture of oil and vinegar? How about some fancy balsamic vinegar? (bob is not much of a vinegar fan, so this is the most acceptable route down that road). Keep it simple. Drip the dr bob interpreted vinaigrette over the beets, spread some goat cheese on top and stick it in the oven.

And the result, though not impressive in appearance like in the restaurant, and certainly not a reproduction of the unknown ingredients, is very successful. Hope you think so too. Take your own liberties if you wish. But open up to beets. You're worth it.

ingredients

- 8oz recipe ready beets or not
- a few heaping spoons of goat cheese
- 1 t oil
- 1 t balsamic vinegar

1 squirt of lemon juice (1/2 t?) .

instructions

1. If your beets are not recipe ready, peel them and cook them by chopping up into small enough pieces and steaming.
2. If your beets are recipe ready and babies, they still need to be cut in half at least after draining.
3. Arrange the beets in some small oven container.
4. Mix up the vinaigrette and drop over the beets evenly using a small spoon.
5. Then cut small chunks of the goat cheese and place over the beets.
6. Bake for about 15 minutes in a 350° oven to melt the cheese and warm up the beets if they are not already so from step one.
7. Feeds two people as a side veggie.

notes

1. This recipe can be scaled up for more than 2 people.
2. Oops, maybe the color is not so unique. That Thanksgiving dish is cranberry sauce, not beet anything. Never were fans of that either. Also healthy stuff, cranberries that is. [Lingonberries](#) are the Swedish version. We discovered that pretty quick at IKEA, although the connection with cranberries came much later.
3. [Bianca Restaurant](#) in Bryn Mawr right behind the firehouse in the space where a past favorite Toscana Cucina Rustica used to reside. Apparently bob signed up on their email list because an email arrived shortly after knocking off their recipe: ROASTED RED BEETS AND GOAT CHEESE GRATIN, TOASTED PISTACHIO, ORANGE VINAIGRETTE was their summary and that explains how easy ani went for it among the other terrific choices: pistachio, her favorite nut, implanted from her Middle East origins. Next time we'll have to work that in somehow. Oops, [pistacchio](#) is the Italian spelling that we have been using up till now. Never was much good at double letters in that language...
4. Recipe ready beets courtesy of [Melissa's/World Variety Produce](#). Low in calories but rich in potassium. Thanks to [Trader Joe's](#) for bringing Melissa's to our world.
5. [Illustration](#) available.

farrotto with wild mushrooms

Farro. Spelt or emmer in English. We were late in acquiring our appreciation for this ancient Italian grain which is very similar to barley, a bob favorite. Looking for whole grain pasta products, its dark color came to our attention in the pasta lean years of South Beach diet influence, and we went for it hoping its advertised nutritional benefit would grace our lives. But it was our trusted Italian food store Carlino's which taught us about farrotto, or farro risotto. Needless to say, risotto took a big hit at the same time as the white flour pasta products, and we had been really big into both food groups in our cuisine habits, so this seemed to offer a guilt-free way to work risotto back into the program without the white rice down side. Apparently one can basically replace arborio rice by semipearled farro (*triticum dicoccum*) in any risotto recipe, but this one was our first experience.

We adjusted the original big family style recipe which called for a whole pound of farro, which is more than 2 cups. The almost insignificant amount of shallots suggested for that quantity were promoted to a whole onion because we like onions. The Carlino recommended Pastore Sini cheese was not on our shopping list, in fact we forgot it completely, but by chance picked up a pecorino cheese we'd sampled in the store (very tasty, it pays to give away free samples) and after googling the former, realized that it would nicely substitute. As for the mushrooms, the question is always: wash or brush? The criminis seemed flecked with black stuff so we brushed them as best we could and hoped for the best. The others seemed to pass the superficial amateur eye pass test and we just directly chopped them.

After all our hopes and expectations, we were not disappointed. Risotto with a barley edge, still creamy. The semipearled farro is a bit pricey but then so was arborio rice in the early days. We'll make the sacrifice. It's worth it.

ingredients

- 1/4 c olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 8oz pack mix of crimini, oyster, shitake mushrooms
- 1/4 c white wine
- 3 c (roughly) of veggie broth
- 1 c farro semiperlato (semipearled)
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 c freshly grated pecorino montes tipo foggiano or any Italian pecorino
plus a grating over each serving (or parmigiano if you forget to shop)

instructions

1. Start 3 cups of water boiling in a teapot and reduce the heat when it starts singing.
2. Meanwhile prepare the mushrooms: clean and chop. Same for the onion.
3. Sauté the onions until softened (translucent?), then toss in the chopped mushrooms and cook them down until they are softened (translucent?).
4. Toss in the farro and mix it up just like in the risotto process, sautéing it a moment, then

- splash with the white wine and evaporate off, a minute or so.
5. Add a cup of boiling veggie stock (boiling water plus enough concentrate for 3 cups stock) and grate in some black pepper and shake lightly a little salt to taste.
 6. Cover and simmer for about 50 minutes while continuing to monitor the water content and adding replacement 2/3 c at a time (approximate) until the al dente test gives the green light and the last bit of water is nearly absorbed.
 7. Mix in the pecorino and adjust salt and pepper if necessary.
 8. Serve with freshly grated cheese on each serving.

notes

1. Our farro came from the [Bartolini farm](#) in Umbria (the new Toscana) in a 500g package (17.6 oz = 1.1 lb) which suggested it needs at least 30 minutes to cook. Thank you global economy?
 2. Our exotic mushroom mix presented itself at just the right moment, on a shelf at Trader Joes, from the [Franklin Farms](#) stateside.
 3. We forgot about the [Pastore Sini cheese](#) requested by the original recipe, but lucked out with a serendipitous substitution.
 4. "[Mamma Carlino](#)" said: 1 lb farro, Pastore Sini cheese (grated), 1/4 c each of shitake, crimini and button mushrooms (washed and sliced), 1/4 c white wine, 2 qts vegetable stock, 2 T shallots (chopped), 1/2 c extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper [September 2005].
 5. This is very similar in texture to [barley risotto](#), which we had already given a try, almost.
 6. [Illustrations](#) available.
-

update

We've tried a few approaches to farro, but the basic cooking does not need to be complicated. To save time, they can be pressure cooked carefully. First a precook phase bringing the farro up to steam momentarily with plenty of water. Which will foam up dangerously. Do a quick pressure release cool down and rinse the farro and start over. Three times the amount of farro in liquid. 15 minutes at full steam. That seems to do the trick.

key lime cheesecake

More illegal alcohol activity. Hard to believe that decent ordinarily law abiding citizens are still being reduced to criminals by outdated post-prohibition laws that directly oppose the will of the people without safeguarding minority rights or protecting the public welfare. This time we were south of the border, not just across the Delaware state line where Big Liquor tries to lure the Pennsylvania citizenry with its wide selection and low priced specials, but way south to Catonsville in the Baltimore burbs for in-law socializing. No longer known by many as the location for certain Vietnam war era anti-draft activities of the Berrigan brother priests, it does have a phenomenal Korean supermarket with more strange looking fresh cheap produce than most Americans have seen during their entire lives. Across the street is an ordinary run of the mill looking liquor store. bob goes along for the ride, but spots two interesting cream liquors as well as the Paul Masson chocolate hazelnut cream liqueur we'd given to a chocoholic friend for Christmas, immediately discontinued by the PA LCB afterwards. All three followed bob home to the Philly burbs. Illegally. Not quite like Robert Mitchum in that classic rum running movie of the previous mid-century, but a product of the same social insanity.

The strawberry cream and key lime cream liqueurs are retained for new dessert flavor potential. It's been decades since the [last strawberry cream liqueur recipe](#) and key lime remained to yet experiment with. Tasting the former recalls distant memories, good ones. The latter immediately recalls limoncello with an edge, kicked up a notch so to speak, and therefore suggests following in its footsteps as a [cheesecake ingredient](#). The green color associated with key limes suggested switching the nut from hazelnut to pistachio, an ani favorite. And then just before the Thanksgiving dessert experimentation, we spotted pistachio cream right next to the Nutella at Carlino's Market, imported from Sicily. Not knowing exactly what it was, it seemed like a good idea nevertheless to work into the mix. Thinking it was more like Nutella, it seemed appropriate to somehow marble into the batter or perhaps a thin layer above a normal crust to imbed pistachio crumbs in before covering with the batter. But it turned out to be more like overly sweetened peanut butter. Butter...the glue for crust, so we used it to replace the butter (and the sugar since it was already very sweet). It makes a nice green crust, but it remains largely out of sight. It does contribute a slight twist to the usual flavor expectations, which is good. On the other hand this pistachio cream was 17 bucks for a little 8 oz jar of the stuff, with unlikely chances of spreading across America like wildfire. It can be substituted by just butter.

This too was enjoyed by the Thanksgiving crowd. Another successful experiment in dessert modification.

ingredients (half recipe)

crust

- 1/4 c pistachio cream (or 4 T butter = 1/2 stick = 1/8 lb)
- 1/2 c graham cracker crumbs
- 1/4 c ground pistachios

batter

- 2 1 lb cream cheese (2 8oz packages)
- 3/4 c sugar

pinch of salt
2 T flour
4 T = 1/4 c key lime cream liqueur
2 large eggs

topping

1 c sour cream
2 T sugar
1/2 t key lime cream liqueur
1 T ground pistachios

instructions

1. Preheat your oven to 350° F. Get your 8 or 9 inch spring-form pan out of the closet or cabinet or where ever you hide it. Trace out the bottom on parchment paper and cut it out and insert in the bottom of the assembled pan.
2. Crumb up your fresh shelled pistachios with some sort of electric or mechanical kitchen device, like a hand blender with an attachment.
3. Soften up the pistachio cream in the microwave (after mixing the oil back in---it separates like some other more familiar nut butters) or melt the butter if you go the substitute route.
4. Patiently work the still very viscous pistachio cream into the mixed graham and pistachio crumbs. Eventually it will uniformly coat the crumbs.
5. Press into the bottom of the pan and refrigerate.
6. Mix the (room temp if possible) cream cheese and sugar with electric beaters or a kitchen mixer until "fluffy". Then toss in the rest of the stuff, adding the eggs one step at a time beating slowly to incorporate them last.
7. Get out the cheesecake pan with the crust and pour in the batter, evening out the top surface.
8. Back about 1 hour and then watch until the top surface turns a nice golden brown, maybe an hour and 10 minutes depending on your oven.
9. Remove for 10 to 15 minutes while the bloated and cracked top surface settles back down leaving a slightly raised rim from contact with the side of the pan.
10. Meanwhile mix together the sour cream sugar and liqueur with a spatula briefly and at the end of this cooling down period, dump it in the center of the cake slowly convincing it to even out towards the sides but leaving at least a 1/2 inch rim exposed for aesthetic reasons.
11. Reinsert into the oven for another 10 to 12 minutes to set up the sour cream topping.
12. Remove and let cook on a rack, then chill in the fridge at least one day before use. Okay, in emergencies 4 hours will do.

notes

1. 1968. The Catonsville 9 event. Draft records are destroyed in a gesture against the Vietnam war by Jesuit priests Philip and Daniel Berrigan and 7 others. Later members of the [Plowshares 8](#) in another precedent setting action in our own neighborhood at the nuclear warhead center at the then GE Corporation ("we bring good things to life", which later sold off the weapons division after a long consumer boycott by peace activists) in King of Prussia in back of the world famous [shopping mall](#).
2. Han Ah Reum, 800 N. Rolling Rd, Catonsville, MD 21228. Must be seen to be believed. A

- true testament to the good things ethnic groups contribute to American life.
3. [Thunder Road](#) (1958) starring Robert Mitchum about a Korean war vet who comes home to take over the family moonshine business and drives a fast car to transport the booze.
 4. [KéKé Beach key lime cream liqueur](#) from [McCormick Distilling](#): key lime pie in a glass according to a reviewer, "Taste the creamy flavor of key lime pie, with just a hint of graham" according to the manufacturer. Apparently available in PA for the moment, but we won't believe it till we see it.
 5. [Paul Masson Cream Liqueurs](#): chocolate hazelnut and mocha caramel. We'd picked up both at Christmas in the PA State system, but then it disappeared, never to return.
 6. Pistachio cream. Imported from Sicily by [Purely Organic](#). Organic pistachios and organic raw cane sugar and nothing else. "A unique ingredient in premium pistachio ice cream. Use as a filling in pastries or as a nut butter spread."
 7. [Tequila Rose](#). Strawberry flavored cream liqueur and Tequila. Also from McCormick Distilling.

tiramisu twist.

The anecdote. We simultaneously made a tiramisu as our entry into the 2005 Thanksgiving dessert competition. And replaced the liqueur component in the recipe by 4 T of the strawberry cream liqueur in the batter. It turned out to be a pleasant variation that we will repeat. However, we did run into a bit of a glitch with absentminded dual recipe multitasking. The mascarpone and sugar fluffed up nicely on its own in the kitchen mixer running on autopilot, but then we waited too long to pull out the cooling zabaione cream from the freezer and it was well on its way to solidifying though still as viscous as thick mud. Then letting the kitchen mixer go unsupervised with the two unfriendly components together was a big mistake, but not fatal. The mascarpone-zabione mixture "broke", turning into a lumpy mess with the liquids separated out. Could kitchen inventiveness save the day? The initial attempt with electric beaters did not seem to improve the situation, so the French chinois (conical sieve) came to mind. We gave it a try but the mixture was too thick to pass. Plan B. Insist with the electric beaters on full speed. Persistence paid off. It wasn't silky smooth, in fact it was kind of lumpy but at least no longer grainy. Once assembled no one will know the difference. And they didn't. It hit the spot. Strawberry is a natural complementary flavor for chocolate and coffee.

8. [Illustrations](#) available. Although these variations tend to all look the same...

tarte tatin

bob does not dislike pears, but he likes apples better. So it was a remarkable act of self-constraint that a substitution was not made in this recipe, in view of the fact that a web search turned up many apple versions of the classic French dish. This is a recipe he would never have found if not for Miriam, who is a devoted NY Times reader and had already tried it several times. Which was a strong vote in its favor given our appreciation for her good taste. It did not hurt that we had recently tried a pear walnut tart from our favorite Italian food source Carlino's and had liked it. Plus we have already done repeatedly a successful traditional [French apple tarte](#).

The upside-down cake category to which it belongs is the reason bob followed through. While an admitted lover of traditional upside-down cakes (like pineapple!), the team founder had never actually made one himself. One of those odd things like Italians and cheesecakes no doubt. This seemed to be a good occasion to give it a try. For this recipe, the only part that seemed risky before the execution was the flip of the pan to upside-down the tart. It turned out to be not a problem. Of course bob's usual advice to ani to read the recipe through carefully before beginning turned was not followed by the team leader on this one, which talks about only halving the peeled pears and removing the core. Not only is it a lot easier to core the pears if you quarter them lengthwise, they arrange in a circle together much more cooperatively as quarters than halves. What was a bit perplexing was the refusal of the liquid from the pears in the caramelized syrup to evaporate after a long time compared to the recipe. We just jammed it into the oven after a while and it seemed to be okay. One mistake we made was tossing in some dark rum during the initial caramelization process. The sugar did not like it and hissed while clumping up. Some of the clumps solidified into rock candy and had to be removed, though most of the mixture was salvageable. Even before that we started melting the butter in the pan since some recipes had gone that route, but not this one. We pulled out the stick when we realized it so there was a bit of a coating of melted butter for the sugar to start with. After the booze improvisation failed we added a bit more butter, but the water that oozes out of the pears is really sufficient moisture if the original recipe is followed. Another bright idea was to throw in some roasted walnut baking pieces just before laying down the pie crust. We forgot them in the oven so they were toast, forcing us to stick to the original game plan.

A year and a half before this occasion, the next door neighbor of my adopted Italian family in the beach town of Sabaudia south of Rome learned of the dr bob dessert reputation inspired by some local cheesecake production. Proudly she wanted to show her talents in the torta department and showed us how she made a pineapple upside-down cake in and on her neighbor's stove but the unfamiliar kitchen led to some glitches that spoiled the aesthetic appeal of the finished product. She made another one for dr bob the next weekend to restore her image and the cakes. The next summer the sad news was delivered to the returning dr bob: Marisa had died. Old age. But she left behind her recipe with the team. We'll have to give it a try soon.

ingredients

- 6 firm large pears (we used 3 Anjou and 2 Bosc)
- 2 T fresh lemon juice (we squeezed a whole small lemon)

3/4 c sugar (we tried 1/3 c of a brown sugar Splenda mixture—twice as sweet the package said—and 1/3 regular sugar)

4 T unsalted butter

tatin pastry or one 9 in frozen soft pie crust at room temp

tatin pastry

1 c flour, plus some for rolling the dough

1/2 t salt

1 stick unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

1/2 of one egg yolk mixed with 1 T water

(mix one yolk with 2 T water and use half)

instructions

1. If you must do your own crust, combine the flour and salt in a mixing bowl and add the butter. Cut in the butter with a dough cutter until you make pea sized pieces.
2. Whisk together the egg yolk and water. Discard half and add the remaining half to the flour mixture and stir until incorporated.
3. Press gently into a ball and refrigerate about 30 minutes until firm but not hard.
4. Roll out just before the tart is done on the stovetop.
5. Pat the ball into a flat disk on a floured surface and roll into a circle about 1/4 in thick, using lots of flour since the dough is very sticky. The circle should be cut about 1/2 in wider than the skillet top so it can be tucked in around the pears.

easy approach start here:

1. Preheat the oven to 375°, and make sure one of the racks is about 1/3 from the bottom.
2. Peel the pears, but in half lengthwise and core them. We then halved them again lengthwise as a sign of independence. This actually helps to stack them around a circle later. For now place them in a large bowl and toss with the lemon juice.
3. Put the sugar in a 10 in (oven injectable) stainless steel skillet over low heat and when it begins to melt, stir until it is all melted and turns a pale yellow color. We may have actually helped this along with some of the butter on our first attempt, but the memory is vague.
4. Remove the pan from the heat and arrange the pears in a circle with a few in the middle.
5. Put pieces of butter over the pears and cook about 20 minutes over medium heat until the juices from the pears are almost evaporated.
6. Slap on the round pie crust, tucking it in at the edges and place in the oven to bake about 25 to 30 minutes until the crust is golden brown.
7. Remove from the oven and let sit 10 minutes.
8. Loosen the crust from the edges if necessary and invert on a serving plate by placing the plate over the skillet and skillfully flipping the combination over. Let sit a few minutes before serving. Cut wedges like an ordinary pie.

notes

1. [Molly O'Neill, NY Times](#) Sunday magazine food writer, Fall 2005. No trace of her on

- their web, not even in the pay-to-play archives.
2. Being an aging boomer, the first line of our little rambling above could not but evoke memories of Tom Smothers whining to his comedic partner and brother Dick "Mother always liked you best."
 3. Literally days after we try this pear delight, Bon Appetit arrives with a cover shot of an apple tatin, generic version: caramelized apple tart, leading the lineup of Must-Have Desserts [January, 2006, arrives mid-December]. Now we really have to try the official crust.
 4. [Illustrations](#) available.

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

2006

baby zucchini salad

We'd been occasionally grabbing these baby zucchini that began showing up in the local farmer's market, the next step nature takes after producing those prized [fiori di zucca](#) (zucchini flowers) that we value so much, but we didn't have any special recipe to use them in. Until discovering Marcella's baby zucchini salad when we needed multiple vegetarian side dishes for a dinner with friends, which immediately got our attention since we love fresh mint.. She suggests using "young, small but not miniature zucchini with tiny seeds" but this prohibition is a bit ambiguous: what are miniature zucchini anyway, while young and small implies baby, no?

The result turned out to be delightful and we have made it several times since.

ingredients

1/2 lb small, very fresh zucchini: a standard package of about 6 baby zucchinis are just right
1 celery stalk
1/2 c ripe, fresh tomatoes, seeds scooped out, cut into small dice (halved grape tomatoes also work here)
1 T chopped fresh mint leaves
1 garlic clove, pressed
salt
1/2 lemon, freshly squeezed juice of
2 T extra virgin olive oil
freshly ground black pepper

instructions

1. Clean and cut the baby zucchinis to half their length and then slice thinly. Marcella suggests using a vegetable peeler to get really thin julienne style strips, but we went with simple thicker knife slices.
2. Wash the celery stalk and slice cross-wise into 1/8–1/4 in slices (we like thinner, she likes thicker).
3. Clean and dice the tomato (halve the grape tomatoes, third some big ones), wash and chop the mint and toss everything into the salad bowl.
4. Add the salt and pepper, lemon juice, olive oil, garlic and toss thoroughly, then cover and refrigerate an hour before serving.
5. If you like, garnish the bowl with a sprig of mint leaves when served.

notes

1. [Marcella Hazan](#), Marcella Cucina, Raw Zucchini Salad with Mint and Tomato Dice, p.190 (listed in the index under "salads," but not under "zucchini"). She suggests 2 smashed garlic cloves in cheesecloth that are removed before serving. We like garlic so no need to hassle with cheesecloth, which we don't have anyway. The first time we made this we had

- to omit the garlic for one of our guests who practices active garlic avoidance.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

bzuchsl.d.htm: 26-jan-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

farro salad (insalata di farro)

Farro salad entered our lives through a fairy tale wedding in a 12th century church in Pisa, or more precisely through the ensuing [reception](#) in the hills of Tuscany out in the surrounding countryside. We'd already been doing [farro pasta](#) hoping that it might be more healthful than white flour pasta, but using the whole farro kernel took longer to learn about. However, it is very similar to [barley](#), and in turn to big bulgur, both of which can be used to extend the [idea of risotto](#) by substituting the arborio (or similar risotto rices), while the latter in smaller processed form is already familiar as the grain complementing the veggies in the Lebanese salad tabbouleh, a frequent component of our mother-in-law's dinners, with diligent chopping contributions by her husband. In fact the Italian version of this grained-based Mediterranean salad is done with rice: insalata di riso, but it stretches a bit the American notion of salad, perhaps in the same way our potato salad is a bit far removed from the typical greens- and tomato-based salad that the unaccompanied word "salad" first brings to our mind. Insalata di farro is apparently a traditional recipe from Tuscany.

We googled "farro salad" and came up with many variations. Since we like arugula and had been lucky to frequently acquire the real jagged arugula leaves like Italians use rather than the rounded variety that is too often found in US supermarkets, we leaned towards the arugula versions. And with some faith in balsamic vinegar and parmigiano cheese, this simple recipe from Mary Ann Esposito seemed like a good place to start. One can use imagination here in combining different greens and veggies and seasoning solids and fluids. For example, [Giada de Laurentis](#) suggests tomatoes, sweet onion, chives, parsley, garlic, balsamic vinegar, salt and pepper and olive oil. Others suggest tomatoes, arugula and (cooked shelled) fava beans as the add-ins. Or tomatoes and cucumbers with basil and lemon. Salt and pepper and olive oil of course.

ingredients

- 1 c farro
- 1/4 c extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 t salt
- 2 T balsamic vinegar
- 8 cherry tomatoes, halved [we used more of the tinier grape tomatoes, halved]
- 2/3 c shredded arugula leaves [we used the small delicate jagged arugula, so no need for shredding;
we increased the amount to maybe 2 c unpacked]
- grated pecorino cheese [we used shaved parmigiano on top].

instructions

1. Cooking farro:
If you can think ahead, cover the farro with water the night before and then to cook the next day, drain off the water and place in a 1 quart saucepan, cover with fresh water and cook until tender but not mushy (al dente!), about 15 minutes. Then drain and transfer to a bowl to cool.

If you can't think ahead, you will have to cook it twice as long. Or you might try a 4 hour soak as a compromise. [Giada says cook with salt like pasta, but this seems to be the exception.]

2. Mix up the olive oil with the cooled farro to coat all the kernels, and then combine well with the salt and balsamic vinegar.
3. Rather than use the arugula as a bed for the farro as Mary Ann suggests and placing the tomatoes equally divided on 4 serving plates, just mix them in with the tomatoes, and use a generous amount of both.
4. Drizzle some more olive oil over the top of the salad and either grate the pecorino (large grating) or shave the parmigiano over the top. Mix at the table when serving.
5. Should serve more than 4 as a side dish. We had 10 at the table and had a bit leftover.

notes

1. Mary Ann Esposito, *Ciao Italia in Tuscany* (2003), [Farro Salad from Tuscany](#).
2. Check the internet for variations. Use your imagination.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.

farrosld.htm: 24-jan-2006 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

buckwheat flavored polenta with mushrooms and marcella's two wine braised pork chops

Polenta. The real thing. Soft and gooey, complemented by some flavorful attention getter. Like melted cheese inside and tomato sauce with sausages on top. We like it a lot and yet we never got around to trying it ourselves for so long. There is this mental warning label attached: patience required while you stir forever as it slowly cooks. We had it at [Colleen's](#) when she lived in New York and indeed it seemed pretty laborious. [Valeria](#) served it to us once in Rome and we missed the work, but the memory of the taste stuck in our memories. Mario took us to a terrific restaurant in Venice one foggy evening in January and we tried the polenta special. Yum. So why no spark of initiative on our part?

John and Gulnur finally set us an example, serving their soft polenta with a simple chicken in tomato sauce topping. Wow, it hit home again. But this time our complex carb radar went off. While bob used to be the [mashed potato king](#) in his youth, potatoes had been off the frequent use list for some time now with the new carb awareness of the household in the new century. But polenta is a whole grain mashed potato substitute! So when we were grousing around for an idea of a carb to pair with our pork chops one Saturday night a few days later, polenta popped into our imaginations. Hmm, we have some many year old corn meal hanging around in the dormant bread machine ingredient shelf of the pantry. Quaker Yellow Corn Meal in one of those round cardboard box containers like their famous [oat meal](#) my dad used all his adult life. We consult Marcella who recommends the coarse corn meal. Our box had no qualifiers. Seemed fine grained though. It would have to do because polenta was on the dinner menu by now and we did not want to leave the house to search for the real thing. But Marcella also mentioned a 50-50 cornmeal buckwheat flour mix polenta, so we decided to sexy up our unspecific US corn meal in a 75-25 ratio, using up the last remaining bit almost of our buckwheat flour supply languishing in the refrigerator waiting to flavor some [pancakes](#) or bread, but the bread machine had not been fired up for some years already.

We started out with about 3 1/2 c water for our 1 cup polenta mix and one of us slowly poured it into our nonstick pot while the other whisked it quickly to make a smooth glop. Which turned into a highly viscous still pretty smooth glop in only 5 minutes, which was way too soon for the standard cooking time of 45 minutes, surprising us considerably. We put it on low heat and got some water boiling in a teapot, and every 10 minutes or so added in maybe a half cup or less of boiling water and stirred it in to wake up our polenta, without which it would have stiffened up beyond our acceptable limits. The pork chops still had to finish cooking after all. The mushrooms were also waiting, since they were done pretty quick. So finally the chops were ready and as far as we were concerned, the polenta had been ready after 10 minutes. What is all that cooking time necessary for?

We assembled the dish. A bed of the grayish tinted polenta, followed by the mushrooms, a spoon of the tomato wine sauce from the chops on the mushrooms, and then the parsley-flecked pork chop placed carefully on top. bob pushed his on the side immediately to cut it up so we could have just as well put it there initially. It looked good. And it tasted good. The four people

portions tempted bob to go for a double helping (it proved to be too much but resistance seemed futile), while ani went for a more reasonable smaller second portion. Success on the first try is a good sign, even without fancy authentic ingredients. Looks like we'll be doing polenta more frequently from now on.

ingredients

soft polenta

3/4 c corn meal
1/4 c buckwheat flour
1/2 T salt (?!)
5 c water

sautéed mushrooms

about 8 oz chopped mushrooms (we used half white mushrooms and half baby bellas)
2 T butter and 1 T oil

marcella's two wine pork chops

4 small sliced pork chops (1/2 inch)
3 T olive oil
flour spread on a plate
1 t garlic chopped (we just pressed it)
1 T tomato paste, dissolved in a mixture of 1/2 c Marsala and 1/2 c dry young red wine
salt and freshly ground pepper
1/4 t fennel seeds
1 T chopped parsley

instructions

1. Start the **pork chops** first since they take the longest. Press the chops onto the flour on each side and shake off excess flour.
2. Heat the oil on medium heat and cook the chops until both sides are nicely browned, a few minutes say on each side.
3. Add the garlic, stirring it into the oil and when it has cooked slightly (but not burned!), add in the wine-tomato-paste mixture and sprinkle generously with salt and pepper and add the fennel seeds.
4. Simmer the wine "briskly" for about 20 seconds.
5. Then turn the heat down to a low simmer, cover the pan with the lid slightly ajar, and cook for about 1 hour until the meat feels tender when fork tested. [We could have left it longer to get a bit more tender.] Turn over the chops occasionally.
6. When ready, add the parsley and turn the chops over 2 or 3 times to get the parsley to stick.
7. Marcella goes on to remove the chops and most of the fat, add 1/2 c water and make gravy stirring continuously with a wooden spoon until thick enough to pour over the chops, but we were content to stop with the wine sauce as it was.

polenta

8. Boil 5 c water, and then slowly whisk in the polenta mixture and add the salt, while continuously whisking. At some point switch to a large wooden spoon.

9. Pretend to stir frequently but let it go for a bit in between stirring. You can always add a bit more boiling water if it gets away from you. Don't take this too seriously.
10. When it seems like you can call it quits, remove from the heat and serve promptly, otherwise it will stiffen up and you lose the comfort food aspect.

mushrooms

11. If the mushrooms are not already chopped (ours were), prep them.
12. Heat the butter and oil and sauté the mushrooms until the water they shed is evaporated and they are softened. Maybe 10 minutes. Then turn off the heat but leave on the burner.

assembly

13. Put the desired portion of polenta down first, then put some mushrooms on top and spoon some of the tomato wine sauce over them. Place a pork chop against the edge of the polenta, or if you like vertical presentation, on top of the pile. Enjoy.

notes

1. [Marcella Hazan](#). *Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*.
2. Feel free to surf the internet for alternative polenta accompaniment ideas. We certainly will. Vegetarians can try tofu and/or cheese. Vegans, you already have to be pretty inventive to survive, so you'll probably figure this one out too.
3. [Illustrations](#) available.

polentaprchkps.htm: 25-feb-2006 [what, ME cook? © 1984 dr bob enterprises]

prune yogurt debuts in America!

Subject: YEAH! prune yogurt finally arrives in the US

From: dr bob

Date: Monday, 30 Jan 2006

To: Friends and Relatives

JANUARY 2006 HOT PRODUCT TIP

dr bob has often lamented about the disappointing US yogurt scene

[for example see <http://www.drbobenterprises.com/recipes/smychck.htm>]
having traveled the yogurt world off shore where the masses actually support healthy tasty choices while we deal with increasing lack of real choice from repetition of too many esoteric product lines available in too few flavors.

But now a product [Activia] long ago available in the [European Danone](#) market has arrived in the US with its flagship prune flavor super-charged with nutrients and anti-oxidants (and low fat!) that bob has enjoyed frequently [in Rome](#).

[Prunes! Not just ugly dried plums! <http://www.nutritiondensityindex.com/>]

Read the company hype:

http://www.dannon.com/dn/dnstore/cgi-bin/Brand_Cat_240859_NavRoot_200_ID_1796954.htm

Already spotted and purchased with several other flavors in two separate local Philly 'burb supermarkets. [Genuardi's =Safeway, Acme]

A miracle!

A-C-T-I-V-I-A, Activia! Ask your local supermarket to carry this Dannon product line. Prune power to the people. Or in the flavor of your choice.

Salute!

(sah-LOO-tay, that's Italian for "good health")

dr bob

<http://www.drbobenterprises.com>

PS. Returning to Rome for a May wedding, we resample the original European prune yogurt and immediately remember that it is not blueberry-colored like the US product but a plain almost white yogurt color with flecks of prunes in it. So why the extreme color for us American consumers? After some continued daily sampling later in the summer, it becomes clear that the taste is better in Europe as well. Not unexpected.

spontaneous veggie hot potato salad

This dish initially had other aspirations. Leftover turkey meatloaf a third night this week bob was thinking, but this time some mashed potatoes on the side! Mashed potatoes with some sautéed veggies incorporated. So the plan is initiated before ani returns from work. And announces that she can't eat meat that night. Why not? Wednesdays and Fridays. Lent. Oh. Bob is a bit pissed but accepts the decree. No meat for bob either, but ani has to take over the meal direction (bob insists). The potatoes are boiled. The veggies are done. What to do? Ani decides to mix them together, toss in a handful of arugula (the jagged stuff, like in Italy) and a bit of allspice, and it becomes hot potato salad. And the entree for the evening, with a side salad of lemon-olive oil arugula and some halved grape tomatoes added in. It works. Everybody is happy.

ingredients

- 2 medium Yukon gold potatoes, cleaned and cubed (less than a cm side), skins left on
- 2 T olive oil
- 1/2 stalk celery, chopped
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 1/6 red pepper, 1/6 green pepper, chopped finely
- 1 side layer of a fennel bulb, diced finely
- 1 baby eggplant, cubed like the tomatoes
- salt and pepper to taste
- some boiling water
- a pinch of allspice
- 1 T butter, sliced thin

instructions

1. Prepare the potatoes and barely cover with salted water and boil about 15 minutes until tender.
2. Clean and prep the celery, peppers, fennel, and baby eggplant, or whatever you can scavenge from the refrigerator.
3. Heat the oil in a stir fry pan or chef's pan and dump in all the veggies except the eggplant and sauté them a bit (a little salt brings out the flavor?), then toss in the eggplant cubes too and continue sautéing until everything is softened, stirring to prevent sticking or burning.
4. Grind in some black pepper.
5. When patience wears thin, pour in say a quarter cup of boiling water and let go on low heat for a while while it continues to cook.
6. Drain the potatoes and combine with the veggies and the thin slices of butter (to melt quicker), add the allspice and adjust for salt and pepper, mixing up the ingredients with the final addition of the arugula.
7. Serve. No meatloaf. No mashing. Enjoy anyway.

notes

1. Lent. If you can't say something good, don't say it, bob. Too many people to offend unnecessarily.
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

spontveg2.htm: 11-may-2006 [[what, ME cook?](#) © 1984 [dr bob enterprises](#)]

orecchiette with fiori di zucca and saffron

[Fiori di zucca](#). zucchini flowers. a bob and ani favorite dish, but nonexistent on the west side of the Atlantic unless you do it yourself. We already tried the risotto version with success, and now another application challenges the team.

Every summer when bob arrives in Rome during June and July, it is fiori di zucca season, and every chance he gets, in every dish he finds them in, he tries, remembering ani back in the USA lusting after this delicate ingredient. This year eliana introduced him to a new lunch spot not far from the Vatican Radio where the flowers were delightfully matched with a favorite pasta: orecchiette and another product we import in unusually large quantities for our Iranian friends Cyrus, Nadereh and Roxana every year from the GS supermarket on via ventun aprile not far from the University of Rome La Sapienza (by bus 310) and just a short walk from Piazza Bologna.

The chef from [La Locanda di Borgo](#) was happy to explain the recipe. In a few short words, chop up the fiori and sauté in olive oil with just a little finely chopped prosciutto and braesaola (the beef version of prosciutto), add a touch of red pepper powder and then evaporate off a splash of white wine, and then finish with a little cream and saffron, the saffron getting added last since it is delicate and should not be cooked, as bob finally learned by chance after many years from a friend. Then combine with the al dente pasta, many choices of which would seem appropriate for this sauce. Can we quantize this into an actual working recipe? Let's see. We'll have to examine the photo for guessing some quantities.

instructions

1. in progress.

notes

1. The restaurant was not only simpatico, it had working air conditioning! La Locanda del Borgo, Borgo Vittorio, 92 00193 Roma lunedì' chiuso [tel. 06/6880.9215]. With a companion restaurant La Locanda del Borgo 2 out in Fregene where the beautiful people used to beach in the summer until progress moved them on to better scenery: via Nettuno, 161 [tel. 06/6656.4860] open only in the summer. Their website was down when we checked but they had one good user review on the web [\[1\]](#).
2. [Illustrations](#) available.

pesto lasagna

This recipe took a long time to materialize, the ultimate result of a random meeting of two ladies at the baggage claim of a transatlantic flight to New York from Rome back in 1990, one of whom needed to use the bathroom, requiring the other to watch the already retrieved luggage during the deed. Ani met teresa and then later teresa met bob when she came to philly on another business trip, or did they meet in Rome when ani took the bus in the wrong direction while shopping and ended up outside the city? In any case teresa became one of our regular almost annual summer dates thereafter as we shared our friendship while enjoying Roman cuisine.

Eventually we met teresa's brother's family in New York, gianni and carla and 2 teenage kids, when they did their month long Italian visit America tour with teresa and another family to see not only the northeast US but also some of those terrific national parks out in the southwest that ani and bob had never set foot in. And the subject of carla's famous pesto lasagna came up, intriguing the two American pasta lovers and leading to an offer to send the recipe. Somehow the recipe never managed to find its way to us, but as the next summer drew near, an offer to dine on the anticipated dish did materialize, and indeed, it proved to be worthy of the expectations that had been set the summer before.

The idea is simple: replace the Bolognese sauce with pesto sauce in the traditional béchamel, Bolognese and parmigiano layered recipe, a stronger substitute requiring much less quantity to mix with the white sauce in each layer between the pasta sheets. The question is, how much quantity, for which a recipe from Rome would save the need to experiment to get it right. A recipe which then had to wait till after the August vacation.

in progress.

ingredients

instructions

- 1.

notes

1. [Illustrations](#) available.