

FOOD NIRVANA

By

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This recipe book is dedicated in loving memory of Marie Piretti Gardner (10/19/1947-01/21/2008)... the greatest cook I've ever known.

Ray Gardner



What better way to express my eternal love and adoration of this, my lady, Marie ... with some lyrics from Annie's Song© ...

**You fill up my senses
Like a mountain in springtime
Like a storm in the desert
You fill up my senses**

**Come let me love you
Let me drown in your laughter
Let me lay down beside you
Come let me love you**

**Let me always be with you
Come love me again ...**

**Like a night in a forest
Like a walk in the rain
Like a sleepy blue ocean
Come fill me again**

**Let me give my life to you
Let me die in your arms
Let me always be with you
Come love me again**

Come let me love you

Would that I had died in her arms, not she in mine ...

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FORWARD

Introduction

Welcome to the world of Food Nirvana. This endeavor is all about quality of life in eating and how to do it at home. This introduction was new with the creation of the Food Nirvana web page. Prior to creating the web page Food Nirvana existed only as a book in Microsoft Word® doc format. Now, the home chef can access the recipes instantly and individually even using a cell phone, an Ipad® or a notebook PC in the kitchen. The secret is in having the Table of Contents as the web page with direct links to each individual recipe. Like before, the reader can choose to review or to print/save any recipe. I've provided download links to get free full copies of Food Nirvana as well in different formats as described below.

With the 36th edition I culled recipes that I knew I would not make or improve. Now the 50th edition has more great and well tested recipes. As you might guess, that situation is not static, for I add really good recipes fairly often ... the ones I take time to create and/or improve from other sources that turn out to be very special. Certain recipes (about 45) I developed into what I call Teaching recipes, as they provide detailed explanations regarding ingredients and procedures and technical information for making great food. You will see the letter T as the last character of a given quality rating as described in the next paragraph. For example, an excellent recipe with a rating of ☺♥ ... if it is a teaching recipe ... will appear as ☺♥T when the recipe is displayed online or as part of the recipe index of the book version of Food Nirvana.

I decided to introduce icons to represent my opinion of the quality of particular recipes. Here they are: ☺♥♥♥☺ = Super Star, ☺♥ = Excellent, ☺ = Good, ▲ = Okay, ► = In Research & Development, ? = Untested / Looks Promising. You will find the symbols immediately following the name of the food when you display a recipe. The symbols serve as a guide for you to select foods appropriate to your planned meal or party. My goal, of course, is ultimately to enhance any recipe that is less than excellent. Thus, through time the quality level symbol shown for a given recipe may change. In other words, Food Nirvana is always a work in process. In fact, I have only a few recipes that I have elevated to Super Star status, and they are identified with the symbols: ☺♥♥♥☺. The required icon additions to all of the individual recipes have been made to the book version of Food Nirvana as well.

I decided to provide the book version of Food Nirvana in three different formats to meet the variable needs of reader environments, their word processing software and whether or not a given reader was using a desktop pc, a laptop or a

tablet/cell phone. The book versions of Food Nirvana continue and will continue to be maintained along with the web page version. This serves the worlds of those who are cooking in environments where they may not be accessing the Internet. The book versions lack most of the pictures and picture references present in the web pages to keep the book file size reasonable. If you want to download a free copy of Food Nirvana then click on one of the book links below.

[Download Food Nirvana in Microsoft Word "doc" format](#)

or

[Download Food Nirvana in Microsoft Word "docx" format](#)

or

[Download Food Nirvana as a Portable Document File \(PDF\)](#)

(The PDF format does not support jumping from the index entry of a recipe name to the page for that recipe, but you can use the page jump feature of Adobe® Reader to do that.)

The 50th edition of the book remains the same in the indexing of recipes, while the online version of Food Nirvana has a major change in the grouping and access of cuisines by country or region. It is a nice improvement. Individual recipes are maintained and the ones not grouped are accessed alphabetically as usual.

The group Pasta and Other Ethnic Foods has not been changed in this 50th edition of the Food Nirvana book, but that recipe heading no longer exists online. Instead, online recipe access addresses some cuisines that are grouped and presented alphabetically within country or region. And to repeat, any recipes not grouped are simply accessed alphabetically, as before.

Well, have fun!

Ray Gardner, Sr.

May 6, 2025

Another Recipe Book?

Why create another recipe book? There must be hundreds of them out there if not thousands. We are inundated with recipes in books, television, newspapers and the Internet!

My answers are three:

This book focuses primarily on special foods that you make on special occasions and/or more often for very special people.

Many of the recipes for typical and special foods are so good that they are simply too good to ignore.

The cooking environment and equipment available to the home chef are very important, as are cooking techniques, and they are covered conceptually and often in detail in this book. Likewise acquiring quality ingredients at the best prices, including processing and storing those ingredients for best results, are also included topics.

Intent

My primary intent was to capture and organize recipes for only a select group of foods where the recipes are definitely "best of breed," so this book is not a general cookbook at all, yet the variety of different foods is rich. It is currently 1609 pages long. Why so long? I start each recipe on a new page, which leaves space at the end of the previous recipe for you to use to write notes to yourself. All told there are 516 recipes, far less in number than any general cookbook where the number of recipes can be 1000 and up. Yet each of the recipes in this book offer you the very best recipe I could find, obtain from other people, create or modify to become the very best, over many years.

So, this book is an eclectic collection of my favorite recipes for a variety of types of food representing many different cuisines. Some of the recipes are originally from other people I've known, cookbooks, restaurants and the Internet. I have personally created some and/or improved a lot of the recipes. Overall, most of the personal recipes were developed by me and/or by a few other relatives and friends based on improvements to what we found and tried from other sources. I have intentionally excluded a number of my recipes for common foods that most people know how to make well. Conversely, I have included a few recipes for special foods I have yet to try because I sense they are excellent. As I perfect recipes I modify Food Nirvana. Know that overall my focus is on excellent foods that many people do not know how to make well, or not at all.

Let's say you are planning to entertain and you want to figure out a dynamite menu to thrill your guests. Well, this is the book you go to when that is your goal. Just a brief scan of the index will provide just what you need in ideas, so you will arrive at your goal quickly and with certainty. Even better, you will know that each item you select and make will get many compliments, and the recipes in this book tell you everything you need to get and do for guaranteed success.

A Long Time Coming

One of my personal recipes goes back forty-five years to when I was first conducting experiments in great eating e.g. my Bleu Cheese Dressing. Other recipes are less than one year old, so you may think of this work as a collection of the best based on my life experiences. Recently I developed a delicious sweet and sour salad dressing that is virtually identical (at least in taste) to a very special one served to me in a great restaurant, Poor Richards Inn®, sometime during 1968. I was amazed that I waited so many years before attempting to make it. I can't get enough now, and the restaurant closed thirty-five or more years ago! Wow! Just think how interesting it is that food memory and in particular detailed taste memory can span so many years.

Often I have anecdotal stories to accompany recipes that may entertain you or to talk about the inevitability of change, some of which is desirable and some not so desirable. You can sift through those stories in whatever manner suits you best.

My pride shows, and so it should. I've put in many years acquiring, developing and culling out recipes such that with rare exceptions I would much rather eat my cooking than tolerate the variety of slop served in most restaurants. Too often restaurant owners focus on profits at the expense of quality. At other times recipes are confined to the market they serve, which can be severely limiting, with boring unchanging menus. Yet other times the owner and chef or cook simply lack knowledge. But this is not always the case. The idea is that the best restaurants can make many excellent dishes that I don't even know how to prepare so in general you won't find me competing with them. But where I have tried to either duplicate perfection or create it from scratch I will hold up my results to scrutiny by any professional chef.

Credit must, however, be given to the greatest cook I ever knew, my deceased wife Marie Piretti Gardner, and this book is dedicated to her memory. She could out-cook me easily and I owe her my biggest debt of gratitude for her joy and skills in cooking or preparing great foods that I would not have otherwise enjoyed. She was my best teacher and chef par excellence! The great times we shared with making and eating superb food, not to mention wonderful meals in

great restaurants, are unforgettable. Yes, a fair number of her recipes are included in this Food Nirvana book, and if/when I locate more of them I will select the best ones and add them.

I am fortunate to have dear friends and relatives, very few who are excellent cooks in their own right. We share knowledge and thus we all win. My gratitude goes out to all the good and great cooks who have helped me learn and I won't waste the space trying to give credit, except within certain specific recipes/titles.

Most of all I hope you take the time to use these recipes to experience for yourself the reality that you can vastly outdo most restaurants and commercial products found in supermarkets. Your family and friends will let you know your degree of success. And always be ready to improve any recipe. Ego has no place when it comes to making great food. Indeed you will make some new friends and open the door to learning things about cooking that are not part of your experience or mine. When you find or learn something that you consider to be excellent or make an improvement to one of the recipes in this book, please share that knowledge with me. This is especially important for those few special recipes included where I have indicated/stated that I have yet to try the recipe.

I included one section in Food Nirvana under Beverages on the topic of winemaking without providing my specific recipes. That section is for people ready to tackle making fine wines, not ordinary wines, as the requirements and investment are significant. I will freely provide help and further information to those adventurous enough and committed to making fine wines. For others I suggest you read the section simply to get a fundamental education about winemaking.

Economics and Quality of Life

If you enjoy eating really good food and in many instances great food then waste no time. Use this book. Get great results. Save lots of money without sacrificing quality, for you can make many foods just as well as the best restaurants or best commercial food producers, at home. I enjoy ambience as much as the next person and there are special times when I want to be spoiled by eating in an excellent restaurant, but the cost of doing that on a regular basis is prohibitive for most of us. Thus, to learn to cook very well gives you the best of both taste and cost savings. Finally, take time to consider that when you do the cooking you know for certain what you are eating, and that has many ramifications related to health.

I take the time to discuss techniques that will enhance your understanding of how to get the best results. Quite often it is a matter and method of following instincts based on knowledge gained by experience. When I recommend using a particular quality of food or special piece of kitchen equipment or utensil know that getting the best results in your kitchen will depend on you having or acquiring that item. The next section of this book discusses critical requirements, for even the best recipes are easily weakened when the cooking environment, ingredients and/or equipment are less than the best. Beyond equipment, techniques that explore the behavior of ingredients under different physical conditions is important, so I take time to explain physical properties that can determine success or failure in the various recipes. That is a unique departure from traditional recipe books or cookbooks.

I even included the section on winemaking that concentrates on the best techniques for making wine at home, and a full description of supplies, materials, techniques, costs, sources, and some theoretical treatment beyond what you will find in typical wine recipes.

The most fundamental consideration is that we eat for a lifetime. Why take one of life's greatest needs and potentially greatest pleasures and waste the opportunity to enjoy the best? You have to prepare or buy and/or serve or eat the meals anyway. What justification do we have for opting for convenience or laziness or endlessly doing it the way Granny did, with a small repertoire of common meals? If you and your spouse both have jobs and you feel pressed for time when you come home then where is the real problem? Should your employment cause you to go through life eating marginally okay meals? Can you justify ignoring new knowledge and opting to put convenience ahead of quality instead of doing the things that can truly improve your enjoyment of life? I do admit, however, that if you are truly wealthy it is understandable that you will concentrate on other areas of life and typically eat the best by buying the talents of the expert chefs and eating the foods they prepare. Are you wealthy?

You will find web site addresses, phone numbers and sometimes location addresses for certain ingredients mentioned in this book. My intent was/is to get you in touch with quality, variety and price alternatives to what you find in your typical supermarket. You will be more than surprised to find just how much you can save if you use these resources. Yes, this is about economics as well as quality of life.

New Editions and Revisions

For Webpage Users:

The Food Nirvana web site will be updated regularly so you can access the latest recipes or upgrades to recipes simply by clicking on the available webpage hyperlink. Access to the webpage is provided here:

[FOODNIRVANA.htm](#)

For Book Users:

I will update the book regularly to keep it synchronized with the web page content, so I suggest you keep your book copy on your personal computer instead of printing it. You might print the index and a few of the recipes that you will use fairly often and you might want to organize those recipes using a three-ring binder. You can save a lot of paper easily if your printer is the type that can print on both sides of the paper. Another idea is to print the odd numbered pages only, then put the paper back into the paper feed area face up and have the printer do the even numbered pages ... but use the correct paper orientation else half of the pages will print upside down!

I keep the most up to date version of this book on my web page even as revisions and additions are occurring, so the latest information will be available anytime (almost), by making sure your Internet connection is active and by clicking on the hyperlink provided here:

[FOODNIRVANA.doc](#)

When you download a new version of the book, if you save it to the location/folder that has the old version you will be asked if you want to overwrite the older file, and the answer is yes. That way you will have only one up to date copy of the book, which will have both new recipes and improved/edited older recipes. You might, if you have OCD or want to give the book directly as a gift, make a copy to a removable memory device.

The amount of time necessary to download the book depends on the speed of your Internet connection. The book is about six megabytes in size. A typical high speed Internet connection will download a file of that size in less than one minute.

Note that the recipes are presented alphabetically by type of food and usually alphabetically within type of food, so think about the basic word(s) for what you

want to make. Or you can simply scan the five pages of the table of contents. As stated in an earlier paragraph, the early editions/revisions of this book lack a lot of great recipes that I have developed or presently need to locate that I intend to provide as time permits.

Even the best of the recipes can be improved and it is a sure bet that some in this book will be improved through time. In short, you may want to download new versions of this book a few times a year to keep up to date. I've made major recipe additions, corrections and textual changes no less than three hundred times since Christmas of 2010. I do, however, expect the pace of the changes to lessen considerably as I round out the different sections of the book with other best recipes.

Think of this, however, as a living recipe book or one that will evolve. It is a legacy I leave with friends and loved ones, so they won't have to search for how Marie or I made something after I too am gone. Thus, in one place my descendants, other relatives and friends can find a perfectly compiled and organized collection of my personal favorites that I have created for them with joy. My wish is to provide knowledge to improve your quality of life. My hope is that one or more of my descendants, other relatives or close friends will assume responsibility to promote and to add to this book in the future, provided they are top notch cooks!

A brief note about using Microsoft Word® is in order for book users unfamiliar with its features. The Table of Contents page numbers are direct links to each of the recipes. Simply click on the page number while holding down the Ctrl key and the recipe will appear. To return to the Table of Contents, if you opened the book with Microsoft Word® options set to Web under Tools/Customize, you can click on the small blue back arrow (<-) at the extreme left on the bottom of the Microsoft Word® menu bar. If you don't use the Web option then you can return to the Table of Contents using the Edit and GoTo menu options.

I conclude this Forward/Introduction to "FOOD NIRVANA" with three considerations:

If you cook on average two meals a day for fifty years that each average only one hour to prepare you will spend over 36,000 hours cooking, and likely you will spend 6000 hours simply acquiring ingredients. Does it make sense to use that time well?

I am what I do.

Aim high in life.

YOUR KITCHEN

In the Beginning

When I think about the quality of pots, pans and skillets my wife Pat and I used starting out in the mid-1960's I shudder. They had thin bottoms and sides and frankly they were junk. No serious cook/chef would have been willing to use them. The apartment stove was electric and not of high quality, which in simple terms meant it was all but impossible to do great cooking. Decent cooking, maybe. Great, rarely! A lot of foods must be cooked on a gas stove where heat control is instantaneous and with continuous temperature range from barely there to wickedly hot. We lacked key utensils and important powered equipment of top quality. This meant we were always improvising with utensils, which is not a good idea, and we always had a difficult time with our electric mixer getting superior results. We also lacked much knowledge. Neither of us had ever used or seen tools as common as a whisk. We didn't even know what a whisk was!

This section discusses one of the three most important rooms in your home, and I leave it to you to figure out the other two. I cover cooking references, ingredients, equipment, planning, kitchen design and the storage and utility room. Overall, this section tells you how to get the most from your kitchen, including ways to enhance your enjoyment in doing cooking.

Your Cooking References

Back in the 1960's many cookbooks were loaded with inferior recipes and they uniformly lacked important information about the cooking process and how best to handle the ingredients. Some of those cookbooks were born out of the Great Depression, where economy trumped everything else, so even the variety of ingredients was severely limited. Yuck! Only a few great cookbooks existed, and most great home cooking was a result of recipes handed down through generations of dedicated cooks.

Some years later I learned much about cooking from "The Joy of Cooking©" by Rombauer and Becker, which was one of the few great cookbooks available in different editions/revisions since, I believe, the late 1930's. What they did that was unique was to teach background information about ingredients and how to become a great cook by learning cooking techniques, not simply provide "do this, do that" simpleminded recipes. No longer was the homemaker's knowledge confined to what was learned from mother or in home economics class in junior

high school or in simple minded (and typically bad) recipes found in magazines or newspapers.

Today life is vastly improved with opportunity to learn cooking techniques and what to use via the Food Network® and other food related television programs, numerous excellent recipe books, and the Internet is a vast resource for getting recipes, many of which, however, are pathetic. But you can learn how to identify the best from the worst through experience, for yes, experience can be but not necessarily is for all people the best teacher. One problem with the cooking shows on television is that they exist to entertain more than teach, so quite often too little information is given during a show segment to allow the home cook to faithfully reproduce the prepared food. Sometimes, however, the specific recipes are available on the Internet.

Great friends in Massachusetts, Russ and Sue Gale, loaned a copy of a book to me used as a primary textbook by The Culinary Institute of America® to train professional chefs. As you might guess, the title is "The Professional Chef©." That book is a real revelation and in some important ways it goes far beyond the information provided in "The Joy of Cooking©." Let me simply say that I am having a great time learning ever more important information about cooking and confirming some essentials I learned independently, and to my chagrin learning why some of the foods I have attempted to prepare in the past were marginal instead of excellent. Well, if we are smart the learning never stops, and if we are considerate the knowledge gained is shared.

I used the Internet to learn about the most recent books available from the culinary institute and they number about ten. The two that appear most important generally are "The Professional Chef©" eighth edition and "Baking and Pastry©." As of early 2011 they each cost \$70 and they can be purchased directly through the Internet from the culinary institute. What a fine bargain! If you know folks who really love to eat and like to cook and whom you really care about then give them these books as a lifetime gift. They just might feed you well for the remainder of your days out of gratitude.

Now we get to the truly important, absolutely essential reference for anyone who wants to compete with professional chefs. J. Kenji Lopez-Alt is stunningly good at presenting cooking with a view towards the science behind what is happening, leading to very specific recommendations on how best to cook a whole lot of different foods, such that the home chef really does understand the "why" of procedures and ingredients, not simply the typical do this, do that non-educational stuff in typical cookbooks. Trot out to your local Barnes & Noble®, or visit them online, and buy a copy of Kenji's book, "The Food Lab©." It costs

about \$50 (less in some places) and it is the best money you will ever spend relative to getting a real education about cooking. It is superb. Just do it!

More recently Kenji created a second excellent book for Oriental cooking, named "The Wok©." That happened to coincide with my developing interest in cooking Chinese, Japanese and Thai foods, so you can be sure I enjoyed reading and learning about some of those cuisines and cooking techniques. Even better, my close friend, Loren Knight, gifted me with that book! Now that was most kind and generous, and as you may guess I like to cook meals and try new types of foods for Loren and he does the same in return, so we both win.

I also found an excellent website for Chinese cooking named "The Woks Of Life" and I often learn valuable techniques and get fine recipes from that source, after which I experiment to best please me. You should treat the recipes in Food Nirvana in the same manner, for there will nearly always be refinements to those recipes that will maximize your pleasure.

Writers of books about cooking each provide material they believe to be most important, based on their own experiences and in particular, their goals. What I have done with Food Nirvana is attempt to isolate best recipes for a subset of great foods, and I have provided a variety of information about setting up a kitchen and some limited discussion of the science behind cooking. Well, my efforts relative to the scientific descriptions and cooking techniques do not begin to approach the quality or completeness of the material in Kenji's book. Thus, in my commitment to egoless efforts to do the best cooking I defer and refer you to Kenji's book(s). And check out the "Serious Eats" website. Have fun!

The Ingredients You Use

Now let's briefly consider the world of ingredients. Fresh is everything. Wide repertoire in your knowledge of ingredients makes the difference between the pedestrian and the excellent. Let's face it, we all start off ignorant and we only learn to the extent of our curiosity and the robustness of our environment, which means, among other things, using food markets of many types. If you don't have and use top quality restaurants and a variety of ethnic grocery stores/outdoor markets and high-end supermarkets you can't know the wide world of ingredients or just how good food can taste. If you didn't have the good fortune to grow up in a family of good or great cooks your early life experiences will not have provided useful knowledge for later in life. If you haven't tasted the various cuisines in their native countries, you simply can't know about the wide world of

excellent food, for Americanized versions of other cuisines are most often weak approximations of the really great foods served in other countries.

These challenges are not intended as an insult but the implications are undeniable. I cannot personally use that which I do not know. Myopic tunnel vision is the typical result. In ignorance we tend never to learn or to expand our horizons and we can spend our entire lives missing a lot of fantastic eating. That, my friend, is a tragedy. Food, sex, sleep, clothing and shelter are simply the most important physical essentials in life. They all can range from awful to great. Ignore or underplay any of those items and you have wasted an important part of the gift of life.

It is sadly true that some individuals are not blessed with a keen sense of smell or taste. I know of no way to help those people experience or appreciate the finer nuances of great food. Indeed, most of those folks live in a world similar to that of partially blind or deaf people. They are congenitally unable to participate in the world of great food. You will learn quickly who they are when you attempt to eat foods they have prepared or when you serve them your best and get a ho hum response. This book is not intended for those unfortunate people. Their food cabinets and/or pantries and refrigerators/freezers also hold key evidence, which might also be only a sign of ignorance or limited budget for younger people.

Another word or two about ingredients and cooking methods is in order. Marie and I used to visit the very best restaurants in the USA and elsewhere. When any particular dish we ordered was very superior we would share small bites of it while discussing what was used to make it, both in terms of ingredients and cooking methods. With practice you can identify almost any ingredient and make a good guess as to amount required. If you do that and write down your conclusions immediately you can attempt to make the same dish at home.

Of course, Marie with her eidetic memory didn't have to write down anything! Marie was so superb that when she would try to duplicate something great that we had in a restaurant she would always have it perfect by the second attempt. The first attempt is supposed to be close but not necessarily perfect. But you too can make new and excellent dishes by the second attempt. You are not limited to what you can read or watch. You can learn to be creative. Do note, however, that if you don't make any effort to learn about the hundreds of potential ingredients you can't succeed if one or more of them were used in what you try to recreate in your own kitchen.

Finally, I want to share some important facts about acquiring certain ingredients. Supermarket prices are silly for many items. If you have any curiosity at all you will find far better prices for products of equal or better

quality elsewhere. That statement is not true for everything but you will be surprised at the difference in price for things you buy directly or for the cost for things you start to make at home. Here are some examples ... This book contains recipes for almond paste and marshmallow crème. Both products are ridiculously overpriced at the supermarket and they are utterly easy to make at home with higher quality and far lower cost. You will learn later in this recipe book that fools or lazy people buy ice cream at a supermarket, for both quality and cost considerations. Simple items like red food coloring are another example, as are spices. Your little ½ to 1 ounce bottle of food coloring costs you anywhere from \$3 to \$4 or more. I bought McCormick® red food coloring via the Internet (we use it to make food for hummingbirds) and I paid \$14 for a pint! We don't buy Confectioners' sugar anymore because we make it from regular granulated sugar using our food processor. For making sausage I buy one pound bags of herbs on the Internet at www.nutsonline.com and pay only about \$15 each, and I freeze them to keep them fresh. At the supermarket you will pay \$4 or more for one ounce or less. Internet purchasing of a lot of food products is the ultimate and economical convenience as the products simply show up at your door. The recipes in this book provide many examples of that truth.

The Asian market I use sells literally dozens of products all of us use very cheaply, including spices, produce, canned goods and also special products like dried peppers of various heat levels that you can't even find in a regular supermarket. Learn to patronize ethnic markets, indoor and outdoor, and you will win. Note, however, the prices at some small farmers markets or roadside stands are absurdly high as they cater to organic or health food nuts and to people too ignorant to realize they are being ripped off. Most of what they sell you can grow at home easily, cheaply and with excellent quality, or purchase in places like Costco® or large farmers markets, cheaply.

I, like many people, have purchased bulk quantities of some foods and other products at Costco® and Sam's Club®, and in some instances from Amazon® or Walmart® online. That type of purchasing can be very economical with no sacrifice of quality ... you simply have to think ahead and be ready to share the products (and cost) with relatives or friends when the amounts purchased exceed your foreseeable needs. Do note, however, that even the discount giants are known for opportunistic pricing, so not everything is a bargain. And in particular, some vendors using Amazon® or Walmart® are plain crooks, so don't get fooled into buying small amounts of products for high prices. Be alert and win.

Last, know that use of current technology for product storage, like vacuum sealing, can greatly extend the shelf life and/or freezer or refrigerator life of

many products you might not think to buy in quantity. Here is an example. I bought 50 lbs. of raw blanched jumbo peanuts from Wakefield Peanut Company® in Wakefield, VA for only \$1 per pound. Even with shipping the cost per pound was only \$1.80 (That low price changed in late 2011 to \$1.75/lb plus shipping). The nuts were fabulous. I vacuum sealed them in half pound and pound quantities and gave many away as inexpensive gifts that would have cost far more at retail prices, if you could even find nuts of that high quality in your supermarket. Two years later I used the last bag from the food pantry and the nuts were just as fresh as when I received them. If you have trouble believing that then you really need to improve your knowledge. That is not meant as an insult but accurate knowledge is king, and it is your duty to yourself to determine reality to enhance your life. Supermarket chains will not aid you in that endeavor for their profit is their only true consideration. Even the FDA is behind the times.

Equipment and Planning

I have to say a few words about refrigeration, etc. It is very smart to have two refrigerators and one large deep freeze, all in convenient locations relative to the kitchen. By so doing you will have the required room to hold a wide variety of fresh ingredients and finished products in quantity for when you entertain or when you need long term storage. A large food pantry (see Kitchen Design later in this section) is also highly recommended, for bottled, canned and dry goods come in many varieties and they are all important. You want to be able to find any item easily, and to be able to buy and store certain items in quantity at the best prices. You can't do that with a small pantry or only kitchen cabinets.

If you do forward planning of your menu you can avoid wasting money on ingredients, for you will buy certain items only as you need them, particularly and specifically perishables. And you will use them as close to their peak as possible. But people who love to cook typically love to have everything they need at hand as soon as an idea for making something occurs. Well, all I can offer is the suggestion that you avoid waste, ergo rotting fruits and vegetables, by careful planning and the occasional unplanned trip to the market.

The act of shopping for special ingredients can be pleasurable in itself in anticipation of later enjoyment. I know this to be true for me as I have always enjoyed food shopping, starting when I accompanied my mother to the market regularly as a child. Later in life Marie and I had many joyful times going to the Italian Market area of south Philadelphia, seeking out the best of the best in quality and also food items we had not tried before. And we loved to visit high-end supermarkets to see and buy special products of perfect quality.

Now it is time for a few words about kitchen equipment. First, buy pots, skillets and pans with very heavy bottoms and sides, some with multi-layered metals, and I don't mean cast iron or porcelain cookware, for those items, while very useful when high heat capacity is essential (frying a steak, or searing veal shanks for Osso Buco) are terrible in most other applications. One exception to the "thick" rule is a Wok, used for Stir Frying, or frying in oil, which should be thin. For making sauces and candies, buy a proper heavy French copper saucepan with a tin interior surface, or at least pure thick copper. For most items buy non-stick (anodized aluminum) only and ignore all the sales pitches about great quality without the non-stick feature. It doesn't matter what the brand is or the price, if it isn't non-stick you are in general simply making your life difficult. Exceptions are those times when you want to sear and/or brown meat, fowl or seafood on your cooktop or roast/sear briefly in a very high temperature (550°F) oven. In the latter case the entire skillet or other vessel should be metal, or multiple metals with exterior stainless steel cladding, especially including the handle(s). Transparent glass lids for all pots, pans and skillets are a great addition as you can see in an instant what is going on with the food you cook.

The harder you have to work the less likely you will be willing to tackle anything new or involved. Be kind to yourself. You have a lifetime of cooking to do so why buy anything less than the best? The rewards far outweigh the investment cost. Buy once, for a lifetime. Don't ever get caught up in the idea that you don't need something superior because you already have something "close" or something that looks identical at home. That error of judgment can and will keep your cooking and eating experiences far below what they might have been. Throw away inferior equipment. Do not pass it on to the less fortunate lest they remain forever unfortunate. Granny's lousy saucepans belong in your attic as keepsakes, not in your kitchen.

I can't do a respectable job covering the world of utensils or mixing bowls or cutlery because there are too many to discuss. Just pay attention and little by little you will acquire a full collection of essentials. And don't buy the cheap stuff. Think of German or Swiss or Swedish cutlery. Buy only storage containers that are robust and suitable for the freezer, the microwave oven and the dishwasher. The best products of that category that we have found are made by Rubbermaid®. Buy some good quality wooden spoons for stirring the contents of pots, pans and skillets as that will avoid damaging the non-stick surfaces. A hard, thin polymer spatula with a fairly sharp front edge is the optimal tool to use with non-stick skillets. Finally, no tool, e.g. a potato peeler, should ever be uncomfortable to use. Again, avoid cheap products, for in the long run they are no bargain, for they will hurt your hands, rust soon after purchase and break within a year or two, e.g. can openers.

Use the Internet to seek out specialty products that you will never see in any department store or even typical kitchen store. Stores and Internet web sites that carry commercial quality restaurant equipment are the very best places to look. For example, I paid \$1400 for my commercial vacuum sealer in 2007 as an Internet purchase from a company named Pleasant Hill Grains®, when I might have purchased a FoodSaver® unit at Wal-Mart® for a mere \$150. Why? First, my unit never needed maintenance. It would run virtually forever. It was fast. It had variable controls to accommodate virtually any need and useful accessories. It handled very small to very large bag sizes that cost only a few cents each (3 to 10 cents depending on the bag size) instead of the FoodSaver® type that typically cost at least 25 cents per bag. Do you get the idea? I used it extensively.

Here is an important update about commercial vacuum sealers. Mine finally died after ten years of use. The only maintenance I ever had to do was replace a burned out heating element where it seals the bags. I shopped around to find a commercial quality replacement, looking for the same brand, Ary®. I ordered a new unit that is the rough equivalent of my first unit, though actually superior with dual heating elements, but now costs only \$669 ... if you buy it at Webstaurant.com ... or you can pay a lot more, as I did the first time around, at Pleasant Hill Grains®. Your choice.

The high initial cost is quickly seen to be intelligent because of time saved and lower consumable costs. A difference of even 15 cents per bag translates to \$15 for every 100 bags you use. In a typical year I use between 800 and 1000 bags. And remember my vacuum sealer won't break, need maintenance or replacement. Thus I save \$135 on average each year in consumable cost, and I will be doing vacuum sealing for many years. The time I save is an intangible but a very important intangible, for I find myself ready to tackle the processing of large volumes of food with no concerns about required processing time. This is a quality of life consideration, with excellent additional downstream benefits.

I saw an ad and a video for a new product named, VacuVita®, on the Internet. I was most pleased as that product did exactly what I was attempting to do by using hard sided containers with vacuum sealing. You might guess that I ordered the complete kitchen set of that product, via crowd sourcing, for \$125, and it was estimated to be shipped sometime in September 2013. I will work with it and provide a review in Food Nirvana (see below) so that you will know if it works as advertised and if I can apply some of my own ideas using it.

Okay, the Vacu Vita was delivered during 2016 and it is all I hoped it would be and more. The quality is great. The full kitchen set currently retails for \$400. Check it out online.

Well, perhaps I spoke too soon. While the Vacu Vita pretty much worked as advertised I found I had no routine use for the device. I was afraid it would become an expensive bread box and nothing more. Live and learn, or perhaps it was only my perceived needs that did not require that type of device. Maybe lots of other people would find it useful.

But wait ... I need to be able to vacuum seal liquid products in canning jars where I need a deep chamber to hold jars that are too tall for my chamber vacuum sealer. Now that is a potentially fine use for the Vacu Vita. You can read more later about that use.

Some very important equipment is quite inexpensive. For example, a kitchen scale is very useful for accuracy and in following recipes where weights of ingredients are specified rather than volumes, and when weights are specified in grams instead of ounces. I purchased a Taylor® scale called the Healthy Weigh™ through the Internet for about \$20, and it has good features like English or Metric units and tare weight corrections to accommodate the container you use to hold an ingredient. I use it often and I find that recipes increasingly specify weights for some ingredients and volumes for other ingredients, especially recipes for foreign cuisine.

Using the kitchen scale is a real eye-opener at times for the real weight of a trimmed food item, given things like fat removal, can be substantially lower than the weight shown on the package as purchased at the supermarket. Also, supermarket practices of making meat products wet and using absorbent products to hold the meat prior to weighing results in the customer being cheated to some variable amount. Even the bulk chicken products sold by Costco® contain extra water, up to 7%, for "processing." This means you will miscalculate the weight of the chicken or other product based on the weight of the product as purchased, not as used after thawing and draining off excess water, unless you use a kitchen scale.

Beyond the regular kitchen scale you will find uses for more precision weighing devices, like the reloader scale that I bought at Cabelas® for \$70 that measures accurately to the tenth of a gram. For example, I use it for weighing small amounts of soy lecithin that is used as an emulsifier in making freezer chocolate. Beyond that I found and purchased a milligram scale for about \$25 for precision measurements of very small amounts of food ingredients or chemicals, like potassium carbonate used to adjust fruit juice pH in winemaking.

Here is a very small but handy list of English/Metric volume and weight conversions that you can use anytime you encounter a recipe with Metric units:

151 grams of flour is 1/3 lb. which is approximately one cup (unsifted)

29 grams of cold water is approximately one volume ounce

7.5 grams of salt is one teaspoon

28.375 grams of dry product is one ounce (454 grams = 1 pound = 16 ounces)

205.7 grams of sugar is one cup

Note that weight \leftrightarrow volume conversions depend on the density of the ingredient and how it is handled. One example is sugar, which by the cup will weigh more than one cup of flour (7 1/4 oz. vs. 5 1/3 oz.). For another example, one cup of flour unsifted is approximately 1/3 lb. but after sifting, air has been introduced, so the volume will be larger than one cup for 1/3 lb. Thus, measure the weight or volume prior to doing processing like sifting. J. Kenji Lopez-Alt uses the weight of five ounces of general purpose flour to represent exactly one cup, and he rightfully declares that weighing the flour is vastly better than using a measuring cup. I totally agree! Learn to use your kitchen scale in these special circumstances and your cooking will become consistent and superior. Recognize that humidity can affect the weight of a given volume of products like flour and sugar. Thus, these items should be stored in sealed containers after the original packaging is opened, else your best efforts at weighing instead of using measuring cups will be in vain.

Here is what I do with flour. I will purchase a 25 pound bag of flour and immediately dispense all of it into vacuum seal bags that will hold six cups each. I then vacuum seal the bags, knowing that the flour will be exactly what it was when I sealed it, even a year later, for it is impervious to changes in humidity that happen outside the bag. Note also that no weevils can develop or hatch in a vacuum!

If a recipe calls for a fraction of a teaspoon or quarter of a cup of a minced or chopped ingredient then mince or chop it first and lightly compress it into the measuring spoon or other container of the correct volume. Avoid under measurement that will happen if you don't expel the air between the pieces of the ingredient.

A final but important consideration about weight vs. volume is that some ingredients will be heavier for a given volume if they absorb moisture from humid air. This implies that you should keep such materials in sealed containers, like flour or sugar, so that variations in humidity do not alter your cooking results when you use a recipe that calls for ingredients by weight instead of volume. And moisture changes from the product as purchased will definitely

affect the measured results, for who hasn't experienced hard lumpy brown sugar from an opened bag that clearly has changed since it was purchased in term of weight per unit volume, as well as overall consistency? Kenji provided a useful method to soften hard brown sugar. Process it briefly in a microwave oven. That also works to re-liquefy honey that has become to viscous.

Now we return to the discussion of powered kitchen equipment. Plan to spend \$500 to \$1000 each in 2010 dollars to buy your electric mixer and your food processor and your meat slicer. You will use them for many years, so why tie your hands with less than superb equipment? The very top end of Kitchen Aid® or Cuisinart® or Bosch® mixer and food processor appliances are what to buy, even if you have to budget for a year to afford one of them. You will not find these products in regular stores or even kitchen stores, so use the Internet. Yes, get all of the accessories, so when you need them you have them, else you will not make a food item, possibly for many years, that you could thoroughly enjoy the first time your curiosity is aroused and many times thereafter. Alas, too many times we learn we lack required equipment and give up making something new and good and later we forget to acquire that equipment.

I would be remiss not to mention a power tool that I find most useful in meat processing. As we normally do not own meat cutting band saws there is nothing in a conventional kitchen to cut through bone conveniently. In the old days some people would use a hacksaw, but that was and is very crude and laborious. I process pork shoulders (and other meats) that do have the bone included and I use a Milwaukee Super Sawzall® given to me many years ago as a gift from my son, Ray, Jr. That tool can hold saw blades of lengths up to one foot long, and with teeth sizes ranging from six to eighteen teeth per inch. I use a 12 inch saw blade, eighteen teeth to the inch, and it cuts meat and bone beautifully, quickly and easily. I laugh when I think how simple it was to solve the problem. Inexpensive too. Deboning a roast that has been sawed through is very simple. You can decide to cut through the bone lengthwise and that leaves a very shallow pocket of meat holding each half of the bone, and you can use a sharp paring knife to cut the meat away from the bone. If instead you made crosscuts across/through bone then the length you have to insert a knife along the bone to separate it from the meat is much shorter and can be approached from both ends. The overall idea here is to think about tools and methods that are not commonly found or used in a kitchen, and your ease in preparing foods will improve greatly.

One final area of equipment to consider is specialty fryers. Both vacuum fryers and pressure fryers can be purchased for home use to make commercial quality foods like potato chips and fried chicken, easily. The advantages of these

products are numerous in terms of retaining moisture in foods like fried chicken (Pressure fryers) and minimizing fat content and having a uniform nice light color in foods like potato chips (Vacuum fryers). I do not yet own either of those types of devices but I am intrigued with the possibilities. If you have paid any attention to the price increases of potato chips in the past ten years you will be more than happy to make them at home and laugh at the commercial producers, for there is nothing but greed in their colluded pricing. You can easily make limited amounts of great potato chips at home using cooking oil in a wok, if you have a meat slicer that allows you to slice raw potatoes to a thickness of only 1/16th inch. See the Food Nirvana recipe for making potato chips.

Kitchen Design

I missed some very important aspects of the cooking environment in the previous kitchen paragraphs and I will correct that deficiency now, with a small amount of repetition. You need a very large kitchen (think 15 feet by 20 feet minimum) with lots of granite countertop area and eye level cabinet space, and a large hanging rack to hold a few dozen of the pots and pans and skillets you use most often, for ease of access. A large island, with more than three feet but no more than four feet of clearance on all sides, is a must too. It should have a medium size sink, offset a few feet to the left or right, across from the primary kitchen counter sink.

The idea is that you can set up multiple workstations, one for each item you are preparing for a meal with no crowding or required sequencing of using available space. That is a great benefit and it makes cooking fun. You get the great overview and status of what is happening in your kitchen, and each workstation is spacious, with its own ingredients and equipment. Multiple people can prepare different foods at the same time with no crowding. And to top off those considerations, islands make a wonderful area for serving a large dinner with many different foods buffet style.

As I reflect on kitchen design and consider all the environments I have used or seen I have some very distinct recommendations. When you build a house or do a major remodeling of an existing house plan the large kitchen area along the lines of what I describe next.

First, you want a very large gas Wolf® type of cooktop along a wall and not on an island. Have lots of counter space on both sides of the cooktop. The cooktop should be under a very large hood with a powerful exhaust fan that exhausts only to the outside of your home. Never have an air recycling type with filters. They are stupid toys and they simply don't work when you have serious cooking to do. Similarly, the Jenn-Air® disappearing type or range top intake type of exhaust system, that is an integral part of a cooktop, is terribly inefficient compared to an overhead hood, and that idiotically conceived type of exhaust system can even draw off important heat from your gas burners as you cook. You can actually see it happening as the flames are pulled towards the exhaust intake! The simple reason why it doesn't work to your best advantage is that the air intake isn't high enough above the pot or pan that is emitting the steam or oil vapor or odors that you are trying to eliminate. Avoid that type of exhaust/ventilation system.

Install double electric wall ovens of the Viking® class, with all the special features intrinsic to high-end appliances, like temperature control from room temperature and higher in one degree intervals. Double ovens are a must because you will be roasting or baking different items at the same time, or equally likely you will need a warming oven while something else is baking. Also, it is so much better having your ovens where you can easily see inside and easily access the foods you are preparing. Purchase, independently, a thick large flat stone or slate that you can use in one of the ovens to enhance baking of breads, pizzas, etc. Having a large oven under a cooktop, which is similar to the conventional kitchen range, is far less convenient. You have to stoop and/or bend over too much to do any and all operations when using it. Why should you make your life difficult? Thus, I do not recommend a Wolf® or any other type of range with an oven under a cooktop.

So, just where do you go to find the best appliances at retail prices? In Wilmington, DE I used ABC Appliances® on Greenhill Avenue, for they carried a fine inventory of the best products of different manufacturers. You will not find the better products they sell at Sears® or any other common appliance outlets. You will have to seek out stores like ABC Appliances® where you live, or perhaps search the Internet for better prices. In the past Marie and I also used the high end EXPO® stores that no longer exist to buy products like cooktops, the kitchen sink, etc. Do what you have to do but do not lower your quality standards. Let's continue.

Yes, have a large convection microwave oven installed high enough that you have the top of the door only 3 to 4 inches below eye level, so that you may easily see what is happening inside the oven. Be sure the front of the oven is inset with counter space directly beneath, extending six inches or so in front of the front of the convection microwave oven. The convection feature is a superb backup in the event you need an additional oven to roast or bake a relatively small item. The microwave function is indispensable for thawing frozen food and for providing rapid reheating or primary heating for many other foods. Having usable counter space below and in front of the convection microwave oven makes inserting and removing dishes or other items from the oven easy. You also need the counter space to make that operation safe, for some items are very hot and dangerous when removed, like open containers of liquids.

Something I have never seen that would be a great improvement in using all ovens is to have the doors open from the top like a conventional oven but provide on the inside of the door a shelf when the door is in a horizontal position. This shelf is where baking dishes, skillet, etc. might be placed temporarily either when first putting them into the oven or during removal or any intermediate step

that requires working with the food during the cooking cycle. The point is that oven shelves, even the best slide out types on rollers, do not necessarily present the optimal height surface to the cook. Having an extra shelf capability as a staging area that presents easy access would be a fine improvement, especially for the upper oven of double wall ovens and for microwave ovens. I wonder if any manufacturers will ever act on that improvement opportunity?

Here is an update in 2018 ... some eight years after I wrote the Kitchen Design section for Food Nirvana. Bosch® now has side by side double wall ovens with doors that open from the side, like those of microwave ovens. It is part of their Benchmark® series. This is a vast improvement over all other designs, especially the time worn open from the top oven doors that make oven shelf access difficult. Three cheers for Bosch®! What is so hard to believe is just how long the stupid conventional open from the top oven door has been in existence.

Your primary refrigerator should be very large (26 cubic feet or larger) and convenient to your island and your primary kitchen sink. Get whatever brand appeals to you. Subzero® refrigerator/freezer models are often the choice of people determined to have the best kitchens.

Similarly, have a top quality quiet dishwasher like Bosch® or Miele®. It is a wise investment and a great timesaver. If you are permitted to use garbage disposals where you live, by all means make certain both sinks are so equipped. If not then use the simple method of having a waste product bowl beside each sink that can contain, for example, vegetable peelings in a confined space, and do not simply toss them into the sink. Later the bowl can be emptied all at once into your trash receptacle(s).

In general you want to use the space under your granite countertops for larger appliances and trash receptacles on sliding shelves. The idea is that under counter cabinets can be a pain in the butt if they are used to store equipment or dishes that you will use frequently. Try to use eye level cabinets or a large hanging rack for things you use frequently, and, have plenty of drawers immediately below the granite countertops for a large variety of utensils and flatware.

One very important drawer in particular is usually non-existent in most kitchens. It is a deep drawer(s) that holds all of the lids for your pots, pans and skillets, stored vertically on their edges, in a simple rack that lets you see and access what you want immediately. You no longer have to go searching the recesses of the bottom of a large cabinet or even racks within one if you have a properly designed drawer for lids close to your cooktop.

By using garbage disposals or waste product bowls your sinks remain clean and available to process other food or to hand wash certain utensils or pans that need to be used sequentially to prepare different types of food. For the home chef I strongly recommend using your sinks and your dishwasher as appropriate before a meal to clean all or most used utensils, pots, etc., so that the dirty dishes at the end of a meal are essentially those on the dining room table. This is a great time saver as you will typically have some food item(s) cooking at the same time you are doing cleanup from cooking other items. You will be amazed how great it feels to walk into a clean kitchen after the meal. It makes the small amount of required cleanup of table items fast and simple. After all, you want to be able to relax soon after the meal, not slave for an hour or more to clean up a mess.

The large island is a great workspace and it is above the island that you want your very large hanging rack to hold your pots and pans, etc. That gets them away from the cooktop area, which is a major source of grease and then dust accumulation for anything that might be hanging above it. It is so much easier to find and access what you want than searching in any cabinet below the island or below counter tops. You can have a medium size sink as part of the island but you should have your primary sink along a wall with a nice bay window to allow lots of light into your kitchen. Your primary sink should be a very large and deep stainless steel single sink capable of holding essentially any food item or cooking vessel that you could possibly want in your kitchen, such that you could, for example, fill a five gallon plastic pail under your faucet easily. Double-sided sinks are a thing of the past, when dishes used to be washed on one side and rinsed in the other and then drained in a counter top dish holder. We have evolved.

It is surprising how few people match their supply of trash receptacles to their actual needs, in size, type and in location. Two trash cabinets each with 13 gallon cans are highly recommended. One should be underneath the island granite countertop beside the island sink. The other one should be under the main granite countertop beside (not under) the primary sink. This allows for ease of access where they are most frequently needed, and have them roll out on sliding trays and/or hanging racks, so that you avoid spillage when discarding kitchen waste. You will save a lot of steps and keep your floor and cabinet interiors free from spills and stains.

If you want to carry this concept one step farther, consider having four instead of two trash cabinets and then designate each trash cabinet for recycling requirements, like glass, plastic, metal and paper/general trash. If you do the recycling operation in your kitchen as I have just described you will save a lot of

time, both in the kitchen and later in disposing of the trash in larger trash cans for your trash collector.

Trash compactors that seemed like a great idea when first available turn out to be pretty much ignored by most folks I know who own them. Just acquiring the bags is an annoyance and extra expense. And the *&%^ things break. I have no interest in owning a trash compactor.

Speaking of floors, avoid installing hardwood floors in your primary kitchen area where you actually process food for they will get and show a lot of wear and there is a high damage potential from dirt, liquid spills and stains. If you feel you must use hardwood then use a dark stain and a few throw rugs or pads. Ceramic tile is hard and cold and can also develop stains in the grout areas when they eventually develop small cracks, and thus ceramic tile is also a bad choice, especially if you are going to be on your feet for an extended period of time. I believe simple asphalt tile covered with mats, pads or throw rugs to soften the primary walking areas will give you the best result, provided those items can be laundered or hosed clean outside. Simply use hardwood around the perimeter of the asphalt walking areas and either hardwood or ceramic tile flooring in the rest of the kitchen. This design consideration is particularly important between the primary kitchen sink counter and the island.

Have multiple thick hardwood cutting boards of different sizes and shapes to accommodate different and/or simultaneous needs. A simple hot water rinse and wipe down is all they normally need after use, and wood is much nicer to use than plastic, for things can skid away too easily on a plastic surface, and you risk cutting yourself or trashing your food if that happens. All the fear mongering about bacteria on a wood surface is simply that ... fear mongering! Ignore it. Buy bamboo or other good hardwood (maple or oak) cutting boards with cutouts for liquid drainage or insets to hold foods like a roasted turkey preliminary to carving. The physical act of using wood and plastic cutting boards in a comparison test will quickly convince you that the wood product is much nicer to use. And cuts in plastic cutting boards can also harbor bacteria, so plastic offers no advantage over wood other than weight. Light weight can be a marked disadvantage as you want the cutting board to be stable and firmly in place so it doesn't move as you process food.

Kitchen lighting should be ample and sourced from overhead moveable halogen track lights in multiple locations with dimmer switches, such that specific work areas are very well lit as needed. Inset ceiling lights/floods/spots are far less flexible. Under cabinet lights with dimmer switches are also very important so you can see what you have on your counters under your cabinets. These latter lights are also nice for setting an informal mood in your kitchen. A fair number

of people I know with great kitchens use them as entertainment areas for parties, and this is one use of an island that is seldom considered but very nice if the island has two deep granite overhangs with comfortable bar stools.

I recall designing and building a large custom exhaust hood above a cooktop in one of my homes, and I even thought to provide dimmer controlled halogen lighting from inside the hood to illuminate the cooktop. Even the inline fan that exhausted the area above the cooktop operated with a rheostat for variable speed to match the need. My, was that nice, and designing and making it myself was a real high/deep satisfaction.

Storage and Utility Room

Beyond the kitchen it is important to consider your larger food storage and utility needs, particularly regarding auxiliary refrigeration, the deep freeze and food shelves, plus food processing equipment that you do not want to store or necessarily use in your kitchen. In other words having a nice large food pantry is okay, but it is far less in functionality than the superior facility I am about to describe.

I wonder how many people ever consider sacrificing their kitchen table area and combining it with a large food pantry area for a food storage and utility room that would be easily accessed from the kitchen? Let's see where this idea takes us.

A room with a food storage area can contain the second refrigerator and the deep freeze and great open shelving, etc., to hold canned, bottled and dry goods, out where you can see them easily, uncrowded. Note that the refrigeration unit should be only refrigeration as you already have plenty of freezer space. The storage section of the room should be about 15 feet long and up to 3 feet deep to accommodate the freezer. Given eight foot ceilings, the shelving potential beside and above the appliances is quite large and easily accessed.

The utility section of the room, on the opposite wall, should consist of a sink and a trash receptacle and sizeable wood topped adjacent tables or cabinetry about 30" deep, all items about 15 feet long in total. Counters with cabinets underneath should have double doors. A few should have drawers for special utensils. You might consider using both counters with cabinets underneath and a table with a thick wood butcher block top for cutting meat, etc. The tops of the tables or counters are where you keep your larger equipment, like your food dehydrator, extra large food processor, meat slicer, vacuum sealer, gelato maker and any

other device you acquire for bulk food processing, like a standalone meat grinder, powered meat cutting saw and possibly a grain mill.

A rolling two shelf stainless steel cart (24" wide x 36" long x 30" high) with a 1" high lip around the perimeter of each shelf provides extra temporary space to hold foods that you process anywhere in the utility section. You can roll the cart to the refrigerator, freezer, food shelves or even into the kitchen to offload items you plan to cook. Similarly, any kitchen operation that produces a large number of containers of food, like canned goods, destined for the storage area will be a perfect use for the cart. Now that is a real labor saving feature. And the food items cannot slide or roll off the cart shelves. The rolling cart can normally be stored beside or between a table and a cabinet in the storage room to keep it out of the way when not in use.

By using the storage/utility room approach you have a convenient place to do special work and to store food. Most important, you don't have to lift each appliance out of storage each time you want to use it (and your kitchen cabinets will not be crowded). The area under the table(s) or inside the cabinets can be used for infrequent use equipment and accessory storage, not to mention infrequently used cooking vessels and portable kitchen appliances, and/or as an area for storing plastic 5 gallon cans when making bulk foods like sauerkraut or pickles. Even carboys can be stored there for making wine. How convenient! The storage/utility room is immediately adjacent to the kitchen, for easy access, yet the kitchen aesthetics are not affected.

As it is likely the storage and utility room will not have a window there are two other important things to consider, light and ventilation. I suggest installing a continuous bank of double tube overhead fluorescent lights (now use LED's), as they will light the entire area brilliantly. I suggest installing an exhaust fan that vents to the exterior of the house to accommodate any food odors from activities like making sauerkraut. You will likely not want the room to be heated as there is no advantage whatsoever. Food will last longer on the shelves in a cool room and making things like pickles and wine are done best at cool temperatures of 60° F to 70° F, not higher. You may, however, want to have air conditioning in warmer climates or during the summer.

The exception to the above method for using large counter or table top appliances is to keep certain small or medium size frequent use appliances on your kitchen countertop where they will be better used, like your toaster, blender, regular food processor and electric mixer. What you want to avoid is forced transport of materials to/from the kitchen and the storage/utility room, for frequent routine cooking or other common food preparation that involves mechanical/powering devices.

Overall, the food storage and utility room should be 15 feet long and 8 to 9 feet wide, with 36" wide doors on each end, such that one door opens into the garage and the other into the kitchen. There will be a generous 3½ to 4½ feet of walkway between the storage and the utility areas. Using this special room concept will eliminate using your kitchen as a staging area after food shopping, and it minimizes your work in transporting and storing what you have purchased.

With a nice dining room and comfortable bar stools at a kitchen island do you even need a kitchen table area for anything more than a temporary dump zone when you have been shopping? My bet is that, unless you have a very large family, the kitchen table is not essential if your kitchen island is properly designed and if a food storage and utility room is located conveniently to your kitchen as described above. Why not use that nice dining room more than once a week or less, as is most typical in most homes? Think about it.

Let me conclude this section with two simple thoughts. Serving those you love the best food you can make is truly a measure of your love. And remember to love yourself by providing the best environment for you to process and prepare food.

PRESERVING AND MODIFYING FOODS

The Past

Our grandparents and parents often canned foods based on times of harvest or other considerations like preserving wild game or meat from farm animals. A few foods like corn or apples could also be dried and thus preserved for future use. It was only in the last half of the twentieth century that large home deep freezers became common and their use significantly reduced the amount of foods canned or dried at home. Since that time commercial food producers started using shrink-wrap, heat sealing and then vacuum sealing and nitrogen atmosphere environments in polymer packaging both to preserve the products awaiting purchase and to improve their appearance and to mechanize food production and reduce human labor/cost. Yet through it all a short trip through your local supermarket will make you smile as you realize that we still use all methods named above for food preservation and marketing advantage even today.

The Present

The simple fact is that some food products are best sold canned for convenience, like kidney beans. Others are fine in polymer coated paper containers, like milk or fresh orange juice and yet others in plastic or glass bottles, refrigerated or not depending on the product. We see all kinds of dried fruit products. The use of nitrogen gas to eliminate oxygen during polymer packaging operations is great for avoiding food oxidation, discoloration and early spoilage. In short, the "shelf life" of products so packaged is vastly improved. Vacuum sealing is another way to protect food from bacteria, molds, insects and dirt and also oxidation and freezer burn, and it allows for attractive see through presentation. Flash freezing is yet another method used commercially to capture food freshness and texture that would be lost using conventional freezing methods. Irradiation is used, especially in poorer countries where refrigerators are a luxury, like Mexico, to preserve milk and meats.

All of the older and modern methods have their place. For the home chef it is important to learn which methods are right for which foods and how to do the processing successfully. We may not have flash freezing or irradiation devices at home yet but we pretty much have access to all the other essential pieces of equipment.

Technology at Home

Indeed, you can even purchase tanks of gases like nitrogen and carbon dioxide at welding supply businesses and use them at home (just remember to buy a pressure regulator). I used to make hundreds of liter bottles of seltzer water for Marie using a medium sized tank of carbon dioxide gas with a pressure regulator and simple tap water, for about six cents per bottle. My labor was about 30 seconds per bottle. See the recipe for lemon-lime soda in this book to learn how to do all of this process.

The advent of high quality vacuum sealing machines for home use, freezers that maintain temperatures of 0°F, and such mechanical devices as high quality meat slicers and food processors and top quality electric mixers and blenders, and a myriad of attachments and accessories, make this environment both more complicated and also more rewarding. Don't feel overwhelmed. Get them one at a time and take your time to learn how to use each one well. These many products increase your freedom to do things that can't easily be done in lesser kitchens, indeed in time your concept of how to use your kitchen and various food products will change substantially.

It is important to realize that commercial food processors have access to chemical preservatives that, regardless of our opinions regarding some of those chemicals, are not all available to consumers, due primarily to government regulations. An example of what you can buy is sodium benzoate, a common preservative in pickled products, sauces and dressings. The opposite is true for direct purchase of sodium nitrite and chemicals like calcium disodium EDTA. You will likely never see yet other chemicals like potassium metabisulfite unless you happen to make wine and have a supply store near you with all the specialty wine chemicals, some of which can be used in other foods. Unavailability of certain chemicals does limit what we can choose to do safely and/or with optimal results in food preservation.

Note, however, that many useful preservation chemicals are readily available via the Internet. Examples are sodium propionate and potassium sorbate, both of which are used in making breads to preserve freshness and resistance to molds. Often the less expensive loaves of bread and specialty baked goods at the supermarket have little or no preservation chemicals, and those products, as a result, have very short shelf lives. For example, Scali bread, Tuscan Pane bread and other Artisan breads and rolls have no preservation chemicals so they will get moldy within a few days to a week. In contrast, Pepperidge Farm® breads will literally stay fresh for a month with zero mold. Note also that double packaging in cellophane and regular wrapping bags extends shelf life by keeping the contents from becoming dry and hard.

The home chef must prepare and use many fresh foods within a few days that do not lend themselves to long term refrigerated storage, for lack of chemical preservatives. Conversely, a number of recipes use products that already contain chemical preservatives and they, along with acidic and/or salty recipe compositions permit longer refrigerated food storage. And pasteurization of the product, while not as dependable as canning, is a great way to extend the shelf life of lots of products you make and then package and refrigerate. An example of built in preservation chemicals in some of the ingredients, combined with heat for sterility, is when you make homemade barbecue sauce that has been simmered and immediately sealed in a sterile jar.

The knowledge gained in using the above mentioned devices and methods of food handling supports the home chef with choices in food preparation and preservation that would have amazed our grandparents. And even chemical preservatives can be obtained in special circumstances, like sodium nitrate and sodium nitrite in pre-measured mixes for making home cured meats like pastrami. For that matter the natural acidity of some foods like tomatoes and citrus fruits, and the use of acidic products like vinegars, allow you fairly long food storage, refrigerated, without other chemical preservatives.

Equipment You May Not Own and Why You Need It

Well, with the lead-in about food preservation methods, what I want to do is highly recommend that the serious home chef acquire all the modern devices. A high quality vacuum sealer is an obvious example. Those devices have started to become popular as low price models have become available, but few home chefs understand how their whole concept of food preservation and freshness can and will change if they learn to use a vacuum sealer. Add to that a high quality meat slicer and the home chef can literally make all the cold/lunch meats the family might want for sandwiches easily and cheaply and with refrigerator shelf life of around a month. And this is done without any of the preservatives found in the cold meats at your local delicatessen. That is very impressive, and I will illustrate that point now with a "prime" example.

I cooked a three pound piece of eye roast of beef, trimmed of fat, in an oven at 350° F for 45 minutes. The end product was brown on the exterior and medium rare throughout inside and very juicy. I immediately processed the warm roast through my meat slicer to create thin sliced roast beef for later use in making sandwiches. I then vacuum sealed four packages of the sliced juicy meat and

refrigerated it. Three weeks later I opened the last package and it was as fresh and delicious as when it was first made ... same color, texture, taste and no spoilage! Here is the best part. I paid \$2.59 per lb. for the eye roast at Costco® (The 2012 price was \$3.49/lb. The 2024 price is \$5.99/lb in our local supermarket.).

Comparative premium roast beef in our supermarket delicatessen was selling for \$11.99 per lb. and it has a limited shelf life. Sliced meats like roast beef from the delicatessen typically must be eaten within one week or less.

If you do the arithmetic the conclusion is obvious. The same excellent economics and freshness results are obtained for ham and turkey breast, etc. I routinely buy bulk quantities of many cheeses at Costco® and package and vacuum seal them for what is likely to be used in one sitting, thus, the cheese is always fresh and there is no mold or bacterial contamination. Think about this as a quality of life issue as well as intelligent economics. What should you do?

For those of you who might be reluctant due to fear of bacterial contamination let me make the single most important point ... all of our normal bacteria that might contaminate food, like salmonella, cannot live or reproduce in an oxygen free environment. Vacuum sealing really works to impede almost all bacteria as well as molds. One exception is botulism which is found, albeit rarely, in canned goods ... recall the consumer warnings about never using canned goods where the can is swollen. You will refrigerate or freeze any food item that you have vacuum sealed that would degrade if not refrigerated or frozen. Hence, with even a tiny bit of common sense you will have no problems, only product cost, quality and shelf life benefits.

Dabbling in Science

Part I - Vacuum Sealing - A bit of Physics

I will now tell you, or admit as the case may be, about me learning some realities about vacuum sealing the hard way, and these are things I should have anticipated based on my education. I thought I could vacuum seal refrigerated canning jars of homemade salad dressings and other sauces, refrigerate them after vacuum sealing and give them away as gifts with a long refrigerator shelf life. What I didn't consider was that the very process of vacuum sealing moist or liquid products can be fraught with difficulties when using canning jars. First, the product tended to exhaust into the flexible vacuum line that connected the canning jar accessory to the vacuum sealer during vacuuming because a properly filled jar put the dressings/sauces too close to the vacuum accessory

port, and some of it got sucked out into the vacuum tubing. Second, the appearance of the food changed because canning jars, unlike vacuum sealing bags, do not collapse around the food. What looked like air bubbles formed along the interior glass jar surface, giving the product less eye appeal. Ah well, live and learn. But do we give up? Absolutely not!

Okay, let's learn some quantitative physics about what really happened. Those bubbles were simply the result of some of the liquid portion of the jar contents boiling off as water vapor, even when the product was pre-chilled in the refrigerator, because of the high vacuum conditions. Thus, the explanation for what happened is that the boiling point of water becomes amazingly low under high vacuum. We all know that water boils at 212° F at normal atmospheric pressure of 14.69 pounds per square inch (PSI) (or 29.92 inches of mercury in a Torricelli barometer) at sea level, but when that pressure is severely reduced to near total vacuum conditions the boiling point changes significantly.

Specifically, refrigerated water at 40° F will boil if the vacuum sealer vacuum level (as shown on the vacuum gauge) is 29.17 inches of mercury, which is down around 0.37 PSI. At a vacuum level of 29.76 inches of mercury water will boil at 30°F, which as you will note is below the normal freezing point of water (32°F) at normal atmospheric pressure. When you dial in the effect of having the water mixed with solids and semi-solids in the foods we try to vacuum seal, we find (for other physical reasons I will not cover here) that the water portion will boil at slightly higher temperatures than what pure water will boil under vacuum conditions. Finally, the type of food being vacuum sealed affects the process as well. Salt in the food tends to depress the freezing point and slightly increase the boiling point. What fun!

Sooo ... can we vacuum seal liquids and sauces and dressings in canning jars and be successful, and if so, how? The answer is yes. Here is one idea I have used with canning jars, and one that I know will work. Put the canning jar with product at least 3/4 inch from the top and with the canning jar lid and ring on it somewhat less than tight into a taller hard-sided container (glass or plastic) that will close/seal tightly, and to which you can attach the vacuum line from the vacuum sealer, or use a vacuum chamber directly, like a chamber vacuum sealer or the primary unit of the Vacu Vita®. When you vacuum seal, none of the product will exhaust into the vacuum line, because of the large physical displacement of the product surface from the point of maximum suction, or, because you chose a method/equipment that eliminated entirely the need for a vacuum hose. The product will still "boil" slowly and develop the "bubbles" but it will not overflow the canning jar, and after vacuum sealing is complete you can make the product appear normal again by gentle tapping against a soft surface to get the bubble

areas to rise to the top. This is similar to getting air bubbles out of cake batter. The moral of this story is clear. Be aggressively determined to be successful, find out what is really happening and use your brainpower to figure out a workable answer. What got me started thinking about the above approach was using the chamber of my vacuum sealer to process multiple 8 ounce canning jars of various products at one time. It was neat and easy, and also a reason to think about purchasing later a vacuum sealer with a deep vacuum chamber.

Okay ... it is time for a Vacu Vita update. Wow! This is December of 2016 and I got my full Vacu Vita product set shortly before Thanksgiving. That was a long wait. On the other hand I now have a very high quality product made to European appliance standards, which are typically vastly superior to what is made/sold in the USA. Marie and I learned that important fact back in 1998 when we lived in Switzerland. I still use the powered appliances we bought there (they last!) and we even provided 220V power to our kitchens to be able to do so. Well, the Vacu Vita I received was built to operate on the 110V power we have in the USA, so you can get one and not worry about needing a special high voltage circuit for your kitchen. The product even comes with special reusable vacuum sealing bags perfect for doing sous vide cooking.

I am pleased with this capability for sealing some products in canning jars. Now I have a vacuum unit with a very deep chamber for processing canning jars, remembering, of course, that vacuum sealing is not the same in preservation as true canning if the product(s) is stored at room temperature. So we refrigerate certain products even following vacuum sealing. Note also that the amount of vacuum using the Vacu Vita is less than that of a commercial vacuum sealer, by about one third.

For every funny story about screw-ups I like to tell one about successes you can have if you "think outside of the box," which simply means use your imagination to develop novel solutions to seemingly intractable problems, similar to the above story. My story here is what I learned from reading an obvious fact and not liking that fact, and then doing something different to make the fact irrelevant.

Try to vacuum seal a loaf of bread or a pastry in a plastic vacuum sealing bag and you will see it collapse into a small clump of useless gunk. Taking away the air from the inside of the soft bread/pastry by using a vacuum sealer, while allowing a flexible bag to compress it from the higher air pressure outside, and the loaf of bread or pastry is wrecked. So, does that mean we can't vacuum seal soft products like bread? No, it certainly does not mean that at all. Yet, makers of vacuum sealers and other literature do not tell you how you can successfully vacuum seal things like a loaf of bread. The secret? Put the bread or other soft baked item into a strong plastic container that will not collapse. Put that

container into a vacuum sealing bag and vacuum to your heart's content and let it seal. Voila, you have preserved bread/pastry without freezing or any other physical storage procedure. When you later break the vacuum seal to use the bread it simply gets the air it needs and holds its original shape. I know this works very well as I have done it many times.

Recently I saw an ad and a video for a new product named, VacuVita®, on the Internet. I was most pleased as that product does exactly what I was attempting to do by using hard sided containers with vacuum sealing. You might guess that I ordered the complete kitchen set of that product, and it will be shipped sometime in September 2013. I will work with it and provide a review in Food Nirvana so that you will know if it works as advertised and if I can apply some of my own ideas using it, like vacuum sealing liquid products in canning jars without the problems of using a close proximity vacuum line.

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Part II - Food Preservatives - A bit of Chemistry and Biology

Food manufacturers use a variety of chemical preservatives to provide their products with good shelf life, ergo, products that stay fresh and tasty and do not get moldy or otherwise spoiled. Breads and other pastries are a good example. Likewise lunch meats and many beverages and bottled liquid products like pancake syrup. Almost all products other than fresh fruits and vegetables have one or more types of preservatives, and often even some fruits and vegetables are sprayed with an antifungal product to avoid surface contamination and mold or rot. Exceptions are found in canned goods that tend not to deteriorate. Two common preservatives are potassium sorbate and sodium benzoate. Potassium sorbate is used at a concentration of 0.1% to 0.3% by weight of the product, and you can buy it easily and cheaply via Internet vendors or in stores like Wal-Mart®. Similarly, today sodium benzoate is easily purchased via the Internet, but I have a story below that describes the steps I had to take when it was

difficult to obtain sodium benzoate powder. You are about to get a science lesson and I hope you appreciate/enjoy it.

This section is a story about finding sodium benzoate online at a time when it was not commonly available to consumers. It was in concentrated liquid form and the seller would not disclose the concentration ... thus I determined it myself by using a simple scientific method. Note that now you can simply buy pure sodium benzoate powder via Amazon®. But take time to read the story, for it will give you insight for other potential applications with other food preservation chemicals and food additives.

I was delighted to find that I could buy concentrated sodium benzoate solution from the people who sell snow cone syrups, Koldkiss®. Sodium benzoate is used as a preservative for many foods, like pickles, soft drinks, and, well the list goes on and on. The proper amount to use is anywhere from 1/20th to 1/10th of a percent by total weight of the product and the liquid that contains the product. Also, sodium benzoate will not work effectively unless there is some acidity in the liquid, like that provided by vinegar in pickle brine. The optimal pH is 4.5. Given the proper conditions sodium benzoate can keep products in glass jars from spoiling after being opened, easily for a year, as long as they are kept refrigerated and resealed properly with the lids. That means many products I make, like tomato juice, which is naturally acidic, benefit from the addition of sodium benzoate, such that they can be refrigerated after vacuum sealing with no concerns about spoilage or fermentation. Thus, canning is unnecessary. Another example is the Hot Giardiniera Condiment used on steak sandwiches and subs. Yet a third example is my hot habanero sauce.

Now I get to the science part. Koldkiss® provides instructions to vendors who sell snow cones regarding the use of concentrated flavor syrups, sugar, water, concentrated sodium benzoate solution and their fruit acid product that is used to acidify the final syrup that will be dispensed onto shaved ice. As most snow cone vendors are not educated in chemistry the simple instructions from Koldkiss® are just what they need. But now a person like me comes along and I need to know the exact concentration of the sodium benzoate solution so I can know precisely how much to use with each of the food items I prepare for long term storage, either in a pantry or in a refrigerator. Koldkiss® declined to share that information with me so I had to use my education and common sense to outwit them and determine for myself the precise concentration of sodium benzoate in their concentrate product.

Thus, the following discussion is about what I did and what I learned. First, I dispensed exactly one tablespoon of their liquid concentrate into a small weighing dish used with my very sensitive electronic reload scale that I

purchased from Cabelas®. I weighed it and the total weight of the dish and the contents was 13.25 grams. I then placed the dish in a 160 degrees F oven to evaporate the water from the dish. Once the water was gone I let the dish cool to room temperature and then weighed it again. That time the weight had been reduced to 9.65 grams. Finally, I rinsed the dry sodium benzoate from the dish and dried it completely. I then weighed the empty dish and it was 7.40 grams. Now I had all the information I needed to directly calculate the concentration of the Koldkiss® product.

The total weight of 13.25 grams less the weight of the empty dish, 7.40 grams, yields 5.85 grams of weight for one tablespoon of the concentrate. The weight of the dried product in the dish, 9.65 grams, less the weight of the empty dish, 7.40 grams, yields 2.15 grams of sodium benzoate in one tablespoon of the concentrate. Thus, the weight of the water in one tablespoon of the concentrate is 5.85 grams less the 2.15 grams, or 3.70 grams.

Two tablespoons is one fluid ounce. Thus, each fluid ounce of the concentrate contains two times 2.15 grams or 4.30 grams of sodium benzoate. That is precisely the information I needed to know how many fluid ounces of the concentrate to use in a batch of whatever product I happen to be making. For example purposes, assume I have a mixture of product and liquid that weighs ten pounds. Let's assume I want to use sodium benzoate at the rate of 1/10th of one percent by weight. Thus, 10 lbs. divided by one thousand gives the right amount needed in pounds. That number is 0.01 pounds. Now, knowing that one pound is 454 grams (of any product) I multiply by 454 and my result is 4.54 grams of sodium benzoate as the right amount needed. Thus, I know I need a bit more than one fluid ounce of the Koldkiss® concentrate to add to my product. Specifically, 4.54 divided by 4.30 yields 1.056 fluid ounces.

Now I can multiply the weight of one fluid ounce of the concentrate by 1.056 and know the exact weight in grams of the concentrate I need to measure out and use. Thus, 5.85 grams per tablespoon of the concentrate times two tablespoons per ounce yields 11.70 grams per ounce. Now I multiply the 1.056 fluid ounces I need by the 11.70 grams per ounce and I find that I have to dispense 12.36 grams of the concentrate solution into the weighing dish, and then dispense that liquid into my product and mix it thoroughly. So I use my reload scale to measure out 12.36 grams of the concentrate solution and I don't have to think about trying to do liquid measures down to the thousandth of a fluid ounce. Easy, wasn't it?

Most of the time you will never come across a situation as detailed and necessary as what I had to do to use the Koldkiss® product. But this example shows just how important it can be to dabble in science to get what you want. There is also the consideration that in doing my experiment I might have made an error in

measuring of undetermined amount, or an error in my calculations. In science one of the ways we deal with those possibilities is to repeat experiments looking for precision in results. Given the doing of multiple presumed identical experiments we then compare the results and quickly determine the reliability of the experimental procedure in terms of precision. If the results vary widely then the procedure isn't very good.

Accuracy is a related but different matter. For example, suppose the Koldkiss® folks put a second chemical in their concentrate solution besides the sodium benzoate, perhaps to help keep the sodium benzoate in solution. What that would mean is that the weight of the dried product in my experiment would be that of the sodium benzoate plus that of the other dried chemical or chemicals. That means the actual concentration of sodium benzoate in the solution would be less than what I determined. I could do other experiments to determine if that situation exists, but in this case the Koldkiss® folks declare that the only ingredients in their concentrate are water and sodium benzoate, so we put that problem to bed (maybe).

Here is one very important additional point. Koldkiss® could change the concentration of their sodium benzoate solution at any time and not notify their customers of the change. Why might they do that? One reason could be that by doubling the concentration they could package the solution in 500 ml bottles instead of 1 liter bottles, thus saving some money. They would at that point change their instructions to snow cone vendors regarding how much of the concentrate to add to a batch of snow cone syrup. The rest of us who are using the sodium benzoate to do other things than make snow cones would not be any the wiser and we could mistakenly use too much sodium benzoate in our food preservation steps in various recipes. Thus, ALWAYS test the concentration of the sodium benzoate solution when you purchase a new supply, in the manner I explained above, doing what I did.

We still have the issue of how accurately I could measure and then dispense exactly one tablespoon of their product. As I am sure you know, measuring spoons are rather pathetic when it comes to dispensing precise quantities of anything. In a laboratory environment a liquid product would typically be measured and dispensed using either a pipette or a burette, which are finely calibrated glass tubes that are used to hold and then dispense precise amounts of a liquid. Yes, you can purchase products like pipettes and burettes from companies like Fisher Scientific® if you really want to get into this aspect of food science.

Check out the simple recipe for strawberry preserves at the end of this section.

Part III - Brine Curing Meats - A bit more of Chemistry and a wisp of Physics and a tad of Biology

I have a fairly detailed description of the chemistry and other factors involved in using the pink curing salt, Prague #1, in making Canadian Bacon from pork loin. That description is found in the Food Nirvana recipe for Canadian Bacon. It is rather more involved than the simple examples shown earlier in this section, but it is surely worth the read if you want to brine cure meats.

Okay, that is enough science for today! Class dismissed!

Summary:

I conclude this section with the simple idea that your income can go further and your quality of life can get better if you will learn to take advantage of modern food preservation and processing technology. All you have to do is use your native intelligence and have some curiosity and sometimes the willingness to experiment. The rewards are great and your inner feeling of independence and satisfaction will put a smile on your face often. You are in charge.

Smoking Points of Cooking Fats & Oils

There are a variety of choices for cooking oils and certain ones are better for high temperature frying, while others are better for lower temperature sautéing. As you look at the table below consider that you do not want to do high temperature frying using any oil with a smoking point lower than 375 degrees F. In general, the best choices for frying for the home chef are Canola Oil and Peanut Oil.

For stir frying or sautéing you might instead use coconut oil or extra virgin olive oil. In some instances you will instead want to use butter or drawn butter for lower temperature sautéing, to capture the taste of the butter.

Drawn butter is not as refined as Ghee, yet it is suitable for somewhat higher temperature frying. It has water and milk solids mostly removed from the butter. That is done via heating butter in a Pyrex® type of container in a microwave oven until the water in it starts to cook off, then scraping away any foam from the top, then cooling it, and then decanting the top layer of pure butterfat away from the lower layer of remaining water and milk solids, which are then discarded. Alternatively, best done in advance of when you might use it, you process the container of heated butter, which can be chilled in the refrigerator to solidify the butterfat, making it easier to separate it from any water and milk solids on the bottom, thus avoiding wasting any butterfat.

You will want to consider the cost of an oil before using it in large (2 quart) volumes for deep frying. Canola oil is relatively cheap. Peanut oil is more expensive but still reasonable if purchased in gallon size or larger quantities. You can look up the prices of the various oils from supplier Internet web sites or businesses like Amazon®. The prices you find there will be a lot lower than those of a typical supermarket.

Note that oils for high temperature frying can be used, in general, for about three times, provided you filter out any food particles prior to storing the oil between uses, and remember to wipe excess moisture from the items you plan to fry. The idea is that oils gradually break down chemically, which results in lowering the smoking point temperature. Old, overused oils will impart an off flavor to foods fried in them. There are a variety of choices for cooking oils and certain ones are better for high temperature frying, while others are better for lower temperature sautéing. As you look at the table below consider that you do not want to do high temperature frying using any oil with a smoking point lower than 375 degrees F. In general, the best choices for frying for the home chef are Canola Oil and Peanut Oil.

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<u>Oil</u>	<u>Degrees F</u>
Avocado	570
Butter	200 to 250
Drawn Butter	350
Canola	400
Coconut	350
Coconut (refined)	450
Corn	440
Flaxseed	225

Ghee	485
Lard	370
Olive (extra virgin)	375
Olive (virgin)	391
Olive (extra light)	468
Peanut	450
Sesame	460
Soybean	450
Vegetable	400
Vegetable (shortening)	360

Sous Vide Cooking

Sous Vide cooking is a method of sealing food in a plastic bag and heating it through in a heated water bath to a precise temperature, and holding that temperature for the needed amount of time. The idea is that the food will not overcook due to higher temperatures and that it can be held at the desired temperature for an extended period without overcooking. Note that the starting temperature of the food will affect how long it takes for the heated water bath to increase that food temperature, all the way through, to the right level for cooking.

The sous vide technique was developed in France in the 1970's but not used much in the USA until the late 1990's. It is now common practice in upscale restaurants, like great steak houses, to have steaks already heated through to, for example, a medium rare amount, like 130 degrees F, allowing the chef to simply remove a hot steak from a bag and do a very rapid very hot grilling (about 30 seconds to one minute per side) to complete the cooking and have the steak ready to serve, nicely crisp on the outside and evenly cooked throughout the inside.

It is easy to think of other applications, like precooking a boneless skinless chicken breast to a bare 148 degrees F, all the way through, and maintaining that temperature for one hour, to have it perfectly safe to eat and ready for battering and very rapid frying. About five minutes of frying is all that is needed to make the batter perfect, and the chicken breast is already cooked through and so remains very moist and tender. That is a massive improvement over simply trying to fry a battered raw chicken breast, where by the time it is cooked through the batter is overcooked and most of the flesh is tough and dry.

You likely already know the government recommended temperature for cooking fowl is 160 degrees F, not 148 degrees F, so why the difference? The reality is that the higher temperature causes the flesh to be drier and tougher. The lower temperature of 148 degrees F, if maintained for one hour after the flesh is heated through, is perfect to guarantee no bacteria will be alive. But what will happen is that you will have very moist and tender fowl, which is wonderful compared to that cooked to a higher temperature.

One thing you might consider with sous vide cooking is having the item being cooked in a marinade in the sealed bag. I leave it to your imagination to consider all the possibilities ... and/or to look up recipes.

Food Nirvana has two excellent recipe entries for making and cooking cured meats. Note that the final cooking of those meats can readily be done, and done perfectly, via sous vide cooking. For example, ham made from pork loin is

cooked to a final temperature of 150 degrees F, after which is cooled, chilled, and then used as lunch meat for sandwiches or like Canadian bacon for light frying and enjoyment at breakfast.

Pastrami made from cured beef is heated to 200 degrees F, which is still within the use range of the sous vide heating unit I describe next.

The picture shown with this discussion is of a sous vide unit I purchased for roughly \$250 that includes a water circulating electric heater with precise temperature and time controls, plus a water tank that holds the heater and the food to be cooked. It is the epitome of ease of use provided you have a convenient place to keep and use the three gallon water tank. I also use my vacuum sealer and "boil-in" plastic bags to seal the meat, fowl or seafood products I decide to cook by the sous vide method. I cover the tank during cooking with a plastic cutting board to hold in the heat and thus better maintain the desired temperature.

I enjoyed reading J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's description of sous vide cooking in his great book, The Food Lab©, and especially the part about how a home cook can bypass all the expense of the sous vide equipment and the vacuum sealer, and simply use common items found at home to do sous vide cooking. I paraphrase his thoughts next.

Use a 3 to 5 gallon cooler of the type you would take camping. Fill it about 3/4 full of hot tap water a few degrees hotter (or as hot as you have) than what you need to cook whatever you are cooking. Have a quick read thermometer handy to periodically check the water temperature. Add boiling water when necessary, with stirring, to create or to maintain the desired temperature for the 30 minutes or more required to cook the food all the way through, and to cook it long enough to make it safe to eat. Use something like a Ziploc® freezer bag to hold the flesh item. Expel air from the bag by immersing the food filled bag into the sous vide water up to but not over the top edge of the bag, after which you seal the bag, having eliminated unwanted air in the bag that might cause uneven cooking.

The cooler lid is closed tightly to keep the heat in the cooler as much as possible.

Using this simple and inexpensive approach to sous vide cooking does require periodic checking of the cooler water temperature, about once every ten minutes, making temperature adjustments as needed by adding additional boiling water, which you keep available by having a one gallon pot of it at a low boil on your stove, adding water to the pot as necessary.

Okay, that is a primer for sous vide cooking, sufficient for you to do it successfully. You can choose to read more about sous vide cooking via searching the Internet.

Using Hydrocolloid Thickeners

Few home chefs get beyond the use of gelatin and corn starch or flour when it comes to thickening juices, syrups, sauces or gravies. Commercially, whether in food production factories or in high end restaurant kitchens, a class of thickeners known as hydrocolloids is used. These come in powder forms either white or off white in color.

This class of thickeners is used to create what I call special effects. Think about that high clarity beautiful fruit based sauce a chef ladles onto your dessert plate. Or think about serving sauces or syrups at home that retain their clarity instead of becoming murky from using a product like corn starch.

Besides appearance, this class of thickeners create behaviors that differ from each other ... some set when heated while others set when cooled. Some can be reheated to redo a process of liquefying followed by gelling or thickening. When grilling meat, a sauce that thickens when heated is surely superior to one that becomes thin and runs off the meat. Conversely, a syrup is better for pancakes or waffles or ice cream if it is relatively thick at room temperature instead of being thin and runny.

Technically gelatin is a hydrocolloid, the only one that is a protein, so the reader should not feel intimidated by the word hydrocolloid. All the term means is a natural product that merges physically (vs. chemically) with water to form molecular groups that thicken whatever food is being made.

For example, agar agar is extracted from red seaweed. Locust bean gum comes from a seed. Gum Arabic comes from tree sap. Pectin comes from fruit. Xanthan gum is the result of microbe produced fermentation. All are complex sugars, and this list is not complete. For my purpose, it is enough that you know these products are natural.

Xanthan gum is a typical product found in salad dressings as it helps merge chemically and physically different products like oil and vinegar so that they tend to stay together when used on your salad, rather than separate from each other.

I have a supply of agar agar that I purchased through BulkFoods.com. I've also added xanthan gum to my pantry and that product is available also at BulkFoods.com and other places. The idea is that a simple Internet search via search engines like Google will provide you with web site links to a variety of sources happy to sell you what you want, inexpensively. For example, agar agar and xanthan gum can be purchased for roughly \$12 per pound and a pound is

one heck of a lot of product compared to how much you will use in any given recipe. Likely a pound of either product will last you at least five years.

With a bit of searching you will find good recipes that use hydrocolloids. But try to learn a bit about each first so you can recognize errors that are unfortunately too typical with many Internet recipes. Alas, I've found that too many home cook suppliers of recipes to popular web sites use, shall I say, poetic license in describing their results from the stated ingredients and procedures. In any event, agar agar is stirred into cold water a bit at a time to avoid clumping and left to hydrate for five minutes. Then the mixture is heated barely to boiling and stirred to cause it to mix well and then it is introduced into the product being thickened/gelled, with stirring, and it sets upon cooling at around 95 degrees F. Xanthan gum thickens at both room temperature and higher temperatures so it is quite versatile and all it takes to hydrate it is a blender.

Hydrocolloids are typically used in certain amount ranges based on the total weight of the product being thickened. Thus, for a syrup made from fruit juice and pulp that will also contain sugar the total weight of the juice and pulp and sugar will be used to calculate how much of a given hydrocolloid to use. But note that I am talking about the final weight of the syrup, so if evaporation during boiling is significant then the final weight will be less than that of the original ingredients.

Agar agar is used at the approximate rate of 0.5% to 0.8% by total product weight. Using more or less of it will produce either more or less thickening/gelling, and the choice is yours to make. Don't be afraid to experiment, for that is how we learn best.

Xanthan gum is typically used at the approximate rate of 0.25% to 0.75% by total product weight, depending on the degree of thickness desired. In my reading about Xanthan gum I was informed that using too much can produce ugly, slimy results. Also, the tendency of Xanthan gum to clump suggests adding the powder gradually into a blender or into a container where you are using an immersion blender, that is already mixing the other ingredients. Another way to make the use of Xanthan gum powder easy is to use about 1/8 of a teaspoon per cup of liquid. After blending and allowing to sit for a few minutes you can check the results and either stop there or add more and blend again. I noticed enhanced thickening of one salad dressing after it had been refrigerated for 24 hours, so you might want to try that before increasing the amount of Xanthan gum powder that you use.

Hydrocolloids need to go from powder form to mix with water such that they become hydrated. This can be accomplished with relative ease by mixing

vigorously with cold water via a blender or by hand. It depends on which product is being hydrated. You also need to learn that hydration will occur best in pure water, not in a syrup that already contains sugar. Hydration will sometimes be impeded if the product is too acidic, so the answer is to hydrate the thickening agent prior to introducing it into an acidic product.

Sometimes thickened product can be processed in a blender to create a creamy consistency that will be maintained at serving time. The point, as usual, is to do some research on the physical behaviors of a hydrocolloid and to find or create recipes where the presence of the hydrocolloid and how it is introduced into the product works best.

Below I have listed relative amounts of different thickeners you can use when making gluten free baked goods. Thickeners are necessary as the absence of gluten makes a batter that won't stick together like a risen yeast bread made with regular flour. Note that you choose one ... You don't use all of them at the same time.

Breads and Dough (per each cup of gluten free flour)

1/2 tsp. xanthan gum

1 tsp. ground chia seeds

1 tsp. psyllium husk powder

1 tsp. guar gum

1 tsp. agar agar powder

Cakes, Cookies & Muffins (per each cup of gluten free flour)

1/4 tsp. xanthan gum

1/2 tsp. ground chia seeds

1/2 tsp. psyllium husk powder

1/2 tsp. guar gum

1/2 tsp. agar agar powder

This discussion of hydrocolloids/thickeners has barely scratched the surface of the subject, yet you already know roughly how much to use of the two discussed products and how and when to use them to get the desired effect in your final presentation. You also know how much of five different thickeners to use when making baked goods.

You might give yourself a homework assignment to learn which hydrocolloids are best for gelling as opposed to thickening. Yes, the Internet is a great source for this kind of information. Use it.

Transglutaminase

This Food Nirvana section addresses the use of a special product that actually joins different pieces of meat or fowl or seafood together to process and often appear like a single piece of flesh. That product is transglutaminase, an enzyme that links two amino acids in proteins (glutamine and lysine) chemically via a true covalent bond. Note that you can easily buy that product via Amazon®.

My later references to processes in this discussion possibly related to what is done by Arby's® in making their roast beef are all my own thoughts and guesses, not firm knowledge of what Arby's® actually does to make their beef roasts.

Think about delicatessen cold meat products like ham, or consider how Arby's® creates that obviously combined processed beef so that it slices very thinly and doesn't fall apart. It is rather obvious that the delicatessen ham products are not cut from one integral piece of cured, smoked pork ... instead, they are a loaf formed of pieces of ham chemically joined by a product such as transglutaminase to behave as if they were simply one piece of meat (in a very convenient loaf shape). It is also obvious that Arby's® roast beef is a composite, highly processed product that retains the taste of beef, because it is mostly beef, but certainly not a single integral roast of beef.

The point is obvious. A "Meat Glue" product like transglutaminase is essential in making many of the products we enjoy from delicatessens and fast food restaurants. You have consumed much of it and it is very safe and recognized as safe by the FDA. That having been said, you may well be wondering why a home chef would have any interest at all in a commercial product like transglutaminase. Now the discussion becomes quite interesting, as you will read below.

I have a recipe for gyro meat in Food Nirvana. It is obvious when reading the recipe that a great deal of effort goes into making a final product that will behave as a loaf of combined meats that can be sliced, grilled, and hold its general shape until it is consumed within a pita bread wrap. Now consider how many steps might be eliminated from that recipe if transglutaminase (TG) were used during raw meat grinding and mixing with herbs and seasonings, then formed into a loaf that, after refrigeration, seems to magically become integrated. Yes, if you can easily bond ground beef and ground lamb to form an easily sliceable loaf, then you have a perfect method for making gyro meat. Actually, that method is far superior to what has been done historically to create the same general type of product, sometimes called souvlaki.

Now, for the fun of it, think about being able to do what Arby's® does with beef ... use tenderizer and salt and the enzyme and join the meat pieces by vacuum sealing until the enzyme has bonded the pieces of meat, then bag and seal the composite meat in a brine in a heat proof polymer bag and bake it for a few hours to get the flavors of the brine into the meat, producing a delightful, thinly sliceable "roast" of beef for hot sandwiches.

Chalk another success up on the board for applied science! And yes, we owe Ajinomoto®, a Japanese company, the applause for doing all of the research to create, biologically, a perfect form of transglutaminase for commercial or home use.

I will now describe the use of their product named Activa® RM. It is one of a family of transglutaminase products used for different applications. It is sold as a powder that is sprinkled on raw flesh or used in a slurry to coat pieces of raw flesh. Ajinomoto produces transglutaminase and sells it in vacuum sealed foil pouches. I have modified the content of an Internet transglutaminase information source that I read in the usage paragraphs that follow, to limit and direct discussion to what the home chef is most likely to need.

Unopened, the pouches of RM are good for 18 months if stored below 21°C (70°F). Once open, however, the enzymes become vulnerable to moisture. Opened pouches should be tightly wrapped and stored in the freezer. The freezing temperatures will not hurt the enzyme and the low humidity in the freezer will prevent degradation. A vacuum sealer is especially useful for breaking a batch of RM into small packages for sealed storage in the freezer.

Never leave large quantities of RM out on the counter, especially in open containers, for they will quickly become useless. Remove only the amount needed using clean, dry utensils and return the rest to the freezer. Keep the working container/pouch/plastic bag closed when not in use.

Salt has an interesting effect on meats when combined with RM. Salting meat makes more of its proteins soluble and allows the meat to bind together naturally, as in a traditional sausage: Meat and salt are mixed together, the salt forces some of the meat's protein into solution, and this protein forms a gel that binds the sausage together.

In charcuterie this is called the primary bind. Because these soluble proteins are an excellent bonding substrate for RM, salting meat can dramatically increase bond strength. In some recipes, however, the combination of RM and salt can make food rubbery. You can avoid this problem by limiting the amounts of salt

and/or RM. I can easily imagine salt and RM being used by Arby's® together to both season the meat and perfectly bond the pieces together.

When bonding a mixture like ground beef and ground lamb, add RM by weight. Typically, RM is used at .75% to 1% by weight of the mixture being bonded. 1 kilogram of mixture will require 10 grams of RM. One pound thus requires no more than 4.5 grams of RM. An exception is pure chicken breast, which is more difficult to bond and sometimes requires up to 2%, though leg meat will work at 1%. Adding water or water-based flavors (like wine) to mixtures in small quantities does not affect bond strength, but adding fat-based flavors (like cream) will weaken the bond.

After adding RM, remove any air pockets between the bonding surfaces. If you can, vacuum pack food items to assure a tight seal. For shapes like rolls and sausages, simply roll the products in an ample length of plastic wrap and twist the ends. The plastic wrap technique is great. It is simple, fast and cheap; foods can be cooked in water directly in the plastic wrap if it is sealed or tied off. Putting a weight on top of pieces to be glued is also a good and different technique from vacuum sealing or rolling in plastic wrap for having all inner surfaces touch.

Try to get all gluing and forming done within 20-30 minutes and then allow the product to remain undisturbed in the refrigerator for 4 hours or more, unless you are using the heat-set method described below. RM will bond pieces of flesh within 3 hours but bond strength will be substantially higher after 4 or 5 hours at refrigeration temperatures.

Highly acidic environments (below pH 4) cannot be glued effectively. For example, to make a RM ceviche, glue the seafood together before marinating in acidic lime juice. Most other marinades, however, won't lower the pH of the proteins enough to inhibit bonding, allowing for post-marinade gluing. Thus, it is easy to imagine a flavorful marinade and a meat tenderizer being used for products like Arby's® roast beef prior to gluing/vacuum sealing and later baking in brine in a sealed bag.

RM, like other enzyme products, increases its activity as the temperature is raised ... to a point. The same bonding reaction that takes 4 hours in the refrigerator takes place in just 5 to 20 minutes at 50-58°C (122- 136°F). This technique is called heat setting. Typically you place items to be heat set vacuum sealed in a plastic bag in a 55°C water bath. 5 minutes after the core has reached temperature the meat is bonded.

The heat denaturing of an enzyme is time and temperature dependant. Enzymes are typically stable up to a given temperature, which for RM is around 40°C (104°F), above which the enzyme is slowly inactivated. As temperature is increased, inactivation becomes faster and faster. Although it takes many hours to inactivate RM at 45°C (113°F), 10 minutes at 60°C (140°F) will destroy 94% of RM.

So, what are you to conclude from this primer? In the spirit of Food Nirvana you should delight in finding ways to create at home what appears to be magic in commercial applications. Even better, this stuff is easy and inexpensive, and overall adds considerably to your perceptions of what you are capable of doing in your advanced kitchen.

Go for it! Experiment. Share what you learn. You now have all the essential information to use RM in making gyro meat, so try it. Then think about actually making nice beef roasts or even steaks from pieces of raw beef. Use your imagination.

Temperature Ranges for Making Candy

Many types of candy are made by heating sugar and water (sometimes with butter and other ingredients like corn syrup) mixtures to temperatures above the boiling point of water, which as all of us know is 212°F at sea level with a normal barometric pressure of 14.7 pounds per square inch (psi). Variations in elevation affect barometric pressure, which in turn will modify the temperature at which water boils. See below.

In general, when we consider making sugar based candy the cooking process eliminates water present in the ingredients in accordance with the temperature to which we elevate the mixture above 212 degrees F. It is very useful to know just how high to heat the temperature of a candy mixture to achieve different physical characteristics related to softness or hardness.

The descriptions below are very useful when you decide to make candy, for they provide exactly the information you need to achieve different levels of softness or hardness. Candy examples are given and that is particularly useful for you to home in on the normal temperature range appropriate to what you plan to make. I found the descriptions on the Internet and I believe they are very important to include in Food Nirvana, and I am grateful to the source, whose identity I cannot possibly remember.

Note that no information was provided to address any elevation considerations. If you live at a high elevation (1000 feet or higher above sea level) you should do Internet research to further understand the effect of elevation on making candy. The information provided in the descriptions below is for elevation ranges from sea level to roughly 1000 feet. But here is a handy rule of thumb: Subtract two degrees Fahrenheit from a stated temperature range shown below for every 1,000 feet you are above sea level.

Thread: 230°F to 235°F Sugar Concentration: 80%

Thread is the early stage of sugar syrup that forms thin strands when drizzled and cooled. The syrup can be used to make meringue and syrups of different types in this stage.

Softball: 235°F to 240°F Sugar Concentration: 85%

At softball stage the sugar syrup is viscous, and when dropped in water it forms a ball that quickly loses its shape when removed from the water. Sugar syrup at this stage is right for fondant, fudge, pralines and peneuche.

Firmball: 245°F to 250°F Sugar Concentration: 87%

The sugar syrup is very tacky and thick, and if you drop some in water it will form a loose ball that is sticky to the touch. Caramel candies are cooked to this stage.

Hardball: 250°F to 265°F Sugar Concentration: 90%

At the hardball stage the sugar forms a ball and holds its shape when dropped into cold water, and it has resistance to shape change and it has buoyancy. Nougat, marshmallow and gummy candies are created at this stage.

Soft Crack: 270°F to 290°F Sugar Concentration: 95%

Soft crack is the stage where the sugar is pliable and can be pulled with your fingers (when cooled to a safe handling temperature). Chewy, sticky candies like taffy, butterscotch and toffee are made at this stage.

Hard Crack: 300°F to 310°F Sugar Concentration: 97%

Lollipops, brittles and hard candies are created at the hard crack stage. If dropped into cold water the sugar syrup will completely solidify.

Light Caramel: 320°F to 335°F Sugar Concentration: 100%

At this temperature range the sugar mixture starts to break down and it takes on a light brown color. At this temperature caramel takes on a bright nutty flavor. Remove the mixture from the heat quickly once it reaches this temperature range and you will be able to make a golden caramel sauce (with heavy cream).

Dark Caramel: 340°F to 350°F Sugar Concentration: 100%

This is the point at which to remove the syrup from the heat immediately and mix in heavy cream to make a deeply colored robustly flavored caramel sauce. Do not cook further.

Strawberry Preserves - ☺♥

We have a very nice strawberry crop every year and we preserve a lot of strawberries by vacuum sealing and freezing. Later we use them in many different ways, and one of those ways is to make delicious strawberry preserves.

The recipe I have created below uses pectin to thicken the preserves along with an elevated temperature of 214 degrees F.

Most recipes recommend traditional canning of the preserves in a hot water bath. I prefer to use sodium benzoate as a preservative and simply seal the canning jars with the very hot preserves in them and allow them to develop a vacuum seal as they cool. The jars can then be stored on a pantry shelf and used as needed.

If you don't have the sodium benzoate solution you can simply can the preserves in the jars in a boiling water bath, submerged, for 15 minutes, and then put them on a wood cutting board to cool and seal.

Ingredients:

2 pounds of hulled ripe medium size strawberries

4 tsp. of fresh lemon juice

1 cup of sugar

4 grams of Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution

2 tbsp. of Ball® fruit pectin

Directions:

If you have any very large strawberries then cut them in half.

Heat the strawberries and lemon juice and pectin in a heavy bottom saucepan on low heat and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the sugar and mix well.

Boil the mixture on low heat, with slow stirring, until the temperature is 214 degrees F, skimming off the foam as needed.

Pack the hot preserves in 8 ounce canning jars leaving 1/2" of space at the top.

Tighten the lids to seal the jars and allow them to cool to room temperature.

APPETIZERS:

Carrabba's® Dipping Oil - ☺♥

This fairly well known named dipping oil from the Carrabba's® restaurant chain is great to serve with warm Italian, French, or Pita bread as an appetizer. Also with some varieties of artisan crackers. I got one version of the recipe from the Internet and it belonged in Food Nirvana simply because it was really good, especially after a few "minor" modifications, to ingredients and to the methods of preparing it and serving it.

Various recipes for other foods that use herbs call for heating them in a small amount of cooking oil to extract the oil soluble flavors. I added that approach to this recipe to ramp up the herb tastes in the olive oil. It works well, plus letting the olive oil and herbs age for a week (or longer) after making it really helps to infuse the flavors into the olive oil.

And Wow! Double the diced fresh garlic amount shown in this recipe and see/taste what happens when you heat the dipping oil right before serving it, in the microwave oven, for about 30 seconds, for perhaps two ounces of the oil and herbs in a bowl. Unforgettably fine ... though you may not want to go out on a date that evening! Or maybe you and your lady friend might share this delight, in which case there will be only joy.

Oh, don't skimp on the kosher salt. Carrabba's seems to have eliminated that critically important ingredient in what they serve, and that is a shame, for they diminished their own fine recipe. And alas, they serve the oil at room temperature!

Recipes like this one lend themselves to many variations based on what each of us like best. I suggest you start with this recipe and then experiment by varying the ingredient amounts to suit your taste. I actually halved the amount of crushed red pepper as the heat got in the way of enjoying the flavors of the herbs and the garlic.

Ingredients: (makes about one cup, enough for four to six pre-dinner appetizer events for two people)

1/2 teaspoon of crushed red pepper

1 teaspoon of ground black pepper

2 teaspoons of dried oregano

1 1/2 teaspoons of dried rosemary
1 1/2 teaspoons of dried basil
1 1/2 teaspoons of dried parsley
1 1/2 teaspoons of granulated garlic
1 tablespoon of diced garlic cloves (be generous)
1 1/2 teaspoons of kosher salt
3/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon of fresh lemon (or fresh lime) juice

Directions:

Put all of the ingredients into a small saucepan and heat the mixture on very low heat with gentle stirring to keep the herbs from sticking to the saucepan, until the tiny pieces of diced garlic come to the surface sizzling. Then turn off the heat.

Dispense the saucepan contents while hot into an 8 ounce canning jar and close it by screwing on a lid & ring. You can store it in a cupboard or food pantry as long as you plan to use it within a month or two. Otherwise let it age for a week and then refrigerate it, noting that you will have to microwave it later before using it to re-liquefy the olive oil.

To serve the dipping oil, remove the ring and lid and warm the oil and herbs/seasonings in the microwave oven for 30 seconds or until warm. You might also choose to heat the oil briefly even if you stored it in a food pantry. Yes, do that. Carrabba's didn't do that. They served the dipping oil and herbs at room temperature. Mix and then decant the entire contents of the canning jar into a shallow dipping bowl or a ramekin or multiple smaller dishes if you are serving more than four people. Then serve the warmed dipping oil with warmed artisan breads, crackers or even crispy crusted warmed rolls.

I like to tear apart pieces of warmed Pita or Tuscan Pane bread to dip into the oil and herbs/seasonings mixture. That way I can scoop out small amounts of the herbs and seasonings (and garlic) with the oil, which tastes great! I've also been known to keep a teaspoon by the mixture to make it easy to get the herbs/seasonings as well as the oil on artisan crackers. Yes, do smear both herbs and oil on to the breads/crackers.

This appetizer goes very well with a nice glass of crisp chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio. What a fine prelude to a dinner of Italian (or other ethnic) food!

Chicken Parmesan Meatballs - ☺♥

Apart from the fact that the name of this delectable treat is illogical (Fowl isn't Meat) the rest of what you are about to read is the real thing. I went looking on the Internet for chicken recipes to find something out of the ordinary that I might be allowed to eat during my recovery from a recent illness. What I found, with my modifications, turned out to be pure serendipity. All it took was one taste of the meatballs (Fowlballs? [ha, ha!]) and I knew I had another great addition for Food Nirvana. On thinking about various ways these meatballs might be served I concluded the most appropriate food category, from the categories available within Food Nirvana, was Appetizers, for these things taste so good they should be served as is at parties. Perhaps one day I will create a Comfort Food category within Food Nirvana and populate it with a variety of named dishes, some of which will be cross-referenced where appropriate to recipes listed within Food Nirvana by food type, like entries under the category, Fowl.

Okay, the first thing to do is to give credit for the recipe as I first found it, and the source is apparently Rachael Ray of Food Network®. I tip my hat to Rachael, for this recipe, admittedly with my considerable variations from the given recipe, is excellent. I am sure you will find this to be a very easy recipe and that you will really enjoy the results. I was completely and very pleasantly surprised. The recipe as given below makes 24, 1 1/4" diameter meatballs.

Ingredients:

1 lb. of boneless skinless chicken breast

1 cup of unseasoned bread crumbs

1/2 cup of Hellmann's® Mayonnaise

1 tbsp. of Bell's® Poultry Seasoning

1/2 cup of Parmesan cheese

1 tsp. of sea salt

4 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. If your oven has a convection oven feature then use it.

Grind the chicken breast pieces using a meat grinder. I use the appropriate grinder attachment with my Kitchen Aid® mixer.

Mix all of the ingredients except the olive oil in a two or three quart mixing bowl. Mix well with a large spoon and then by hand to assure complete mixing.

Form the mixture using your hands into approximately 24, 1 1/4" diameter meatballs, placing the meatballs onto a sheet of waxed paper.

Put the olive oil into a large high temperature resistant heavy skillet. I use a 12" diameter all metal stainless steel with steel clad copper base skillet.

Place the meatballs onto the olive oil with even spacing, then heat the skillet on medium high heat until the meatballs start to sizzle in the olive oil.

Sauté the meatballs on medium heat for about three minutes (it is not necessary to turn the meatballs over during sautéing) and then place the skillet into the preheated oven.

Bake the meatballs for 20 minutes at 400 degrees F. Then turn on the broiler and broil for five minutes without allowing any time for the broiling element to reach proper temperature. The idea is to lightly brown the tops of the meatballs. It is smart to check the degree of doneness after three to four minutes to make sure the tops of the meatballs do not become dark.

Remove the skillet from the oven and put the meatballs on a paper towel to cool slightly and to drain off any excess olive oil.

Serve the meatballs hot in a preheated serving bowl, along with whatever other hor d'ouvres you are providing to your guests. They are excellent as is without any sauce or other seasoning.

Expect applause. It will be forthcoming.

Chicken Dip - ☺♥

This recipe is for a fine appetizer dish and it comes from our great friends, Ken and Lynda. The dip is easy to make once you have smoked the chopped chunks of chicken breast, and that was Ken's contribution to perfection. The dip is served warm with the scoop type of tortilla chips. Lynda used her creativity to make this dip better than what she found in a different recipe in terms of ingredients and procedure. She is clearly a cooking expert and I tip my hat to her. Peggy and I really get spoiled when we enjoy Lynda's cooking.

Making the smoked chicken ingredient for this recipe does require you to have a smoker of some sort. It can be any type operated via charcoal, propane gas or even be an electric smoker. The only key requirement is the ability to measure and to control the temperature. You also want to be able to have the apple wood chips smoke and be consumed slowly and not catch on fire. There are various tricks for accomplishing that even if you use a charcoal smoker without a smoking tray. For example, the chips can be wrapped in aluminum foil with a small opening to allow smoke to escape and only a small amount of air to enter ... and be placed beside the coals so the most intense heat is avoided. Limiting the air (oxygen) supply to the wood chips allows them to smoulder but not to readily catch on fire. Placing the foil package beside the coals provides enough heat to cause smoking without consuming the chips too quickly.

I know that you and your family and friends will really enjoy this appetizer. I know because I couldn't stop eating it and I almost lost my appetite for a fine follow up dinner! Oh, my, life is good!

Be sure to check out the variations to this recipe shown after the directions. In short, use your imagination and experience, like Lynda. Yes, in the carousel of life, remember to go for the brass ring!

Ingredients:

1, 10 1/2 ounce can of Campbell's® condensed Cream of Chicken soup

1, 8 ounce tub of President® brand Pub Cheese (herb and garlic, at room temperature)

1, 12 1/2 ounce can of chunks of chicken breast in water, cut into small cubes

4, fresh scallions, sliced thin, including some of the green part

1 or 2 cups of apple wood chips for the smoker

2 to 4 cups of water for the smoker liquid tray

1 disposable aluminum tray to hold the chicken pieces during smoking

1 large bag of scoop type tortilla chips

Directions:

Preheat the smoker to 250°F.

Depending on the type of smoker tray you have with your smoker you may or may not need to dampen the apple wood chips before using them in the smoker.

Drain the water from the can of chicken breast chunks and cut them into cubes about 1/4" to 1/3" per side.

Put the water into the water tray and put it into the smoker. Then put in the apple wood chips in the smoker tray. Then put in the aluminum tray of cut chicken breast pieces.

Smoke the chicken for two to two and one half hours at 250°F. Remember to check the water tray periodically to make sure there is still water in it. If not, then add a few cups of water.

When the chicken is done then proceed with the remainder of this recipe.

Mix the can of cream of chicken soup with the smoked chicken and the herb and garlic cheese in a two or three quart microwave safe glass bowl.

Slice the scallions into 1/16th to 1/8th inch thick slices. Reserve some of the green parts to garnish the dip after it has been warmed. Add the scallion slices to the chicken soup, smoked chicken and cheese mixture and mix well.

Warm the mixture in the microwave oven to the serving temperature of your choice, but do not overheat or bring to the mixture to a boil. The required time depends on the wattage of your microwave oven and your preference regarding how warm to make the dip prior to serving it.

Lynda used a low wattage heated serving bowl at serving time to keep the dip warm, following the microwave heating.

Garnish the dip with the reserved green scallion slices and serve it the tortilla scoops.

A nice glass of light white or rose' wine goes well with this appetizer.

Enjoy! You will get many compliments.

Variations: You can use diced slices of jalapeno peppers from a jar of that product instead of the scallions if you want more of a kick of heat in the seasoning. You might also experiment with different tub cheeses like cheddar horseradish.

Chinese Egg Rolls - ☺♥

I wanted to make really good Chinese Egg Rolls so I went searching for great recipes. Well, that was pretty easy, thanks to the creators of The Woks Of Life© web site. As usual I've made some changes to the recipe as found ... to make them exactly the way I want them to be. Yummy! They are superb!

Ingredients: (makes 30 egg rolls)

30 egg roll wrappers

10 cups of cabbage, shredded, packed

2 cups of carrot (shredded, packed)

2 cups of celery (finely chopped)

4 scallions (cut into 1/4" long pieces, green and white parts)

3 large cloves of garlic, minced

1 tablespoon of sea salt

2 teaspoons of sugar

2 tablespoons of toasted sesame oil

2 tablespoons of peanut oil (plus a quart or so more for frying)

1/4 teaspoon of five spice powder

1/4 teaspoon of white pepper

3 cups of Chinese BBQ pork (shredded or ground)

2 cups of shelled, cooked shrimp (chopped into 1/4" long pieces or ground)

1 egg (beaten)

12 ounces of Duck Sauce in a small bowl

2 tablespoons of hot Chinese mustard in a small dish

Directions:

Bring a one gallon pot of water to a boil. Mix the cabbage, carrots, and celery into the boiling water, return to a boil, and parboil for about 4 minutes. Then transfer the vegetables to a colander and rinse them with cold water while mixing them, then allow the mixture to drain for five minutes.

Thoroughly squeeze out all of the excess water from the vegetables (you can squeeze handfuls by tightly closing your fist, or, you can put the vegetable pieces on a clean kitchen towel, wrap it and then squeeze out the water). This is a very important step because if the filling is too wet, you will have a wet filling and soggy egg rolls later.

Once squeezed dry, transfer the vegetables to a large mixing bowl. Add the garlic, scallions, salt, sugar, sesame oil, 2 tablespoons of peanut oil, five spice powder, white pepper, BBQ pork, and cooked shrimp. Toss everything together. The filling is now ready to be wrapped.

To wrap the egg rolls, take a bit more than 1/3 of a cup of filling and place it on the wrapper about 2 to 3 inches in from a wrap corner. The wrapping method is similar to that of a burrito (look at the picture). Just brush on a thin layer of beaten egg around the perimeter to make sure it stays sealed after it is rolled. Line the egg rolls up on a sheet of parchment paper, and continue assembling egg rolls until you use all of the filling.

If you want to fry only some of what you have made then you need to freeze the rest. Storing freshly made eggrolls without freezing them allows interior moisture to accumulate on the dough bottom inside the eggroll and make it wet and unstable. Avoid that. Put a sheet of parchment paper on an 11 x 17 inch baking sheet. Place the eggrolls on the baking sheet not touching each other. Freeze the eggrolls for four or more hours. Remove the baking sheet and the frozen eggrolls from the freezer. Package the frozen eggrolls in a plastic bag or bags and put them back into the freezer until you want to use them. Alternatively, vacuum seal the frozen eggrolls two to a small bag and return them to the freezer.

Now we continue the recipe to fry the freshly made eggrolls you want to eat right away.

In a two quart pot, heat the peanut/canola oil to 325°F. You only need about a quart of oil - just enough to submerge a few egg rolls during frying. You might instead use a large, deep skillet and two quarts of oil and fry the eggrolls six to eight at a time, which is more convenient.

Carefully place three egg rolls into the oil, and fry them for about 5 minutes until golden brown. Keep them moving slowly in the oil and turn them over often to make sure they fry evenly. They are done frying when they start to hiss and pop with steam coming from the heated vegetables inside escaping into the hot oil.

Use tongs to remove the fried egg rolls from the hot oil and stand them up almost vertically against the inside side of a cast iron skillet or a large shallow bowl with the bottom end of the egg rolls on a paper towel to soak away excess oil.

Repeat the frying operation for the remaining egg rolls, three at a time.

Cool the egg rolls slightly and serve them, along with a generous bowl of Duck Sauce and a small dish of hot Chinese mustard on the side.

Freeze leftovers in freezer bags and reheat them later in the oven at 350°F, until they are crispy. I like to vacuum seal the frozen leftovers and then keep them in the deep freeze until I want to reheat them. That method avoids freezer burn.

Enjoy!

Cold Smoked Cheese - ☺♥T

This was a new experiment for me. I enjoy eating smoked cheeses and I couldn't wait to try this modified (by me) set of six different Internet recipes/videos, each of which had some good ideas but also some oversights, and even a few conflicting directions, especially how long to smoke cheeses (from 1 hour to 18 hours!). In short, I studied the fine points of six very different cold smoking recipes for cheeses and created a composite recipe that captures the essential considerations to have success. Here is one important point to remember ... you can decide to smoke cheeses for two to four hours, based on how strong you want the smoke taste to be. This recipe, the first time around, used two periods of smoking, each two hours long. It is perfectly okay to limit the smoking to a single, two hour period if you like, and that will give you a milder smoked taste.

I am now reporting back with the smoking results I got in making my first batch of cold smoked cheeses. Overall the various cheeses (ten different types) taste fine. They are certainly smoky. The surfaces are obviously darker than the interiors in what I will call a light to dark tan surface as opposed to brown, depending on the type of cheese. The interiors have the texture they are supposed to have were the cheeses not smoked, so that pleases me. There was/is a variable rate of surface absorption of smoke across the different cheeses. Pecorino Romano showed the least change at the surface. Gruyere showed the most darkening effect of the smoking. In all cases the flavors were either good or great, which in part depends on which cheeses you like best.

Here are the types of cheeses I smoked all at once to develop an accurate comparison across the cheeses, all smoked for four hours using apple wood chips, with smoker temperatures varying from 50 °F to 90 °F ==> Gouda, Swiss, Feta, Bleu, Pecorino Romano, Cheddar, Pepper Jack, Gruyere, Mozzarella.

Now, what about the future? I have decided that I did not need to smoke the cheeses for four hours. I believe two hours of smoking will be fine, so that is my recommendation. As you will read further on, the interior temperature of the smoker stayed in a perfect range for the first two hours of smoking (maximum temperature 83 °F), but after that I had to resort to actions like opening the vertical electric smoker door to cool the smoker to control the temperature/keep it from going above 90 °F. Note that general recipes for cold smoking cheeses strongly advise starting with ambient temperatures no higher than 60 °F. I say the ambient temperature should be no higher than 45 °F, unless you have means to cool the smoker to be certain the interior temperature does not exceed 85 °F. I strongly recommend limiting the interior temperature of the smoker to maximum 85 °F to avoid causing the cheeses to sweat or expel oils.

Note that the directions I provide are appropriate for an electric vertical smoker. If you have a different type of smoking setup then you can adapt my directions to your environment (or find a different recipe).

A key instruction in the Internet recipes was not to eat any of the smoked cheese immediately after smoking it, for it will taste bitter. Wait a month or two for the smoked cheeses to age and become mellow. That means allow enough time for the concentrated smoke deposited on the surface of the cheeses to penetrate them. That recommendation is right on target, and waiting for two months might be best, but one month is in general okay.

Another key instruction was not to start to smoke the cheese if the ambient temperature is higher than 60 °F. I say, don't even think about cold smoking cheeses if the ambient temperature is above 50 °F. You don't want the cheeses to melt during smoking so you want the internal temperature of the smoker during smoking to be a maximum of 85 °F, but my personal recommendation is to absolutely limit the maximum interior temperature to 85 °F. Having colder ambient temperatures will help assure that the internal smoker temperature will remain at an acceptable value ... ideally no more than about 80 °F (yes, that is the best internal temperature goal), but that also depends on the physical characteristics like size and basic materials (metals) and design of the smoker and the smoke tube you use.

Now let's digress and consider what actually happened during the two, two hour periods of smoking the cheeses ...

What I learned was the temperatures I encountered during the first two hours of smoking the cheeses (from 56 °F rising to 83 °F) made the process look easy, but that was not a valid predictor of what would happen during the second two hours of smoking. The reason is the starting temperature of the smoker, the cheeses and especially the hot smoke tube produced a second period starting temperature of 76 °F, even after opening the smoker to allow cool (58 °F) air to enter and cool the smoker and contents for five minutes. With the higher starting temperature, and a fairly large (12" long) smoke tube producing lots of smoke plus heat, in short order the temperature inside the smoker during the second two hour period rose to 90 °F, and it would have continued rising had I not intervened to stop it. The solution was to partially open the smoker door so the internal temperature dropped and stayed at 88 °F for the remainder (1 1/2 hours) of the second two hour smoking period. I wondered if the cheeses would be exposed to enough smoke with the partially opened door, but that turned out to be no problem at all given the large volume of smoke produced by the smoke tube.

Ultimately, the higher temperatures did negatively affect the cheeses, with some of them softening in the direction of melting, but not actually melting, and some becoming oily on the surface from oils expelled from the interior of the cheeses. In short, my original thought of a high temperature of 80 °F was the best limit to set, though the 83 °F from the first smoking period did not appear to harm the cheeses at all.

What this means is I have to reduce the heat generated by the smoke tube, (or only smoke cheeses when the ambient temperature is 30 °F to 45 °F) and that can happen by me purchasing and using two shorter (6" long) smoke tubes (which I've now done) for my relatively small vertical smoker (2.8 cubic feet internal volume). The idea is that I remove the first smoke tube after two hours and set it aside. Then, only light a second smoke tube and start using it if I decide I want to have a second two hour smoke period. The heat produced by the smoke tubes is in part a matter of how long they have been smoldering ... and especially how much of the content is smoldering at any one time. Less heat is the objective for using two of the shorter tubes in sequence. So be it for the future. Of course, I look forward to cold weather so the heat problem pretty much goes away, by opening the smoker and cooling it for ten to 15 minutes before starting any second smoking period.

Okay, now let's get on with the recipe ...

The hardest part of smoking the cheeses will be waiting a month for them to mellow in the refrigerator, vacuum sealed, before eating them. And that turned out to be the truth. I simply had to taste one of the cheeses after two weeks, and I learned my lesson. Don't do it.

One way to get a lot of smoke flavor is to have cheese blocks about 1" thick, and 1" or more wide. Think of it as total smoked surface area of the cheese per pound of cheese. Thinner blocks yield more total surface area, and 1" thick seems to be the best thickness for flavor. Note also that the dimensions of the larger blocks or wheels of cheese you buy will determine your best options for cutting the cheese into sections as just described prior to smoking it.

Besides eating the cheese on hors d'ouvres or by itself you can use it in many different ways, for example:

- Crumbled in a salad
- One of the cheeses used in macaroni and cheese
- As a topping for pizza

- Part of a meat and cheese sandwich
- An egg and cheese omelet
- A grilled cheese sandwich
- A cheese sauce like that used with steamed broccoli or cauliflower

Ingredients:

Up to 18 to 24 blocks [For example: 1"x 2"x 4"] of Cheese (use hard cheeses: sharp Cheddar, Gouda, Pepper Jack, Gruyere, Swiss, Bleu, hard Feta, hard Mozzarella, Pecorino Romano)

Equipment:

Smoke Tube (use two 6" long smoke tubes, not the regular ones that are 12" long), and use a disposable type of aluminum foil tray underneath it to collect ashes.

The Smoker ... Note that You Do Not turn on the normal source of heat for the smoker when you are cold smoking cheeses.

Wireless temperature probe system, with a simple, made at home 5/16" hole in a small wood block (1.5"x2.5"x2") to hold the probe (system optional but recommended), or alternatively, an accurate ordinary thermometer, that will require you to open the smoker periodically during smoking to check the temperature.

Rack(s) to hold the pieces of cheese (that will fit on a high smoker shelf/shelves [or you might use only the smoker shelf/shelves]).

Disposable type of aluminum foil tray on a shelf immediately above the smoke tube to use as a heat diffuser.

1 to 2 cups of Wood pellets (Apple, Alder, or other mild smoke wood(s)) to fill the smoke tube. I chose Apple.

Latex Gloves (Avoid transferring bacteria, mold or oils from your hands to the cheese).

Propane Torch (A small propane tank with a small torch attachment [like plumbers use]).

Heat resistant gloves to protect your hands while lighting and setting up the smoke tube (optional ... I did not find the gloves to be needed).

A vacuum sealer and vacuum seal bags.

Directions:

Do not start to cold smoke the cheeses unless the ambient temperature is less than 60 °F. My advice? Don't cold smoke cheeses if the ambient temperature is above 50 °F. Make sure the ambient temperature will be no more than 60 °F by the end of four hours of smoking. That will help keep the cheese temperature inside the smoker from going above 85 °F (or more) in the smoker and melting or otherwise harming/denaturing the cheeses.

Put on the latex gloves and cut larger blocks of cheese as necessary to be no more than 1" thick but as wide and long as you choose, as long as they will fit on the rack(s) with 1" or more of space between them. If you happen to have narrow wedges of cheese (about 1" thick at the wide end to 0" at the other end) you can cut them in half lengthwise and put the two halves together to form one block of even 1" thickness.

Arrange the cheese blocks on a rack (or a smoker shelf). Be sure to leave space between them for the smoke to come through. Allow 1" of open space on all sides.

Let the cold cheeses from the refrigerator, that are now on a rack or shelf, to come to room temperature for an hour before smoking them. That allows a pellicle to form on the cheese surfaces, which later will help the smoke particles to stick to the surfaces of the cheeses. A pellicle is a type of tacky surface that will form on cheeses left to warm to room temperature.

Put the aluminum foil tray heat diffuser on a low smoker shelf. The tray size should be about 3" shorter and 3" narrower than the smoker shelf. That provides somewhat more even distribution of smoke rising to the cheeses as well as diffusing the heat from the smoke tube.

Fill the smoke tube with about 1 to 2 cups of Apple or Alder or Maple wood pellets. Avoid the stronger scent/taste smoke from woods like Hickory or Cherry or Mesquite.

Put on the (optional) pair of heat resistant gloves before lighting the wood pellets. (Maybe. I didn't need them. Simply hold the cold end of the smoke tube.)

Light the pellets on the open end of the smoke tube using a propane torch constantly for about two minutes, keeping the tube vertical, and then let them burn for about five minutes until the flame goes out. What actually happens is the smoker tube starts to become red hot and that surely does get the pellets

inside the tube actively smoking. They should at that point be smoldering and making smoke, and they should continue to make smoke for around four to five hours for a 12" long smoke tube or two and one half hours for a 6" long smoke tube. If the flame doesn't go out then blow it out.

Put the second aluminum foil tray at the bottom inside of the smoker to catch any ashes, and place the smoking tube on it horizontally, with the hot end under the surface of the heat diffuser tray above, moving the position of the heat diffuser tray if necessary.

Make sure there is a 1/2" to 3/4" diameter hole or other small open area low in the smoker so the pellets have a limited air supply flowing in to allow them to continue to smolder (See Notes below) but not start burning with a flame.

Put the (optional) wireless temperature probe into the wooden probe holder hole and place it on (what will be) the highest smoker shelf. Alternatively, put a conventional, accurate thermometer on the top shelf of the smoker but do not allow it to touch the cheeses or the metal surfaces directly. If needed, place it on a small piece of wood.

Place a rack/shelf of cheese on the highest smoker shelf position. If necessary, also use the second highest smoker shelf position. Close the smoker. Adjust the top air vent to be half way open.

Be sure smoke is being generated by the smoldering wood pellets. The smoke should become quite obvious exiting the air vent. If it is not, then check the smoke tube to make sure the pellets are smoldering. If they aren't, they may have extinguished due to too limited supply of fresh air. If so, enlarge the air supply hole/port to allow more air to enter the smoker and relight the pellets. If instead the pellets are burning with a flame, blow them out and partially cover the air supply hole/port to further limit the amount of air allowed to enter the smoker.

Smoke the cheeses for two hours, then if you want a second two hour smoking period, then turn the pieces of cheese over, keep the smoker door wide open to cool the smoker for five minutes, and then continue smoking the cheeses for the remaining two hours. If you have two racks/shelves of cheeses swap their positions for the second two hour smoking period. Swap the smoke tubes, lighting the second one using the same procedure as described earlier, and placing the first hot smoke tube on a nonflammable surface.

Use the (optional) wireless temperature system to monitor the internal smoker temperature, to alert you if the temperature exceeds 85 °F. If the temperature does get above 85 °F then open the smoker door completely to let heat escape for a few minutes, then close the smoker door allowing it to remain partially open,

perhaps a 1" wide opening. If you don't have a wireless temperature system then use an accurate ordinary thermometer placed on the highest rack/shelf to display the temperature and open the smoker every 15 minutes to check the temperature to make sure it does not rise above 85 °F.

Note that a 12" smoke tube will finish smoldering the load of pellets in 4 to 5 hours and a 6" smoke tube in 2 1/2 hours. Let it burn out naturally in the smoker if it is still smoking when you have removed the smoked cheeses.

When the cheeses have smoked for 2 to 4 hours they are finished and they can be brought into the house on the racks/shelves to cool for about an hour. After the cooling period, if you notice any oily surfaces on the cheeses blot them with paper towels to remove most of the oils.

Once the cheeses are at room temperature, put on latex gloves and vacuum seal the cheese blocks individually. Label the vacuum sealed packages.

Put the vacuum sealed cheese blocks into the refrigerator for one or two months to "age" or mellow out.

Remember to clean the smoke tubes after they have cooled (with a long narrow brush) and remove the second one and both of the disposable aluminum foil trays from the smoker. Clean the trays and the smoke tubes with warm water and a mild detergent, then dry them and store them for future use.

Notes:

Make sure the ambient temperature is low (40 °F to 50 °F is best) before you start smoking the pieces of cheese. You do not want the internal temperature of the smoker to exceed 85 °F during the smoking of the cheese, so the cooler the smoker is at the beginning, due to the weather, the less chance you have of developing a too high temperature during smoking.

Make sure the smoker is in the shade (A smoker can get hot in the sun, even if it is cool outside).

If you have a wireless thermometer accessory, use it to monitor the temperature inside the smoker. Put the probe through a hole drilled in a small wood block, do not stick it into a block of cheese. If the smoker temperature exceeds 85 °F then fully open the smoker door/lid for a minute to allow hot air to leave and cool air to enter ... then leave the door partially open (1" wide) for the remainder of the smoking period.

Wear latex gloves when handling cheese to prevent oils, mold and bacteria from your hands transferring to the cheese. That will help avoid mold forming on the surface of the cheese and help the cheese to last longer in storage.

Provide a small air supply hole or port in the smoker for the smoke tube pellets, to keep them smoldering/smoking. Example: Slightly open the port that holds the smoker wood shavings box by slightly pulling the smoker box away from the side of the smoker, maybe 1/8th of an inch, or a bit more, from the closed position.

Vacuum seal the blocks of cheese after smoking them and letting them cool, then put them into the refrigerator to age/mellow. Be sure to label the vacuum seal bags if you are smoking multiple types of cheese.

Enjoy!

Crab Dip - ☺♥

This delightful appetizer recipe was provided to me by Peggy's friend, Lynda. I can vouch for the fact that it is excellent. In a few instances I had to replace the "to taste" directions with specific amounts based on my own experience making the crab dip. You do want to make this one and serve it with some mild crackers ... You don't want to use highly spiced crackers as they would overpower the delicate and delicious flavor of the crab. Enjoy!

Ingredients:

8 oz. of cream cheese

½ cup of mayonnaise

1 tbsp. of Dijon mustard

1½ tsp. of lemon juice

1 tbsp. of extra-virgin olive oil

1 tsp. of Sea Salt

1 tsp. of freshly ground black or white pepper

2 tsp. of Hot sauce (Lynda uses Sriracha) or to taste

1/4th cup of diced fresh chives

1½ cups of lump crabmeat (about 12 oz.), drained and, if necessary, cleaned by removing any pieces of shell

Directions:

Combine the cream cheese, mayonnaise, and Dijon mustard in a food processor (or small electric mixer bowl) and blend/mix until smooth.

Add the lemon juice, olive oil, and hot sauce.

Season with the salt and pepper.

Process until well combined, scraping down the sides of the food processor (or mixer bowl) with a rubber spatula as necessary.

Put the mixture into a one quart bowl and fold in the chopped chives and crabmeat.

Adjust the seasoning with salt, pepper, and hot sauce, if necessary, then cover and refrigerate the crab dip.

Serve with mildly flavored crackers like white (corn) tortilla chips or Kellogg's Club Crackers® or plain seeded crackers.

Creamed Herring Appetizer - ☺♥

This is a very nice appetizer and simple to make because the main ingredient is a jar of pickled cut herring filets (some are in a cream sauce) available at good supermarkets, in a refrigerated deli area. When you buy it and take it home, do remember to store it in the refrigerator, not the food pantry.

This appetizer is especially popular in Scandinavian countries. Also in the USA for those adventurous enough to eat cured raw herring. Trust me, it is delicious. The last time I saw it available in a USA restaurant as an appetizer was likely twenty years or more ago in Maryland at a restaurant named The Swiss Inn. It was superb! I believe that restaurant closed around 2005, which made me sad, for in their prime years The Swiss Inn was excellent for many foods.

This recipe starts with a jar of the pickled cut herring filets and adds additional ingredients to create a fine appetizer. When served, the chilled herring pieces are taken from the serving bowl (one at a time) using toothpicks, and then placed on a cracker and eaten. A nice medium dry white wine like Pinot Grigio, chilled, is perfect to serve with this appetizer. Also, I like to serve some accompanying foods like cheeses plus olives and/or gherkins on the side.

Ingredients: (four to six servings)

12 ounce jar of cut herring fillets (either just pickled or pickled and creamed), drained and liquid reserved (if there is any)

2/3 cup of sour cream

1 teaspoon of lemon juice

2/3 cup of thinly sliced diced onion

1 tablespoon of fresh dill, chopped

1/8 teaspoon of white pepper

1/4 teaspoon of sea salt

toothpicks for your guests to access the creamed herring pieces

crackers of whatever type you like

Directions:

In a 2 quart bowl, combine 2 tablespoons of the reserved herring liquid, the lemon juice, sour cream, diced onion, dill, salt and white pepper.

Mix the sauce ingredients until the mixture is smooth.

Spread the herring pieces on a plate, and cut any piece in half that is too large to fit on the cracker type you plan to serve.

Add the herring pieces to the bowl and mix gently to coat the herring pieces with the sauce.

Cover and chill the herring and sauce mixture for two or more hours to blend the flavors.

Serve the creamed herring appetizer in a wide, shallow bowl, with toothpicks on the side for your guests.

Serve crackers and a chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio, plus any accompanying appetizer foods on the side.

Be sure to cover and refrigerate any herring in cream sauce leftovers, and use them within two days.

Enjoy!

Escargot - ☺♥

Escargot is snails usually prepared first in some white wine and then sautéed in butter with onions (or shallots) and garlic and parsley. It is considered to be an appetizer, and the cost is usually between \$8 and \$11 per serving of six snails. Typically restaurants serve the snails in snail shells on a very hot white glass or porcelain platter with indentations for each shell for an attractive and functional presentation (you want to keep the snails and sauté ingredients hot during eating). The sauté ingredients are drizzled in and around the shells after the sautéed snails have been inserted in them. The appetizer is served with a cocktail fork and sometimes with special snail shell holders for easy removal of the snails and with some bread to sop up the delicious melted butter, onions, parsley and garlic.

By random chance I happened to see canned snails in a discount "job lot" store and I decided to buy a few cans and prepare them. Now here is the best part ... each can contained 24 to 25 extra large snails without shells ... the price was only \$1.25 per can. I couldn't believe the price so I doubted the quality but decided to try them. They were superb! The following day I revisited the store and bought every can they had left on the shelf ... 19 in all.

You won't believe how simple the recipe is and how delicious the escargot is. I ate 12 and I was wishing I had prepared more. Very recently my great friend, Sue Rosa, suggested I can improve the escargot recipe with the addition of a small amount of Pernod® liquor. I have yet to try it but I'll bet it provides a unique effect. Sue should know as she and her husband have owned a few restaurants with high end chefs.

Ingredients: (three to four servings)

1 can of 24 snails

6 oz. of a medium dry white wine like Pinot Grigio or a French white burgundy

½ stick of butter

¼ cup very finely diced sweet onion or shallot

2 cloves fresh garlic diced very fine or processed through a garlic press

½ tsp. Sea salt

½ tsp. white pepper

½ tsp. dried parsley flakes or 1 tsp. finely chopped fresh parsley

1 tsp. Pernod® liquor

24 snail shells (optional)

1 small French baguette, sliced into ½ inch thick slices (optional)

Directions:

Dump the snails and the liquid from the can into a small saucepan. Add the wine and heat to a simmer on low heat. Let the snails simmer for two to three minutes, then drain them and place them in a small skillet. Discard the liquid.

Meanwhile, put the dishes or plates and any snail shells you may have purchased into a 250°F oven to pre-warm them.

Add the remaining ingredients to the skillet, mix them and heat the contents on low heat to a sauté temperature, which simply means getting the melted butter hot enough to make the onions and garlic bubble slowly. Sauté on very low heat for three to four minutes but be certain not to let the garlic or onions turn tan or brown. Remove the skillet from the heat. Also, overcooking will result in the snails becoming tough instead of remaining tender.

Remove the snails to whatever pre-heated serving dish or plate you intend to use. If you used snail shells then use small tongs to put one snail into each shell. Drizzle the sauté butter, onions and garlic and parsley over the snails and/or into the shells.

Serve the escargot with the slices of the French baguette and the same kind of wine you used to simmer the snails.

Filo Delights - ☺♥

This appetizer/hors d'oeuvres recipe is compliments of my sweetheart, Peggy. She used to bake trays of it for friends at camp and they loved it. So she made it for me and I have to give it very high marks. It is delicious. It is also rather easy to make.

Among the ingredients listed below there is a convenience product prepared by Formaggio@reg; and sold by supermarkets. You can easily replace that entry by providing your own salami or prosciutto ham, mozzarella cheese and ground or fresh basil. Actually, you can use your imagination regarding all of the toppings above the filo dough, for a simple search of Internet recipes related to filo dough appetizers will surprise you with all of the listed varieties of ingredients. In any event, have fun ... lots of fun.

Ingredients:

8 ounces of frozen filo dough sheets (1/2 box), thawed overnight in the refrigerator, unopened pack

3/4 stick of melted butter

8 ounce container of freshly grated or shredded Parmesan cheese

1, 8 ounce roll of Formaggio@reg; Soppressata salami (or prosciutto ham), mozzarella cheese and basil

2 large or 3 medium size plum tomatoes

12 pitted kalamata olives, sliced in thirds crosswise

12 fresh basil leaves or 1 tbsp. of dried chopped basil

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Use a pastry brush to lightly coat a 10" x 15" cookie tray with melted butter.

Place an unrolled sheet of filo dough into the cookie tray. Brush it very lightly with the melted butter. Sprinkle a thin layer of the parmesan cheese on top.

Repeat the previous step until you are down to the last two sheets of filo dough. Place them on top of the cheese and brush them very lightly with melted butter.

Slice the Roma tomatoes into four or six slices each, making a total of 12 slices. Cut the roll of salami(ham), mozzarella cheese and basil into 12 slices.

Place the roll pieces evenly on top of the filo dough to create what will later be 12 hors d'oeuvres.

Put the tomato slices on top of the roll slices, then dust them with dried chopped basil or use one fresh basil leaf per tomato slice.

Place three slices of kalamata olive on top of each tomato slice/leaf of basil.

Bake at 350 degrees F for 15 to 20 minutes, checking for doneness after 15 minutes.

Remove the tray from the oven and cut the pastry into 12 squares with a sharp knife. Remove the hors d'oeuvres pieces to a pre-warmed serving dish with a spatula.

Serve hot. A chilled glass of Pinot Grigio wine or a cold bottle of beer go well with this appetizer.

Enjoy!

French's® Fried Onions Clone - ☺♥

Don't buy what you can easily make at home. You save a lot of money for very little effort and you get a better product.

Ingredients: (makes 15 ounces of fried onions)

2 1/2 cups of buttermilk

4 cups of thinly sliced small yellow onions

3 cups of all purpose flour

1 tsp. of Kosher salt

1/4 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper

4 cups of canola oil

Directions:

Soak the onion slices in the buttermilk in a large bowl for 30 minutes.

Mix the flour, salt and pepper in a large shallow bowl.

Heat the canola oil to 375 degrees F.

Dredge the buttermilk soaked onions in the flour mixture in small batches until they are well coated.

Add the dredged onions to the hot oil, frying in batches until they are golden brown, then remove them from the oil with a slotted spoon and drain them on a paper towel lined plate.

Continue frying with the remainder of the onions using additional paper towel lined plates after a double layer of onions are on the first plate.

Use the fried onions immediately or store them in an airtight container in a dry cool place for up to a few days.

Enjoy!

Fruit Salad - ☺♥

A well made fruit salad is both refreshing and very satisfying, not to mention nutritious. The quality depends completely on the choice and freshness of the ingredients, though some ingredients are likely to come from a can or be frozen instead of being fresh. I learned how to make delicious fruit salads from Marie. Believe me, they bear no resemblance to the garbage sold as "fruit cocktail." I have experimented a lot and I have my own ideas of what to include and when to introduce a given ingredient to the salad for maximum texture, taste and color effects. I know you will get rave reviews if you serve this salad to your guests, either as an appetizer or as a dessert.

I believe ripe fresh fruit is optimal but realistically we can't buy decent quality fresh fruit in our typical supermarkets. Seldom is it truly ripe and sweet and juicy. Thus, you will notice that I recommend canned fruits for some ingredients. If you have ripe fresh fruits where I recommend using canned fruits then by all means use the fresh fruits.

Note that some of the fresh ingredients are not added to the fruit salad until just prior to serving it. That is particularly important for the fresh strawberry pieces and the banana slices, as these fruit pieces will lose their character, appearance and taste if mixed with all the other ingredients prior to chilling the fruit salad.

Ingredients: (This recipe makes a gallon of fruit salad. More if the optional ingredients are added.)

1 quart of fresh ripe strawberries

2 ripe bananas

1, 20 oz. can of sliced peaches or two very ripe large peaches, peeled and pitted

1, large fresh Gala or similar apple

1 cup of fresh or frozen blueberries

1 large fresh orange

1, 15 ounce can of mandarin oranges (optional)

1, 6 ounce package of fresh red raspberries or blackberries

1, 20 ounce can of pineapple tidbits, or, equivalent amount of very ripe fresh pineapple

1 to 2 cups of fresh orange juice

1 cup of sliced seedless white/green grapes

All of the syrup from any canned fruits that you use

1/2 cup of sliced maraschino cherries and/or 1 cup of sliced frozen or fresh dark sweet cherries

1, 20 ounce can of lychees (optional)

Directions:

Use a 1 1/2 gallon stainless steel or glass bowl and a large wooden spoon to prepare the fruit salad.

Add the canned peach slices plus juice, or, the peeled, pitted and sliced fresh ripe peaches.

Peel, seed and chop the apple into pieces about 1/2" on each side, then add to pieces to the bowl and mix lightly to coat the apple pieces.

Add the cup of fresh or frozen blueberries to the bowl and mix lightly.

Peel the fresh orange, cut it in half and remove all pith. Cut the orange halves into pieces about 1/2" on a side. Add the pieces to the bowl and mix lightly.

Add the can of mandarin oranges and the juice to the bowl and mix lightly.

Add the fresh red raspberries or blackberries to the bowl and mix lightly.

Add the can of pineapple tidbits including the juice, or, 1/2" per side cut pieces of peeled and cored fresh ripe pineapple. Mix lightly.

Add the sliced fresh seedless white/green grape pieces. Mix lightly.

Add the sliced maraschino cherry pieces, and/or the sliced fresh or frozen dark sweet cherry pieces. Mix lightly.

Slice the (optional) lychees into four pieces each and store them with the juice from the can in a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag in the refrigerator.

Cover the fruit salad bowl with plastic wrap and put it into the refrigerator for at least four hours, or overnight.

When you are within an hour of serving the fruit salad then do the final steps outlined below.

Special Note: If you will be serving only part of the prepared one gallon of fruit salad then dispense the approximate amount you plan to serve into a smaller stainless steel or glass bowl. Then adjust the quantities of strawberries and banana slices indicated below to smaller amounts based on the amount of the one gallon fruit salad you intend to serve. Cover the remaining unused fruit salad and return it to the refrigerator for later use.

Hull and wash the fresh strawberries and slice them into four pieces each, or more if they are very large.

Peel the bananas, removing any membrane or discolored areas. Cut them in half lengthwise and then slice the halves into pieces about 1/4" thick.

Add the sliced strawberries and the slices of banana to the chilled fruit salad.

Add the optional lychee pieces along with the juice.

Mix the fruit salad lightly but thoroughly.

If the fruit at the top of the bowl is mostly covered with juice then the salad is ready to serve. Otherwise add the fresh orange juice in small additions, and mix the fruit salad with each addition, but only use just enough orange juice to barely cover the fruit.

Serve the fruit salad in chilled clear glass cocktail or dessert dishes of sizes six to ten ounces.

Garlic And Butter Sautéed Shrimp - 😊♥

It is hard to imagine how many great ways there are to prepare and serve shrimp. This recipe is from the Internet, somewhat modified, and it is superb. I mean really tasty!

You want to make this recipe as either an appetizer or a main entree. Simply adjust the quantity of the ingredients. As shown below it is a generous appetizer quantity for four adults.

Ingredients: (serves 4 adults a generous appetizer)

1 lb. of large (12 to 16 count) raw shrimp, peeled & deveined, leaving tails on

1/4 lb. of butter (1 stick)

2 large garlic cloves, minced

Seasonings:

1 tsp. of dried ground Basil

1/2 tsp. of dried ground Oregano

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of ground black pepper

1/2 tsp. of ground smoked paprika

Directions:

If using frozen shrimp, defrost the shrimp and pat it dry with paper towels.

Peel and if necessary devein the shrimp, leaving on the tails.

Combine and stir the ingredients for the seasoning: the basil, oregano, salt, pepper and paprika in a one quart bowl.

Coat the shrimp with the seasoning by mixing well by hand in the bowl.

Melt the butter in a large skillet on medium heat, put in the minced garlic, then cook for one minute, stirring frequently.

Add the shrimp to the skillet, mix it in with the butter and garlic, and cook 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Serve the shrimp with other appetizers or meal items you prepared earlier.

Kim Chee - ☺

One year my cabbage crop was so abundant I got tired of making sauerkraut. I think I had canned ten dozen quarts of it, but I still had a few heads of cabbage left over. For whatever reason I happened to think about the Korean pickled cabbage product named Kim Chee. A bit of Internet searching to gain some knowledge about Kim Chee convinced me that it was worth trying to make, as it has a reputation for being very pungent with garlic and ginger and hot also due to the use of hot peppers.

Some recipes involve fermentation and some do not. I chose the latter way of making it. As usual, I sought a variety of recipes on the Internet, thought about the pros and cons of each, and then I put together my own recipe and tried it. Wow! It is potent stuff and very tasty. I tried it with a few friends and family and about six of us really liked it.

Kim Chee is a very potent tasting cabbage dish that is best served cold on a relish tray (or eaten out of a jar with a fork!). The mixture of fresh ginger, garlic, hot peppers(habaneros), sugar and vinegar is responsible for the pungent smell and flavor.

This recipe makes about nine pints of Kim Chee. You can keep the finished product in double Ziploc® freezer bags (double to avoid having the pungent smell get into other food products) in your refrigerator or you may simply store it in a jar in your refrigerator or you can it or use your vacuum sealer. Canning is the best method in terms of a longer shelf life and canning makes it easy to give to friends and family as a gift. If you can it in pint jars, 10 minutes in a boiling water bath is fine. It has a shelf life of about two years if canned.

The second year that I made Kim Chee I decided to try vacuum sealing it in pint bags and simply refrigerating it to see how long it would remain fresh and safe. The short answer is that it was still great after six months and still edible after a year, but I decided the six month limit to be the best choice. In any event, vacuum sealing sure took a lot of the work out of processing, and it resulted in a better finished product because it wasn't heated for any period of time as it was when I canned it. Even better, vacuum sealing followed by refrigeration made it very simple to give the Kim Chee as a gift to friends and family.

Enough background ... Here is the recipe. It is easy and fun and open to whatever variations you might want to try after your first batch. That means you might want to try small batches by scaling down this recipe. I actually bought some Kim Chee a few years later just to compare it to my product. They were apparently similar in ingredients, the only ingredient differences being the

commercial product used red pepper instead of hot peppers and it also contained some type of anchovy sauce, which mine does not. A taste test comparison caused me to drop the bottle of commercial stuff directly into the garbage can. Mine is vastly superior.

Ingredients:

Two large heads of cabbage

1½ gallons of salt brine with a ratio of ½ cup of Kosher salt per quart of water

2 fresh habanero peppers (or use 4 hot cherry peppers instead of the habanero peppers for a milder Kim Chee)

2 fresh hot cherry peppers

2 medium size onions or one large onion, diced

½ tsp. of Cayenne (red) pepper

5 (or more) large fresh cloves of garlic, diced

3 tsp. of finely diced fresh ginger root

2 cups of white distilled vinegar

1 1/2 cups of sugar

Directions:

Start with two large heads of regular cabbage. Cut the cabbages into strips about one inch by two inches and put the strips into a five gallon plastic (food grade) pail. You can buy suitable pails with lids at Home Depot® ... in white, not colored plastic.

Add salt water to the pail (1/2 cup of coarse or Kosher salt per quart of water, well mixed until the salt is dissolved). You will need about one and one half gallons of the salt water to have enough to submerge the cabbage pieces under a weighted dinner plate. Do that, put the lid on and let the cabbage soak overnight.

Meanwhile, prepare the rest of the ingredients and store them in a double plastic Ziploc® freezer bag in your refrigerator or in a jar with a tight fitting lid. Be sure to wear latex or nitrile gloves while handling the hot peppers. Never touch your eyes or your genitals while working with hot peppers. If you must use the bathroom then discard the gloves first and wash your hands to be safe.

Afterwards, put on a new pair of latex or nitrile gloves before resuming work with the hot peppers. Also, have a well-ventilated room to work in because fumes

from habanero (and other) peppers can be so intense you can have trouble breathing.

Okay ... clean and dice two habanero peppers (pieces about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch square), or instead, four red cherry peppers. Do the other two red cherry peppers (hot or mild ones) and the five cloves (or more) of fresh garlic. Peel the fresh ginger root and slice it crosswise very thinly to make three teaspoons of finely sliced ginger. Dice the slices of ginger. Dice two medium size onions. Put all these ingredients into a gallon Ziploc® freezer bag or into a one quart canning jar. Add the sugar and 2 cups of white distilled vinegar. Mix well and close the bag/screw on the lid, eliminating as much air as possible if you use a freezer bag. Then place the bag inside another gallon Ziploc® freezer bag and close it the same way. Refrigerate the mixture overnight, allowing it to marinate.

The next morning, drain the salt water from the cabbage, reserving a few cups of the salt water, but do not rinse the cabbage. Leave it in the five gallon pail. Then add the refrigerated marinated other ingredients to the cabbage. Wear latex or nitrile gloves and mix well by hand.

If you plan to can the Kim Chee, then prepare (sterilize) nine wide mouth pint jars with lids and inserts. Then stuff each jar tightly with the cabbage and the other ingredients. When all the jars are stuffed, then use the liquid from the pail to bring the liquid level in the canning jars up, evenly in all jars, to the proper level (the glass rim about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch below the top). Be sure to get rid of any air trapped inside the jar by pressing on the cabbage mixture after adding the liquid. If you run short of liquid, use some of the reserved salt water and top off the jars as necessary. Make sure that no Kim Chee mixture is above the glass rim/liquid. Clean the top rims of the jars and put on the inserts and screw the lids on securely. Process the jars in a boiling water bath for ten minutes. Then remove the jars and let them cool, rechecking the tightness of the lids before cooling. Jars of Kim Chee prepared this way are easily kept for one to two years in any storage cupboard, provided the jars seal as they are supposed to do after cooling from the boiling water bath. You will hear the lid centers pop down as the jars cool.

If you decide instead to store the Kim Chee directly in your refrigerator without canning, then pack it and the liquid tightly and evenly into two, one gallon Ziploc® freezer bags (or into large canning jars). Expel as much air as possible from each bag and seal the bag. Let it sit at room temperature for about two hours. The delay allows the cabbage to soften somewhat and absorb the flavors of the marinade. Then, open each bag a little and compress the mixture as much as possible and thus expel all air and then reseal each bag. Put each sealed bag

inside another one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag. Expel the air and seal the second bag. Refrigerate the Kim Chee and use it within two months.

If you process the Kim Chee with a vacuum sealer as I do, simply refrigerate the finished product, and use it within six months. This is my preferred method. I also think smaller batches make more sense unless you are giving the Kim Chee to others as a gift. Similarly, small batches favor quick turnaround, which gives you more freedom to try recipe variations. Looking down the road, I expect to use a food preservation chemical, like sodium benzoate, along with pasteurizing and vacuum sealing to produce a product that can be stored in a pantry for up to year.

Do remember to serve Kim Chee chilled/cold, directly from the refrigerator. And don't be put off if the first bite or two seems to be too potent. Just eat a few more pieces and you will become hooked on the stuff. It is easy to eat half a jarful without even realizing it.

Enjoy!

Lox, Bagels, Cream Cheese, Onions and Capers - ☺♥

My sweetheart, Peggy, and I enjoy Lox in the traditional Jewish Deli manner, except that we typically use various types of crackers instead of bagels. This combination makes a wonderful appetizer that does not spoil your appetite for a meal. Ergo, it is a great hors d'ouvres.

Today I was vacuum sealing portions of Lox made via the Food Nirvana recipe in amounts typically used at one time by two people. The vacuum sealing helps extend the life of the Lox, which without vacuum sealing will spoil within a few days once the package is opened. And note that Lox also freezes exceptionally well when vacuum sealed, so spoiling should never be an issue.

I got a wild idea while doing the vacuum sealing. The geometry of trying to balance the ingredients of this appetizer on a cracker is peculiar. Often pieces of the ingredients fall off before the item is completely eaten and that is rather sloppy. Thus, my wild idea. Why not make a mixture of the cream cheese, diced onions and capers? Also, first mix the cream cheese with a small amount of heavy cream to make it softer (almost fluffy) and easy to mix with the diced onions and capers. By so doing the mixture is easily spread onto a cracker and then the piece of Lox is added. Ah, a definite improvement, and proof that a bit of imagination can work wonders. And it seems other folks have had the same idea as me.

I know you will really enjoy this appetizer, and the recipe is quite simple. Don't serve a large amount of this delight to your guests or they will consume it all and not be hungry for dinner. But do serve a nice chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio.

Ingredients: (Serves two people)

1/4 pound of smoked salmon (LOX)

4 ounces of cream cheese, softened to room temperature

1 tbsp. of heavy cream

1/3 cup (or more) of finely diced sweet onion

1/4 cup of capers

A bowl of crackers of your choice. We often use Keebler® Club crackers.

Directions:

Put the softened cream cheese and heavy cream into a bowl and mix them with a fork.

Add the diced onions and capers into the bowl and carefully blend those ingredients into the cream cheese mixture with a fork.

Serve the Lox on a saucer, cut into pieces suitable in size to be placed on top of a cracker. If it seems to be too oily simply give it a short water rinse and let the pieces dry slightly on a paper towel.

Serve the cream cheese mixture and the Lox with a bowl of crackers.

Use about two teaspoons of the cream cheese mixture and spread that onto a (small to medium size) cracker.

Place a piece of Lox on top of the cream cheese mixture. Swoon with delight as you eat this fine treat.

A nice chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio is a perfect beverage to serve with these hor d'ouvres.

Enjoy!

Lox, Crackers, Cream Cheese, Onions and Capers - ☺♥

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Ingredients: (Serves two people)

1/4 pound of smoked salmon (LOX)

4 ounces of cream cheese, softened to room temperature

1 or 2 tbsp. of heavy cream

1/3 cup (or more) of finely diced sweet onion

1/4 cup of capers

A bowl of crackers of your choice. We often use Kellogg's® Club Crackers.

Directions:

Put the softened cream cheese and heavy cream into a bowl and mix them with a fork.

Add the diced onions and capers into the bowl and carefully blend those ingredients into the cream cheese mixture with a fork.

Serve the Lox on a saucer, cut into pieces suitable in size to be placed on top of a cracker. If it seems to be too oily simply give it a short warm water rinse and dry the pieces lightly with a paper towel.

Serve the cream cheese mixture and the Lox with a bowl of crackers.

Use about two teaspoons of the cream cheese mixture and spread that onto a (small to medium size) cracker.

Place a piece of Lox on top of the cream cheese mixture. Swoon with delight as you eat this fine treat.

A nice chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio is a perfect beverage to serve with these hor d'ouvres.

Enjoy!

Melon with Prosciutto Ham - ☺♥

At various places in this book I make reference to this appetizer. It is a classic combination of the juicy and sweet with the dry and salty, so your taste buds come alive really well. It is a very tasty appetizer and simple to make. All you need is half a pound of a top quality prosciutto ham, sliced very thin, and a very ripe cantaloupe and some wooden toothpicks.

When you buy the ham look for a price of around \$17 per pound. The cheaper brands typically aren't worth buying. For the cantaloupe, if you cannot find a very ripe one then take the best one the store has home and let it sit out on a counter for a few days to finish ripening. Then refrigerate it before making the appetizer.

Even the best prosciutto ham, like Parma®, will have some amount of fat in or around each slice. Use a sharp knife and cut each slice of the ham to eliminate the fat. Then cut or tear each ham slice into crudely shaped pieces roughly three to four inches long and about one inch wide or less.

Process the cantaloupe to make bite size pieces that, due to the shape of the cantaloupe, will be like curved trapezoidal prisms that have a volume from about a cubic inch.

Each piece of melon is wrapped with one of the ham pieces and the two ends of the ham are secured to the narrower top area of the melon piece with a wooden toothpick, making the toothpick stand roughly vertical. Put the finished pieces on an appetizer type of serving dish or tray.

This appetizer is best served cold so you may want to cover the dish/tray lightly with some plastic wrap and put it into the refrigerator for an hour or two before your guests arrive.

Serve this appetizer cold. Some light-tasting crackers go well with it, as do some small ½ inch square pieces of a good provolone cheese and some kalamata or oil cured olives. Also, a nice medium dry white wine like Pinot Grigio, chilled, is appropriate.

Nachos Grande - ☺♥

I finally decided to make a recipe for this stuff. So I stole one and improved it ... but I'm not giving it back. This one is mine. And it is definitely yummy!

For an appetizer, 9 tortilla chips per person is fine, as these are loaded nachos. We like 18 tortilla chips per person when this dish is used as a one dish meal.

This stuff is so easy to make I can't imagine anyone fearing the potential results. This is comfort food, plain (well, not so plain) and simple.

Ingredients: (2 to 4 servings)

36 Fresh Tortilla Chips (We really like Santita's® Tortilla Chips)

1¼ cups of chili con carne y frijoles (drained)

3 cups of shredded or grated sharp cheddar cheese

1/3 cup of fresh or pickled jalapeño pepper slices

1/3 cup of Guacamole

1/2 cup of sour cream

1 cup of sliced black olives

1 large ripe tomato, seeded and diced

1 lb. of seasoned (taco seasoning) browned ground beef and ground pork mixture

Red salsa on the side (optional to spoon on to the nachos after broiling)

Directions:

Preheat the broiler with the rack positioned 8 inches or slightly more from the heat.

Lay 18 chips on an ovenproof platter (or on a steel baking sheet). Lightly spread the chips with half of the chili, leaving a few chips uncovered.

Sprinkle half of the cheese evenly over all the chips. Top with half of the jalapeno slices.

Repeat to make a second layer with the remaining chips, chili, cheese and jalapenos.

Broil until the cheese is melted and bubbly throughout, 6 minutes (or less). Keep a close eye on the nachos during broiling as it is easy to ruin the dish by burning it under the broiler.

Garnish the nachos with guacamole and sour cream on top and beside each other in the center of the nachos.

Top the spread out nachos with the sliced ripe olives and the diced tomato.

Spoon an (optional) small amount of red salsa on top of the chips.

Serve the Nachos Grande hot along with cold beer and a bottle of Sriracha sauce on the side for heat lovers!

Enjoy!

Olive Tapenade - ☺♥

I well remember the different tapenades and aioli that Marie and I used to enjoy. We got hooked on them while eating light meals (and sampling wines) at the Viansa Winery in California. The entire scene was romantic and fun ... a great natural setting and a time to enjoy life and celebrate. We used to purchase the aioli and tapenades available at the Viansa gift shop and take them home to enjoy with friends later. My, they sure were good, and so were the friends, especially Bob and Lois. We had great times with them at many places.

In memory of those times I decided to provide a tapenade appetizer in Food Nirvana. I will likely also provide a nice aioli recipe soon. The recipe below is self-explanatory regarding how to use a tapenade as an appetizer. I hope you try the recipe. It looks very good. Yes, I do intend to make it and report back to you. I kind of doubt any recipe improvements will be necessary ... It simply looks to be perfect. Enjoy!

Ingredients: (Makes 4-6 servings)

1 clove of garlic, chopped

1 3/4 cups of whole, pitted olives (kalamata, black, green or use a mixture)

1 anchovy fillet, rinsed

2 Tbsp. of capers

1 tsp. of chopped fresh thyme or 1/4 tsp. of dried thyme leaves

3 Tbsp. of lemon juice

6 Tbsp. of olive oil

1/8 tsp. of white pepper

Directions:

Combine the garlic, olives, anchovies, capers, thyme and lemon juice in an electric blender or in the bowl of a food processor. Slowly add the olive oil into the mixture while blending or processing. Blend until a paste is formed. Add the white pepper and stir.

You can also make this recipe by using a mortar and pestle, or by chopping all ingredients together until very fine. The texture can be as smooth or as chunky as you like.

Store the tapenade in the refrigerator, well covered.

Serve it with crackers or crusty French bread. It can also be a sandwich spread. For example, use it with roast beef and hoagie buns for a rich sandwich.

Prosciutto Crisps - ☺♥

Peggy and I were invited to dinner at the home of great friends Ken and Lynda. Lynda served some wonderful appetizers, one of which I captured in this recipe for Prosciutto Crisps. I am pleasantly amazed with the delightful foods Lynda has served that I literally never had before. As it turns out this recipe has her unique touch, varying considerably in procedure from something she read, and it is a simple to make delight ... a sure winner.

You will be surprised with how simple it is to prepare Prosciutto Crisps. Your family and friends will consume them quickly.

Ingredients:

6 oz. of very thinly sliced prosciutto ham

A spray can of virgin olive oil (Pam® or any other brand)

Garlic powder for dusting after cooking

Onion powder for dusting after cooking

A few paper towels

Directions:

Place a paper towel on a counter top.

Place three slices of prosciutto ham on the paper towel, well spaced from each other.

Spray the pieces of ham very lightly with olive oil.

Put the paper towel with the olive oil sprayed prosciutto ham slices into the microwave oven.

Microwave on high heat for one and one half minutes.

If your microwave oven is a 1200 watt model the cooking is most probably completed. If not, then cook for additional time, with no more than 30 seconds of cooking each time, until the prosciutto ham is barely crispy and curled.

Remove the ham pieces to a serving plate and dust each piece of ham very lightly with both garlic powder and onion powder.

Repeat the above procedure until all of the prosciutto ham has been cooked and dusted with garlic and onion powders. If you plan to serve the ham later then put all of it into a tightly sealed plastic storage container.

Serve the crisps either warm or at room temperature along with crackers, cheese, any other accompaniments that appeal to you, and a good light white or rose´ wine.

Ray's Potato Skins - ☺♥

Yes, I could make all kinds of pleasant groans and grunts to make the point that this recipe is fantastic. I will dispense with the theatrics and get down to business. This is one recipe you want to make ... period! The quality and taste of these potato skins puts all the places I have ever eaten these things to shame ... bars and restaurants. Typically they cheat on the quality and amounts of essential ingredients. Okay, enough bragging. The key point is you can't have excellence without perfect ingredients, perfect procedures and a generous use of the perfect ingredients. Let's proceed with this recipe for two servings.

What is a perfect potato skin? We start with two jumbo russet potatoes baked at the pure convection oven setting of 420 degrees F for one hour. What comes out is a crisp skin perfectly baked potato. Cut it in half with a sharp knife, lengthwise, to create two shallow halves per potato, and use a spoon to scoop out roughly half of the soft interior from each piece. Use the scooped out soft potato for some other recipe. Then fry the halves/skins in peanut oil at 325 degrees F until they have a golden surface on the soft part of the potato interior. At this point they must be drained of any residual peanut oil on a paper towel, then loaded with the perfect ingredients, as described next.

Grate a high quality aged white cheddar cheese ... roughly 4 ounces for two potatoes. Fry four slices of dry cured thick sliced hickory smoked bacon only until it is just crisp ... not flexible fatty and not fried to death. Drain the hot fat from the bacon onto a paper towel. Let the bacon cool. Break it up into small pieces roughly 1/2" on a side. Get a cup of real sour cream ready for the final step.

Now, fill the potato halves with the grated cheese, distributed evenly. Then distribute the bacon pieces evenly over the surface of the cheese. Then put the potato halves on a cookie sheet and into a 250 degrees F oven for five minutes. Finally, put the potato halves on two serving plates and coat the tops with the cold/room temperature sour cream.

Serve the perfect potato skins hot with cold beer. Watch your guests faces as they start to eat these delightful creations. You will see surprise, excitement and hear expressions of pleasure. You will get fine compliments from everyone.

Does this sound like something you might want to do? Yes. Actually, if you taste them first your guests might go hungry. What are you waiting for? Get busy!

Now you have another great Food Nirvana recipe ... this being one of the rare ones presented in narrative form.

Have fun! Show your love to your close friends and family.

Enjoy life!

Salsa - ☺♥

This is a fun recipe guaranteed to please you and your guests. It is best served as a snack or as an appetizer course with white corn tortilla chips (scoops are the best shape) and various beverages. But isn't it easiest just to buy a jar of the stuff from the snack aisle at the supermarket? Easy, yes, intelligent, no.

Freshly made salsa is simply a whole lot better in taste and texture than any canned or bottled product. In fact, the bottled products all stink! That is why the best store bought salsas are found in plastic containers in the produce or specialty sections of supermarkets, fresh and refrigerated. I decided many years ago to make my own salsa to guarantee freshness, taste and minimum cost. Also, by making it myself I could vary the amount based on the number of people eating it at any event, and I could vary the ingredients to please different tastes. Similarly, I could divide the basic salsa into separate portions to vary the seasoning to please everyone from mild versions for children to fiery stuff for hot pepper fanatics.

There are many different types and flavors of salsa and I have tasted many that are just as good or better than mine but with a special flavor focus, like southwestern salsa, which contains some products and spices, like corn and chipotle, that I do not use. You can use my recipe as a starting point and then vary it to produce any flavor that pleases you best.

Note that with a good fresh salsa people tend to scoop fairly large amounts on to each white corn tortilla chip. This means the amount consumed will be larger than you might first conclude. Thus, the recipe shown below allows for about one cup of fresh salsa per person. That is significantly more than they would eat with a typical canned commercial product, and that is due primarily from the bulk resulting from using freshly chopped ingredients. Fresh is so much better ...

Ingredients: (makes about 2 1/2 quarts, serves 10 people)

1, 28 oz. can peeled plum tomatoes (or 6 large ripe fresh tomatoes)

12 oz. of tomato or V-8® juice (more if needed, none if using all fresh tomatoes)

3 ripe fresh large tomatoes

1 large sweet onion

4 stalks of celery

6 large cloves of garlic

1 large sweet red pepper

1 mild green pepper (optional ... some folks don't like green peppers)

1/4 cup of tightly packed freshly chopped cilantro (or 2 tbsp. dried cilantro ... Buy the fresh cilantro!)

1 large lemon or one medium lemon and one lime (lime adds a unique flavor)

2 tsp. of sea salt

2 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 cup of Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce or 1/4 cup of Sriracha Sauce (optional - for a medium hot salsa)

1/2 cup of chopped canned or fresh jalapeno peppers (optional, ... for an extra hot salsa)

1/4 cup of habanero pepper sauce (optional, ... only for a very hot salsa)

2 giant or Family Size bags of white corn tortilla chips (the ones shaped like scoops are ideal)

Directions:

Use a six quart mixing bowl, a sharp paring knife and a wood cutting board. Drain the juice from the can of tomatoes into the mixing bowl. Chop the tomatoes into pieces about the size of the end of your little finger. Put all of the pieces and the extra juice produced during chopping into the mixing bowl. Add the can of tomato or V-8® juice only if needed. The idea is that after all ingredients have been combined there should be barely enough liquid to keep everything wet, so you can defer the liquid addition until last. Cut the fresh tomatoes into roughly the same size pieces as the chopped canned tomatoes and add them to the mixing bowl.

Chop the onion into small pieces about 1/4" by 1/4". Similarly, cut the celery into small pieces about half the size of the end of your little finger. Do note that you can use a good food processor for all the firmer vegetables to speed up the process. Add both to the mixing bowl and mix gently. Finely chop the six cloves of garlic (some folks like more garlic, like 9 or 12 cloves) and add them to the mixing bowl. Finely chop the red/green pepper(s) and add them to the mixing bowl. About this point you will be cursing me as this recipe does have a labor component! Trust me, it is worth the effort. If you are lazy, buy the fresh salsa. If you are smart, use the food processor with a disc for fine chopping (I am too stupid and stubborn to use a food processor for this recipe).

Finely chop the fresh cilantro and put it into a one quarter cup measuring cup, pressed tightly, to be certain to have the right amount (The next time you make this recipe you may want to increase or decrease the amount of cilantro. Ditto the garlic.). Add it to the mixing bowl. Cut the lemon/lime in half and extract the juice into a separate small bowl. Remove any seeds and pour the juice into the mixing bowl. Add the salt and the pepper and mix the contents gently but thoroughly. Adjust the solids/liquid ratio if necessary by adding some additional tomato or V8 juice. As mentioned earlier, the liquid should barely cover the solids when they are pressed down into the bowl. Mix again.

Divide the salsa into equal parts by ladling it into sterilized one quart canning jars, but leave space in one jar for the ½ cup of Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce. Add the Hot Sauce to the jar for those who like medium hot salsa, and reserve the other full jar for those who like mild salsa. You will have excess salsa after filling the first two jars. Use a third canning jar and reserve that extra jar of salsa for later addition of seasonings for the "hot" fanatics. Put lids on the jars and refrigerate the salsa, ideally for 24 hours. That will allow the seasonings to mix well with the other ingredients, particularly the cilantro and the garlic.

Serve the salsa in wide and deep bowls (for easy scooping) along with large bowls of white corn tortilla chips, and some beer or other beverages like frozen margaritas, lemonade, canned sodas, etc. You will get some nice compliments.

For those who like salsa to be very hot, take the third partial jar of salsa and add the optional habanero pepper sauce, chopped jalapeno peppers and/or Texas Pete's® or Sriracha hot sauce in whatever proportions are desired.

Overall, the chips and salsa make a great appetizer course preceding many different types of outdoor meals. The secret is to serve them and the beverages immediately when guests arrive, about one hour before the main meal is served. The point is they will be enjoyed best and act as social stimulants if served early.

Leftover salsa will keep well and remain fresh in the refrigerator for a week if stored in the canning jar(s). I doubt it will last that long before use. Chips and salsa make a wonderful snack.

Scallops Ceviche - ?

Ceviche is pretty fabulous as an appetizer, and it may be found in upscale seafood restaurants, like Harry's Seafood Grill® in Wilmington, DE. Harry's Seafood Grill is a favorite restaurant of mine where my great friend Peggy Hullinger and I occasionally have lunch. Basically, Ceviche is raw seafood marinated in pure lime juice or in a mixture of pure lime and lemon juice. The marination replaces the normal cooking process for the seafood. Then selected fresh vegetables are prepared and added to the drained seafood along with some olive oil and salt and pepper. A small amount of the reserved, drained and strained lime juice is added back into the mixture, to taste. The Ceviche is served very cold, immediately.

By happenstance I saw a recipe for baby scallops ceviche on the Internet and I knew that, with a few modifications, it would be a great addition to the Food Nirvana Appetizer section. As I have never made Ceviche of any sort I decided to provide the recipe and indicate that I have to test it and possibly modify it to create a perfect product. I will do so and report back to you. Alas, I doubt the chefs/management at Harry's would share their recipe.

Note that the recipe I found used bay scallops and I specifically avoided them in this recipe as they are inferior in every respect to fresh sea scallops. I figure that if you are going for something great you have to start with the very best ingredients.

Ingredients:

1 pound, 5 ounces of drained fresh sea scallops

3/4 cup of lime juice (from about 8 limes)

1/3 cup of minced red onion

1/3 cup of seeded and diced tomato

1/2 cup of peeled, seeded and diced cucumber

1 seeded and diced jalapeño pepper

3/4 cup of diced fresh cilantro, loosely packed (about 1 bunch of fresh cilantro)

3 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Wash and drain the sea scallops. Then cut them into pieces about 1/2 inch per side.

Marinate the scallop pieces in the lime juice in a medium size bowl for 30 minutes, covered and refrigerated, tossing every 10 minutes.

Strain the lime juice from the bowl and save it in a separate bowl, using a very fine sieve.

Stir in the onion, tomato, cucumber, jalapeño pepper and cilantro.

Stir in the olive oil and season the Ceviche to taste with salt and pepper.

Add back some of the strained lime juice to taste as desired. I suggest starting with no more than 1/8 of a cup.

Serve the Ceviche immediately in pre-chilled appetizer dishes.

I suggest serving herbed crackers and a nice chilled clean-tasting white wine like Pinot Grigio to accompany the Ceviche.

Enjoy!

Shrimp Toast - ☺♥

Shrimp toast is a tasty appetizer and it is easy to make. Only a few fairly common ingredients are needed. Having researched recipes on the Internet and in my Chinese cookbook I put together my ideas of the best combination of ingredients, processing and frying. I added a scallion for taste and appearance, and I decided to process some of the ingredients in a blender for the best texture. The results were great.

The frying of bread in peanut oil does make this appetizer higher in fat content than typical Chinese foods, so my advice is simply to limit the amount served per person.

Ingredients: (6 generous servings, two pieces per person)

½ lb. of shelled deveined fresh raw shrimp

5 water chestnuts, sliced or whole

1 tsp. of fresh ginger root (or more), minced, or equivalent bottled minced ginger.

1 or 2 scallions, finely diced

1 large egg

1 ½ tsp. of cornstarch

1 or 2 tsp. of medium dry sherry wine

½ tsp. of sea salt

Dash of black pepper

6 slices of day old (stale) white bread (moist bread absorbs too much oil)

3 cups of peanut oil (for frying)

Directions:

Chop and then dice half of the raw shrimp and set it aside on a saucer. Chop the other half of the shrimp and put it into a one quart bowl.

Chop the water chestnuts and add them to the bowl.

Mince the ginger (or use pre-purchased minced bottled ginger) and add it to the bowl.

Finely dice the scallion(s) and place the pieces on the saucer with the diced shrimp.

Break the egg into the bowl.

Add the cornstarch, sherry, salt and pepper to the bowl.

Put all of the bowl contents into a blender and blend on high speed for two minutes.

Empty the blender contents back into the bowl.

Heat the oil in a medium to large non-stick skillet on medium heat where the depth of the oil is limited to about ½ inch. You can vary the amount of oil used based on the size of the skillet.

Cut the crusts from the bread slices. Discard the crusts.

Cut each bread slice into two triangular pieces.

Mix the blender contents in the one quart bowl with the reserved diced shrimp and scallion with a wooden spoon. Mix thoroughly.

Coat one side of each triangle of bread with the shrimp mixture so that all of the mixture is used on the twelve triangular pieces of bread. The coating will be about ¼" to 3/8" thick. Put each piece on a plate as it is coated.

Use a frying or candy thermometer to check the temperature of the oil. It should be heated to 365°F. Adjust the heat as necessary.

Note: The various shrimp toast recipes call for oil that is very hot, even smoking, but I determined that method to be overkill as it is too easy to burn the bread rather than fry it to a golden crispy color. This is especially true since the frying is done one side after the other instead of doing deep fat frying. The purpose of using very hot oil is to reduce the amount of oil absorbed by the bread, but too hot is too hot, period. After adjusting our oil temperature down from smoking to 365° F we got superior results and nice crispy shrimp toast.

Use a thin polymer spatula to introduce each piece of the shrimp toast into the oil. Do only four pieces at a time as one batch. The easy way to do it is to dip the spatula into the hot oil and then put a piece of coated bread coated side down onto the spatula. Then slide the piece from the spatula with a fork into the hot oil.

By the time four pieces have been put into the hot oil it is time to start turning them over. Give each piece no more than one to two minutes on the first side and one minute after turning it over or it will become too dark.

Use tongs or a slotted spoon to remove each piece of shrimp toast quickly onto a plate with a double paper towel on it to absorb excess oil. Do not put the pieces on top of each other. Use additional paper towels for each stacked batch so that the toast is crisp and well drained of excess oil.

When all the batches are done the paper towels can be removed and the shrimp toast pieces placed in one layer, on top of one fresh paper towel. The plate can be put into a 200°F oven and held for up to an hour prior to being served ... or, you can serve the shrimp toast immediately.

Remember to turn the heat off under the skillet. Enjoy!

Tasty Ladies - ☺♥

Milady Peggy made a type of hors d'oeuvre whose origin for her was a commercial wine tasting event. It didn't sound especially good to me (I was in the mood for a meat or seafood hors d'oeuvre) and she didn't have a name for it. She did, however, tell me that they are very good, and she made a few changes/additions relative to what she was served, and WOW, what a fine result. The flavor and texture combination was excellent and quite unexpected by me, and they are very attractive as well. We went through 20 of them in one sitting and I could easily have eaten more. I knew immediately that I needed to make a new appetizer entry in Food Nirvana. Of course, you will likely have to purchase a few of the ingredients on your next trip to the supermarket when you decide to make them.

Peggy had no name for the hors d'oeuvre so I looked at one with a blank mind and figured out a suitable name. They look like colorful little ladies wearing red skirts so I decided to name them Tasty Ladies. If you've had anything similar before you will probably know them by a different name.

These delicious hors d'oeuvres are rather easy to make. They consist of five items skewered on a colored cocktail toothpick and stood on end as a group on a cocktail or small serving plate. The challenge is to find the perfect ingredients so I have indicated in the ingredients list below the brands of tomatoes, cheese and garlic that Peggy used. You can, of course, substitute other products, including what you can make at home.

Ingredients:

20 colored cocktail toothpicks

20 green manzanilla pimento stuffed olives (though you might also try a variety of additional small pitted olives for variety, like black or kalamata olives)

10 small salad tomatoes (Peggy used very expensive hothouse grown small tomatoes from Canada that are genuinely ripe and sweet and are not supposed to be refrigerated, simply washed first when used. The brand name is Sunset Angel Sweet®.)

20 cloves of garlic from bottled garlic and spices in water (Pampa® brand) or use the Food Nirvana recipe in Processed Vegetables to make marinated garlic and save a lot of money

**10 small mozzarella cheese balls marinated in oil and herbs and spices
(Formaggio® brand)**

10 small leaves of fresh basil

Directions: (reverse the order of ingredient assembly if you use parasol top or other decorative top cocktail toothpicks)

Cut the tomatoes in half, cross-wise. Do the same for the cheese balls. Cut the basil leaves in half the same way.

Skewer each tomato piece with a toothpick such that the flat part of the tomato is at the bottom when the toothpicks are placed on a cocktail plate vertically.

Push a piece of basil onto each toothpick until it is touching the tomato on the top.

Skewer a piece of the cheese on each toothpick and push it down to the basil.

Skewer each clove of garlic, sideways, and push it down the toothpick to the cheese.

Skewer an olive sideways on each toothpick and push it down to touch the garlic.

If necessary, chill the Tasty Ladies for a few hours, covered with plastic wrap, before serving them to your guests.

Serve them and be prepared for applause.

BEEF:

Beef: Degrees of Doneness

I found the following pictures, numbers and general information on the Internet to illustrate the different degrees of doneness for beef in terms of the final internal temperature and the appearance. The information provided next is how to know and to assure that the roast or steak will be exactly what is wanted at serving time.

Test roasts for doneness using a meat thermometer placed so the tip is in the center of the roast, not touching bone or resting in fat. Remove the roast from the oven when the thermometer registers 5° F to 10° F lower than the desired temperature as the internal temperature will continue to rise briefly after it comes out of the oven. This is not much of a problem with steaks because they are thinner than a roast. A quick-read thermometer can also be used in roasts and it can be used more effectively than a regular meat thermometer in testing steaks for doneness.

Very Rare -----> Rare



Medium Rare -----> Medium



Medium Well -----> Well Done



Beef and Barley Stew - ☺♥

This recipe is from J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's great book, *The Food Lab*©, very slightly modified by me to contain my minor differences in ingredient preferences and procedure. You simply have to make this stuff. Kenji is oh, so right about it being great and easy to make. Don't hesitate. Go for it.

As given, this recipe makes an easy gallon of stew, which is fine for a group of six to eight hungry guests, or for delicious leftovers if fewer folks eat it. It is also easy to halve the recipe for fewer people.

Ingredients:

4 pounds of lean boneless chuck roast or other lean beef roast, defatted

1/4 cup of canola oil

1 tbsp. each of coarsely ground black pepper and Kosher Salt

4 large carrots, peeled and cut into 1/2" chunks

4 large stalks of celery cut into 1/2" chunks

1 large sweet onion, diced

2 tsp. of soy sauce

2 tbsp. of tomato paste

1 tsp. of Marmite (you can order it from the UK via Amazon, inexpensively)

4 cloves of garlic, minced

4, 14 ounce cans of chicken broth

Up to one pint of water during cooking, if needed

1, 28 ounce can of peeled plum tomatoes and juice, chopped

2 cups of uncooked pearl barley

4 bay leaves

4 cups of tightly packed roughly chopped kale leaves

Directions:

Trim any fat from the beef and cut it into slices about 3/4" wide.

Cut the beef slices into chunks about 1/2" by 1/2". Mix the beef chunks with the Kosher salt and the pepper in a large bowl.

Heat the oil in a large, 1 1/2 to 2 gallon heavy bottom pot until it starts to smoke.

Add 1/3 of the beef pieces, and sear/brown them, first on one side for five minutes and then mix them and continue browning and mixing for an additional five minutes. Remove the beef pieces to a large bowl. Repeat the process two times to complete the cooking of the beef, keeping all of the cooked beef in the bowl. If necessary, reduce the heat to keep the pot from scorching during cooking.

Put the heat on medium high, and add the carrots, celery and the diced onion to the pot and stir, scraping up some of the brown particles left from the meat. Cook until the vegetables have softened and developed a nice brown color from the meat particles, 5 to 10 minutes. This process goes faster with a lid on the pot with frequent stirring.

Add the Marmite, soy sauce, minced garlic and tomato paste. Mix well and cook for an additional minute. Then add the chicken broth and use a long wooden spoon to capture any remaining pieces of beef stuck to the bottom of the pot.

Add the tomatoes, barley and bay leaves to the pot along with the beef. Increase the heat to high until the mixture boils, then put it on very low heat (typically a very small burner), covered, to simmer for two hours, with occasional stirring to keep the barley from sticking to the bottom of the pot. If the mixture is becoming too thick then add one pint of water and mix and continue cooking.

Add the kale pieces and cook, covered, at a simmer for five minutes, then shut off the heat and let the stew rest, covered, for at least one hour.

Taste the stew and adjust the salt and pepper seasoning as needed.

You can serve the stew or store it refrigerated until the next day for even better flavor. We enjoyed eating fresh buttered Scalia bread with the stew. A glass of a mild red table wine is also a nice addition, though most any beverage is fine with this meal.

Beef And Broccoli - ☺♥

This recipe started as the Woks of Life recipe for beef and broccoli, followed by modifications to achieve what I wanted. For example, at over \$6 per pound, flank steak is no bargain, so I'd either use sirloin steak or choose a tender cut of beef like rib eye or filet and skip the baking soda velveting.

I used sirloin steak and three hours of marinating time to velvet the beef. It came out perfect! It was very tender even at a thickness of 1/4".

Make this dish. You will be pleased. So will your guests.

Ingredients: (makes 3 to 4 generous servings)

For the beef and marinade:

1 1/4 pounds of flank (or sirloin) steak, sliced 1/4-inch thick (or a tender cut of beef like rib eye or filet)

1/3 teaspoon of baking soda (only if you are using flank steak or sirloin steak)

3 tablespoons of water

1 1/2 teaspoons of cornstarch

2 teaspoons of canola oil

1 teaspoon of oyster sauce

For the sauce:

2/3 cup of chicken broth

1 1/2 teaspoons of granulated sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons of mushroom soy sauce

1 teaspoon of dark soy sauce

1 tablespoon of oyster sauce

2 teaspoons of sesame oil

1/4 teaspoon of white pepper

1 teaspoon of sea salt

For the rest of the dish:

3 to 4 cups of broccoli florets

3 tablespoons of canola oil (divided)

1 clove of garlic (minced)

1/4 teaspoon of ginger (grated/minced, optional)

2 tablespoons of Shaoxing wine

2 tablespoons of cornstarch mixed with 3 tablespoons of water

3 tablespoons of toasted sesame seeds (optional)

Directions:

Prepare the rice you plan to serve, following package directions. Put the cooked rice in a bowl, covered with plastic wrap, and put it into a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Put the serving bowl you plan to use for the beef and broccoli and individual serving bowls for each guest into a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Put the sliced beef along with the (optional) baking soda and water into a large bowl.

Mix in the remaining marinade ingredients: cornstarch, oil, and oyster sauce, with the beef and water. Put the beef and the marinade into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag. Expel all the air and seal the bag. Set the beef aside in the refrigerator to marinate for two to three hours. Turn the bag over three or four times during marinating.

Make the sauce mixture by mixing together the chicken broth, sugar, mushroom soy sauce, dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, sesame oil, white pepper and sea salt. Set the sauce mixture aside.

Bring a one gallon pot of water to a boil and blanch your broccoli for 90 seconds. Drain off the water and set the broccoli aside in a bowl.

Heat the wok over high heat until it is smoking.

Add 2 tablespoons of canola oil, let it heat for a minute, and then add the beef, and stir fry the beef until it is browned, about 3 minutes.

Turn off the heat, remove the beef from the wok, and set it aside in a bowl.

Set the wok over medium heat and add another tablespoon of oil along with the garlic and (ginger). Stir fry the garlic and (ginger) for 30 seconds and then pour the Shaoxing wine around the perimeter of the wok.

Add in the sauce mixture you made earlier. Stir the sauce around the sides of the wok to deglaze it .

Bring the sauce to a simmer. Stir the cornstarch and water into a slurry to ensure it's well combined, and drizzle the mixture into the sauce while stirring constantly. Allow it to simmer and thicken for 20 seconds.

Toss in the blanched broccoli and the seared beef.

Mix everything together over medium heat until the sauce coats the beef and broccoli and the mixture is starting to steam.

If the sauce seems thin, turn up the heat and reduce it further, or add a bit more cornstarch slurry. If the sauce is too thick, add 1/3 cup of water and stir to mix, then continue cooking until the sauce has the thickness you want.

Serve the beef and broccoli in the pre-warmed large serving bowl. Sprinkle the (optional) toasted sesame seeds over the top.

Serve the beef and broccoli with the steamed rice using the individual pre-warmed serving bowls.

Enjoy!

Beef and Dumplings - ☺♥T

Success in making a great meal like homemade chicken and dumplings is wonderful, but sooner or later you can't help but wonder how that success might be expanded to include other foods. In particular, I never heard of a dish named Beef and Dumplings. Sure, beef stew is well known and good versions of that are quite yummy, and I've seen beef and sauce recipes with biscuits ... But where is the beef counterpart to chicken and dumplings made in the style used by Cracker Barrel® in making their chicken and dumplings? Specifically, where do you find a recipe for a rich gravy with soft dumplings swimming in it along with rich beefy tasting shredded roasted beef?

It turns out I couldn't find any recipe for beef and dumplings on the Internet similar to a rich gravy type of chicken and dumplings. Okay, so be it. I will create a great one, for I have plenty of experience with beef and with dishes like chicken and dumplings.

Well, I made it today and my sweetheart Peggy and I are really pleased, so now it becomes a very worthy Food Nirvana entry. In this case an original by me. Yes, I love doing this when it works exceptionally well. You likely won't hear about my failures, for why should you care about them? One small bit of advice ... Don't overdo the salt with this dish as people can adjust seasoning to suit themselves at serving time. You can even reduce the stated amounts of salt somewhat if you have diet or health limitations.

Okay, enough of patting myself on the back. Now let's look at some similarities and differences between what I made with beef and what I normally make with chicken. Here are some obvious considerations: 1) In one case I simmer a whole chicken in broth and break it down to get the meat. In the beef case I make skillet seared roast beef because it has a very rich beefy flavor due to the Maillard reaction (formation of savory flavors due to high temperature cooking and resultant complex chemical reactions between proteins and carbohydrates) ... Not like some weakly flavored boiled version of a beef dish, and 2) The seasonings appropriate for use with chicken aren't quite right with beef, so one could make changes there, and I did, and 3) I use beef broth, not chicken broth, and I ramp it up with a great beef base that is far better than bullion, and 4) I shred the roasted beef so it is totally tender as well as tasty and it mixes in really well with the broth/gravy after I have made the dumplings.

Oh, Yeah! This dish is designed to make you moan with pleasure. It is the beef version of fantastic chicken and dumplings, and from now on I'll have trouble figuring out which one I want to make! Oh, you will see in the recipe that you can choose to use all milk when making the dumplings or a mixture of whisked

eggs and milk instead. The latter version produces a somewhat more noodle type of dumplings, which I prefer.

Note that no one has to be a genius to figure out how to create new and excellent foods. This experimental first attempt success, like a few other new ideas, turns out to be pure serendipity. That wouldn't happen were I a complete dolt in the kitchen. Based on some bonehead errors I've made with other dishes in the past I'm merely a minor but trainable dolt! Well, experience and curiosity and patience can all come together to allow most anyone to make something new and nice. This time you get the benefit of my efforts for free. You might think about carrying on this labor of love as a tradition with ever new and better recipes created by you and others and shared widely.

Let's get to it ... Have fun making and eating this dish. It is particularly nice to make and enjoy hot comfort food dishes like beef and dumplings during cool or cold weather. And it is now mid-September ...

Oops, did you decide what side dishes to make and what beverages to serve with the meal? You probably want to wait until the beef and dumplings are done cooking to make any other items to be served. The preparation and waiting times for making beef and dumplings is a combined full four hours due to the roasting time for the beef and the delay periods for dough processing. But it is far more than worth the wait!

Now that I think about it, this dish lends itself to preparation by three cooks at the same time in one kitchen, making the whole process relatively quick and easy on everyone. Or three cooks could make the three different food items in their own kitchens and just bring it all together at the end to make the final pot of beef and dumplings.

Ingredients: (makes six to eight generous adult servings)

Beef:

3 lb. Eye Roast of beef, with most of the fat removed

2 tsp. of Kosher or sea salt

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

2 tbsp. of canola oil

1 cup of water for moisture control while searing and roasting the beef

Broth/Gravy Mixture:

2 quarts of beef broth

1 tbsp. of Better Than Bullion® roasted beef base

1 quart of water

1 large onion, peeled and cut into thick slices

3 carrots cut into slices

3 cloves of garlic, sliced

3 stalks of celery, cut into pieces about one inch long

1/4 tsp. of turmeric

1/4 cup of fresh compacted parsley, chopped

4 sprigs of fresh thyme

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

4 tbsp. of cornstarch mixed with 1/2 cup of water (hold until the last step for thickening the gravy)

Dumplings:

3 cups of all purpose flour

1 tsp. of baking powder

3/4 tsp. of sea salt

3/8 cup of Crisco® shortening, chilled

3/8 cup of butter, chilled

3/4 to 1 cup of cold milk, or, 2 extra large or jumbo eggs, whisked, and 1/4 cup of milk

Directions:

First let's roast the beef:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Cut the beef into five or six similar size sections about 1" thick. Be sure to cut across the grain, not along the grain of the meat. If you cut along the grain you will wind up with long strings of tough beef.

Put the canola oil into a large (12" wide), deep, oven proof skillet, then put in the beef sections, moving them around to spread the oil over the bottom interior surface of the skillet.

Season the beef sections on both sides with the salt and the pepper.

Sear the beef heavily on high heat. Use a lid to cover the skillet, and perhaps use an exhaust fan, once the skillet starts to emit smoke, but not before it starts to emit smoke! We don't want boiled beef. After four to five minutes total time, turn the beef sections over with a meat fork and sear the second side with the skillet covered. That will take roughly four minutes.

Turn off the heat. Add about 1/2 cup of water to the skillet, cover it, and put it into the preheated oven.

Note: You can start working on the vegetables and broth preparation while the beef is roasting, as described below.

Roast for one hour, then partially remove the lid just a bit (a 1/2" wide gap on one side is fine) and roast for another 30 minutes.

Add the other 1/2 cup of water to the skillet, reduce the oven temperature to 325 degrees F, and roast for a final 30 minutes with the skillet covered.

Remove the covered skillet from the oven and set it aside on a heatproof surface (like a granite counter top) to allow contents to cool.

Remove and shred the beef sections after they have cooled enough to be handled (about 15 minutes) and keep the shredded beef in a large bowl. I do the shredding using a large wooden cutting board, a sharp knife and a meat fork.

Reserve the skillet contents. Set the skillet aside. Later the strong beefy flavor coating in the skillet will be extracted by mixing some of the broth with it. That mixture will then be poured back into the broth pot to help flavor the final gravy for the beef and dumplings.

Now let's cook the vegetables in the broth:

While the beef is roasting you can do all of the preparation work for the vegetables. Then proceed as described next.

Place the onion, carrots, celery, garlic, parsley, thyme, turmeric, salt and pepper (but not the cornstarch) in a large, 1 1/2 to 2 gallon pot and cover the mixture with the beef broth and the quart of water. Add the Better Than Bullion® beef base and mix the ingredients with a long wooden spoon.

Bring the pot contents to a boil, covered with a lid, on high heat, then reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, and keep the pot covered. Cook the vegetables and broth and seasonings for an hour at a simmer or very low boil.

Use a spider or other utility scoop with holes to remove the vegetables from the broth. Set the pot of broth aside. Discard the vegetables or use them for some other purpose. At this point it will be time (or past time) to continue the steps for roasting the beef, so return to those directions. Note that during the final half hour to hour of roasting the beef you can make the dough for the dumplings as described below.

Now let's make the dough for the dumplings:

Put the flour, baking powder and salt together in an electric mixer bowl. Run the mixer on medium speed. Cut the chilled Crisco® and butter into the flour mixture gradually in one teaspoon amounts and continue mixing until the contents resemble small peas. This may take up to five minutes of mixing after all the shortening has been added, and in any event at that point, whether it looks like small peas or not, proceed to the next step.

Decide whether you want to use only milk or eggs and milk when making the dumplings. If you are using only milk, then add the cold milk, only 1/4 cup at a time while mixing for a minute or two between milk additions. You may not need a full cup. Make the milk additions and mix until a ball of dough begins to form. The formation of the mixture into dough will be obvious so it is easy to know when to stop adding milk. At that point continue mixing for a minute or two to knead the dough, then stop mixing. If you are using the eggs and milk combination, whisk the eggs, then whisk the milk with the eggs, then add all of it to the mixing bowl and mix on medium speed until the dough forms and gets kneaded for a minute or two.

I form the completed dough into two round, flat patties, and wrap them in plastic wrap and refrigerate them for 30 minutes. That aids in gluten formation which makes processing the dough into dumplings much easier.

Roll out the dough onto a floured surface. I put plastic wrap sufficient for rolling out both patties of dough, side by side on a granite countertop, and I dust it with flour. Then I partially knead and flatten each piece of chilled dough to a 1" thickness by hand to make rolling it out easier. Then I dust the dough pieces with

flour, center them on each area of the plastic wrap, and put a second piece of plastic wrap on top of each piece of dough. Then I roll out the dough with an ordinary rolling pin to about 3/16" thick. This works perfectly for rolling dough without having it stick to any surface, and the rolling pin stays clean.

Remove the top pieces of plastic wrap, then use a pizza cutter or a sharp knife and cut the dough areas roughly into rectangles about 1 inch wide by 2 inches long. Allow the dough pieces to harden/dry for around 30 minutes or up to an hour, then remove the pieces to a plate, being careful not to include any plastic wrap. Note that you can then fold up the floury plastic wrap and discard it and not have any work surface to clean. Nice, huh?

Now let's cook the dough pieces in the vegetable and beef broth to make the dumplings:

First dispense a pint of the broth from the pot into the skillet used to roast the beef. Stir well to capture all of the roasted beef flavors from the skillet. Pour the skillet contents back into the pot.

Bring the broth to a simmer on high heat, then drop in the dough pieces a few at a time so they don't clump together. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot and allow them to cook for 10 minutes. Do not stir them while they are cooking. You now have dumplings of the style served at Cracker Barrel®.

If you have not already shredded the roasted beef, now is the time to do it.

Add the shredded beef pieces to the pot a little at a time with gentle mixing. Allow the mixture to cook, covered, at a simmer, to partially thicken it and to blend the flavors, about 20 minutes.

Mix the cornstarch with the 1/2 cup of water and pour it into the simmering beef and dumplings mixture slowly, while mixing gently. Then increase the heat to medium and let the gravy come to a low boil while mixing gently and it will be thickened in a minute or two at a low boil.

Turn off the heat and keep the completed beef and dumplings covered to keep it warm while you prepare any other items for the meal.

Serve the beef and dumplings in wide shallow bowls that have been pre-warmed in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

If you want you can sprinkle some freshly chopped parsley on top of each serving to add color and good complementary taste.

Let each guest season their serving with salt and pepper, to taste.

I leave it to your imagination to figure out what dessert to serve with this meal. I suggest you keep it light.

Enjoy!

Beef Brisket - ☺

This recipe is one attributed to a Nach Waxman that I found in "The Joy of Cooking©." It was certainly excellent so I included it here. The amount of onions seems excessive. It is not. Follow the recipe and you will get yummy gravy with the beef. But it is wise to check the liquid level during the second baking to assure the gravy stays fluid instead of turning into a paste.

Ingredients:

1 first-cut brisket of beef - 5-6 pounds – or a lean boneless chuck roast

1 to 2 teaspoons of unbleached all-purpose flour

Coarsely ground black pepper, to taste

1/4 cup of corn oil

8 medium or 4 large onions, thickly sliced and separated into rings

2 tablespoons of tomato paste (or ½ cup of tomato sauce)

1-1/2 teaspoons of coarse (kosher) salt

2 cloves of garlic, quartered (I use 8 cloves for 6 lbs. of meat)

1 carrot, peeled (I use more like ten carrots, cut to 3 inch lengths, for 6 lbs. of meat)

6 coarsely chopped medium size peeled russet potatoes (optional but appropriate)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Trim the brisket or chuck of most of its fat, and dust it lightly with the flour. Sprinkle it with pepper.

Heat the oil in a large heavy flameproof metal casserole or Dutch Oven. Add the beef, and sear/brown it on both sides and around the perimeter of the meat over medium-high to high heat until some crispy spots appear on the surface. This will take about five minutes per side.

Transfer the beef to a plate. Keeping the heat medium high, add the onions to the casserole/Dutch Oven and stir, scraping up the brown particles left from the

meat. Cook until the onions have softened and developed a handsome brown color from the meat particles, 10 to 15 minutes.

Remove the casserole/Dutch Oven from the heat, and place the beef, along with any juices that have accumulated, on top of the onions. Spread the tomato paste or sauce over the beef as if you were icing a cake. Sprinkle with pepper and the coarse salt. Add the garlic and carrots, and cover tightly. Place the casserole/Dutch Oven on the middle rack in the oven, and bake covered for 1-1/2 hours.

Remove the casserole/Dutch Oven from the oven, and transfer the meat to a carving board. Cut it into 1/4 inch-thick slices. Place raw potato pieces on top of the reduced onions. Return the slices to the pot, overlapping them at an angle so that you can see a bit of the top edge of each slice (in effect reassembling the brisket, slightly slanted). Correct the seasoning if necessary and add 1/4 cup of water to the casserole.

Cover, and return the casserole/Dutch Oven to the oven. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F. Cook until the meat is brown and fork-tender, about 1-1/2 hours. Check the meat for tenderness. If more cooking time is needed then add 1/4 cup of water and cook for an addition 30 minutes. Transfer the roast, onions, potatoes and carrot slices to a heated platter, along with the wonderful gravy that formed during cooking. Serve at once on warmed dinner plates.

Beef Bourguignon (Beef Burgundy) - ☺♥♥♥☺

Who doesn't like beef bourguignon? It sounds like a classy dish but in reality it is simply great comfort food. I know you will enjoy it. Actually, it is so good the scents of all the ingredients together will make you hungry right after you cook the bacon, before the other cooking steps!

The origin of this recipe is mixed. Marie used to make a yummy beef bourguignon but I never found the recipe for it. I also made this dish many times so what I provide here is likely a mixture of Marie's and my thoughts and preferences. Whatever the origins, this stuff is truly delicious.

I learned the finest way to enhance the taste of this dish is to roast a 3 to 4 pound top round roast at 350 degrees F for roughly 45 minutes per pound in a covered skillet. Make sure the lid remains in full contact with the skillet during roasting. If necessary you can separate the sections of beef from each other with a butcher knife after the first two hours of roasting to guarantee the lid fits the skillet tightly. After roasting, the beef will be dark and easy to slice across the grain and separate into shreds of beef that are quite tender and tasty. Do so on a cutting board. As for the skillet, it will contain wonderful flavoring from the browning of the meat during roasting. You simply use some beef broth or water after removing the roasted pieces of beef and use a wooden spoon to stir the broth/water with the beef drippings to obtain a delicious beef base for the sauce of the beef bourguignon. Fabulous taste!

If instead you prepare the dish starting with cut pieces of raw beef as shown in the recipe below then you will have a very good dish but not perfection. Your choice.

Ingredients: (4 or more servings)

4 thick slices of dry cured hickory smoked bacon

3 tablespoons of butter for sautéing

8 ounces of canned, sliced mushrooms (drained net weight)

1 tsp. of sea salt

3/4 tsp. of pepper

1 cup of diced sweet onion

3 large cloves of garlic, diced

2 or more pounds of lean sirloin or other grilling beef, all fat removed, cut into pieces 1/2" by 1/2" by 3/4", or, use the shredded roasted beef and drippings described earlier.

3 tablespoons of all-purpose flour

1 cup of burgundy or merlot or pinot noir or cabernet sauvignon wine

1 1/2 cups of beef broth

2 tsp. of Better Than Bullion® beef seasoning base (or twice that if you make this dish starting with raw beef)

1 tbsp. of cornstarch

Bouquet of 3 or 4 sprigs each of sage and fresh thyme tied with kitchen string (or 1 tsp. each of dried herbs)

1 lb. of wide egg noodles

3 tablespoons of soft butter to use with the cooked noodles

1/4 cup of chopped fresh parsley

Directions:

Set the oven at 200 degrees F and put individual wide, shallow serving bowls or plates into the oven. Then put in the dishes you plan to use for serving the beef burgundy and the noodles. Later, this pre-warming of the dishes will keep the food delightfully warm while it is being eaten.

Heat a large deep skillet with a heavy bottom over medium high heat. Add the bacon slices to the skillet and fry them normally. Remove the bacon and set it aside to cool.

If you have more than 2 tbsp. of melted bacon fat remaining in the skillet, discard the excess.

Add 1 1/2 tablespoons of butter to the skillet and melt it in the bacon drippings. Add the diced onion to the skillet and turn the pieces to coat them evenly with butter and bacon drippings.

Break up the bacon into small pieces, put them in a dish and set it aside.

Season the onions pieces with salt and pepper. Sauté them for 2 to 3 minutes and then add the mushroom slices and the diced garlic to the skillet. Continue

cooking 2 to 3 minutes longer, then transfer the mixture to a plate and return the skillet to the heat.

If you are starting with cut up raw pieces of beef then follow the next two steps. If instead you are using the shredded roasted beef and the juices from adding beef broth/water to the beef drippings, then simply mix the cornstarch into the juices, along with the Better Than Bullion® seasoning base and proceed from there with adding the flour to the browned beef as you will see below.

Add the remaining sautéing butter to the skillet and melt it on high heat, then add the raw pieces of beef to the very hot skillet and brown them evenly on all sides, keeping the meat moving by stirring. Then remove the skillet from the heat.

Add the cornstarch to the beef broth and mix it briefly with a spoon. Then add the Better Than Bullion® beef seasoning base and stir until it is mixed into the beef broth.

Add the flour to the browned meat in the skillet, mix well and cook for 2 minutes on medium high heat.

Add the wine to the skillet slowly while stirring. When the wine comes to a boil and you have scraped any drippings to get them mixed in, add the beef broth and cornstarch mixture and the bouquet of fresh sage and thyme sprigs (or dry herbs) to the skillet.

Mix well and then cover the skillet. When the liquid boils, reduce the heat to very low. Cook covered for 5 minutes.

Remove the lid and add the mushroom, onion and garlic mixture and the bacon pieces. Mix that with the other skillet contents.

Simmer the beef bourguignon on low heat with the cover off until the sauce thickens a bit, about five minutes, stirring to assure nothing sticks to the bottom of the skillet. Remove and discard the herb bouquet.

Cover the skillet and set the heat to very low on a small burner to keep the contents warm but not boiling.

Prepare the noodles per package directions.

Toss the hot egg noodles with the butter reserved for the noodles and the parsley.

Place a bed of noodles in each individual serving pre-warmed wide and shallow bowl and ladle the beef burgundy over the noodles.

Serve the beef bourguignon with glasses of the wine you used in the recipe.

Enjoy? No ... Moan with pleasure!

Beef Tenderloin, Johnny style - ☺♥

I have to thank friends Russ and Sue Gale for providing the following delicious recipe. They served this entrée to me and I know it is great. Try it.

Ingredients:

2 lbs. of beef tenderloin, trimmed

1 cup of onions, chopped

1 cup of mushrooms, sliced

½ cup of bleu cheese, crumbled

2 cloves of fresh garlic, chopped

1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil for sautéing the vegetables

1 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil for rubbing on the outside of the raw meat

1 sprig fresh rosemary, chopped

Directions:

Cook the onions, mushrooms and garlic on medium heat in a medium size sauté pan with 1 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil until the onions are translucent. Remove the pan from the heat and place the vegetables into a bowl. Allow them to cool.

Cut a pocket lengthwise into the center of the beef. Fill the pocket with the cool vegetables. Add the crumbled cheese.

Close the pocket and tie the meat with 100% cotton butcher's twine.

Rub one tbsp. olive oil all over the outside of the beef. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle the rosemary over the meat.

Place the meat into a roasting pan and roast at 350° F for desired doneness. Rare is five minutes per pound, medium rare is six and one half minutes per pound and well done is seven and one half minutes per pound.

Let the tenderloin stand for ten minutes before slicing.

Enjoy!

Bleu Cheese and Bacon Burger - ☺♥

I suppose a hamburger recipe is not something you would expect to see in my recipe book. It seems to be too common, and who doesn't know how to make a respectable hamburger? Well, by now you know my love of great food, so if I think I should provide you a hamburger recipe I have a very good reason.

My love of bleu cheese and bacon burgers started in the early 1980's when my DuPont® work friend Bill Rawls and I would do the occasional lunch at the Town Squire® restaurant in downtown Wilmington DE. Prior to that time I did not know just how good that kind of burger could be.

The secrets used by the restaurant cook were to grill the bun, use real high quality bleu cheese generously, and well-melted, not stupid bleu cheese dressing, and also plenty of crisp bacon, not to mention pretty decent beef. The idea is that he opted for quality more than profit, and that I respect, so that unnamed kitchen hero gets some recognition here. The flavors were intense. The serving temperature was hot and thus perfect. Zowie, what a great burger!

I have attempted to recreate that burger and I am pretty successful using food items available today, but nothing approaches my memory of the Town Squire® bleu cheese and bacon burger. It had to do with the intense flavor of the bleu cheese.

Oh, we typically each had a cold bottle of Michelob® beer and a small bag of potato chips with the burger, for back in those days there was no workplace bullshit about having a beer at lunch. What a yummy lunch! For that matter, we could also smoke in bars, restaurants and at work, and so we did. Alas, I can't help but disrespect the overly restrictive laws and oppressive business practices today and the people who create(d) or sustain them, for I was and I am a child from a time of far greater liberty and freedom.

Well, that is enough yakking from me. Let's get on with the recipe as this burger is too good to miss.

Ingredients:

1/3 lb. Choice ground sirloin formed into a hamburger patty

1 Big Marty's® sesame seed bun

1 1/2 oz. High quality Bleu or Roquefort cheese

2 strips Dietz and Watson® bacon or equivalent high quality bacon

Black pepper to taste

1/4 tsp. of powdered or granulated garlic

1 tbsp. peanut oil

1 tsp. butter

Veggies shown in the picture (optional)

Directions:

Fry the bacon on medium low heat until it is somewhat crisp. You don't want limp fat and you don't want brittle bacon. Then put it on a paper towel to drain the fat. Break or cut the pieces in half.

Form the hamburger patty with the garlic mixed in with the raw beef, such that the raw burger has the same diameter as the Big Marty's® bun. That will result in having the raw meat thickness exactly right, and at the end of the frying the patty size will fit inside the bun perfectly.

Fry the hamburger patty on high heat in a small but thick bottomed pre-heated skillet after coating both sides of the raw burger with the peanut oil. It should be fried fairly crisp on both sides yet be medium on the inside, thus the use of high heat to keep the burger moist and tender inside yet crisp outside via fast frying. Two minutes per side is plenty of frying time for a 1/3 pound patty if the skillet is sufficiently hot, but you can adjust the frying time as necessary.

While the burger is frying, spread the butter on the opened Big Marty's® bun and grill it on medium heat face down in a separate skillet. It should be grilled to a golden brown color and removed from the skillet to a 200 °F warming oven.

When the burger is done frying remove it from the skillet to a saucer and coat the top evenly with the bleu cheese. Then put it under a broiler for 30 seconds to 1 minute until some of the cheese melts.

Remove the burger from the broiler and put the bacon pieces on top of the bleu cheese. Return the burger to the broiler for 20 seconds to re-warm the bacon and then remove it.

Put the burger into the warm grilled bun and serve it with the pepper on the side or in a shaker at the table.

Note that using the above cooking procedure results in the perfect temperature of all components at serving time, and that is how you make a perfect bleu cheese and bacon burger.

Note also that I used no salt, for the bleu cheese and the bacon both provide plenty of salt.

Brine Cured Smoked Pastrami - ☺♥♥♥☺ T

This recipe is an amalgam of the best recipes I could find for making smoked pastrami from a beef brisket, along with a few special additions of mine. It involves multiple steps over multiple days, but at the end you have a real treat in store for yourself, your friends and your loved ones. I experimented a lot and finally arrived at perfection. That means this smoked pastrami is equal to the best I have ever tasted, even in the best Jewish delicatessens. Thus, this recipe is given the highest Food Nirvana rating. Are you interested in perfection too? If so, read on ... if not ... well ... I hope you find something else to float your boat.

Due to safety considerations in curing meats, using sodium nitrite, I decided to make this a teaching recipe, which is one reason why it is longer than typical recipes in Food Nirvana. Note that I have a variety of teaching recipes for different foods in Food Nirvana when the process steps/measurements need to be done very accurately and done in a particular order.

So, why do we brine cure meat with sodium nitrite? Quite simply to avoid botulism, which results from having a particular bacteria (Clostridium Botulinum) in or on the meat that can reproduce and produce toxins that can kill you. Sodium nitrite kills that bacteria even at refrigerator temperatures. Beyond that, meat cured with sodium nitrite has a great flavor. Sodium nitrite is present in cured foods like hams and bacon, and dried beef and pastrami, and in many different lunch meats. Now let's continue with the recipe.

I sometimes use two 3 pound chuck roasts instead of one 5 pound beef brisket for making both corned beef and pastrami, due to the price of beef brisket (and the typically high fat content ... thick layers of fat). A good chuck roast will have nice marbling that will approximate that of brisket meat. I cut away all large fat areas and cut the chuck roasts into the two sections with different grain directions before cutting it into 2" thick pieces across/perpendicular to the grain. I then cure the meat for six or more days using the brining recipe shown below. If you are curing brisket or chuck roast that is thicker than 2" you can cure the meat for seven or eight days. That produces raw corned beef.

If I am using chuck roasts, I apply McCormicks® bromelain based meat tenderizer (or other less expensive bromelain products like crushed 500 mg tablets) to all surfaces of the raw corned beef, and then I apply the pastrami rub mixture to all surfaces of the meat. The meat is refrigerated overnight and then smoked in an electric smoker at 250°F for two hours.

The meat is then allowed to finish cooking/steaming using the smoker aluminum foil drip pan of steaming water (plus pour two cups of boiling water into the drip

pan in the smoker, and more later, to keep the steaming going) placed in the smoker, to a final internal meat temperature of 205°F (but see pressure steamer discussion next). Note that I use a wireless thermometer to monitor the internal temperature of the meat.

If the temperature increase of the meat stalls at around 190°F you can increase the temperature of your smoker to either 325°F, or lower if your maximum temperature is like my smoker, 275°F. Why would it stall? Because the extra moisture in the meat from brine curing is partially evaporating and the cooling effect of that can very much slow down the temperature increase until the "excess" water has evaporated. Alternatively, if you have an Instant Pot® pressure steamer you can stop the smoking step at 190°F and then use the Instant Pot® pressure steamer to complete the cooking of the pastrami. That will promote keeping/making it moist and tender, which is highly desirable.

Desirable? I did not see that step in any of the Internet recipes for making pastrami. They all really missed the boat. Well, almost all. I compliment Meathead of the Amazing Ribs® web site for sharing a tiny tidbit of knowledge he gained pumping the counter people for processing information at Katz's delicatessen in New York City. To point ... the last step they used in processing pastrami, immediately before making sandwiches, was to steam it, which tenderizes and moisturizes the pastrami ... which is exactly what you want/need to make a perfect hot steamer sandwich. What you will learn in this recipe is that a pressure steaming step after the smoked pastrami has been made is quite simply "required" for making a first class sandwich. So buy an Instant Pot® pressure steamer via the Internet ... in 2024, they cost \$150 for the large one, and they are worth every cent for making multiple varieties of foods.

Following cooling, (optional) vacuum sealing and refrigeration, the final step is to cut very thin slices (1/8th inch thick or less) of the pastrami, cross grain.

Use the pastrami slices generously (a stack at least 1/2" or more thick) with partially melted Swiss cheese on top (30 seconds for the cheese on the stack of meat on high heat in the microwave oven on a paper plate or saucer) to then make the sandwiches on (optionally grilled) rye bread slices that are spread on the inside of the slices with brown deli style mustard before adding the hot pastrami and melted Swiss cheese. I've also found that adding a slice of Swiss cheese on the bottom slice of rye bread after it has been spread with mustard is a nice improvement. The final steps are to cut the sandwich diagonally and microwave it on high heat for 30 seconds. Now you have a delicious hot pastrami and Swiss on rye sandwich. Serve a Kosher dill pickle and some potato chips on the side. Serve cold beer or some other cold carbonated beverage.

You can also make either a Reuben sandwich or a variation of a Rachel sandwich (usually made with corned beef or turkey), the first using warm (but not wet) sauerkraut and thousand island dressing (instead of mustard) and the latter using room temperature coleslaw (moist but not dripping wet) along with thousand island dressing.

I hope you make this pastrami. It looks like it takes a long time and is difficult to make, but in reality it is easy ... there are simply multiple steps, but you do need to have various essential items like a kitchen scale, an electric smoker and a pressure steamer to make great pastrami, and a wireless thermometer is important too, as is a vacuum sealer. If necessary you can use an instant read thermometer and aluminum foil wrapping instead of vacuum sealing. You can also steam slices of pastrami on a stovetop steamer if you lack a pressure steamer, but the final product will be somewhat less tender and less moist. You also need to be careful in doing all measurements of weight and volume of ingredients. The prize at the end is more than worth the effort. Just think of the bragging rights you will have as a fine chef!

Now let's proceed to make pastrami with the first of six steps ...

Step One: Prepare the meat to be cured

Ingredients:

5 lb. beef brisket (or two 3 lb. chuck roasts, defatted, separated into sections by grain direction, and sliced vertically across the grain into 2" thick pieces)

Directions:

If you are using beef brisket, cut away the exterior layer of fat and silver skin, but do not cut out any interior fat layer (unless, of course, you want to do that [I do because I want lean pastrami]). If you are using chuck roast cut away all large areas of fat and any sinew/silver skin. Note that removing the fat and silver skin from brisket is a tedious task due to the large area of the meat surface that is affected. Use a very sharp knife. I use a boning knife as it is easier to push it under the fat/silver skin layer due to its long thin shape and sharp point. Chuck roast may also have some silver skin that must be cut off if it covers a meat surface that will need to be penetrated with curing brine.

Weigh the meat after fat/silver skin removal. You will want to make the correct amount/concentration of brine, where the amount of curing agent is matched to the real weight of the meat being cured (plus the weight of the water), not to the weight shown on the supermarket package, and not the weight before you remove fat. Otherwise, you will use too much Prague #1 curing salt, and that is

not a good idea. Specifically, you risk making the brine toxic. Also, I typically wear latex or nitrile gloves when working with curing agents.

Put the prepared meat into the refrigerator on a plate.

Step Two: Make the curing brine

If you look at a number of recipes and recommendations for curing meat with Prague #1 pink curing salt via the Internet, you will find a confusing mess of apparently conflicting recommendations. Why? The pink curing salt is used in dry brining and wet brining, the meats are different, the overall recipes differ, like in brine/water volume, and the final end point for sodium nitrite content in the meat, per the FDA, is a range, not a specific quantity.

Based on the actual weight of the meat to be cured, (and using a liquid volume of one gallon of water), you will use pink curing salt (Prague #1) at the rate of about 1/2 teaspoon (2.9 grams) per pound of meat. That translates to about 14.6 grams of curing salt for 5 pounds of meat in one gallon of water. Note that the most accurate way to measure the curing salt is by weighing it, not by using a measuring spoon, so use a good kitchen scale that can measure weight in grams. Why? The weight per unit volume of pink curing salt varies considerably based on what brand you purchase (anywhere from 4 to 6 grams per teaspoon, due partly to grain size), so measuring something as critical as pink curing salt should be done by weight, not volume.

Note that the FDA specifies final cured meat content of 120 to 200 parts per million of sodium nitrite, depending on the type of meat product, which is a narrow but comfortable range allowing some variation in the amount of pink curing salt to be used in one gallon of water for five pounds of meat. Note that pink curing salt is only 6.25% sodium nitrite. Note that meat is around 60 to 70 percent water. Note also that most of the sodium nitrite remains in the brine after curing the meat, and part of it is consumed when it reacts chemically with the myoglobin (a protein) in the meat, turning that amount of pink curing salt into nitric oxide, which is non-toxic at the amounts produced during curing, and it then turns the meat pink in color. Thus, the amount of pink curing salt recommended in this recipe for making pastrami is estimated to be about mid-range of the FDA specification in final sodium nitrite content. You can refer to the Food Nirvana recipe for making Canadian bacon for a detailed description of calculating the right amount of curing salt to use to wet brine cure five pounds of meat in one gallon of water starting with the FDA specification in parts per million (ppm) and converting that into the grams of pink curing salt to use in wet brining.

The final weight of the meat to be cured becomes part of the calculation for the amount of pink curing salt to be used. That is the reason the list of ingredients below shows a variable amount of pink curing salt, for you don't actually know the weight of the meat until you have removed any excess or otherwise unwanted fat. In short, weigh the meat accurately after fat removal and adjust the exact amount of pink curing salt you use based on the exact weight of the meat.

Kosher salt content of the curing brine is recommended to be 3% to 6% of the weight of the water, so the Kosher salt should weigh about 5 ounces for one gallon of water for a 6% solution. Kosher salts vary a lot in weight per unit volume based on crystal size and shape, so it is important to weigh the salt. Consider that salt retains water, so having the right amount of salt determines in part the moisture content of the cured meat, as well as how salty the meat will taste after cooking.

Digression: One might assume that doubling the weight of the meat would require the amount of curing agent to also be doubled. That turns out to be a bad mistake, for that much curing agent, even with the meat weight doubled, creates a toxic brine. Instead, if you double the weight of the meat, but use the same brine volume, then increase the amount of curing agent by only 25%, or about an additional one half teaspoon (or 2.8 grams). The reason for this limit is based on the fact that the amount of curing agent to be used is determined by the combined weight of the water and the meat, and the calculation method, which is not provided here, appears to be nonlinear. My advice? Don't double the amount of meat unless you also double the rest of the brine and cure the pieces of meat in separate containers, ergo bags or pots. This recipe recommends using either vacuum seal bags or Ziploc® freezer bags as the curing must take place in a refrigerator with temperature between 33 degrees F and 38 degrees F.

Ingredients:

Curing:

1 gallon of water

2 to 2 1/2 teaspoons (or 14.6 grams for 5 pounds of beef) of pink curing salt (Prague #1), based on the actual final weight of the meat to be cured plus the weight of the one gallon of water [about 2.9 grams per pound of meat when brining in one gallon of water]

¼ cup of granulated sugar

10 garlic cloves, chopped or sliced thin

2/3 to 1 cup of Kosher salt (You want the Kosher salt to be around 6% of the weight of the water. Kosher salts vary in weight per unit volume due to crystal size and shape. 6% of 8.34 pounds/gallon of water is about 5 weight ounces. Weigh the salt to get the right amount.)

Seasonings: (If you are curing two chuck roasts then increase the seasoning ingredient amounts shown next by 25%)

2 teaspoons each of black peppercorns, yellow mustard seeds and coriander seeds

1 teaspoon of dried red pepper flakes

2 teaspoons of whole allspice

2 teaspoons of ground nutmeg

2 whole cinnamon sticks, broken up into around eight smaller pieces (or 1 tbsp. of ground cinnamon)

6 bay leaves, crumbled

2 teaspoons of whole cloves

2 teaspoons of ground ginger

Directions:

Mix the seeds and seasoning powders and pieces of cinnamon stick (or ground cinnamon) and bay leaves in a bowl. You will use half of that mixture when you brine/cure the brisket/chuck roasts, and the other half to store in a canning jar for future use the next time you want to make pastrami. (But if you are making corned beef instead of pastrami you can use the other half of the seasonings after the curing step, when you simmer the corned beef in water for 3 to 4 hours before serving it).

Combine the water, pink curing (Prague #1) salt, sugar, chopped garlic cloves and Kosher salt in a two gallon pot.

Put the seasonings into the larger of the two Magic Bullet® mixer containers, then mix for 30 seconds. That will partially crush the seeds in the seasonings. Alternatively, you can seal the seasonings in a Ziploc® freezer bag, spread them out roughly flat on a hard surface, and pound them briefly with the flat side of a kitchen mallet. Add half of the partially crushed seasonings to the pot. Set the other half of the seasonings aside in a tightly closed small canning jar to use at a later time. Put a label on the jar to identify the contents.

Bring the brine to a simmer (about 180 degrees F) on high heat, stirring until the sugar and salts have dissolved. Remove the pot from the heat and allow the brine to cool to room temperature. Note that this step sterilizes the brine, which is necessary to avoid potential contamination of the meat by various types of bacteria or molds that might be present in the water you use.

Refrigerate the brine for a few hours until it is completely chilled.

Use a volume marked pitcher to measure the exact volume of brine. You will want to distribute the brine to the different curing bags based on the comparative weights of the meat and water in each bag. If all you are curing is one beef brisket you can skip this step, unless you have cut the brisket into halves to make handling of the bags, brine and meat easier.

Step 3: Cure the beef

Put the refrigerated beef into one or more 10" x 16" vacuum sealing bags. Alternatively, you can use two, one gallon Ziploc® freezer bags for a beef brisket that has been cut in half, or two or more, one gallon Ziploc® freezer bags if the meat you are using started as two chuck roasts.

Hold the vacuum sealing bag(s) [or Ziploc® freezer bag(s)] vertically and add the chilled curing brine/seasonings. Divide the brine volume across the bags based on the weight of the meat in each bag. For example, if one bag contains 2 pounds of meat and the second bag contains 3 pounds of meat, then the first bag should get about 40% of the brine and the second bag should get about 60% of the brine. Then, let's assume the actual brine volume is one gallon, (or a bit more) due to added solids and dissolved salts and sugar. 40% of one gallon is about 51 volume ounces of brine, and 60% of one gallon is about 77 volume ounces of brine. So that approximation is how you determine how much of the brine to put into each bag.

Vacuum seal the meat and brine in the 10" x 16" vacuum seal bag(s). Alternatively, expel the air from the Ziploc® freezer bag(s) by partially folding them and then close/seal them manually.

Refrigerate the vacuum sealed meat and brine (or the sealed Ziploc® bags of meat and brine) and let the brining happen for 6 to 8 days. Turn the bag(s) over once each day. Note: If you are using Ziploc® bags you will want to put them in disposable aluminum foil pans with a 1" high border all the way around, to protect your refrigerator in case brine leakage occurs from the Ziploc® bags.

Note that the penetration of the brine and curing agent in particular is usually about 1/4" per day, starting from all surfaces to the inside center of the meat. So

if the meat is 2" thick at its thickest part, then the brine should be at the center of the meat in four days. But that is a highly variable result if the meat is of variable thickness, such that providing an extra day or two to know for certain the curing agent has penetrated all the way to the center of the meat is a smart idea. That is why you cure the meat in this recipe for six or more days, not four days.

Note, however, that allowing some extra time for curing the meat does not mean there is no upper limit. Do not exceed seven or eight days as additional time can increase the salt content of the cured meat, and that is not desirable, for it may taste too salty. Also, you only want enough sodium nitrite to migrate into the meat to reach the center of the meat and cure it. Conversely, you do not want inadequate penetration of the meat.

All it takes is one bad experience where not enough penetration occurred and you will recognize with serious disappointment that you cannot trust the uncured area to be safe to eat later or to look right or taste right after the remaining steps in making the pastrami. Incomplete curing of the middle of the meat is indicated by it having a dull light brown color instead of the expected pink color. In short, don't make that mistake.

Well ... what can you do if the meat you are curing is very thick, like 4"? How can you be sure the brine/curing agent has penetrated all the way into the center of the meat? The answer is to inject brine into the center of the meat at the start of the curing period. A brine injector looks like some old time hypodermic syringe made of metal, and it is strong enough for you to apply manual pressure to force brine inside the meat. I inject through the middle of the meat if I have a tube of meat, like pork loin used to make Canadian bacon, or an eye round roast of 4" or more in diameter for making dried beef. The injection guarantees that the curing agent will be all the way in to the center of the meat, but you still have to allow plenty of time for the curing period based on what is appropriate for the actual thickness of the meat. Think of the brine injection like an insurance policy, not a replacement for a slowly penetrating brine cure.

After six days (or longer by another day or two, to be certain of the cure, especially if any of the meat is more than 2" thick) of brining, put the vacuum sealed bag(s) [or Ziploc® bag(s)] into the sink, then cut or open it/them and drain off the brine. Then rinse the meat.

You now have raw, brine cured, corned beef. No further directions are provided in this recipe if all you want to make is corned beef. Refer to the Food Nirvana recipe for making corned beef.

Put the raw corned beef into a pot somewhat larger than the height of the combined pieces of meat and cover it with cold water.

Refrigerate it for 4 hours, changing the water once, after 2 hours. That removes any excess surface area salt absorbed by the meat during brining.

Thinking ahead: Buy rye bread (seeded or not), deli style brown mustard, sliced Swiss cheese, Kosher pickles and potato chips. Also good beer, and chill it. But if you want great rye bread that you can slice as thick as you want, make it using the Food Nirvana recipe, Ray's Rye Bread.

Step 4: Make the rub that will be used to coat the raw corned beef.

Ingredients:

To tenderize corned beef made from chuck roasts:

Apply 2 tbsp. of McCormick's® Meat Tenderizer (or other bromelain product, with concentration adjustment) at the rate of one teaspoon per pound of meat. The McCormick® product is mostly filler, not bromelain, so if you use a crushed tablet of high concentration of bromelain then mix it with some corn starch to approximate a 5% bromelain concentration. The way you know how much bromelain product to use is to weigh a tablet using a milligram scale and compare that weight to the listed number of milligrams of bromelain in one tablet. Then mix a crushed tablet (or more) with enough corn starch to have a 5% bromelain concentration.

Rub seasonings: (You will want to increase (by 25%) the rub seasoning ingredient amounts shown below if you have multiple pieces of cured meat, i.e., chuck roasts.) The reason is that you have increased the total surface area of the meat to be coated with the rub.

1 tablespoon of whole black peppercorns

2 tablespoons of whole coriander seeds

1 tablespoon of coriander powder

2 tablespoons of brown sugar

1 teaspoon of paprika

1 tablespoon of garlic powder

1 tablespoon of onion powder

½ teaspoon of whole yellow (white) mustard seeds

Directions:

Remove the raw corned beef from the pot of water and lightly dry it with paper towels.

If you started with chuck roasts, then apply the meat tenderizer all over the surfaces of the raw corned beef.

If you do not have a Magic Bullet® mixer then put the peppercorns, coriander seeds and mustard seeds into a Ziploc® freezer bag, seal it flat with the air expelled, then break up the seeds with the flat side of a kitchen mallet on a hard surface. Then combine the cracked seeds with the rest of the seasonings in a bowl and mix them with a spoon. Then skip the next two instructions.

If you have a Magic Bullet® mixer, then put all of the rub ingredients into a bowl. If you had to increase the ingredient amounts then use the larger of the two Magic Bullet® containers in the next step to hold the seasonings.

Spoon them into a Magic Bullet® mixer container and run the mixer briefly (about 30 to 60 seconds) until the whole seeds are "cracked" but not completely powdered.

Apply the rub liberally to the raw corned beef and press it into the entire surface of the meat by hand to help it adhere.

Refrigerate the (pieces of) meat overnight on a rack (or racks) placed on a disposable aluminum foil pan(s). Smaller pieces of meat should be placed against each other on a rack to make what looks like a larger piece of meat.

Step 5: Smoke the cured, rub coated raw corned beef

Set up your electric smoker:

Put a disposable aluminum foil drip pan on a low smoker shelf. That will help keep the smoker clean, collect some liquid from the smoking meat, and help with the later steaming process.

Decide what type of wood you want to use for smoking the meat. Hickory chips are a good choice, as are apple, maple or cherry, or a mixture.

Put about 1 1/2 cups of the wood chips into the smoke tray and put it into the smoker.

Preheat the smoker to 275°F.

Once the chips are smoldering/making a lot of smoke, reduce the smoker temperature setting to 250°F.

Put the rack(s) of cured, rubbed meat into the smoker on a high shelf/shelves, and be sure you that put a disposable empty aluminum foil tray/pan on a low shelf to catch any rub or drippings that fall from the meat during smoking. There will be a lot of liquid and that is good as it will start part of the steaming process. If you fail to do that, the meat drippings from the smoking process will soil the interior of your smoker.

Insert a wireless thermometer into the center of one of the larger pieces the meat. If you lack a wireless thermometer you will have to use an instant read thermometer to periodically (every fifteen to thirty minutes after the first two hours of smoking) check the internal temperature of the meat.

Smoke the meat for two hours. Then add two cups of boiling water to the foil tray/pan used to collect meat drippings, then close the smoker door, to create a steam environment. Note that there will already be some water from drippings in the foil tray/pan. About 30 minutes later, check the water level and add boiling water as necessary to continue steaming the meat.

If you don't have an Instant Pot® pressure steamer, you should smoke and steam the meat in the smoker until the internal temperature of the meat reaches 205°F. (This direction from other recipes is included here, but I question the wisdom of further drying out the pastrami by increasing the temperature beyond the stall.) Add water as needed to the foil pan to keep up the supply of steam. If the temperature increase stalls once it is around 190 degrees F, then increase the smoker temperature to 275 degrees F (or higher, like 325 degrees F, if your smoker temperature maximum is above 275 degrees F). Or maybe not ... your choice.

If you plan to use an Instant Pot® pressure steamer later (and I recommend that) then you can end the smoking process when the internal temperature of the meat is 190 degrees F. Why? Pressure steaming will take care of the remainder of the cooking. If you don't have a pressure steamer note that you will use a stovetop steamer later just before making sandwiches, said step intended to moisturize and tenderize the slices of pastrami.

Continue the smoking/steaming process (maybe) until the meat is at 205°F, or 190°F if you will later be using an Instant Pot® pressure steamer. Be sure to keep water in the steaming pan/tray in the smoker.

Remove the pieces of meat from the smoker and allow all of the meat to rest/cool to room temperature for about 30 minutes, unless you plan to pressure steam the pastrami.

Here are the Instant Pot® steamer instructions: Add one cup of beer (or water) to the bottom of the Instant Pot® (if your pressure steamer has a volume of 6 liters use one cup of liquid. Double that if the volume is 8 liters.) and place the smoked pastrami on a rack in the Instant Pot®. Cook at high pressure for 20 minutes. Turn the steamer off and use the steam release lever/tab to exhaust all of the steam, until the steamer is no longer pressurized. Take off the lid and check to see if the meat is moist and tender (flexible). If not, then repeat the pressure steaming of the meat for ten minutes longer. But note that if you pressure steam the meat for too long it will become "fall apart" tender and will not be suitable later for slicing. Remove the pastrami from the pressure steamer, keeping it on the steamer rack.

Vacuum seal all of the pieces of meat once they have cooled to room temperature and then refrigerate them. Alternatively, wrap the pieces of meat tightly in aluminum foil and refrigerate them.

Step 6: Serve the pastrami

Refrigerate the wrapped or vacuum sealed/pressure steamed pastrami for a few hours. Note that if you try to cut it immediately after smoking or after pressure steaming it will tend to break apart rather than cut into nice slices. The idea is the pressure steaming process makes the pastrami very tender and very moist. Chilling the meat first will help it hold together later during slicing.

Look at the meat and notice which way the grain is running.

Use a wood cutting board and cut the pastrami by hand (using a large, sharp knife) into thin slices, 1/8" thick, cross grain. Alternatively, use a good electric meat slicer like I do, which is very nice, easy and fast. Note that brisket will be better than top round for slicing.

Rewrap any remaining piece of pastrami with aluminum foil (or vacuum seal it). Then put it into the refrigerator (along with any other wrapped/sealed pieces of pastrami that you will use later).

If you used a pressure steamer the pastrami slices are now ready to eat. Otherwise steam the pastrami slices for 15 minutes in a stovetop steamer.

You want to serve the pastrami hot with the rye bread, deli style brown mustard and partially melted Swiss cheese.

You might want to grill the rye bread first (Yes, you do), using a thin spread of butter on one side of both pieces, and grill them in a medium hot skillet, until the grilled surfaces are slightly crisp and golden in color, but not burned.

The final steps described below are for making a grilled pastrami and Swiss cheese sandwich on rye bread. If you are instead making a Reuben sandwich or a Rachel sandwich then do not put mustard on the slices of rye bread. You will instead use thousand island dressing, and warm (but not wet) sauerkraut for the Reuben sandwich, or room temperature coleslaw that is not dripping wet for the Rachel sandwich. For both of those types of sandwiches you do not want the sauerkraut or the coleslaw filling to make the rye bread wet.

Pile the thin slices of pastrami for one sandwich on a paper plate or a saucer and put the Swiss cheese on top, then microwave it for 30 seconds to partially melt the cheese (This also heats the pastrami). Then make the sandwich, using the grilled rye bread with the mustard already spread on the soft inside surfaces of both pieces [and maybe that extra slice of Swiss cheese on the mustard of the bottom slice of rye bread]. Cut the sandwich in half using a partially diagonal cut. Repeat these steps for any additional sandwiches.

As a last step, microwave each cut sandwich briefly (30 seconds) to make everything warm or hot.

Serve each sandwich on a plate with a Kosher dill pickle and potato chips to the side.

Cold beer is the perfect beverage to accompany this fine sandwich. Be sure to serve it, or at the least serve some cold carbonated beverage.

Enjoy! You have truly earned this delightful treat.

Charcoal Grilled Dry Brined Rib Eye Steaks Sous-Vide With Compound Butter - ☺♥T

Wow! What a long, complicated, scary title! This food must take forever to prepare! What in the world is sous-vide? Is this stuff safe to eat? Why would I want to use a complicated procedure for making charcoal grilled steaks? Don't you just toss the meat onto the charcoal grill and have at it?

If you didn't ask or take time to think about the above questions then you already know the answers, or, you best not try this recipe as you don't pay enough attention to detail and will somehow ruin the steaks, possibly even making yourself and perhaps your partner ill from eating them. If, however, you are inherently curious about methods used by professional chefs to make superb food, and pretty much kitchen capable, then fasten your belt and get ready for some wonderful surprises, and a bit of work and patience.

Here is an important heads up ... I made the steaks and afterwards realized that I needed to change a few recipe recommendations. The most critical item was maintaining a consistent sous-vide water temperature, specifically not allowing it to climb above 130 degrees F. Live and learn ... Thus, the recipe you will read below reflects five different changes to the original recipe, and I'm not going to bore you with details and results of what didn't work best. So let's get on with what does matter.

Let me begin at the beginning ... This entire recipe is a composite of techniques I learned from reading J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's fantastic book, *The Food Lab*©. He discussed each of the techniques that will be used in this recipe in detail, but combining all of these techniques into one recipe for Food Nirvana was my decision. I think Kenji wisely avoided doing that as home cooks may not have the necessary equipment or other supplies, and if the meat is not handled properly it could become dangerous to eat. Note that Kenji is in no way responsible for any errors I have made in translating his directions nor for any of the directions I have provided that are my personal recommendations. Okay, you've had the warnings, and if you are still ready for a giant change for the better in how you make charcoal grilled Ribeye steaks then read on.

The easiest way to introduce the techniques is by narrative description, taking each technique in sequential order in terms of what you do to make the final wonderful steaks. The best way to proceed now is for you to read the recipe in entirety. Then plan how to acquire/assemble the necessary ingredients, equipment, etc., and how to fit all tasks into a time frame of one day plus about two hours that will guarantee you will serve a great meal without unexpected delays or risky shortcuts. Here we go ...

Purchase two Choice or Prime boneless Ribeye steaks of thickness 1 1/2" from a reputable butcher. Avoid buying them at the supermarket or warehouse club as the quality of their displayed meat can vary from excellent to terrible, and you sure don't want to put in a lot of preparation time only to wind up with inferior steaks. Demand that the thickness be 1 1/2" ... Nothing less, nothing more, as directions given in this recipe are specific to steaks of that thickness. They will each weigh approximately one pound, give or take. Keep them packaged and refrigerated briefly prior to use, which should happen within one or two hours or less. Whatever they weigh you will lose some of the weight when you trim off excess exterior fat while leaving a thickness of 1/8" or less of fat.

The fat is essential to having great taste and good grilling, but too much of it typically causes excess flaming on a charcoal grill. In this recipe, too much fat left on the meat could yield yucky undercooked fat because of the very short grilling time. According to Kenji, some chefs will even use a blowtorch to crisp a normal thickness of fat around the perimeter of a steak, particularly if it is pan fried instead of grilled over charcoal.

As for the charcoal grill, we are a long time at the moment from needing it, but when you prepare it and light it you want very high heat to result, so don't be cheap about how many briquettes you use. Think of an area about one foot in diameter with briquettes deep enough (three layers in the center of the grill) that the highest ones are only about two to three inches from the grill surface, in an even layer. The charcoal setup happens to be my recommendation, not Kenji's, though I think he would agree. Specifically, he recommends the use of a chimney for starting the charcoal, which minimizes the likelihood of having uneven heat or briquettes that expel charcoal lighter fumes when you are trying to do the grilling, which is awful. The chimney approach is best if the chimney can contain enough briquettes to create the configuration I described. Otherwise, use a minimum amount of charcoal lighter and give the grill plenty of time to reach maximum temperature and even burning of the hot briquettes. You might even accelerate that process early on by using tongs to move some of the hot briquettes around to low ignition areas to force balanced heating. Note that you don't need a huge charcoal grill to do two steaks. The small, 14" diameter bowl shaped types like those made by Weber® are fine, provided they have vent holes in the bottom to get plenty of air to go through the briquettes during use. And you might want to have a strong steel spatula designed for flipping the steaks during charcoal grilling, right?

So much for the charcoal grilling primer. Well, not quite. I now favor using an electric heating element accessory to ignite charcoal. That totally avoids the use of charcoal lighter or any other ignition accelerant, and it is less work than using

a chimney. You simply allow thirty minutes for initial heating time, having covered the heating element with briquettes, and then spread the briquettes around and give the grill another fifteen minutes to have all coals burning evenly. Okay, now let's get to the beef!

Take the steaks from the refrigerator and trim off the excess fat and discard it, or almost all of it. That includes any large chunk areas within the steak. Some people I know like to take one large piece of fat at grilling time, impale it with a long meat fork, and rub the hot grilling surface with it immediately prior to grilling the steaks. That is not a bad idea for general grilling as the meat is less likely to stick to the metal grill. The choice is yours. That large piece of fat may be a chunk you have to cut away from one end of the meat to avoid having it present at all during the grilling.

Okay, fat removal may result in a steak having a flap or tail of meat attached to the main body of the steak. In the worst case a section of the steak will become completely detached from the main body. We can deal with those possibilities, if necessary, right before grilling by attaching the flap, tail or section of meat to the main part of the steak using either wooden toothpicks or small metal skewers. In the meantime simply proceed per the directions that follow.

Put the steaks on a dinner plate and sprinkle coarse Kosher salt and crushed peppercorns on both sides of the meat. I like to use a Magic Bullet® high speed miniature blender to grind whole peppercorns because it is so easy and effective. Use about two teaspoons of coarse Kosher salt and one and one half teaspoons of crushed peppercorns for each steak, divided evenly to cover both sides. Rub the salt and pepper into the meat before flipping it to do the second side. Rub the salt and pepper into the second side also.

Let the meat rest for one hour at room temperature. You may note, early on, some liquid on the plate. It will mostly be reabsorbed by the end of the hour. That is good as the salt and the moisture have been returned into the meat.

Put the steaks on a cookie cooling rack, a small one is fine, and put the rack onto a cookie tray lined with one or two paper towels. Place the tray into the refrigerator with the steaks uncovered. You can proceed to the next step anytime after the steaks have spent 24 hours in the refrigerator. You will notice the outside of the steaks will appear drier, and that is very good, for ultimately the grilling and formation of the wonderful outside crust on the steaks will be accomplished much faster by already having partially dried the surfaces to be seared/browned/crusted. The salting/refrigeration procedure you used is known as dry brining. Now you understand the second part of the recipe title, also the first and third terms, right? We're making progress!

Soon you will be needing the Compound Butter referenced in the recipe title. Or not. It is your decision, so read the recipe here and decide. Do it, or not. Here is a simple recipe for one type of compound butter (there are numerous types). Put one stick of softened butter into a bowl. Add four ounces of softened bleu cheese of most any type, mix them together and then add one teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce and one small shallot, finely minced. Mix well and form the mixture into a one inch diameter log shape near the end of a sheet of plastic wrap, roll it from that end to the other, twisting the ends, and then refrigerate the mixture until it is needed. When needed you can cut off small slices of about 1 tbs. each to be used with individual steaks. The idea is that it will melt over the crisp surface of the hot steak and provide even more eating pleasure.

Okay. At this point you could grill the steaks, but there is a far superior way to make them perfectly medium rare throughout. It is called sous-vide cooking, and as you likely guessed it is French in origin and the process is now used by many fine steakhouses in the USA. Next we will learn about sous-vide cooking and why we want it and how to do it. Then you will do it, home style. After that, finally, you can actually grill the steaks.

A medium rare steak is one where the meat temperature is raised from what you had in the refrigerator (40 degrees F or lower) to 130 degrees F, evenly, throughout the steak. In sous-vide cooking that is achieved by taking the steaks from the refrigerator and individually vacuum sealing them, letting them come to room temperature (15 to 30 minutes), and then putting them into a water bath maintained at 130 degrees F, where they are kept for one hour to assure the internal steak temperature has risen to 130 degrees F. You can use a sealable bag without vacuum sealing provided you expel all air before sealing it.

Note that the vacuum sealing step prior to sous-vide cooking should be carefully controlled, such that the lowest effective level of vacuum that causes the vacuum sealing bag to cling to the meat is the right amount of vacuum to use, particularly if you dry brined the meat. You can practice a few times with other meat to find out what works best with your vacuum sealer. The idea is that excess vacuum will draw moisture out of the steak to the partially dried surface, which is to be avoided as the steak will not be as moist inside when you eat it if you have used too strong a vacuum.

Now, given that vacuum sealing may not work well with a dry brined steak for the reason given above, and given that you may not own a vacuum sealer, then you simply want to use a sealable plastic bag. The proper way to use a sealable plastic bag, of a type you know will not leak, like a Ziploc® freezer bag, is to put the meat into it, pressing out most of the air, then closing almost all of the seal, and then putting the bag slowly into the sous-vide water described below, except

for the tiny unsealed area that you will pinch shut just before completely submerging the bag of meat in the water. That procedure will eliminate the air in the bag well enough that any residual air will not interfere with good heat transmission during the sous-vide process.

Note: Once you complete the sous-vide cooking you only have a minute or two of grilling actions per side and it will be time to eat. I recommend putting all dishes and plates that will be used at your meal for hot food into a 180 degrees F warming oven, as that practice really improves eating enjoyment. I also strongly recommend that you prepare all the remaining items for your meal during the sous-vide cooking, to avoid delay in enjoying the grilled steaks.

Here is how you do sous-vide cooking at home (with the help of a quick read or instant digital thermometer) ... Use a two and one half to five gallon cooler and put in 2 gallons to 4 gallons of hot tap water at a temperature in excess of 130 degrees F, ideally 132 to 135 degrees F. If your tap water isn't hot enough then boil a gallon of water in a pot on your cooktop. Use some of that boiling water as necessary, such that the mixture of tap water and boiling water creates a 130 degrees F environment. Just the act of partially filling the cooler will start to reduce the water temperature, so starting with a temperature of 132 degrees F is perfectly okay. When the water temperature has dropped to 130 degrees F put in the vacuum sealed steaks, close the lid and wait for about 15 minutes. Open the cooler lid, check the temperature, and if necessary adjust the temperature back up to 130 degrees F by adding more boiling water and stirring with a large spoon. Repeat this process until the meat has had one hour to come to the proper internal temperature. If (Ugh!) you want medium instead of medium rare steaks the sous-vide water temperature should be 135 to 140 degrees F.

At the end of the sous-vide process the steaks are ready to be removed from the vacuum sealed bags and grilled. Note that the meat is already cooked to the proper temperature before it is grilled, so grilling is intended only to create the crisp browned exterior to the steaks and partial crisping of any thin fat layer around each steak.

My initial recommendation for grilling time differed from Kenji's for multiple reasons, but I was wrong. 30 seconds per side is quite sufficient on a really hot charcoal grill to create a browned/crisp surface on the steaks under normal weather and grilling conditions. You can vary the grilling time to get the browning you want but at the risk of undoing the sous-vide advantage of consistent doneness throughout the steak. Ambient temperature and delayed grilling could be negative factors in cooling the steaks before grilling. Simply think about the difference between grilling on a calm hot summer day versus grilling when the outside temperature is only 40 degrees F in windy conditions.

In any event, transfer the steaks from the 130 degrees F sous-vide environment directly onto the hot charcoal grill after removing the vacuum sealing bags. To my knowledge, Kenji never discussed variable weather conditions or delay in grilling the steaks as these considerations probably would not be present inside a commercial restaurant kitchen, but which could be important for the home chef using an outside portable charcoal grill.

Now you understand why it was important to eliminate most of the fat prior to grilling, for large areas of fat will never have enough time on the grill to melt away, burn, or become edible, as in crisp. But a very thin layer of fat on the perimeter does have the needed time exposed to very high heat to become tasty.

Now, suppose the early removal of internal chunks of fat caused the steak to have a loose flap or tail or complete section of disconnected meat. Prior to grilling, you can fasten that flap, tail or section in three or more places, if needed, to the main body of the steak using either wooden toothpicks or small steel skewers. What I actually experienced was the tail created when I removed fat did not require any action to fasten it later because the vacuum sealing and sous-vide cooking, in combination, caused the tail to hold tightly against the rest of the meat, even during grilling.

Okay, now do the grilling. Oops! Did you remember to rub a piece of beef fat on the grill surface first? Okay, now grill on ...

Remove the grilled steaks to a pre-heated dinner plate. You might offer access to your barely used hot charcoal grill to less fortunate neighbors for them to do their hamburgers and hot dogs!

Now it is time (optionally) to put a dollop (about one tbsp.) of the compound butter, prepared earlier, on the top side of each steak. Brush it around with a pastry brush to coat the surface. If you want, you can flip the steak over and do the same thing on the second side. Note: It is perfectly okay to skip the addition of the compound butter. Your choice.

Okay, folks ... If you prepared the rest of the meal during the sous-vide period you are now ready to eat. If you didn't prepare the other meal items then you are about to become very unpopular. People want steaks with a crisp exterior not a soft one from sitting around too long after grilling.

Typically, steaks should be "rested" under an aluminum foil tent for up to ten minutes after grilling. That keeps the juices from running out of the steak and all over your plate when you cut it. The resting period only needs to be about "one" minute for steaks done sous-vide. That is very good as they remain crisp on the

outside, and if you applied some compound butter they already had that very short resting period.

Time to chow down ... Life is wonderful, isn't it? If you happened to use toothpicks or skewers do let your guests know to remove them. Now you can tell your friends about sous-vide cooking and all the other fancy but important preparations described in this recipe, leading to perfect grilled Ribeye steaks ... Crisp on the outside and perfectly medium rare throughout, not to mention a lovely intense beefy flavor.

Note: Due to the application of salt and pepper done earlier, prior to dry brining, DO NOT SALT, PEPPER or otherwise season the steaks until you have tasted them or you may ruin the entire experience.

Charcoal Grilled Steaks - ☺♥

This All-American fare needs no introduction. All we need to cover are the basics.

Here are the basics: 1) Buy only well marbled Choice or Prime beef and 2) Trim excess fat from the perimeter prior to grilling and 3) Use only a very hot charcoal grill, not a gas grill and 4) Have all other meal items prepared before grilling the steaks, including beverages. That's it.

Ingredients:

Ribeye or Delmonico or Porterhouse or T-bone steaks, or beef filet ... cut 1 1/2 inches thick.

You might also use a good thick top sirloin to save money. It will not be as tender after grilling as the other cuts of beef as it is lean/not marbled with fat. Avoid New York Strip Steak as it tends to be too comparatively tough, as in not tender, to justify the always high price.

1 tbsp. peanut oil per steak

Kosher salt

Freshly crushed black peppercorns

Directions:

Trim all excess exterior fat from the meat, leaving a thin (1/16" to 1/8" thick) coating of fat where there is fat. Any large areas of fat in the interior of the meat should also be removed/cut out. Put the meat on a plate and have it at room temperature. Note that you can wrap a filet with bacon (using small steel skewers) that has been partially cooked in a skillet (about half of the fat rendered but still flexible) as filets have no appreciable fat.

You can crush whole peppercorns in a Ziploc® freezer bag with the flat side of a wooden kitchen mallet, or better, use a Magic Bullet® mixer.

Put a fine coating of peanut oil on the top and bottom surfaces of each steak.

Sprinkle both sides of the meat with Kosher salt and crushed black peppercorns and rub them into the meat. I have to thank my son, Ray, Jr. for this seasoning treatment of the meat before grilling. While visiting Brazil, he learned that the Brazilians use this seasoning/searing technique with great results.

Prepare and light a charcoal grill with the charcoal briquettes at least three briquettes deep and a grill large enough to easily accommodate the number of steaks to be grilled. Allow the briquettes to all turn completely gray. This will allow time for all of the charcoal lighter to have burned off or evaporated, and, you want completely even very high heat across the grill so all pieces of meat grill evenly and quickly. One sure way to destroy a good steak is to grill it slowly, for then it becomes dry and tough. Ugh! Have the grilling surface two to three inches above the briquettes.

Preheat a meat platter in a 200° F oven.

Put the steaks on the grill with at least an inch of clearance on all sides. Have a very good quality long handled wide steel spatula ready to turn the steaks when needed. Grill the steaks for five minutes on each side. This will typically produce a medium rare steak. Think four minutes per side for rare and six to seven minutes per side for medium. If excessive flaming occurs during grilling then move the affected steaks on top of other steaks until the fat burns off. Adjust the grilling time for those steaks accordingly. When the steaks are done they will be fairly crisp on the outside and very juicy and pink and tender on the inside.

Remove the steaks to the platter that was pre-heated in the 200° F oven.

Serve the steaks immediately with whatever else you chose for your meal. The steaks should not be held for any extra time as they are at their peak immediately after grilling. Eat them immediately. The typical recommendation to rest meat for five to ten minutes after grilling or roasting is not valid as you will waste at least five minutes getting your guests seated and ready to eat, with drinks served. Note that the steaks should not require seasoning, but it is smart to have salt and pepper mills available.

Drink ice cold beer or a fine red (but not sweet) wine, like Pinot Noir.

Love life.

Chateaubriand - ☺♥

Chateaubriand is the most costly piece of beef ... the heart of the tenderloin. It is typically prepared by roasting with noticeable seasoning as the beef flavor is very mild, in fact too mild to taste "beefy.". The meat is so tender you can cut it with a fork. Made well it is a dish to make you moan with pleasure.

I've had Chateaubriand in some excellent restaurants known for their beef, in Wilmington, DE (Constantinou's House of Beef), in Detroit, MI (London Chop House), and in Chicago, IL (Kelsey's). There were other fine restaurants in other locations in the USA and Europe as well, where I ate great Chateaubriand and/or other fine beef filet entree's, too many to remember and too many to list! In short, the meals and great, high quality meat I've been lucky enough to experience set my expectations for when I would make Chateaubriand.

This past year my sweetheart, Peggy, ordered various meats from Kansas City Steaks®, including some Chateaubriand filets. She prepared one using the directions given and the included seasoning packet. She made only one mistake ... serving their version of good Chateaubriand to me. I was appalled with the meat being overcooked and way over seasoned. One might as well have coated the meat heavily with Montreal Steak Seasoning, which is over the top and not suitable for better cuts of meat unless used quite sparingly.

Thus, when I recently decided to make Chateaubriand for us, for my first time, I turned to my food science guru, J. Kenji Lopez-Alt for a Chateaubriand recipe, using the SeriousEats.com website. My, was I pleased to learn what he did, and this recipe is quite similar to his. I am passing this on to you for multiple reasons, not the least of which is for you to understand his excellent creativity in developing new ways to make excellent food taste and look even better.

Kenji uses a technique that he calls Reverse Searing. What that means is the searing of the roast happens at the end of cooking, not at the beginning. The reason? More of the interior of the roast remains perfectly pink, all the way through, without sacrificing a beautiful crust on the outside. In short, you will now learn how to make superb Chateaubriand ... I did on my first attempt, and all because Kenji's method is essentially foolproof and guaranteed to yield great results, including the aromatic herb seasoning, which is not overpowering, but just right to impart some complexity to the beef.

Kenji also recommends serving diced chives and a horseradish cream sauce with the beef. I heartily agree and Food Nirvana has a fine recipe for making the sauce. Use it. We did and we loved having that sauce with the Chateaubriand.

Ingredients: (Serves 3 to 4 adults)

2 lb. beef tenderloin center, trimmed

1 shallot, chopped

6 sprigs of fresh thyme

3 or 4 tbsp. of butter

6 finely diced chives

Kosher or coarse sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Cooking supplies/materials:

Butcher's cord to tie the roast

A baking sheet and a small steel cooling rack

An instant read thermometer

A heavy cast iron skillet, a soup spoon and tongs

At serving time: Sprinkle the chives over the slices of Chateaubriand on a platter and provide the Horseradish Cream Sauce on the side by serving it in a single bowl to be shared by all of the lucky guests (and you).

Directions:

Kenji places the filet uncovered on a plate in the refrigerator after seasoning it with salt. Then he leaves it sit overnight to partially dry the exterior of the meat and to gain the benefit of the tenderizing effect of the salt applied hours before cooking. I bypassed his first step. I simply wiped off excess moisture with paper towels, seasoned the filet with salt and pepper and tied it with butcher's cord around the perimeter once every inch along the length of the filet.

Make Horseradish Cream Sauce using the Food Nirvana recipe. Cover it and keep it refrigerated until it is used.

Set the oven temperature at 230 degrees F. (Note that Kenji uses 225 degrees F and 3 to 4 hours of low temperature roasting. I was more in a hurry due to the long roasting cycle and me not wanting to wait to eat dinner until 9:00 P.M. that night. To point, 3 hours of roasting at 230 degrees F did the trick.)

Wipe off excess moisture from the room temperature filet with paper towels and roll the filet on a flat surface (like a wood cutting board) across a mixture of Kosher or coarse sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Tie the seasoning coated filet with butcher's cord around the perimeter every inch along the length.

Place the filet on a cooling rack on a baking sheet and roast it for 3 hours, checking the internal temperature periodically after the first 2 1/2 hours.

Now is the time to make all the side dishes you plan to serve with the Chateaubriand, during the roasting period. Baked potatoes are a nice side dish (served with whatever toppings you like), as are French Fries prepared immediately before serving the Chateaubriand. A traditional tossed salad with the dressing(s) of your choice is also very nice. Some people like to have soft dinner rolls with butter. A mild red wine makes a fine beverage with the Chateaubriand. Ice cream or gelato make a fine dessert. Or you can go (pardon the expression) "whole hog" and make a sinful chocolate mousse or a decadent butterscotch pudding. My recipe for the decadent butterscotch pudding is in Food Nirvana. There is also a very nice but significantly more complicated recipe for Espresso Panna Cotta Mousse.

After the first two and one half hours, check the internal temperature at the center of the filet with an instant read thermometer. If it measures 135 degrees F the roasting is done. Otherwise continue roasting and checking the temperature every 15 minutes until the interior temperature is 135 degrees F. That will yield a perfectly pink medium rare to medium interior to the roast, all the way through.

Put the filet aside to rest while you prepare the large (12" diameter) cast iron skillet for the searing step.

Chop/slice the shallot and strip the leaves from the thyme stems.

Dice the chives that will be used as a garnish at serving time.

Melt the butter in the skillet on high heat and continue heating it until the foam subsides and it starts to turn a nutty brown color. Then add the shallot and thyme ingredients and mix them with the butter.

The skillet is now hot enough to sear the filet. Do adjust the heat down if necessary during the searing process to avoid burning the butter or having smoke from the skillet set off your home smoke detectors. I use an exhaust fan to eliminate smoke.

Put the filet into the hot buttery skillet and spoon the shallot and thyme and butter mixture all over the top.

After one minute turn the filet about one eighth of a turn (with tongs) to sear the next area and repeat dispensing the shallot and thyme and butter mixture over the top with a spoon.

Continue turning and searing and dispensing the other ingredients on top of the filet until the filet has been seared all around. The total searing time is roughly eight minutes with no area being seared for more than one minute. Note once again that during searing you may have to reduce the heat to keep the butter from getting too hot (burning/excessive smoking).

Serve the filet hot on a preheated platter and sliced into pieces 1/2" thick and sprinkled with the diced chives. Be sure to provide coarse sea salt, freshly ground pepper and the horseradish cream sauce on the side.

Serve the prepared side dishes, and possibly some soft dinner rolls with butter, as well.

Yes, a mild red wine like Merlot goes very well with this meal, along with glasses of ice water on the side.

If you serve a mousse or the decadent butterscotch pudding for dessert be sure to also serve hot freshly made coffee.

Enjoy!

Chili Con Carne - ☺♥

This dish is great in the winter or on cool days. It goes great with beer. It is basically a one dish very tasty, filling and satisfying meal, served with crackers and butter or with whatever artisan bread you like.

If you have the very good fortune to have made the Food Nirvana recipe for Chili Powder then use 5 tbsp. of it in this recipe and skip using any other chili powder. Also skip the use of the Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce, the Habanero sauce and the red pepper flakes. You can always add hot sauce, like Sriracha, later if you want to ramp up the heat. The idea is the Food Nirvana Chili Powder has a small kick to it, so it isn't totally mild, but it is perfect for people who don't want a highly seasoned (hot) chili.

Ingredients:

- 1, 28 oz. can of peeled whole plum tomatoes coarsely chopped**
- 3 stalks of celery chopped medium**
- 1 medium onion chopped medium**
- 4 cloves of fresh garlic chopped fine**
- 2 tbsp. of corn oil**
- 1 lb. of Ground beef (additional 1/2 lb. or more, ground beef or pork, if you are a meat lover)**
- 2 tsp. of sea salt**
- 1 tsp. of black pepper**
- 3 tbsp. of chili powder (or more according to your preference)**
- 2 tsp. of ground cumin**
- ¼ cup of Texas Pete's® (or other) Hot Sauce (optional)**
- 1, tsp. of Habanero sauce (optional)**
- 1/2 tsp. of Red pepper flakes or one medium hot to hot chopped dried pepper**
- 1, 12 oz. bottle of beer**
- ½ cup of dry red wine**

2, 19 oz. cans of Kidney beans

Various toppings (optional) like grated cheddar cheese or raw onion pieces

Saltine crackers and butter or any artisan bread

Directions:

Heat the corn oil in a large, deep skillet on medium high heat. Add the ground beef (and ground pork if you are using it) and brown it, breaking it up into small pieces.

Add the onion and celery to the beef and continue cooking until the onion is translucent.

Reduce the heat to medium. Add the garlic, chili powder, ground cumin, salt and pepper, mix well and continue cooking for three minutes with a lid on the skillet.

Add the can of tomatoes and break up the tomatoes with the front end of a spatula (or pre-chop the tomatoes before adding them to the skillet). Add the Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce, the Habanero sauce (optional) and the red pepper flakes or chopped dried pepper (seeds included) and mix well. Increase the heat to high and add the beer and the wine. Mix again and cook covered until the mixture comes to a boil.

Reduce the heat to medium. Add the kidney beans and mix well. Taste the chili and add as much additional chili powder and/or other spices to suit yourself. Cook on medium heat and then later, as the mixture thickens, low heat at a slow boil, almost a simmer, stirring every two to three minutes.

When the volume of the liquid is reduced to create chili of the consistency you like the chili is done (the chili will tend to thicken later, so it is better to stop the cooking while the chili still has a fair amount of liquid showing). But you must stir it thoroughly every few minutes while it is simmering to make sure it is not sticking to the bottom of the skillet and overcooking. Remove it from the stove.

Serve the chili in warm bowls with saltine crackers and butter. Some folks like to cover the chili with grated cheddar cheese and/or small pieces of chopped raw onion.

I enjoy a very cold and harsh beer like Budweiser® in a frozen mug to accompany this highly seasoned dish.

Yes, you will really enjoy this chili con carne!

Chinese Pepper Steak - 😊♥♥♥😊

I found a great looking recipe for this dish on the Internet so I decided to try it and make whatever changes were necessary to fit my preferences. Some of the ingredients can have substitutions, like the Shaoxing wine, where instead you can use Dry Sherry or Mirin or Sake. Also, instead of oyster sauce you can use Hoisin sauce. When it comes to the beef the recipe said it is best to stick with flank steak though London broil can be used and simply marinated longer (overnight) in the velveting step. Velveting is the secret to having tender beef in this dish.

I used a slab of bottom round roast, defatted and cut into 2" long 3/4" wide 1/4" thick strips and velveted in the refrigerator in a Ziploc® quart freezer bag for six hours, and it was tender when served. Even so, I recommend a thickness of 1/8" if you use any cut of beef other than flank steak, just to guarantee tenderness. Before making the dish I bought the best Shaoxing rice cooking wine, the best Oyster Sauce and the best light Soy Sauce online via Amazon®. I figured I will get lots of use from all three products.

Chinese Pepper Steak is my sweetheart Peggy's favorite, so now you know why I captured this already fine recipe for Food Nirvana. But I had a reason to develop the recipe, which is to make it amenable to vacuum sealing and freezing for later use, to be heated and served along with freshly cooked rice. I expect the vegetables to come out more limp than when the dish is freshly made, but I think that is a minor downside vs. having a nice backup supply to use any time we want pepper steak without the labor of cooking it from scratch. Thus, when I prepare it I will make enough for eight servings, in three batches ... two servings to be used immediately and six to be vacuum sealed and frozen for future use.

The only ingredient/seasoning changes I made to the recipe were to use a whole red bell pepper instead of half a red bell pepper, and to increase the roasted sesame oil from 1/2 teaspoon to 1 teaspoon. But I also used chicken broth when making the steamed rice.

Note that times shown for the stir frying depend in part on the size of your wok and on the ability of your stove to heat the wok, so you may have to stir fry a bit longer than what is provided in the directions.

Net Result ... To Die For Delicious! And credit must go in part to the premium products I bought for my pantry ... Shaoxing wine, Oyster Sauce and Light Soy Sauce ... to prepare for making this dish. It is flat out superb! Credit must also go to the makers of the Internet recipe, The Woks of Life, as it was the real thing, not some half baked idea, as proven by my results. So here is a big Thank You to the folks who provided this recipe!

Ingredients: (makes 2 generous or 3 regular servings)

For the beef:

12 ounces of flank steak (or London broil, etc., ergo lean beef)

1 1/2 tablespoons of water

2 teaspoons of cornstarch

2 teaspoons of neutral oil (like canola oil)

2 teaspoons of oyster sauce (or hoisin sauce)

2 teaspoons of Shaoxing wine (or dry sherry or sake)

1/4 teaspoon of baking soda

For the rest of the dish:

1/2 cup of chicken broth

1 tablespoon of cornstarch

1 1/2 tablespoons of oyster sauce (or hoisin sauce)

1 tablespoon of Shaoxing wine (or dry sherry or sake)

1 tablespoon of light soy sauce

1 teaspoon of dark soy sauce

1/2 teaspoon of sugar

1 teaspoon of roasted sesame oil

1/8 teaspoon of white pepper

1 green bell pepper, cut into 1/2" wide 2" long strips

1 red bell pepper, cut into 1/2" wide 2" long strips

1 medium onion, chopped into 1"x1" pieces

2 tablespoons of neutral oil (like canola oil or peanut oil)

1/2 teaspoon of fresh ginger (minced)

2 cloves of garlic (cut them into thin slices)

For the rice:

1 cup of uncooked Basmati rice, cooked/steamed for 14 minutes in one pint of chicken broth

Directions:

Slice the beef into 3-inch long strips, about 1/8" to 1/4" thick. To make slicing easier, do it when the beef is slightly frozen and firm.

Velvet the beef: in a medium bowl, mix the beef with the water, cornstarch, oil, oyster sauce, Shaoxing wine and baking soda. Set aside for at least 30 minutes or overnight, covered, in the refrigerator (The longer marinating time is needed for tougher beef cuts like London broil).

Prepare the steamed rice you plan to use for this meal, according to package directions.

Put your pepper steak serving bowl and guest plates into a 180 degrees F warming oven. Put the cooked rice into a serving bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and place it in the warming oven.

Make the sauce by mixing together the chicken stock, cornstarch, oyster sauce, Shaoxing wine, light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, sugar, roasted sesame oil, and white pepper. Set the sauce aside.

Cut the bell peppers into strips and the onion into 1-inch pieces. Make sure that the pepper and onion pieces are all about the same size, so they cook evenly.

Heat the wok over high heat until it is smoking. Add 1 tablespoon of canola oil to coat the wok. Sear the beef on both sides, about 30 seconds (or a bit more if the beef is 1/4" thick) per side. Give everything a final stir, then transfer the beef back to the marinating bowl, and set it aside. The beef should be about 80% cooked.

Reduce the heat to medium-high. Add the remaining tablespoon of oil to the wok. Toss in the ginger, and caramelize it for about 10 seconds. Then add the garlic, bell peppers, and onions. Stir-fry for 2 minutes.

Add the beef along with any juices. Stir-fry for 1 minute until all ingredients are combined. Increase the heat to high. Stir the sauce to re-incorporate the cornstarch, and then add it to the wok.

Stir-fry to coat everything with the sauce, which should thicken from the cornstarch. (Add more stock or water if the sauce looks too thick, or let the sauce cook down further if it is too thin.)

Once the sauce is simmering and thickened to your liking, transfer the dish to the pre-warmed serving bowl, then serve individual portions of the pepper steak with the steamed rice on the pre-warmed plates.

Enjoy!

Corned Beef - ☺♥T

The following recipes describe how to cure (preserve via salt, sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate) a beef brisket or a top round roast and turn either one into delicious corned beef. There are two different recipes shown for curing the beef brisket, a dry curing procedure and a brine procedure. Cooking instructions for making corned beef are shown after the curing procedures.

I begin by explaining why the home cook is wise to make corned beef rather than buy brisket in a brine solution already cured or in cans as cooked corned beef at the local supermarket.

Corning beef is one process I considered various times but I never took the steps to do it until now. Why? It used to be convenient to buy the beef already corned, in brine, and of decent quality. And the canned corned beef products from South America, while expensive, were essentially all good beef, and firm to the touch.

Well, times change, and in this instance not for the better. Ever since meat processors starting using water infusion to cheat us (enhance their profits), the quality and effective meat weight of various meat products (ham, bacon, ground beef, chicken, lunch meats, etc.) has gone substantially downhill. Even the corned beef sold in brine is fluid logged, and the fat to lean meat ratio is typically terrible ... much worse than, let's say, 30 or more years ago. To be blunt, the price and quality issues of the corned beef products sold in supermarkets, including the canned corned beef products, are enough to make me gag.

Basically, buying 3 pounds of so called premium flat thin cut corned beef in brine, for \$4.50 per pound (in 2020), results in about 1.5 pounds of useful lean meat at serving time, if you are lucky. That price is a bit stiff for beef brisket! It is closer to the price per pound of whole beef filet. I do multiple experiments with the supermarket packages of corned beef and here are the latest results. A 4.25 pound package of corned beef, after cooking and separating out the large areas of fat, yielded only 1 pound 11 ounces of lean meat. That translates to a final yield of 40%, not even 50%. Thus, paying \$4.99/lb. (the current price), the purchased package costs the consumer \$21.21. Given the fat and liquid losses from cooking, and the final weight of lean meat of 1 pound 11 ounces, and you have just purchased corned beef for the real price of \$12.57 per pound! For that price per pound you can literally buy whole beef filet!

I now find the canned corn beef products to be much softer than they used to be. Yes, the weight is the same, maybe, but the meat is no longer in compressed chunks where you could see the fat content. Instead, the meat is ground into a

paste where you wind up getting less meat, more fat and added water. That is disgusting.

Thus, now you know my reasons for putting beef corning recipes in Food Nirvana. It is time to shun the meat processors and make our own corned beef. The recipes below are two of many, and as usual I've made significant changes to achieve what I think is the best. You can try these recipes and then perhaps experiment in terms of flavoring ingredients as you consider the taste of what you have made. You are the boss.

In any event, let's beat the greedy processors at their game by ignoring them and their products. You can save a lot of money and have much higher quality. Buy your own beef brisket or other less expensive cut of lean beef, like top round roast, and get busy. You can easily turn it into corned beef.

Recipes I've read for making corned beef from beef brisket sometimes note that other cuts of beef won't work as well as beef brisket because of it's unique flesh/collagen composition, leading to better tenderness. I tried using raw top round roast and it came out pretty good, and it was only one half the price per pound of raw beef brisket, which at that time cost \$6 per pound. It wasn't quite as tender so I decided to use a small amount of meat tenderizer (with bromelain [from pineapple] enzyme) when I'd cure future cuts of top round roast and I was betting that would produce excellent results. I figured I would change this recipe if/when my experimenting is completed/successful. Well, you can buy McCormick's® meat tenderizer at the supermarket (or, less expensively, bromelain tablets via the Internet). Okay ... I did the deed! My experiment led to perfect success. Lucky you!

The McCormick product is rather expensive given that it is almost all salt and dextrose and very little bromelain. As a substitute, you can buy bottles of 500 mg bromelain tablets cheaply and make your own tenderizer mix. Each teaspoon of the McCormick product is intended to cover one pound of meat. You can make that approximate equivalent by crushing three 500 mg tablets of bromelain (they aren't pure bromelain) and mixing that with 1/2 teaspoon of salt and 1/4 teaspoon of dextrose, or, plain sugar if you don't have dextrose. I recommend the crushing and mixing be done using a Magic Bullet® mixer, and be sure to scale up the quantities for your five pound top round roast. Finally, McCormick recommends cutting shallow slits in the meat surface to get better penetration of the tenderizer. Your call.

Here is another hint if you are dry curing the beef ... moistening the raw meat with Wright's Liquid Smoke® prior to applying the curing agent and spices mixture yields a most delicious corned beef. A cut above ordinary corned beef.

But that step is optional. You will save a lot of money if you buy the Liquid Smoke via the Internet in the one gallon jug size.

Okay, let's start with a dry curing recipe from the Morton® Salt Company, modified to include meat tenderizer so you can use top round beef roast instead of beef brisket. They sell a simple product that contains salt, sodium nitrate and sodium nitrite, and the recipe I am providing here is one provided online at Morton's® web site for using my bag of Morton's® Tender Quick® curing agent. I recommend using latex or nitrile gloves when directly packing/rubbing in dry cure ingredients onto the raw beef brisket since the sodium nitrate and sodium nitrite in the curing mix can be absorbed through the skin of your hands. You do not want that to happen as direct absorption or ingestion of those chemicals is toxic and can be fatal.

Tender Quick® is a mixture of salt, sugar, 0.5% sodium nitrate, 0.5% sodium nitrite and propylene glycol. Note that Morton® used to make another curing/flavoring mixture, Sugar Cure®, that was used to cure hams and bacon. That product is no longer available from Morton®. But the Morton® website shows a recipe for adding sugar to Tender Quick® to turn pork into ham. Note that the best sugar to use is dextrose, which you can buy online cheaply via Amazon®. It is less sweet than sucrose, our common table sugar, so it avoids making cured meat too sweet.

Ingredients:

One lean 5 lb. beef brisket (or, optionally, a defatted top round beef roast)

5 tablespoons of Morton® Tender Quick® curing mix

2 tablespoons of brown sugar

1 tablespoon of ground black pepper

1 teaspoon of ground paprika

1 teaspoon of ground bay leaves

1 teaspoon of ground allspice

1/2 teaspoon of garlic powder

2 tablespoons of McCormick's® Meat Tenderizer or other equivalent bromelain product (if you are using top round roast)

1 or 2 tablespoons of Wright's Liquid Smoke® (optional)

Directions:

Trim the surface fat from the meat, especially any membrane that appears as a silvery shiny thin covering, tightly attached to the lean flesh. I slip the tip of a sharp boning knife under the edge of the silver skin, then pull up on the silver skin and gradually remove it by cutting across the meat with the boning knife flat, right at the surface where the lean flesh joins the silver skin.

If you are using top round roast then use the tenderizer powder (Either the McCormick product or what you have made from bromelain tablets) and coat the surfaces of the meat. Let the meat rest for 30 minutes.

Mix the Morton® Tender Quick® curing mix with the remaining seasoning ingredients in a small bowl. Then use a Magic Bullet® mixer to blend those ingredients and turn the mixture into a powder.

Put on latex or nitrile gloves.

If you use the Liquid Smoke then moisten the surfaces of the beef with it.

Rub the curing agent and spices mixture on to and into all brisket/top round surfaces.

Put the brisket or top round roast into a “food grade” plastic bag, minimizing the amount of air in the bag, and tie or close the open end securely. Or you can do what I do and use a vacuum seal bag and vacuum seal the meat.

Refrigerate the packaged curing agents and seasonings, etc. and meat and allow the meat to cure 5 days per inch of meat thickness. One way to shorten the curing time is to cut the meat so it doesn't exceed two inches thick. Another method is to cut slices into thick meat every two inches so the curing agent will be certain to penetrate completely in ten days.

Turn the bag over once per day to assure even curing.

When the curing time is complete, remove the brisket/top round roast from the bag and rinse it and rub it well to remove seasonings and curing chemicals.

To make traditional corned beef, put the meat into a Dutch oven or into a one gallon pot. Choose a Dutch oven or pot size that is close to the area (size when laid flat) of the meat so you don't wind up using too much water, which would weaken the final flavors of the corned beef.

Add water to cover the meat under 1" of water.

Add one tbsp. of mixed pickling spices (supermarkets and Internet vendors sell it, or simply use the pickling spices recipe below, which is what I recommend).

Bring the water in the pot to a boil, covered, then reduce the heat to very low.

Simmer the meat until it is fork tender, about 3 1/2 hours.

At this point the corned beef is ready to eat. Remove it from the pot and put it on a wooden cutting board and, when somewhat cool, slice it across the grain (never along the grain) into 3/8" thick slices. Serve it hot.

Do not be dismayed if some corned beef slices fall apart, which will happen if the corned beef was cooked longer than necessary. The quality and taste of the meat are so good you won't care if you build a sandwich from a pile of cut meat or serve it mixed in with vegetables instead of having picture perfect slices. Oh, you do want to serve hot corned beef with some horseradish cream sauce. Yes, the recipe is in Food Nirvana.

You also have the choice of not cutting the hot corned beef. Instead, let it cool to room temperature, wrap it in plastic wrap and refrigerate it overnight. The next day, and for some days beyond, you can slice nice thin pieces of the corned beef for cold or hot sandwiches. They will be delicious.

This concludes the dry curing and cooking steps.

Now I provide a curing recipe where a brine is used instead of a dry curing process.

Ingredients:

Pickling spices:

1 tbsp. of whole allspice berries (or 2 tsp. of ground allspice)

1 tbsp. of whole mustard seeds (brown or yellow)

1 tbsp. of coriander seeds

1 tbsp. of red pepper flakes

1 tbsp. of whole black peppercorns

2 tsp. of whole cloves

9 whole cardamom pods (or 1 1/2 tsp. of ground cardamom)

6 large bay leaves, crumbled

2 tsp. of ground ginger

1/2 stick of cinnamon (optional - used only during brining)

Brine:

1 gallon of water

2 cups of Kosher Salt

2.5 tsp. (14.6 grams) of pink curing salt (Prague #1)

3 tbsp. of the pickling spices

1/2 cup of brown sugar

Other:

5 tsp. of McCormick's® or other Meat Tenderizer (optional, only if you are curing top round roast)

Pink curing salt, or 6.25% sodium nitrite plus 93.75% sodium chloride (table salt), goes by many names, such as Prague Powder #1 or DQ Curing Salt #1, and is easily available online and may be available at your local specialty market or butcher shop. If you don't have it, you can still make corned beef, but it is necessary to have sodium nitrite for that vibrant pink color we associate with corned beef. And it adds flavor too. Without it the final corned beef you serve will be a dull grey color.

Note that pink curing salt is NOT Himalayan pink salt. Pink curing salt is toxic and can be deadly if ingested directly, which is why it is colored pink, so consumers do not mistake it for table salt.

Brisket:

1, lean 5 pound beef brisket (or, optionally, defatted top round beef roast)

2 tbsp. of pickling spices

Directions:

Toast and crush the spices:

You can either use store-bought pickling spices or you can make your own. To make your own, toast the allspice berries, mustard seeds, coriander seeds, red pepper flakes, peppercorns, cloves, and cardamom pods lightly in a small frying pan on medium heat until fragrant. Note that it is pretty easy to burn the spices;

you want enough heat to release their flavors, but not so much that they get burned. In other words, keep the heat low to medium low.

Remove the skillet from the heat and place the spices in a small bowl. You can use a mortar and pestle to crush the spices a little, or use the back of a spoon or the side of a knife on a flat surface. Even better, put them into a Magic Bullet® mixer and run it for no more than thirty seconds (my method, simple, easy and fast). Add the crushed spices to a small bowl and stir in the crumbled bay leaves and the ground ginger.

Make the curing brine with the spices, salts, sugar and water:

Add about 3 Tbsp. of the spice mix (reserve the rest for cooking the corned beef after it has cured), plus the half stick of cinnamon, to a gallon of water in a large pot, along with the Kosher salt, the pink curing salt, and the brown sugar.

Bring to a boil, then remove the pot from the heat and let the contents cool to room temperature. Then refrigerate the brine until it is well chilled.

If you are curing top round roast then apply meat tenderizer all over the surface of the meat using one teaspoon of tenderizer per pound of meat. Let the meat rest for 30 minutes. Do this when the brine is nearly chilled.

Cover the brisket with the brine, then chill it: (three different methods are described next ... use the one that will work best for you)

Method #1: Place the brisket in a large, flat container or pan, and cover it with the brine. The brine should cover the meat. If the meat floats, weigh it down with a plate or two to keep it submerged.

Method #2: Alternatively, you can use a 2-gallon freezer or baking bag (placed in a high sided baking casserole so if it leaks it doesn't leak all over your refrigerator), place the brisket in the freezer/baking bag with about 3 quarts of the brine, squeezing out the air from the bag before sealing it.

Method #3: Cut the brisket approximately in half crosswise so that the weight of each piece is about the same. Then put each piece into a 10" x 16" vacuum seal bag. Then pour half of the brine into each bag. Then vacuum seal the bags, put them into the refrigerator, and turn them over once a day for the correct number of days described next.

Place the brining meat in the refrigerator and keep it chilled for 6 to 8 days if the brisket is 2" thick, 8 to 10 days if it is 2 1/2" thick, or 10 to 12 days if it is 3" thick. I prefer to use the higher number of curing days to be certain the sodium nitrite has reached the center of the meat. Flip the brisket over once each day, so

that all sides get brined equally. Note that forcing the meat to stay submerged will accomplish that purpose so you don't have to flip the meat, but I suggest you do it anyway to equalize salt concentration.

To cook the cured meat:

At the end of the cure, remove the brisket from the brine and rinse off the brine with cold water. Place the brisket into a large pot that just fits around the brisket and cover it with one inch of water. If you want your brisket to be less salty, add another inch of water to the pot. I avoid the extra water but I do add water during cooking if/when necessary, for some of the water will evaporate during cooking. I also flip the meat over about every 30 minutes to assure even cooking in the simmering water.

Add a tablespoon of the pickling spices to the pot. Bring the contents to a boil, then reduce the heat to a very low simmer (barely bubbling), and cook for 3 1/2 hours, covered, or until the corned beef is fork tender. (At this point you can, if you want, remove it from the pot, let it cool to room temperature, and package the meat tightly in plastic wrap, and store it in the refrigerator for up to a week.)

Cut the meat across the grain:

Remove the meat to a cutting board.

Notice the visible lines on the meat; this is the "grain" of the meat, or the direction of the muscle fibers.

To make the meat easier to cut, first cut it in half, along the grain of the meat. Then make thin crosswise cuts, across the grain to cut the meat into perfect size pieces to serve.

Corned beef is delicious served hot with horseradish cream sauce. The recipe for that sauce is in Food Nirvana under the Dips, Dressings and Sauces Menu.

Cold corned beef is great in a sandwich using soft white bread or snowflake rolls and mayonnaise. Or, you can make a superb sandwich with grilled seeded rye bread, a spicy deli style brown mustard, some Swiss cheese melted over the hot corned beef, and a garlic pickle on the side with some potato chips.

Yet another variation is to make a Reuben sandwich, which includes sauerkraut and thousand island dressing instead of mustard. For a Reuben, place the meat, cheese and sauerkraut (that has been squeezed to eliminate excess liquid) in a bowl and heat it in the microwave oven until the sauerkraut is hot and the cheese melting. Then, put that assembly onto plain or grilled rye bread (grilled in butter

is the best) and cover it with the thousand island dressing and a top piece of rye bread. Cut it in half and ... Yummy!

Oh, some folks use cold coleslaw instead of sauerkraut after heating only the meat and cheese and they either keep or forego the thousand island dressing. That delight is called a Rachel sandwich. Thus, formally the Rachel sandwich is a variation on the standard Reuben sandwich, substituting coleslaw for the sauerkraut. Indeed, some recipes call for using turkey instead of corned beef. You can, of course, put any combination together that pleases you!

Lest I forget, it is historically and ethnically proper to mention the original New York Hot Steamer corned beef sandwiches. They were simple in that they consisted of only rye bread, hot corned beef and brown deli mustard. But boy were they superb, for the tender and moist meat was piled high, so when you ate one it was a real taste pleasure followed by a pleasantly full feeling. What a great sandwich, done best and mostly only at Jewish delicatessens!

Be sure to serve these sandwich delights with a good cold beverage like beer or a soda, ergo something carbonated.

Enjoy!

Corned Beef and Cabbage - ☺♥

This recipe is one often associated with St. Patrick's Day as it is a favorite of the Irish. It is simple to make, inexpensive and delicious. It is perfect for serving to a hungry crowd. I am partly Irish, which means my family members have long enjoyed this dish. I learned some years ago, thanks to Marie, that making a horseradish cream sauce to serve with the corned beef makes a superb combination, so you will want to find that recipe in the Dips, Dressings and Sauces section of Food Nirvana. I've found that a lot of folks never had horseradish cream sauce with the corned beef, so I decided to include this information to enhance your eating experience with Corned Beef and Cabbage.

Corned beef is made from beef brisket, which is an inexpensive, mostly lean cut of beef that is too tough to use except by boiling it for an extended period of time or slow cooking it covered, in moist conditions in an oven as pot roast. Supermarkets typically sell the corned beef for this dish in roughly three pound amounts, prepackaged, for about \$3 per pound. Around St. Patrick's Day the markets typically put heads of cabbage on sale also, often for 39 cents to 49 cents per pound. Add in a few potatoes and some carrots and voila! You have the complete and inexpensive meal, less the horseradish cream sauce, which you want to be sure to remember to make. A word about serving size for the corned beef is important. Due to the presence of some surface fat on the brisket and due to the high moisture content of the meat due to the marinating (corning) process used commercially to make it, the yield from three pounds of corned beef is only enough to feed four hungry adults. Plan your purchases accordingly. Similarly, a medium size head of cabbage is okay for four people, but scale up or down in what you buy based on the number of people to be served and the size of heads of cabbage. For example, a very large head of cabbage is enough for six people. I generally allow for two medium to large carrots per person.

Some packages of corned beef include a seasoning packet. Some do not. If you have the packet then use it instead of the bay leaves and ground pepper shown below. Otherwise, be sure to use the bay leaves and ground pepper. Actually, if you really want to get back to basics you can look up a recipe for the corning process in *The Joy of Cooking*® and make your own corned beef from plain beef brisket ... but note that the corning process takes a week or so in your refrigerator, so plan well in advance if you are adventurous.

The cooking procedure shown below allows for cooking for a crowd of eight or more people using only one cooking pot, but making use of a warming oven to hold each item, covered, after it is cooked. The meal is served with the food items separated, each in its own serving dish, and the guests decide how much of each

item they want. This differs a lot from recipes where all the vegetables are added to a large roasting pan with the beef after the beef is simmered, and then served wet on a large platter.

There is no special beverage associated with this meal, so anything from water to iced tea to beer will be fine.

Ingredients: (serves four adults)

3 lb. package of corned beef

4 medium size russet potatoes, peeled and chopped into eight pieces each

6 bay leaves

15 coarsely ground or crushed black pepper corns (I put them into a Ziploc® freezer bag and crush them with a kitchen mallet)

1 medium size head of cabbage (about 5 or 6 inches in diameter)

8 medium to large size carrots

Variation: Add a large white turnip, peeled and cut into eight pieces. Cook it with the potatoes and carrots.

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 200°F. Put a meat platter into the oven for later use with the beef at serving time.

Trim the corned beef of most of its fat. Alternatively, you can boil the beef first and then scrape the soft fat from it prior to putting the beef into the oven.

Put the beef into a two gallon pot with enough water to cover it. Then add the seasoning packet contents or the bay leaves and ground pepper.

Bring the pot contents to a boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to very low, cover the pot with a tight fitting lid and simmer the beef for three hours.

While the beef is simmering prepare the other ingredients. Peel and chop the potatoes and put the pieces into a large bowl and fill it with water. Peel and cut the carrots into three or four pieces each and add them to the potatoes.

Make the horseradish cream sauce per the Food Nirvana recipe in Dips, Dressings and Sauces. Cover and refrigerate it until it is served.

After three hours of simmering, remove the beef to the small pre-warmed platter, scrape the soft fat off and discard it if you didn't eliminate the fat prior to cooking, cover it tightly with aluminum foil and put it into the oven.

Drain the potatoes and carrots (and turnip if you used one) and add them to the pot, adding enough water to cover them if necessary. Increase the heat to high to bring the contents to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and simmer for fifteen minutes. Check for doneness with a fork. The carrots should be soft. If not, simmer for an additional five minutes.

Remove the potatoes and carrots (and turnip pieces) and put them into two serving dishes, separating the carrots from the potatoes and turnip. Cover each dish tightly with aluminum foil and put the dishes into the oven.

Cut the head of cabbage into quarters, then cut the core area from each quarter and discard it. Put the four quarters of cabbage into the pot, cover it with the lid, increase the heat to high until the liquid is boiling and then simmer the cabbage for fifteen minutes on low heat.

Pre-warm dinner plates in the oven for five to ten minutes.

Remove the cabbage to a serving bowl, cover the bowl tightly with aluminum foil and put it into the oven.

Remove the beef from the oven and slice it crossways into 1/2" to 3/4" thick slices.

Remove the vegetable serving bowls from the oven and remove the aluminum foil covers.

Get the horseradish cream sauce from the refrigerator.

Remove the dinner plates from the oven.

Serve the meal buffet style using your island or kitchen counter.

You will receive many compliments!

Dried Beef - ☺♥T

As a Pennsylvania native I grew up enjoying dried beef ... a product originated and fairly locally made by Amish (and other) people in eastern PA. My parents bought it at local supermarkets in western PA and we used it to make yummy sandwiches. Years later I found the best dried beef at a place named Fisher's Country Store in Cessna, PA, and it was not as dry as the products sold in supermarkets, so it was perfect for making great sandwiches. I also used to order take-out at Leo and Jimmie's delicatessen in Wilmington, DE; specifically dried beef, sliced tomato and black pepper with mayonnaise on a long roll. Totally delicious! The best dried beef is smoky, not too dry, and fairly salty, but not too salty.

Alas, most of the USA and much of the rest of the world lack dried beef as an available product (unless you order it at absurd prices via the Internet). I was quite disappointed to learn that sad fact, though that type of reality is common across a lot of meat products and other regional or national specialty products. Our federal import laws typically restrict the purchase of meats made in foreign countries to a limited number of import companies. The private individual is denied the freedom to bring meats from, for instance, France, Germany or Italy, into the USA, that might have been purchased during a vacation to Europe. Well, Switzerland has an air dried beef product named Bundnerfleisch that I found in an international delicatessen in California, but it was quite expensive, too dry, and it lacked a smoky flavor. That is atypical. It was probably too old/beyond its shelf life. Charcuterie made in Europe is almost always great ... quite superior to most of our own Charcuterie, and of many varieties.

Recently (in 2024), I decided to buy an electric smoker and make my own dried beef. Why? Fisher's no longer ships products to out of state customers, and the dried beef sold in local supermarkets is expensive and too dry, yet supermarket prices are low compared to prices I see for high quality dried beef via the Internet (from \$26 to \$72 per pound!). Thus, the approach of making well what I can no longer reasonably buy, for cost and/or quality or availability considerations, is one major reason behind my creation of high quality Food Nirvana recipes.

My starting recipe for making dried beef came from a website selling a particular brand of electric smoker. Note that I looked at various recipes but decided to make the one that appeared to me most likely to result in a product most like that sold at Fisher's Country Store. But that was guessing on my part. I also eliminated a few seasoning ingredients that I believed would not produce the right taste. I varied times of certain procedures. By the time of this writing I had learned enough, having done the entire process successfully, to make this recipe a

Food Nirvana teaching recipe. So it is ... take the time to enjoy it and to learn the essentials. You will be glad you did.

I now have solid results to report ... Success! I am very pleased with the dried beef I made, doing what I did ... but like many things in life I noted a few improvements were in order. That is, I put small procedural variations into the recipe below that reflect my analysis of my first attempt to make dried beef. Overall I am delighted. One thing I learned is the initial smoking time should be fine if limited to 8 to 10 hours instead of 12 hours if I want to somewhat increase the moistness of the final product.

The dry curing period for the 3" diameter eye round roasts should be 9 days, not 6 days. Why? The penetration of the curing chemicals is only about 1/4" per day, or 6 days, plus three additional days, just to be sure the cure has fully penetrated the roast. You can, of course, decide to cut the eye round roasts in half lengthwise, which reduces the thickness to 1 1/2" ... and those thinner pieces of beef will cure easily within 6 days. But note that thinner cuts of meat are likely to lose more moisture during smoking, and later refrigerator drying, so you have to decide if you want drier or more moist dried beef.

The final drying period for the smoked eye roasts in the refrigerator is very important as the intensity of the taste and the color and moistness change a lot with only a two day difference in the final drying period. I tried three days and five days of refrigerator drying and the five day dried beef came out right on target for expected weight yield of 65%. The taste was intense and the color dark red, with less moisture. That contrasts with a weight yield of 70% with only three days of refrigerator drying time. The taste was mild and the color dark pink with more moisture. Ultimately you can choose what you want ... mild taste and more moist, or, intense taste and drier.

Note that when large cuts of meat like hams are cured commercially, a brine containing the curing agent is injected into the deeper parts of the meat. Why? There is a limit to how far an externally applied cure can reasonably be expected to penetrate flesh. In general, do not try to cure pieces of meat thicker than 3" using the coating curing method described in this recipe. Instead, look for brining methods and injections of curing chemicals and then decide if you are willing to invest time and money using brining/injection techniques/equipment.

Alas! At a later time I found myself with the meat thickness problem when I had eye round roasts with tube diameters of 4" and a bit more. I had already started a dry cure and I had figured I'd simply add extra days to get full penetration of the curing product. Then, as I thought about it, it was foolish to expect full

penetration. And the loss if the penetration was incomplete would be bad. So, what to do?

Now I am going "off the reservation" in describing what I did to guarantee full penetration. When I say "off the reservation" I mean nowhere have I read anything from anybody that would approve of what I did. What I did was steal curing brine from some packages of other meats I was curing. I then used a brine injector and put the needle straight up inside the center of each eye roast, and then I injected two ounces of curing brine through the center area of the meat, for each eye roast, withdrawing the needle slowly as I kept up pressure to continue dispensing curing brine. The net result? Perfection! Those eye round roasts were perfect in cure penetration. I knew because I cut them in half crosswise and the results were identical for the three eye round roasts. Then I was able to proceed with smoking the cured meats, confident that they would turn out to be delicious. And so they were, after their drying period that followed smoking. Think, totally delicious! Also safe to eat.

I suppose I could call what I did a hybrid curing method, but I believe the experts would scoff at me. They instead recommend doing wet curing, not dry curing, and taking as long as required to have the curing chemical (Prague powder #1) penetrate to the center of the meat. While I have no complaint regarding the choice of wet curing, what I did was guarantee success using dry curing combined with a curing brine injection. It worked. Beyond that, even with wet curing, injection of curing brine becomes necessary all over the surfaces of the meat when the thickness exceeds 4 inches, and that process is not for amateurs, for it can easily produce cured and uncured center areas, or even meat that is too wet internally following curing. The bottom line is that what I did makes a lot of sense without any fear of missing areas or too much brine, but my method was appropriate only given the geometry of an eye round roast ... namely, a tube of even diameter along 90 percent of the length of the eye roast.

Okay, now let's get back onto the reservation ... and return to the experiences of the first attempt to make dried beef.

Given three days of refrigeration drying time, my yield of dried beef, after trimming off fairly hard dried surface meat, was about 70% of the initial starting weight of one eye round roast. I think that will increase slightly with a shorter smoking time of 8 to 10 hours instead of 12 hours. The taste is delicious though mild, it is quite smoky (you can control that variable by choosing how much you use in wood chips), and the moisture level is almost what I want. I am looking for a bit more final moisture and that should be achieved via the 8 to 10 hour smoking time change, plus the control of refrigerator drying time. The trim waste after smoking was only 2 ounces, from a starting weight of 2.5 pounds of

beef. In short, I recommend 10 hours of smoking and 5 days of refrigeration drying time.

Now, about the economics of making dried beef ... My cost for the beef was \$5 per pound, and the other ingredients cost less than \$1, including the hickory chips used in smoking. So my final cost for one 2.5 lb. eye roast, plus other ingredients and wood chips, was \$13.50, and my final yield was 1 pound 12 ounces, or, 28 ounces of dried beef from the 2.5 pound eye round roast. That computes to 48 cents per ounce ... or about \$2 for a four ounce bag ... roughly 25% of the price at the supermarket for four ounces of very dry beef. That is significant savings and a superior product by making it at home. I need not describe again the absurd prices found via the Internet.

A final word about the use of the curing agent, Morton's Tender Quick®, is appropriate. Do not use more (or less) than specified (one tablespoon per pound of meat) and do not allow extended skin contact time with the mixture while using it, as the product contains sodium nitrite, which is an essential chemical for curing, but which is also poisonous if consumed in excess either when eating the cured meat or by extended time of skin contact. I routinely wear nitrile gloves when I work with curing agents and I recommend that you do the same, especially if meat curing becomes a routine activity for you.

Note, however, that you routinely ingest sodium nitrite in moderate amounts naturally from fresh leafy vegetables like spinach, romaine and kale, plus root vegetables like beets, celery, carrots and radishes, not to mention cabbage, lettuce and celery, so let's avoid the witchhunt about cured meat products and demanding the eating of only nature's bounty. Moderation is the key consideration in most of what we do, rather than avoidance based on fear instead of firm, proven facts.

Ingredients:

2, 2.5 lbs. Eye Round Roasts, defatted

5 tbsp. of Morton's Tender Quick® cure product (for curing multiple types of meats, etc.)

5 tbsp. of brown sugar

2 tbsp. of black pepper

1 tbsp. of garlic powder

Equipment:

Electric smoker and one cup (or slightly more) of Hickory wood chips

Vacuum sealer and two 10" x 12" vacuum seal bags (one each for each eye roast, used during curing)

10" x 12" aluminum foil tray (to place on a lower shelf under the eye roasts during smoking, to avoid soiling the interior of the electric smoker with meat drippings)

Electric Bluetooth wireless thermometer set (Optional, but remember to test it first: charge the batteries ... download and install the software to your cell phone, etc.)

Adjustable electric meat slicer (to get very thin slices of dried beef, like slightly less than or equal to 1/32nd of an inch)

6"x 8" vacuum seal bags to briefly hold the sliced dried beef in convenient serving amounts when you cut some slices from the larger piece of dried beef, which should also be vacuum sealed after each time you cut slices from it.

Directions:

Trim all the fat and sinew/silver skin from the eye round roasts. Note that silver skin (shiny membrane that is tight against the flesh) will impede the penetration of the curing agent. You want to avoid that problem. Also, surface fat will reduce the shelf life of the cured meat.

Turn on a kitchen scale. It will read 0.0 ounces. Put a small bowl on the kitchen scale. Record the weight. Then remove the bowl and mix all the dry ingredients together in the bowl and weigh the combination. Subtract the weight of the empty bowl from the combination weight. Spoon out one half of the weight of the ingredients into a second bowl while the first bowl remains on the scale. You now have half of the mixture in each of two bowls so you are ready to use each to coat the pieces of eye round roast.

Coat each eye round roast evenly all over the meat surface with the mixture of curing agent and seasoning ingredients.

Put each coated eye round roast into a 10" x 12" vacuum seal bag, cut away any excess bag (if any) with scissors, and vacuum seal it.

Mark the start date for the curing period on each vacuum sealed bag.

Mark the end date of curing for 9 days later on each vacuum sealed bag. Why 9 days? The eye round roasts will be about 3" thick and it will take around 9 days of curing to be certain to have the cure reach the center of each. So be safe and cure the eye round roasts for 9 days.

Store the curing eye round roasts in the refrigerator and turn them over once per day.

At the end of the curing period cut away the vacuum seal bags and carefully rinse all of the surface ingredients from the meat. Rub the surfaces of the eye round roasts as necessary while rinsing to remove all of the curing/seasoning mixture.

Dry the cured eye round roasts with paper towels.

Preheat the electric smoker to 275 degrees F.

Put the cured eye round roasts close together on a high shelf in the smoker, and on the shelf below, place the 10" x 12" aluminum foil tray.

Fill the wood box of the electric smoker with (one cup or a bit more of) hickory wood chips, close the lid, and put it into the smoker wood port.

Close and fasten the smoker door. Wait roughly five minutes for the electric heating element to get the wood chips smoking (you should see smoke coming out of the smoker vent), then reduce the smoker heat to 130 degrees F.

Close the vent half way to provide a limited exit for the generated smoke and also to keep the wood chips smoking but not being consumed in flames.

Smoke the eye round roasts for 8 to 10 hours, or even up to 12 hours, at 130 degrees F. Note that you will see most of the smoke during the first hour.

Open the smoker and insert a wireless thermometer probe into the center (thickest part, namely the thick end) of one of the roasts. Alternatively, you can later check the internal temperature of the meat multiple times using an instant read thermometer.

Close the smoker and increase the smoker heat to 160 degrees F.

Monitor the internal temperature of the meat using the wireless thermometer base unit (called a repeater [device that picks up a weak wireless signal and amplifies it, sending it on to a more distant viewing device]) and likely your cell phone. Note that this type of wireless thermometer system will most likely require you to download and install a monitoring software package from either the Google Play Store or the Apple Store, depending on whether you have an

Android cell phone or an Apple iPhone. Or, use an instant read thermometer, checking the meat temperature every thirty minutes.

When the internal temperature of the meat is 135 degrees F, turn off the smoker and remove the dried beef to cool to room temperature. Why 135 degrees F? Cured meats like eye round roasts need to be cooked following curing, and 135 degrees F internal temperature is the temperature for what we usually describe as medium rare to medium for cooked beef. If you want, you can wait until the internal temperature is 140 degrees F, but that will result in drier smoked beef. Different safe internal cooking temperatures apply to other types of meat, fowl or seafood.

Once the smoker has cooled (with the door open), remember to clean the smoker interior with a dish cloth, warm water and a mild detergent.

Once cool, refrigerate the dried beef for three to five days, uncovered, to complete the drying. I recommend five days.

Trim the completely dry ends and thin side shavings from each dried beef roast, exposing the dark pink interior that you will use as dried beef. The amount trimmed will be only shallow shavings and that is good. You can, of course, retain the dark exterior from the sides of the smoked meat if you want even more intense smoked flavor.

Use the electric meat slicer to slice the trimmed dried beef roasts very thinly cross grain, with a thickness of no more than 1/32nd of an inch.

Put the sliced dried beef into a 6" x 8" vacuum seal bag and vacuum seal it, and keep it in the refrigerator until you use it. Plus, refrigerator shelf life is roughly three months (and probably longer), for the uncut portion of the dried beef, so keep it vacuum sealed too, though it is almost certain the meat will be eaten within a few weeks. Freezer shelf life can be whatever you want it to be.

Use the dried beef in sandwiches or in making creamed dried beef over toast. There are numerous other nice recipe ideas you can find via the Internet.

Enjoy!

Elvis Presley Cheeseburger - ☺♥

I don't specialize in hamburger or other "too simple" recipes in Food Nirvana, but in special cases I make an exception. Going back about 14 years, to 2003, my darling Marie bought a recipe book of Elvis Presley's favorite foods/recipes. She did it on a whim via the Internet (Amazon®), for he had died sometime in 1978 if I remember correctly. The book, "Are You Hungry Tonight?" was copyright 1992, and thus unlikely to be found in book stores. I didn't make anything from that book until quite recently ... Perhaps to my shame! Bottom line, Peggy and I thoroughly enjoyed Elvis' favorite cheeseburger recipe a few weeks ago, so I simply had to include that recipe in Food Nirvana.

Okay ... I gave credit where credit was/is due (sort of). Having said that, let's get on with doing something delicious!

The secret to the Elvis Cheeseburger, in my humble opinion, is seasoning the ground beef prior to cooking the hamburger patty on a hot charcoal grill. My point is that I typically do not season ground beef prior to cooking a hamburger or a cheeseburger. I have now been properly chastised. Pre-seasoning the meat per the Elvis recipe turned out to be a wonderful idea.

Having achieved Nirvana, food wise at least, thanks to Elvis, etc., I now have to totally rethink my approach to hamburgers, etc. In other words, even my recipe for a bleu cheese and bacon burger may be deficient to the extent the chef seasoned the ground beef prior to frying the burger way back when. Did he? I'll bet that sneaky fellow fooled me by pre-seasoning the ground beef!

Historically I hated burgers people made with raw onion and other unspecified crap in the meat prior to grilling. On balance, that simply means that I traveled in the wrong culinary social circles! I am very fortunate to have at least partially corrected that problem.

That is enough yakking from me. Let's get on with the recipe as this cheeseburger is too good to miss. And note, as usual, you can vary the ingredients from what you see in Food Nirvana to produce your dream hamburger or cheeseburger. I just did by slightly upping the beef from 1/4 pound to 1/3 pound per burger.

Oh, yes, I buy nice chuck roasts and then grind the meat via my Kitchen-Aid mixer accessory, then typically vacuum seal and flatten it (for later easy thawing) in one pound amounts, and then freeze the product for later use. By so doing I guarantee that I will have top quality ground beef, not something that has the

wrong fat content or that has been improperly extended in weight by the store adding water to freshly ground beef to increase their profit!

Ingredients: (for four cheeseburgers)

1 1/3 lb. Choice grade ground chuck (80% lean)

4 Big Marty's® sesame seed sandwich/hamburger buns

4 thick slices of American Cheese (or eight thin slices)

1 tsp. of dried oregano

2 tbsp. of finely chopped red onion

1 tsp. of garlic salt

1/4 tsp. of black pepper

lettuce, prepared mustard, mayonnaise, sliced pickles, sliced tomatoes and sliced red onions as condiments

Directions:

Prepare the charcoal grill to get things quite hot. At grilling time the hot coals should be three to four inches below the grilling surface and be evenly distributed.

Combine the meat and the chopped onion and the dry seasoning ingredients in a mixing bowl, mix well by hand, then shape that mixture into four hamburger patties.

Form each hamburger patty such that it has the same diameter as the Big Marty's® bun. That will result in having the raw meat thickness exactly right, for at the end of the grilling the patty size will fit inside the bun perfectly, provided you didn't buy ground beef only 60% lean!!! Actually, 80% lean is about perfect.

Grill the hamburger patties for 5 to 7 minutes per side to create well-done burgers. I believe making them well-done is the best way in this instance to get the most flavor from the dry seasoning ingredients.

Two minutes before the end of grilling the second side, put the slice(s) of American Cheese on top of each patty.

Serve the burgers on the buns and add the condiments. Perhaps you want to season the underside of your burger first with a bit more pepper. Your choice.

Chow down and groan with pleasure. Take a nice swallow of ice cold beer, like Corona®, now and then!

I made macaroni salad to serve with the burgers using the fine Food Nirvana recipe. It was a good choice, but then, lots of other foods will go well with these burgers.

Filet Mignon with Foie Gras - ☺♥

This recipe results from my memory of a wonderful and unique meal in Brussels, Belgium. The experience dates back to the late 1980's, during a business trip, and the restaurant was Spanish in a large plaza area called La Place, which was quite a fine public area a few acres in size surrounded with large buildings and superb statuary dating back 500 years. Ahh ... to think that great artisans were creating these masterpieces 300 years before the USA was formed ... it kind of makes us look like "Johnny come lately" ... but that is a separate topic for a different venue.

What makes this dish special is the use of foie gras (duck or goose liver), which in combination with the filet mignon was an unforgettable experience. Do note that in general I despise liver, but this was/is a truly exceptional experience.

Okay ... the general idea is that a 1 1/4" to 1 1/2" thick filet is trimmed of fat and/or membrane and wrapped around the perimeter with bacon (attached with toothpicks). The filets are grilled on a hot charcoal grill to a medium rare degree of doneness, which means four to five minutes of grilling time per side based on the thickness of the filet and the heat of the grill. Remove the filets from the grill to a warm meat platter when done.

The top of each filet is coated with a 1/4" thick layer of foie gras paste and put under a broiler for at most one minute to cook the foie gras, as the underside is cooking because of the high temperature of the grilled filet. Then a small amount of a hot clear brown beef glaze is poured over the filet and it is then served on a bed of sautéed mushrooms and shallots.

The taste is to die for ... and the general description I just gave above was the exact way the dish was served to me in Brussels.

Alas, I had to search the Internet to find something close to the recipe in Brussels. I was successful except the recipe called for searing pieces of foie gras and placing them on the filet instead of making a paste (pate') and using broiling to cook it. Ah well ... I decided that just this one time I would suffer with the recipe recommendations instead of experimenting to make a foie gras paste.

Oh, do make your side dishes for this meal prior to grilling the filets. And serve a high quality merlot or pinot noir or cabernet sauvignon wine with dinner.

Ingredients: (Two servings)

2, 8 oz. pieces of filet, trimmed, about 1 1/4" to 1 1/2" thick

¾ lb. Fresh mushrooms (use any type you want except pungent varieties like porcini)

¼ lb. Frozen foie gras (try to buy a horizontal cross section of the liver ½" thick)

1, medium shallot

2, strips thick sliced bacon

½ stick Butter

1, 14 oz. can of beef broth

1, tbsp. Cornstarch

¼ tsp. Sea salt

¼ tsp. Pepper

2 tbsp. Crushed peppercorns

1, tbsp. Herbs de Provence (see recipe for this simple herb combination below)

Directions:

Heat the beef broth on a very low simmer to reduce the volume by one half, thus concentrating the beef flavor. Let the pan of reduced beef broth cool to room temperature. The tablespoon of cornstarch will be added to the broth late in the meal preparation and the mixture mixed and heated with constant stirring to slightly thicken the beef broth into a glaze consistency.

Herbs de Provence is simply a fancy name for a mixture of the following dry herbs. Use ½ teaspoon each of thyme, savory, rosemary, basil and bay leaf. Moisten the mixture with ¼ cup of water and set it aside. It will be used later during sautéing of the mushrooms and shallot. As an aside, French chefs put fresh herbs in a small cloth bag when cooking certain clear soups and call it a bouquet garni, and it is typically removed and discarded after use. Thus, in those recipes the herb flavors are captured but the herbs do not affect the visual clarity of the final soup. But in this foie gras recipe we want the herbs to be part of the final presentation.

Chop the mushrooms into pieces that will be bite sized after sautéing. That means the uncooked pieces should be about ¾" square cubes or anything close to that.

Dice the shallot into small pieces about ½" by ¾".

Sauté the mushrooms and shallot lightly (on low heat) in the ½ stick of butter with the herbs de Provence and water mixture added at the beginning of the sauté process. Add small amounts of sea salt and pepper, perhaps ¼ teaspoon each. You should cover the sauté pan with a lid to have the steam help at the start of the sauté process. The goal is not to overcook the mushrooms ... they should still retain their original shape and not be shrunken or completely soft. You will know when to stop the sauté process as the mushrooms will have changed color, as in from white to light tan. Stir and check frequently. Remove the lid for the last few minutes. Remove the sautéed mixture to a bowl and keep it warm in a 180°F oven. Reserve the skillet that contains the butter residue for searing of the foie gras.

Chop the pieces of foie gras into ½" cubes. Sear them on all sides in the skillet that was used earlier for sautéing the mushrooms. Searing should turn the color from tan to light brown. Do not overcook. About three minutes on medium heat (after the skillet is heated) with frequent mixing is about right. Put the seared foie gras pieces into a bowl and keep them warm in a 180°F oven.

Wrap the filet pieces around the perimeter in partially fried bacon. Fasten the bacon multiple places with toothpicks. Sprinkle both sides of the filet lightly with the crushed peppercorns and a small amount of sea salt. Rub the pepper and salt into the meat. Grill the filets on a hot charcoal grill (4" from the hot coals) for anywhere from four to five minutes per side depending on the thickness of the filets. Put the grilled filets onto individual serving plates, remove the toothpicks (if you can) and put the plates into the warm 180°F oven.

Now is the time to heat the mixture of reduced beef broth and cornstarch. Heat on medium high stirring constantly until thickened and remove from the heat.

Okay ... it is time to assemble the final product. I do hope you made all of the side dishes you want to serve with the filets before this point in time.

Remove the warmed serving plates with the filets from the oven. Encircle the filets with the sautéed mushroom/shallot mixture. Place the pieces of foie gras on the top of the filets. Pour just enough of the thickened beef broth glaze over the top to lightly coat the foie gras and the top of the filet and just a tiny bit on the mushrooms. Serve at once. Oh, my, is it good ...

A word about cost:

I must tell you that the cost for foie gras is about \$90 per pound, so you will spend around \$22 just for the foie gras ... and another \$10 to \$12 for the two, 8 ounce beef filets. You will have to find the foie gras in a specialty store or a supermarket that caters to the wealthy, like Janssens Market® in Wilmington,

DE. It can also be ordered through the Internet. I know it sounds expensive, but how often do you celebrate with something this good? How much do you spend for pedestrian food in restaurants vs. this haute' cuisine experience?

About Foie Gras:

A bit of Internet research revealed a lot about foie gras. When purchased as we did there was no cleaning necessary as we purchased what turned out to be a cross section of one lobe of the liver, about ½ inch thick. We had no cleaning to do because it evidently had been cleaned for us.

Had we purchased an entire lobe or the entire liver there would have been a considerable amount of work soaking it in salt water and then cutting it to remove the complex network of blood filled veins, etc., just to get it ready for cooking.

Foie Gras Pate

I found the following recipe for Foie Gras pate' on the Internet. Now I can make the proper pate' to use on top of the bacon wrapped filet mignon as well as in canapés.

Ingredients:

4 oz. Foie Gras

1 strip of bacon

¼ cup diced sweet onion

1 oz. Ruby Port wine

1 oz. Mayonnaise

Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Fry the bacon on low heat until it is crisp. Remove the bacon and set it aside, reserving the bacon grease in a small cup.

Sauté the diced onion in half of the reserved bacon grease.

When the onion pieces are golden add the port wine and cook on low heat for 3 minutes. Set the mixture aside.

Sauté the Foie Gras in the remaining reserved bacon grease to medium doneness (slightly pink inside). Set it aside.

Puree the Foie Gras, bacon and onions while still warm in a small food processor.

Add mayonnaise, salt and pepper to taste, and chill immediately. Spread the pate into a shallow glass dish for quick chilling.

Refrigerate covered until the pate is used.

Marinated Steak Tips - ☺♥

This recipe is actually two recipes in one for making marinated steak or steak tips. The marinades differ and also the method of cooking. Both are simply great. Try both.

First I provide the recipe for making a type of teriyaki marinade and searing the steak tips in a hot cast iron skillet in peanut oil. At the end of that recipe I provide the second one that is a strong and delightful marinade used when cooking steak strips or tips on a hot charcoal grill. Now you understand why I recommend trying both recipes. Yummy!!!

Let's proceed with the recipe for the teriyaki marinade ...

I've enjoyed marinated steak tips from upscale butcher shops numerous times with different flavors of marinade. One of my favorites is teriyaki marinade. I happened to find a nice recipe on the Internet for that dish and I made it with a few of my own changes.

It was delicious but not quite what I would call teriyaki. It needed a bit more acidity and citrus flavor. The recipe below includes those additions. Now it is in my opinion perfect.

Note that the thickness of the raw steak tips will determine how long any given piece needs to be seared on each side to get the tips medium rare. The ideal thickness is about 1 1/4" to 1 1/2", but you will likely have pieces that size and smaller in thickness. In essence, you custom sear each piece as needed, even though all pieces are put into the hot cast iron skillet at the same time.

I hope you try this dish as it is delicious! Oh, yes ... remember to make the side dishes for your meal before you sear the steak tips, as they are perfect for eating immediately after searing. I suggest making lightly steamed asparagus spears and buttered noodles, and perhaps serve some fresh fruit and cheese for dessert.

A nice glass of Pinot Noir or Merlot wine is a fine beverage to serve with marinated steak tips.

Ingredients: (two to three servings)

1 1/2 lbs. of sirloin steak tips

2 tbsp. of peanut oil for searing

Marinade Ingredients:

3 oz. of beer or sake
3 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice
3/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsp. of soy sauce
2 tbsp. of Worcestershire sauce
2 tbsp. of teriyaki sauce
1 tsp. of tamarind paste
2 tbsp. of brown sugar
1 tbsp. of garlic powder
1 tsp. of smoked paprika

Directions:

Combine the marinade ingredients in a two quart bowl, whisking until they are very well blended.

Pour the marinade into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag.

Cut the steak tips into pieces about three inches long.

Put the steak tips in with the marinade.

Seal the top of the bag after expelling the air from it.

Wrap the empty bag part around the marinating meat to maximize contact between the marinade and all meat surfaces.

Marinate the steak tips in the refrigerator for 24 hours.

Remove the marinade bag and meat from the refrigerator half an hour before you plan to cook the steak tips.

Put the peanut oil into a large (12" diameter) cast iron skillet and heat it on medium heat, until the oil starts to shimmer.

Add the steak tips to the skillet with tongs, letting excess marinade drip off before putting each piece into the skillet.

Discard the marinade. Do not reuse it.

Sear each surface of the steak tips for about three to five minutes, depending on the thickness of the meat, to get it done medium rare.

You can sear the meat for a minute or two longer on each surface if you want the meat to be done medium, but you will sacrifice tenderness.

Enjoy!

Now let's proceed with the second marinated steak/steak tips recipe ...

As noted earlier, this recipe uses a deliciously strong marinade and cooking on a hot charcoal grill. One further point ... you don't need to marinate the meat for 24 hours. One hour is quite sufficient. Have fun!

As you can see in the picture I served the steak tips with red skin potato salad and baked beans. You can make whatever side dishes appeal to you.

I found one version of this recipe via the Internet and I proceeded to improve it quickly ... using toasted sesame oil and a slightly different herb mixture, and my was it nice! The sirloin pieces came out very juicy and tender and well seasoned.

Ingredients: (4 to 5 adult servings)

2 to 3 pounds of sirloin tips or sirloin strips

1/3 cup of balsamic vinegar

1/3 cup of soy sauce

1/4 cup of toasted sesame oil

2 tbsp. of Worcestershire sauce

1 tbsp. of honey

1/2 tsp. of dried oregano

1/2 tsp. of dried basil

1 tsp. of garlic powder

1 tsp. of mustard powder

Directions:

Whisk together all of the ingredients except the beef in a one quart bowl.

Optionally cut the sirloin pieces to whatever size you want to serve.

Put the steak strips/pieces into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag and then add the marinade to the bag.

Expel all air from the bag and seal it, then make sure all meat pieces are well coated with marinade.

Refrigerate the marinating beef for one hour, turning the bag over every 15 minutes.

Meanwhile prepare all the side dishes you plan to serve with the meal.

Prepare and light a charcoal grill with the coals only one inch below the steel grate on which you will place the marinated pieces of sirloin once the coals are very hot.

Use tongs or a long spatula and a long fork to turn over the pieces of sirloin about once a minute during cooking until each piece is cooked to your preference. I strongly recommend medium rare for tenderness. The total cooking time for each piece of beef depends entirely on the thickness of that piece of beef.

Note that smaller or thinner pieces will be done cooking much sooner than larger pieces. Do not overcook the meat or it will be dry and tough.

Discard the bag of marinade. Do not reuse it.

Serve the marinated sirloin steak strips/tips immediately while hot along with the side dishes you prepared earlier.

Many different beverages are fine with this meal. I like ice cold beer.

Enjoy!

Meatloaf - ☺

Food Nirvana needed a meatloaf recipe just for completeness. The one below is a modified copy of one from Food Network® via the Internet. I eliminated the veal, replacing it with additional ground pork, and I reduced the amount of sriracha sauce in the glaze. Note that the flavor of the glaze will depend in part on what barbecue sauce you use. I, of course, use the Classic Kansas City Barbecue Sauce ... recipe provided in Food Nirvana.

I think you will enjoy this dish, and note that you can make many modifications after making it one time with the given recipe, based on your taste preferences. There is a near endless number of meatloaf recipe variations. I have, for that reason, provided yet a second meatloaf recipe here. You can look at both recipes and make the one you think you will like the best. Later, try the other one.

If you plan to eat when the meatloaf has baked then make your side dishes during the hour of baking time.

Recipe #1:

Meatloaf Ingredients:

1 or 2 tablespoons of olive oil

1 small Spanish onion, cut into small dice

Kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper

3 cloves of garlic, minced

1/2 cup of whole milk

1 tablespoon of Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon of Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon of hot sauce, such as Tabasco

2 large eggs

1 pound of ground chuck

1 pound of ground pork

1 cup of coarsely crushed saltine crackers (about 24)

1/3 cup of minced fresh parsley

Glaze Ingredients:

1/2 cup of barbecue sauce

1/4 cup of brown sugar

1/4 cup of apple cider vinegar

1 teaspoon of Sriracha sauce

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, or spray Pam® on the inside of a loaf pan.

For the meatloaf: Heat a skillet over medium heat, add the oil and sauté the onions until translucent, 3 to 5 minutes.

Season with salt, add the garlic and sauté for 1 to 2 minutes without letting the garlic brown. Set aside to cool.

In a large bowl, whisk together the milk, mustard, Worcestershire, hot sauce and eggs, then season with salt and pepper.

Add the beef and pork along with the crackers, parsley and cooked onion-garlic mixture. Use your hands to mix until everything is evenly combined.

Place the meat mixture on the prepared baking sheet and use your hands to gently form into a rustic loaf shape, about 9 inches by 5 inches. Alternatively, let a loaf pan do the shaping for you.

For the glaze: In a small bowl, combine the barbecue sauce, brown sugar, apple cider vinegar and sriracha.

Slather half of the glaze on the meatloaf, then bake it, basting once with the remaining glaze halfway through, until the internal temperature registers 165 degrees F, about 1 hour.

Let the meatloaf rest for 20 minutes, covered, before serving.

Recipe #2:

Here is a no brainer easy and very good recipe for making meatloaf.

Ingredients:

1 pound of ground beef
1 pound of ground pork
2 cups of dried bread crumbs
1/4 cup of dried parsley flakes
1 tsp. of dried sage
4 cloves of garlic, minced
1 large onion, diced
1 large green bell pepper, diced
2 extra large or jumbo eggs
2 teaspoons of kosher salt
1 teaspoon of garlic powder
1 teaspoon of onion powder
1 teaspoon of black pepper
4 strips of raw bacon
1, 14 ounce can of beef broth
2 tbsp. of butter

Directions:

If necessary, grind the beef and the pork.

Sauté the diced onion and green pepper briefly in the butter, just to the point that they are no longer crisp.

Add the diced garlic to the onion mixture.

Add the dried parsley flakes and the dried sage to the onion mixture.

Sauté for one minute, mixing all the ingredients well.

Turn off the heat and add the kosher salt, onion powder, garlic powder and black pepper and mix well.

Put the ground meats into a large electric mixer bowl and mix on medium speed for three minutes.

Add the eggs and mix for one minute.

Add the onion mixture and mix for two minutes.

Add the bread crumbs and mix for two minutes.

Form two meatloaves and place each in a glass baking dish typically used to bake a loaf of bread.

Cut the bacon strips in half and drape four pieces over the top of each meat loaf.

Add 1/2 can of the beef broth to each baking dish to get liquid on both sides of the meatloaf in each dish.

Bake the meatloaves in a 350 degrees F oven for one hour, reducing the heat to 325 degrees F after the first 30 minutes.

Put the baking dishes on a wood cutting board.

Remove the meatloaves with a wide spatula putting them onto a large serving platter.

Slice the meatloaves into sections 3/4" thick.

Serve.

Medium Rare Round Roast - ☺♥

Let's take a look at oven cooking methods for top and bottom round cuts of beef.

The less expensive yet lean cuts of beef are top and bottom round roasts. They cannot be prepared like we would do with well marbled beef like boneless rib-eye steaks or standing rib roasts. The lack of fat and the presence of lots of connective (and strong) muscle tissue make one very tough roast if you cook it with open oven exposure simply until it is medium or well done in the center. One exception to that fact is the Food Nirvana recipe for skillet seared roast beef, roasted in a closed skillet, but that is a different subject.

Most of us have come across an old but good way to handle this problem for cuts of round roast of uniform thickness and about 1 1/2" thick. That method is referred to as making a London Broil, in which very high temperature broiling, close to the heating elements, produces ... after about 5 minutes per side of broiling ... a roast that is well done on the exterior and of varied degrees of doneness towards the middle of the roast, typically with rare beef at the very center.

London broil can be cut, following broiling, into 1/4" thick slices across (not with) the grain of the meat. That yields very tasty beef that can be further cut by the diner into pieces about 1" x 1 1/2" x 1/4" thick. Done that way the beef is easy to eat instead of tough, and it is quite tasty if well seasoned with salt and pepper.

In more recent times different chefs have experimented with alternative methods for cooking lean cuts of beef. I happened to see one example that looked interesting and in fact the idea and the results were/are superb! This new method is definitely superior to making London broil, as the meat is of near uniform doneness of medium rare from right under the surface of the well done exterior all the way to the center of the roast.

I refer in this recipe to using a spray bottle of either canola oil or peanut oil. You can find inexpensive yet high quality spray bottles in places like Home Depot®. The idea is you want to season the meat and then have a light spray of oil that will not affect the previous placement of the seasonings.

In this recipe the optimal thickness for the beef is a uniform 2". That is easy to achieve by cutting a typical 4" thick roast into two parts, each approximately 2" thick. Following the roasting technique and time to rest the beef, it is cut like slices of London broil ... approximately 1/4" to no more than 5/16" thick, across the grain.

You will note that the baking sheet has plenty of room to accommodate two pieces of beef of similar weight. Placed six inches apart, that should not affect roasting time overall. It should remain about the same as what you would do for a single piece of beef. But that assumption falls apart if, for instance, you try to cook four pieces of beef at the same time. In that instance, you have to assume the initial roasting period and the oven cooling roasting time will be longer than the times shown in this recipe, but how long depends on what you choose to roast at the same time. I suggest practice to identify what works best for you with your oven when roasting a larger quantity of beef.

This more modern method of cooking top or bottom beef round roasts is described next in recipe form. You definitely want to make top or bottom round roast by this method. It is superb. But you also need to have all your other meal items prepared first so the meal can be served immediately when the roasted beef is cut into slices. A nice bottle of Pinot Noir or Merlot wine make fine beverage for this meal.

Ingredients: (three servings)

2 lb. cut of Top or Bottom round roast, all external fat removed, uniformly thick around 2 inches

11" x 17" Baking sheet lined with aluminum foil

1 or 2 tsp. of Canola oil or Peanut oil sprayed lightly onto the raw beef following seasoning

Salt and Pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 500 degrees F.

Season the beef with salt and pepper, rubbing the seasoning into the meat.

Spray the beef lightly using a spray bottle containing canola oil or peanut oil.

Place the beef on the foil lined baking sheet and put the baking sheet on a middle oven shelf.

Roast the beef for 5 minutes per pound (in this instance, 10 minutes).

Turn off the oven but do not open the door.

Keep the beef in the oven for 15 minutes per pound (ergo 30 minutes for 2 lbs).

Put your serving plate and the dinner plates into the oven on a different shelf.

Remove the roast from the oven, close the oven door, and let the roast rest on a wood cutting board for 15 minutes.

Cut the roast cross grain into 1/4" thick slices with a sharp butcher knife. Put those slices onto your pre-warmed serving plate.

Serve and eat the beef slices while they are hot/warm, juicy and tender, using the pre-warmed dinner plates. Provide steak knives, salt and pepper for your guests.

Do remember to serve the wine and perhaps also some glasses of ice water.

Your guests may even notice and eat the other meal items you prepared ... after they are done demolishing the beef!

Enjoy!

Osso Buco - ☺♥

This great veal dish is perfect for a cold winter day. It is most tasty and very satisfying. I thank Marie for introducing me to this great dish. Either buttered parsley potatoes or Marie's oven browned potatoes go great with this dish. A nice loaf of crusty French bread and butter are nice as well.

Serves two adults.

Ingredients:

1 sprig of rosemary

1 sprig of thyme

1 dry bay leaf

2 whole cloves

3 whole veal shanks, about 1 lb. per shank, trimmed

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

Flour for dredging

½ cup of vegetable oil

1 small onion diced into ½ inch cubes

1 small carrot diced into ½ inch cubes

1 stalk of celery diced into ½ inch cubes

1 tbsp. of tomato paste

1 cup of dry white wine

3 cups of chicken stock

3 tbsp. of fresh flat leaf Italian parsley chopped

1 tbsp. of lemon zest

Directions:

Place the rosemary, thyme and cloves into cheesecloth as a bouquet garni.

The veal shanks should have all moisture removed with paper towels. Secure the meat to the bone with kitchen twine. Season each shank with salt and pepper. Dredge the shanks in flour.

In a large Dutch oven heat the vegetable oil until it starts to smoke. Put the tied veal shanks into the hot pan and brown on all sides about 3 minutes per side. Remove the shanks and reserve them for later use.

In the same Dutch oven add the onion, carrot and celery. Season the mixture with salt to help draw out the moisture from the vegetables. Sauté on medium heat until the vegetables are soft and translucent, about 8 minutes. Add the tomato paste and mix well.

Return the browned veal to the pan and add the white wine and reduce the liquid by half (about 5 minutes) on medium heat. Add the bouquet garni and 2 cups of the chicken stock and bring to a boil.

Reduce the heat to low, cover the Dutch oven and simmer for about 1½ hours or until the meat is falling off the bone. Check every 15 minutes, turning the shanks and adding more chicken stock as necessary. The level of cooking liquid should always be about ¾ of the way up the shank.

Carefully remove the cooked shanks from the pot and place them in a decorative serving platter. Cut off the kitchen twine and discard it.

Pour all the juices and sauce from the pot over the shanks. Garnish with chopped parsley and lemon zest.

Serve.

Pepper Steak - ☺♥

My sweetheart Peggy likes a variety of Chinese foods, especially Pepper Steak. I was due to make some kind of dinner for us and I didn't seem to have any good ideas. Then, in order, I came up with a meal that combined Middle Eastern and Chinese cuisines.

My first thought was to make a refreshing, lively yet filling cold side dish while I tried to figure out what flesh item would be appropriate. I decided to make the Food Nirvana recipe for Mediterranean White Bean Salad, which is quite delicious. I suggest you make it too before proceeding further with this recipe. I made it and after covering it and refrigerating it, along with the salad bowls we would use at the meal, I decided to look at the beef items in our deep freeze. (Note that with the high temperature searing of thin pieces of beef in this recipe different cuts of beef will work well, as in come out flavorful and tender).

I found two nicely vacuum sealed beef filet pieces, and suddenly I had just the idea I needed for dinner. Why not make Chinese Pepper Steak with the filets? Why not, indeed! What a fine idea to have perfectly tender beef in a succulent, mildly seasoned dish. All I would have to make to go with it was a nice bowl of warm basmati rice. I lacked a recipe for Pepper Steak so I did a bit of Internet searching. I found an almost perfect recipe. The "almost" resulted from that recipe's absence of garlic, which I found to be sadly amusing. Well, that was easy to remedy, along with some changes to amounts of the different ingredients.

I actually was excited by the prospect of making and enjoying the Pepper Steak as making it was both new for me and I had found two ways to enhance the dish, with my choice of beef and the use of garlic. Even the basmati rice would have a fine role by blandly separating the very different tastes of the White Bean Salad and the Pepper Steak ... the perfect go between role to maximize pleasure by not having contrasting tastes clash.

Peggy and I were thoroughly happy with our meal, and the Pepper Steak was so good that I knew I had to add the recipe to Food Nirvana. And I need to mention that we had a nice chilled Sauvignon Blanc wine to make the whole meal perfect. Now you will have all the information to make this great meal too.

The recipe below does not include the preparation of the bowl of basmati rice. You can do that easily by bringing two cups of chicken broth to a boil in a saucepan, then mixing in one cup of uncooked basmati rice, then covering it with a lid, then cooking it on very low heat for 12 to 15 minutes. Check the rice for doneness (no remaining liquid in the bottom of the saucepan) after 12 minutes, and only cook longer if necessary. Stir the cooked rice and again cover it with the

lid and remove the saucepan from the heat. After five minutes put the rice into a bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Ingredients:

2, 6 ounce pieces of beef filet (or other non-fatty beef cut into 1/2" wide strips no more than 1/4" thick)

2 tbsp. of soy sauce

1 tbsp. of sugar

1 tbsp. of corn starch

1/4 tsp. of ground ginger

2 tbsp. of soybean oil

2 large cloves of garlic, diced

1/2 large sweet onion, cut into 1 inch squares

1 large green bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 1 inch squares

1/2 large red bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 1 inch squares

1/2 cup of halved ripe grape tomatoes

A small dish of soy sauce as a condiment at the meal (optional)

Directions:

Turn on the oven to 180 degrees F.

Put your serving dish and your dinner plates or bowls into the warming oven.

Slice the filet pieces into strips 1/4" thick and roughly 1/2" wide and 2" to 3" long on a wood cutting board.

Mix together the soy sauce, sugar, cornstarch and ginger in a one quart bowl until the sugar is dissolved, which creates the marinade for the beef.

Add the filet pieces gradually, mixing and coating them completely with the marinade, then set the bowl aside for 20 minutes or more to let the filet pieces marinate.

Heat the soybean oil in a large cast iron skillet on high heat until the oil shimmers, then add all of the filet (or other beef) pieces, spreading them out flat so one side of each piece will sear.

After three minutes flip the filet pieces over and sear the second side for three minutes.

Put the filet/other beef pieces into the serving dish in the 180 degrees F warming oven.

Add the onion and pepper pieces to the hot skillet and sauté them with light stirring until the onion becomes translucent.

If necessary, you can add one additional tablespoon of soybean oil to keep the vegetable pieces from sticking to the hot skillet.

Add the diced garlic and continue to sauté for two minutes on high heat while gently stirring the onion/pepper/garlic mixture.

Add the filet pieces back into the skillet and mix them well with the vegetables and cook on medium heat for three minutes.

Add the halved tomato pieces and cook for an additional three minutes while stirring.

Serve the pepper steak in the oven warmed serving dish along with the bowl of basmati rice and your pre-warmed dinner bowls or plates.

Serve the white bean salad along with the chilled salad bowls.

For each guest, cover a generous serving of rice with the pepper steak. If you like you might drizzle a small amount of soy sauce over some of the rice.

A chilled bottle of a light, clean tasting (not sweet) white wine goes very nicely with this meal.

You might try a French White Burgundy, a Pinot Grigio or a Sauvignon Blanc as we did.

Enjoy!

Roast Beef – Old Fashioned Skillet Seared Method - ☺♥

There are many ways to prepare roast beef. Some are more effective for tougher cuts of beef and other ways most effective for choice or prime beef in the best cuts. Degree of doneness is also highly variable, from rare steamship rounds of beef and cuts like medium rare prime rib all the way to the opposite extreme of being drier and well done, or, thoroughly cooked in moisture to develop tenderness, like pot roast. This recipe is intended to produce well done but tender beef roast from cheaper cuts, specifically boneless chuck roasts, or from better cuts like sirloin.

Let's start with a five pound boneless chuck roast, which has been partially de-fatted (Simply cut off any excess outside fat) and to which cracked peppercorns and coarse sea salt have been rubbed onto both sides. Use Pam® to spray each side generously after the addition of the salt and pepper, to hold the seasonings in place. Put the beef into a large ovenproof skillet that has a well fitting lid. Chop one large onion into small pieces for later use and set it aside.

The general idea is to thoroughly sear both sides of the seasoned roast in a covered skillet on top of the stove on high heat. This takes from two to four minutes per side. The PAM® sprayed on earlier helps the searing process and in turning the meat over to sear the second side. After searing a small amount of water is added (about ½ to ¾ cup) and the covered skillet is put into a 375° F oven. After thirty minutes, the chopped onion is added and mixed with skillet liquids. The roasting continues for one additional hour, with stirring after the second thirty minutes to mix the caramelizing onions with beef drippings and to check that the skillet contents around the beef are not turning too dark. Reduce the heat for the last thirty minutes to 325°F.

Check the roast beef for doneness. It should be very tender. If not, roast it for an additional thirty minutes, covered. If the skillet contents are becoming too dry then add ¼ to ½ cup of water to keep the drippings from burning/becoming too dark during the final roasting process. Repeat this process as necessary until the beef is very tender. Why the variable roasting times? Meat thickness determines how long it will take to cook through and become tender.

Remove the beef from the skillet to a platter, cover it with aluminum foil and put it into a 200°F oven. Place the plates you plan to use at dinner into the oven to pre-warm them, along with any serving dishes you will use for cooked vegetables, etc.

Now let's assume you cooked four very large finely diced russet potatoes in one quart of canned beef broth, boiling on medium heat for ten minutes, to make mashed potatoes to accompany your roast beef. Once the potatoes are cooked the liquid/beef broth is to be poured through a strainer into the skillet used to roast the beef, which also captures the cooked potatoes in the strainer. That method captures the potato starch for the gravy and some amount of vitamins and the beef broth.

Make the mashed potatoes with softened butter, milk, salt and pepper. Mix at medium and then high speed in a large bowl using an electric mixer. For four very large potatoes use ½ stick of butter, ½ tsp. Salt, and ½ tsp. Pepper. Add up to ½ cup milk after thorough mixing, a little at a time while continuing mixing at high speed until you have the desired consistency. Vary the milk as necessary, seeking whipped potatoes that are soft and moist but which also hold their whipped shape well. Too much milk will create a soupy mess. Too little milk will yield mashed potatoes that are too firm and dry. Transfer the finished mashed potatoes to a bowl, cover it and put it into the 200°F oven with the roast beef.

If you de-fatted/removed the excess fat from the beef prior to roasting you will not have to remove any fat from the skillet before making the gravy. De-glaze the skillet with the potato/beef broth added earlier, which means scrape the skillet bottom gently to unstick the beef drippings so they can be blended well into the broth prior to adding thickeners. Do that blending with a plastic spatula or wooden spoon. Do not have heat on under the skillet.

Prepare a mixture of thickeners to convert the skillet contents into very rich and tasty gravy. Use six tablespoons of flour and two tablespoons of cornstarch in a bowl with one cup of water, adding the water gradually while mixing to produce a smooth thickening sauce.

Add the thickening sauce gradually to the skillet while stirring continuously with a wooden spoon to avoid clumping of the thickeners. Turn on the stovetop heat to high and continue stirring the gravy to keep it uniform in thickness. When the gravy comes to a medium boil it is done. You may choose to strain the gravy or not depending on its consistency ... if you have lumps you didn't mix the thickeners properly or you didn't stir continuously or you didn't wait to heat the juices before adding the thickeners ... we all must learn from our errors.

Transfer the gravy from the skillet into a two-quart bowl directly or through a strainer and place it, covered, into the oven that contains the roast beef platter. Note that it was not necessary to add salt or pepper to the gravy due to pre-seasoning the roast beef prior to searing. Seasoning adjustments can be made by each individual later at the table to suit their wants.

Make whatever other vegetables, salads, etc. that you want to serve with the meal. When they are done serve the entire meal at once ... The beef can be pulled apart easily as it will be very tender. The warmed plates and other serving bowls/contents will make the meal even more enjoyable.

The gravy is to die for delicious on the already delicious beef and the mashed potatoes. The secret was the onion, the beef broth from the potatoes and the pre-seasoning of the beef and, of course the searing process.

Yes, I love medium rare prime rib, steaks, etc., but this old fashioned recipe from my childhood creates an equally delicious but very different roast beef from what is typically served today in homes and restaurants. My grandmother Cora and my mother, Dorothy, pleased family and friends many times with this great tasting roast beef dinner. And my children love it. It will go on ...

Rouladen - ?

If you are German, you have probably heard of rouladen, a very traditional dish in German cooking. If you haven't, rouladen (roo-la-din) is a pickle slice and a few other vegetables and seasonings, and usually bacon also, wrapped in a thin piece of steak. It may sound strange, but it is delicious. I have a very pleasant memory of another traditional German meal that Marie and I enjoyed in California when our friend Norbert invited us to dinner ... Sauerbraten. Yes, Norbert was from Germany, and his sauerbraten was similar in preparation by using red wine vinegar as a tart ingredient like the pickle juice used in the rouladen recipe.

The recipe below is a composite of two recipes I found on the Internet. Note that there are two different ways of using the bacon provided in the directions below so be sure to read the directions all the way through and then decide which method you will use. The picture shown with this recipe is the that of the method where the raw bacon is wrapped around the rolled beef prior to cooking. I have to try this recipe and then I will report back with results, but I intend to use the alternative method of pre-frying the bacon and tying the rouladen rolls with string prior to cooking. I think that method will be superior in holding the contents of the rolled beef in place during cooking.

Note that typical items served with rouladen are spatzle and hot pickled red cabbage. Noodles can be substituted for the spatzle. Hot freshly made applesauce is another nice accompaniment.

Ingredients:

Thin-cut top round steak (About 1.5 pounds cut into 4 thin pieces)

2 whole dill pickles (cut into fourths)

Pickle juice (32 oz.)

1 to 2 teaspoons of beef bouillon or two to four beef bouillon cubes

2 tablespoons of cornstarch

Dried parsley

Garlic salt

Brown mustard

One Green Bell pepper sliced thinly with each piece cut in half

One medium size sweet onion sliced thinly and cut in half to form small pieces

8 slices of raw Bacon

Directions:

If you use the primary recipe directions below then do not fry the bacon first. If you use the alternative method then fry the bacon until it is almost crisp and then drain it on a paper towel and set it aside. Reserve the bacon grease in a small dish.

Flatten and tenderize the steaks with a meat mallet.

Cut each piece of meat in half so that you have 8 pieces of meat, each about 6 inches long.

Cut the two whole dill pickles into quarters lengthwise.

Lightly sprinkle each side of the meat with garlic salt and dried parsley.

Spread a very light coating of mustard on the top surface of each piece of meat.

Put a few slices of the green pepper and the onion, evenly distributed, on the top surface of each piece of meat.

Place a piece of the pickle across the meat at the narrow end and (but see alternative method below) roll it up tightly inside the meat along with the other vegetables, being careful to keep all the ingredients inside the rolled up meat and evenly distributed.

If you do not use the alternative method described below then wrap a piece of bacon around each piece of meat to hold it together.

In a typical rouladen recipe the meat is tied up with string to keep it together, but wrapping it in raw bacon (as opposed to putting fried bacon inside) is an easy trick so you don't have to cut off strings at serving time.

The alternative method is to pre-fry the bacon until it is nearly crisp and put one piece inside the meat roll with the vegetables, and then tie each rolled up piece of meat with string fairly tightly, once around the middle of the roll and also once end to end. The tying guarantees that each roll will remain tight and not lose any content into the skillet during cooking.

The rouladen is now ready to cook.

If you used the method of putting the pre-fried bacon inside each roll then add two to three tablespoons of the reserved bacon grease to a hot skillet.

Brown the meat in the skillet at medium to high heat, turning the pieces every few minutes to cook each side. The meat will slow cook all the way through later during the simmering step.

When the meat is browned, or the wrapped raw bacon mostly fried, add 2 cups of water to the skillet and bring it to a boil, using a spoon to scrape any meat drippings from the bottom of the pan.

Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook the meat for 30 minutes, uncovered. The water should bubble slightly during simmering.

Add 1 to 2 cups of water and 1/2 cup of pickle juice after the 30 minutes, and continue doing this every 15 minutes for two hours total, but do not add too much liquid, ergo, don't completely submerge the meat. If you haven't used all the pickle juice by the end, add the rest. Also, you can always add more water during simmering to make sure the meat is barely covered, depending on how quickly the water evaporates.

After two hours, take the meat out of the pan and place the pieces in a serving dish, leaving the remaining liquid in the skillet.

Make the gravy for the rouladen. Stir 1 to 2 teaspoons of beef bouillon or two to four bouillon cubes into the liquid. Taste it and add more if you want it saltier.

Mix 2 tablespoons of cornstarch with 2 tablespoons of water to make a thickener.

Slowly whisk the thickener into the liquid to make a gravy. Heat the gravy to a boil while whisking until it thickens.

Serve the rouladen hot with the gravy ladled over it in the serving dish.

As noted in the introduction, spatzle and hot pickled red cabbage are traditional accompaniments served with rouladen. Noodles can be substituted for the spatzle. Homemade hot applesauce is also a nice addition.

Enjoy!

Serendipity Steak - ☺♥

Well, sometimes life just goes our way. Yes, I know it doesn't happen often, but hey, it does happen. Tonight I had a delightful meal that went far beyond my expectations. Here is the story...

I want a steak for dinner. It is very cold outside (January) so I don't want to charcoal grill anything! Thus, I have two weak choices ... skillet fried or broiled. I search the depths of the deep freeze hoping to find something respectable. I come up with a hunk of vacuum sealed frozen rib steak 2 inches thick. Where did that too thick steak come from?!!!

Hmmm ... what to do? It is too thick to grill as a steak and it is too thin to roast as a prime rib.

Enter one kitchen guardian angel ... she blesses me with a nutty idea. I accept as I have no alternative. Here we go ...

Suppose I treat this hunk of meat as a skinny rib roast ... if I use a small enough vertical side skillet and some small salad forks to keep it upright then I can roast it as a prime rib. Delightful if it works.

So, I turned on the Dacor® oven to a convection/sear setting at 550°F. Holy smokes! Well, no, that comes later.

Okay, I thawed the beef and coated it with peanut oil. Then I rubbed freshly ground peppercorns and kosher salt into each side. About that time the oven beeped as the extra high temperature oven exhaust fan came on.

I stuck the two salad forks into the meat at a 45° angle down on each side and then opened the very hot oven and slid out the rack holding a steel skillet ... a very hot steel skillet I might add. The forks and meat settled in flawlessly and the meat was sizzling immediately even with the oven door open. I mean to tell you the skillet was really hot. So I closed the oven and set one timer for 10 minutes and a second timer for 30 minutes.

Ten minutes later I reduced the oven heat setting to 375°F. I kind of felt I had to do that as the oven was rather smoky inside. Understatement!!!

My kitchen guardian angel prevailed ... I did not have to call the fire company.

20 minutes later I extracted the beef and I sat down to dinner, which besides the beef consisted of home grown butternut squash and a tossed salad with my recently created Hotel DuPont sesame salad dressing. Okay, a fine red wine too.

One cut to divide the beef in half was all I needed to see. Heaven on Earth! The outside was crisp and I had everything from well done to medium to medium rare to rare in the middle. What a delight! I ate a pound of this stuff like a hungry pig ... forget the rest of the meal! I finally got around to the squash and the salad after many grunts and moans about dying and going to beef heaven.

So, I suppose you get the impression I felt very fortunate as the house did not burn down and the meal was to die for ... that doesn't make any sense at all, does it?

I was thrilled and I decided to bore you with my story in the hope that you too can experience this kind of delight. All it takes is a silly ass problem that shouldn't have happened in the first place combined with a wild idea and a bit of luck, not to mention a kitchen guardian angel to keep a holocaust from happening.

So, now you have it. You just read a narrative recipe.

The End

Standing Rib Roast - ☺♥

Is there anyone out there who doesn't love a medium rare prime rib? If so, I feel sorry for you. We are carnivores, plain and simple. Playing games about which type of animal or fowl or aquatic life we will kill and eat for religious or health reasons is simply that ... playing games. In no culture are humans vegetarians by choice, only by supply limitations and resulting cultural practices. We are genetically programmed to love the taste of beef. Beef provides us excellent protein, albeit with a huge investment in grain to make it happen in a tasty and tender manner. That's it. There ain't no more to say.

Having said it all about killing Elmer for meat I can now move on to how to make this luscious treat. It is so simple a fool could do it, and I do. It is so good if done right that your guests will ask you to adopt them. Let's proceed.

There are two very different ways to cook a rib roast ... the conventional method is where the roasting starts with a high temperature sear (500°F), followed by lower temperature roasting (250°F) for the amount of time needed to elevate the internal temperature of the meat to 126°F, after which the roast is rested on a wood cutting board, covered loosely with aluminum foil, for 20 to 30 minutes. The internal temperature rises during the resting period to around 133°F.

The second method was developed by J. Kenji-Alt of Serious Eats® fame. It is called the reverse sear method. The roasting begins at a temperature of around 250°F, until the internal temperature of the meat is 126°F. That is followed by a high temperature sear (500°F) for about 20 minutes. The same post roasting resting period is used as in the conventional method.

Kenji's method produces medium rare doneness throughout the interior of the roast. The conventional method has outer thick areas up to about 1" wide done medium well, with a second area with a doneness of medium, and then finally a medium rare center. It is really a matter of what you want to eat that should determine what method you use.

I start by showing the conventional method, after which you will see the reverse sear method.

Ingredients: (serves 4 to 6 hungry adults)

1, 4 to 6 bone standing rib roast (the weight is determined after trimming, etc.)

¼ cup of crushed black peppercorns

¼ cup of kosher salt

Directions:

Set the oven at 500°F.

Trim any excess fat from the rib roast. Put it in a large skillet with a rack inside so that fat rendered during roasting will not touch the roast.

Coat the surface with the pepper and the salt and rub/pat it in.

Put the skillet and beef into the pre-heated oven. Roast for 15 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 250°F.

Roast based on the weight of the standing rib roast. Allow 15 minutes per pound. Then proceed to the next direction, measuring the internal temperature.

Measure the internal temperature of the middle of the roast using an instant read thermometer. The goal temperature is 126°F. Continue roasting and periodically checking the internal temperature until it is 126°F.

Remove the roast and let it stand on a wood cutting board covered loosely with aluminum foil for twenty minutes. The internal temperature should then be about 133°F. If not, cover the roast with the foil and let it rest an additional ten minutes.

Carve the roast so that each cut contains a rib bone. Serve.

That concludes the conventional recipe for making a standing rib roast.

Okay ... now let's look at the reverse sear method recipe ... somewhat modified by me for my convenience and your ease of methods comparison.

Ingredients: (serves 4 to 6 hungry adults)

1, 4 to 6 bone standing rib roast (the weight is determined after trimming, etc.)

¼ cup of crushed black peppercorns

¼ cup of kosher salt

Directions:

Set the oven at 250°F.

Trim any excess fat from the rib roast. Put it in a large skillet with a rack inside so that fat rendered during roasting will not touch the roast.

Coat the surface with the pepper and the salt and rub/pat it in.

Put the skillet and beef into the pre-heated oven. Roast until the internal temperature of the meat is 126°F. That will be multiple hours.

Increase the oven temperature to 500 °F.

Roast for 20 minutes at 500°F.

Remove the roast and let it stand on a wood cutting board covered loosely with aluminum foil for twenty minutes. The internal temperature should then be about 133°F. If not, cover the roast with the foil and let it rest an additional ten minutes.

Carve the roast so that each cut contains a rib bone. Serve.

That concludes the steps for the reverse sear method.

I hope you realize that the other parts of your meal need to be ready when you carve the beef. I like to bake large russet potatoes in a second oven. I simply time the placement of the potatoes in the oven so that they are well roasted when the beef is done. That means roughly 50 to 60 minutes before the beef is done, based on the size of the potatoes and the oven temperature. Also, potatoes baked at temperatures above 400°F develop a wonderful crisp skin and a fluffy interior, which is superb. Simply keep an eye on them based on the size of the potatoes so they don't bake beyond the development of the crisp skin. Look at the Food Nirvana recipe for baked potato for specific directions for stabbing holes, oiling and salting the potatoes before baking.

I also like a tossed salad with this meal, with my bleu cheese dressing, and a glass or two of a good Merlot or Pinot Noir wine. A loaf of warmed crusty French bread served with butter is a nice addition. Ice cream, homemade of course, is a fine dessert.

So yes, you will feel good about the world after this meal. So should it be.

Steak Au Poivre - ☺♥

The following recipe is wonderful. I learned how to make this dish back in the early 1980's at a restaurant in Wilmington DE, named Leounes Mansion®. The chef was Tony Leounes and his version of this dish is totally unlike any found in any other restaurant I ever visited, anywhere in the world.

Typically steak au Poivre simply means a grilled steak, using a charcoal grill or a broiler, which is prepared and served medium to medium rare and covered in a brown sauce or gravy loaded with peppercorns. Thus, there is a strong but very good flavor from the pepper, hence the French name Au Poivre meaning "with pepper."

Tony's version replaced the brown sauce/gravy and the whole peppercorns with a combination of bleu cheese, cracked peppercorns and butter. That topping is prepared independently before the steak is grilled and it is slathered about ¼ inch thick on the top of the steak after grilling. Tony then used a small amount of a high proof brandy, which he poured over the dish and flamed. Wow, was it great!

I found the dish easy to copy and I had a lot of fun serving it to family and good friends. High compliments were dependably offered. Later I learned that Tony's version was just as good without the brandy, but in that situation I would put the coated steak under a hot broiler just long enough to partially melt the bleu cheese and butter and peppercorn mix.

Recently I have improved this dish yet again. I use bacon wrapped filet mignon, charcoal grill it to a medium rare level of doneness and then the remainder of the recipe is the same. As you might guess, the use of the bacon imparts yet another great flavor to that of the bleu cheese and cracked peppercorns.

Ingredients:

4, 12 ounce filets of beef about 1 ¼ to 1 ½ inches thick

8 oz. bleu cheese softened to room temperature

1/3 stick of butter softened to room temperature

¼ cup of black peppercorns, cracked

4 slices of thick sliced bacon

Cooking materials:

Medium size charcoal grill ... like the domed Weber® Kettle grills.

Charcoal briquettes sufficient to fill the grill so that the hot briquettes are four inches below the grate on which the steaks/filets will be grilled.

Charcoal lighter fluid.

Good quality spatula for turning the steaks/filets during grilling.

Toothpicks.

An instant read thermometer to check the internal temperature of the steaks/filets during grilling.

Directions:

Prepare the softened blue cheese, softened butter and cracked peppercorn mixture by mixing all three ingredients manually but thoroughly in a small bowl. Set aside. Note: I usually put the whole peppercorns in a Ziploc® freezer bag first and crack or smash them with a flat wooden mallet before adding them to the other ingredients of the mixture.

Pre-fry the bacon on low heat to render out bacon fat, but not enough to make it crisp, for it needs to be sufficiently flexible to wrap around the steaks as described next. Let the bacon drain and cool for a few minutes on a paper towel.

Prepare the steaks/filets by wrapping each in bacon secured to the perimeter of the meat with toothpicks. Set aside and allow the steaks/filets to come to room temperature.

Prepare the charcoal grill and light the charcoal. Do not cook the meat until the briquettes have been completely gray for 10 minutes, to cook off any residual charcoal lighter, which could adversely flavor the grilled meat. Do not cover the grill while grilling unless the ambient temperature is below 50°F. One exception is if you are using wood chips in the grill to smoke the meat during grilling. If you choose to or have to cover the grill be certain the lower and dome vents are wide open.

Turn on your oven broiler to high to preheat the broiler. Warm a small meat platter on a very low rack during the preheating.

Put the prepared meat on the open grill and cook uncovered (unless the weather is cold or you are smoking the meat as discussed above) initially for five minutes

on each side. You may have to move the meat once or twice during initial grilling to avoid excessive flaming from melted bacon fat.

Check the internal temperature of the meat with the instant read thermometer after the initial grilling. When it is 126 to 127 degrees F the steaks are done, for the internal temperature will continue to rise for a few minutes to the perfect temperature of 130 degrees F, which is medium rare. If you want medium instead of medium rare then remove the steaks when the internal temperature is 132 to 133 degrees F. If you want well done then remove the steaks when the internal temperature is 140 degrees F.

In any event, if additional grilling is necessary to arrive at the proper internal temperature, continue grilling, one minute per side, as necessary, until the desired internal temperature is obtained. Do that by checking the internal temperature each minute just before turning the meat to the other side. Remove the grilled meat to the pre-warmed small meat platter and proceed as follows:

Use a simple kitchen knife to spread the bleu cheese, butter and cracked peppercorn mixture on to the top of each piece of meat, about ¼ inch thick.

Place the platter with the coated meat into the oven on a rack about 5 to 6 inches below the hot broiler heating element. Slide the oven rack and platter out after 30 seconds of broiling and see if the cheese and butter mixture is melting. If so, the dish is done. Otherwise broil for an additional 30 seconds. Repeat as necessary.

Serve hot. Note that no salt was used in this recipe. The bacon provided some salt as did the bleu cheese and each guest will further season the meat to suit their preference.

Given the focus on preparing the steak au Poivre it is best to have all other meal items prepared first and on the table ready to eat before the coated steak is even grilled, else the steak will likely not be at optimum serving temperature when it is eaten. That would be a tragedy, so plan ahead.

My grandmother Cora insisted on having hot food served very hot. She was right. Folks who let their hot food lose heat before serving it just don't get it. Great becomes ho hum.

Steak Au Poivre (Traditional) - ☺♥

A recipe similar to this one was recommended to me by my son, Tim. I know it had to be great because he is a fine food aficionado. It differed considerably from the other Food Nirvana Steak Au Poivre recipe that uses bleu cheese, butter and cracked peppercorns on a grilled steak.

My advice? Make steak Au Poivre both ways, at different times, and enjoy life to the full.

I have modified the recipe Tim used to follow some refinements found at the Serious Eats® website.

Remember to make all other meal items before making the steak. This steak pairs well with a good Merlot or Pinot Noir wine. Glasses of ice water will be appreciated too. Either a baked potato or French fries are great as the carbohydrate, and a cold side salad of your choice with a piquant (slightly sharp, non-creamy) salad dressing combine to make a perfect meal.

Ingredients: (2 servings)

Meat Ingredients/Preparation:

2, 1 lb., one and one quarter inch thick boneless rib-eye or strip steaks (any outside edge fat removed) or 4, 8 ounce filet mignons

1 tsp. of Kosher salt, rubbed into each side of each steak (used 30 minutes prior to peppering and searing, to season the steak and to dry the steak surface)

2 to 3 tsp. of cracked peppercorns for each steak (applied [pressed into] to only one side of the steak, just before searing)

3 tbsp. of peanut oil

1 garlic clove, minced

2 sprigs of thyme

1 tablespoon of butter

Sauce Ingredients:

2 tbsp. of cognac (to deglaze the skillet)

1 tbsp. of cracked peppercorns

1/2 of a large shallot, minced

1/2 cup of chicken broth

3/4 cup of heavy cream

1 teaspoon of Dijon mustard

Sea salt (to taste ... about one teaspoon)

Directions:

Preheat an oven to 150 °F.

Remember to prepare all other meal items before cooking the steak Au Poivre. Keep the potato or other carbohydrate item warm in the oven.

Season the steaks on both sides with kosher salt. Set them on a wire rack set over a rimmed baking sheet and allow the steaks to air-dry, uncovered, in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Preheat a second oven to 375 °F.

Spread the cracked peppercorns on a plate or in a shallow dish and firmly press one side of each steak into the pepper to encrust it in an even layer. Set each steak aside, peppercorn side up.

Heat the peanut oil over medium-high heat in a large cast iron skillet until it shimmers.

Add the steaks, peppercorn side down, and cook until the peppercorns are well toasted, about 3 minutes.

Carefully turn the steaks over, trying not to break the peppercorn crust. Add the butter, thyme and garlic, then cook, basting the steaks with the butter, thyme and garlic, using a spoon, until they are well seared on the second side, about 4 to 5 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat.

Transfer the steaks to a wire rack covered rimmed baking sheet. Use an instant-read thermometer and check the internal temperature of the steaks; if they've reached 125°F, they will be ready to serve within a few minutes, medium-rare. If they haven't reached their final desired internal temperature (which will depend on the thickness of the steaks), transfer them to the 375 degrees F oven and continue cooking them until the correct internal temperature is reached.

Allow the steaks to rest for 5 minutes outside the oven once the final internal temperature is reached.

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of fat/oil from the skillet and discard the garlic and thyme. Add the shallot and return to medium heat, and cook, stirring, until shallot is tender, about 2 minutes.

Add the cognac to the skillet and stir to deglaze the skillet.

Put the cracked peppercorns into the skillet.

Add the chicken stock and bring the mixture to a simmer, stirring and scraping up any browned bits left in the skillet from searing the steaks.

Whisk in the cream, then simmer, stirring often, until the sauce has reduced enough to glaze a spoon.

Whisk in the Dijon mustard. Season the sauce with salt.

Remove the sauce from the heat and put it into a gravy boat or other serving dish.

Serve the steaks and pour/ladle the sauce over them.

Serve the other meal items, along with the wine and glasses of ice water.

Enjoy!

Steamship Round of Beef - ☺

I recall with pleasure the times in my life when I ate steamship round of beef at good buffets, weddings and in some better restaurants. Roasted right and kept warm and cut into thin slices it is tender, juicy and very tasty. That means the degree of doneness is such that it is crisp on the outside and medium rare on the inside.

I decided to make that roast at home for a family gathering of twelve of people. What I purchased was a Choice grade 12 pound beef round tip at Costco® for a mere \$29. Then I searched the Internet for different ways to prepare it so I could make an informed decision about what I would do. As it turns out, the very first recipe I found was unique from all the others, for it involved high temperature roasting, and that vastly appealed to me so I made my decision. Maybe the appeal is from the great results from very high temperature initial roasting in doing standing rib roasts and the similar effect making the Serendipity Steak.

My decision was to use the high roasting temperature recipe with the addition of kosher salt. Why? High temperature charcoal grilling of beef as done in Brazil includes rubbing the exterior with freshly ground black pepper and kosher salt before grilling. Since this recipe calls for very high temperature initial roasting I decided the kosher salt would be a great addition to the pepper.

I now report back after making this roast, which came out fine. My only recommendation is to use a meat thermometer to assure the wanted results.

Ingredients:

12 lb. Choice Beef Round Tip

16 medium size garlic cloves (The general idea is to use one to one and one quarter cloves of garlic per pound of meat)

¼ cup of freshly ground black pepper

¼ cup of kosher salt

Directions:

Preheat the oven to a temperature of 500°F.

Cut slits about one to one and one quarter inches deep evenly on all sides except the bottom side of the beef to contain the garlic cloves, one clove per slit.

Cut a garlic clove into four pieces and insert the four pieces into one of the slits. Repeat that procedure for each slit until all the garlic has been processed.

Rub the outside of the beef with the freshly ground pepper and the kosher salt.

Put the roast on a rack in a shallow roasting pan or large all metal skillet.

Roast the beef at 500°F for five minutes per pound. With a 12 lb. roast that means one hour and that will put a good crust on the exterior of the completed roast.

Turn the oven off and let the roast remain in the oven for two hours. Do not open the oven door.

After two hours turn the oven on and set the temperature to 250°F. Roast the beef for an additional thirty minutes.

After those steps check the internal temperature with a meat thermometer inserted into the center of the roast but not into fat or next to bone.

According to the different recipes I read an internal temperature of 140°F will be a rare roast. 145°F will be a medium rare roast. 160°F will be a medium roast. 170°F will be a well-done roast.

If necessary, continue to roast the beef until the internal temperature is about 5 degrees lower than your goal. I prefer medium rare. If necessary you can increase the oven temperature to 300°F if the roast is too cool in the center after you finish the second roasting period and check the internal temperature, like below 140°F.

Remove the beef to a serving platter and put it into a warm 150°F oven until you are ready to serve it. It will actually continue cooking briefly and the internal temperature will increase to the level you want ... thus the removal from the hot oven when the actual internal temperature is 5°F lower than the goal temperature. Leave the roast in the warm oven at least ten minutes to rest it before carving but no more than twenty minutes is necessary.

When the meal is served, slice the roast horizontally starting at the smaller top section, cutting thin slices about one quarter to one third inch thick. Do not cut more at one time than is necessary for each serving so that the meat remains warm. Cover it with aluminum foil if necessary, which means if it is not completely used during the first serving.

Note that with the very high temperature initial roasting the degree of doneness will vary considerably from the exterior to the center of the meat. This is

particularly true on the thinner end or top of the roast, and people who prefer well done or medium meat will find what they want on that end. The medium rare or rare areas will obviously be in the thicker parts of the roast about one third of the way down from the top. It is typical in restaurants to cut the roast into two or three pieces at the beginning of carving so customers can have exactly the degree of doneness wanted in their individual servings.

Restaurants have to keep the beef roast warm during serving as the time frame for serving might be as long as two or three hours. They use carving stations that usually have a heat lamp above and close to the top of the uncut meat to assist keeping the meat warm. At home, the amount of beef roasted should correspond to the number of people eating, and it is likely most or all of the roast will be sliced and eaten immediately after it is served. Making provision for keeping it warm is unlikely to be necessary, but you can use the 150° F warming oven if necessary.

Enjoy!

Stuffed Cabbage Rolls - ▲

This recipe is courtesy of Martha Stewart via the Internet. Some courtesy! I tried it and it needed a lot of help as it was way too bland. Beyond that, the recipe did not include the celery in the sautéing of the raw vegetables. Also, the 2 tbsp. of "unsalted" butter in a recipe that uses coarse salt is a joke. Four tbsp. of regular butter is better by far. The "garlic" ingredient is not specified as a clove or a complete head of garlic. I used half a head and more would have been welcome. The cooking pot required more liquid so in the future I will use three cups of reserved cabbage water, not two as stated in the Internet recipe. The tomato flavor was weak so I needed to address that. Hmmm ... as is so often the case, recipes from TV or the Internet can have major flaws, regardless of whose name is attached to the recipe.

I decided to add a can of tomato paste and a tsp. of oregano and 2 tsp. of basil, then simmer the liquid to concentrate it some and then re-coat the already cooked cabbage rolls. Ahh ... they came out just fine. Whew!

Ingredients:

**2 quarts of water
1 large green cabbage (about 2 1/2 pounds)
2 tablespoons of unsalted butter
1 large onion, chopped
1 garlic, finely chopped
2 cups of cooked rice
8 ounces of ground beef
8 ounces of ground pork
Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper
1 tablespoon of dried parsley flakes
1 medium green pepper, grated
2 celery stalks with leaves, finely chopped
4 cups of tomato puree (we used tomato sauce)
1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, and chopped
1/2 cup of sour cream, plus more for garnish**

Plus my additions and recommendations:

Increase garlic to one head

1 tsp. of dried oregano

2 tsp. of dried basil

1, 6 oz. can of tomato paste

Increase reserved cabbage water from 2 cups to 3 cups

Directions:

Using a paring knife, remove the center core of the cabbage.

In a large non-stick stockpot, bring 2 quarts of water to a boil. Add the cabbage and cook 2 to 3 minutes or until the outer leaves are bright green and tender.

Lift the cabbage from the water with a large skimming utensil, and remove the outer leaves.

Return the cabbage to the boiling water, and repeat the brief cooking and removal of leaves until all of the leaves are partially cooked and removed.

Reserve 3 cups of the cabbage cooking water.

Trim the thick center vein from the bottom of each cabbage leaf and discard it.

Reserve the four largest outer leaves to line the bottom of a Dutch Oven.

In a medium skillet, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and the celery, and cook until golden and tender, about 8 minutes. (I cover the skillet with a glass lid for part of the sauté process to speed it along and not burn the onions or the garlic, so I only need five minutes, not eight) Golden? NO.

In a large bowl, combine the onion mixture, rice, beef, pork, salt, pepper, parsley flakes and green pepper. Add the oregano and the basil. Stir to combine the ingredients and create the filling.

Add about 1/3 cup of the filling to one cabbage leaf. Fold the sides of the cabbage leaf over the filling, and, starting with the stem end, roll the cabbage up. Repeat with the remaining leaves and filling.

Line a 5-quart Dutch oven with the reserved outside cabbage leaves. Transfer the stuffed cabbage rolls to the Dutch oven.

In a large bowl, combine the tomato sauce, the tomato paste and the reserved 3 cups of cabbage cooking water and mix them. Pour some of the resulting tomato sauce over the cabbage to almost cover it. Sprinkle the apple pieces over the top of the cabbage leaves. Bring to a boil and immediately reduce to a gentle simmer; cover.

Cook for 1 hour or more until the cabbage is very tender, adding additional tomato sauce as needed.

I skip the following step and simply serve sour cream with the cabbage rolls:

Place the sour cream in a small bowl, and ladle in about 3/4 cup of tomato sauce from the cooked stuffed cabbage rolls. Whisk to combine. Add the sour cream mixture to the Dutch oven and stir to combine. Serve the stuffed cabbage rolls with additional sour cream.

Stuffed Green Peppers - ☺

I had the pleasure of eating excellent stuffed green peppers made by none other than my daughter, Patty. They were so good I asked for her recipe so I could include it in Food Nirvana. She graciously provided it. See below. I guarantee you will enjoy this dish.

Ingredients:

Enough green peppers, halved lengthwise and cleaned, to cover the bottom of a 12" by 18" oval roasting pan

1 cup of uncooked rice

2 cups of water

3 lbs. of Ground beef

2 eggs

½ cup. of Ragu® Light spaghetti sauce (Use Ragu® Light or other sugarless sauce to avoid unwanted sweetness) to be added while making the ground beef mixture.

1, Two pound 13 ounce bottle of Ragu® Light spaghetti sauce (less the ½ cup listed above)

1 Tbsp. of Salt

1 tsp. of pepper (or more)

1 Tbsp. of Onion powder

1 tsp. of garlic salt

1 Tbsp. of Dried Parsley

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Use the rice and the water and follow package directions to cook it. It should make two cups of cooked rice. Parboiled rice usually takes 15 minutes of simmering on low heat, covered, and regular uncooked rice takes about 22 minutes, covered. Some brown rice have a 45 minute cooking time.

Halve and clean the green peppers and place them open side up on the bottom of the 12" by 18" oval roasting pan.

Mix all the ingredients except the bottle of Ragu® Light sauce together by hand until they are thoroughly mixed.

Fill the peppers with the ground beef mixture evenly.

Cover the peppers with the jar of Ragu-Light spaghetti sauce (minus the ½ cup used in the ground beef mixture)

Hint: Pour ½ jar of the spaghetti sauce over the peppers, then add ½ cup of water to the rest of the sauce in the jar, put the lid on tightly and shake the jar. Then pour that slightly diluted sauce over the peppers and you will get virtually all of the sauce from the jar.

After the peppers are covered evenly, cover the roasting pan with a lid and bake at 350°F for 1½ hours.

Serve hot.

Stuffed Green Peppers II - ☺♥

I found a unique recipe for stuffed green peppers at Allrecipes.com, in which the precooking of the meat significantly shortened the typical baking time. That should result in higher moisture content and tenderness for the stuffing. It sure did! When I tested the recipe I really liked it. Then I made a few nice improvements. Those changes are reflected in the recipe below.

I must, however, confess that one idea shown in this recipe I stole from my daughter. She uses Ragu® Light spaghetti sauce instead of tomato sauce. The light version avoids sugar, which is not appropriate in the savory stuffed peppers dish. Both the Ragu® Light Sauce and the tomato sauce are very good but the choice is yours to make. If you can't find the Ragu® product then you may choose to purchase a different brand of plain spaghetti sauce that does not contain sugar or anything else as a sweetener. Check the ingredients list to know if the sauce is an appropriate choice.

Now I get to a real departure from typical stuffed green pepper recipes. The big change is to avoid over baking the green peppers so they still have some substance and better color (and taste). This is accomplished by reducing the typical baking time and by starting with raw green bell peppers, which works because the other ingredients, except for the cheese and the second can of tomato sauce (or the Ragu® or other sauce), are precooked. The peppers in the real dish looked much better than the ones in the picture shown with this recipe.

All the folks who have tried this dish love it. Well, enjoy ... we certainly do.

Ingredients: (serves four adults)

2 1/4 cups of water (or beef broth)

1 cup of uncooked white rice

1/2 to 1 tsp. of sriracha sauce (optional)

4 very large or 6 medium size green bell peppers

1 pound of 90% lean ground beef

1/2 to 1 pound of loose sweet Italian sausage

1 cup of diced onion

2 large garlic cloves, finely diced

1 tsp. of Sea salt

3/4 tsp. of ground black pepper

2, 15 ounce cans of tomato sauce, or 1, 32 ounce bottle of Ragu® Light or other plain spaghetti sauce

2 cups (or more) of grated/shredded mozzarella cheese (or a mixture of Romano, Asagio & parmesan)

Directions:

Halve the green bell peppers lengthwise. Cut out the white membrane and the stem and rinse the seeds out.

Shake any residual water out of the halved green peppers and place them open side up in a 9"x13" glass baking dish.

Bring the water or beef broth to a boil in a medium saucepan. Add the rice and stir. Add the (optional) sriracha sauce, which flavors the rice nicely without later causing the stuffed peppers seasoning to be too hot.

Move the saucepan to the smallest burner on the stove, set the heat to very low and cover the saucepan with a lid. Simmer the rice for anywhere from 12 to 22 minutes depending on the type of rice you use. Remove the saucepan from the heat and leave it covered.

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

Brown the ground beef and the sausage in a large, deep skillet or a Dutch oven, over medium heat, and then drain any rendered fat (if any) from it. If you used 90% lean ground beef you won't have any rendered fat to discard.

Mix in the diced onion, diced garlic, salt and pepper and continue cooking on low heat for five minutes.

Pour in one can of the tomato sauce (or two cups of the Ragu® Light or other spaghetti sauce) and mix thoroughly. Add the cooked rice and mix well. Let the mixture simmer on low heat for about 10 minutes, covered. Remove the skillet/Dutch oven from the heat.

Spoon the meat and rice mixture, heaping, into/onto each half of the green peppers. If you have extra stuffing then simply fit it into openings around the green peppers. Pour the second can of tomato sauce, or the remainder of the jar of Ragu® Light or other spaghetti sauce, evenly over the mixture/peppers.

Bake the stuffed peppers in the preheated oven for 30 minutes, then check the peppers for doneness. The idea is you don't want them to become soft and mushy

and dull olive colored. If necessary you can bake them for an additional 10 minutes. Less baking time equals better color and texture and taste.

Sprinkle the mozzarella cheese (or other grated cheeses) over the top of each stuffed pepper. Return the peppers to the oven and bake them for an additional 5 to 10 minutes ... just long enough to melt the cheese.

Serve hot. Expect applause. You might also serve a nice oven warmed loaf of Italian or French bread, along with butter. Most any beverage will be fine as long as it is cold. The meal is very filling so a chilled fruit salad makes a fine light dessert.

BEVERAGES:

About Beverages

There is a general question that occurs to us when we entertain regarding beverages. It is "What beverage(s) are best for this event given the foods that will be served?" There can be no single answer as guests may or may not want to consume alcohol, some of the guests may be children, some guests may like beer and others wine. The home chef wants the selection of beverages to complement the specific food(s) being served whether any individual guest wants or does not want a beverage containing alcohol. This means a brief look at the types of food and the corresponding complementary beverages can be useful.

I am not attempting to provide an exhaustive list of beverage types. What I am doing in this discussion is to suggest types of beverages that are often favored with certain types of food. To complicate matters, the enjoyment of sweeter beverages is related to age, in which, for instance, young adults will tend to favor light sweet wines while some older folks will favor drier wines with more intense flavor. This latter truth has nothing to do with the food being served. Similarly, other than water children tend to drink only two basic types of beverages ... milk in any form or fruit drinks, carbonated as in sodas or non-carbonated as in fruit juices and punches. Young adults too young to be offered alcoholic beverages often favor stronger tasting carbonated beverages like colas or root beer.

With the above caveats I will now attempt to provide some useful generalities. To experienced chefs these will be "no-brainers." Here is one quick piece of advice: Enjoy mixed alcoholic drinks as you will, but in general they are not suitable for serving at meals as they get you drunk if consumed in quantities necessary to quench thirst. Thus, this discussion does not cover mixed alcoholic drinks in any context. I enjoy mixed drinks as much as anyone but they do not belong at the table for maximum enjoyment of the food. The exception is at cocktail parties where hors d'ouvres are served.

The taste intensity of a beverage should match the taste intensity of the most highly seasoned or naturally strongly flavored food. Thus, a beer with strong flavor (like Heineken™) goes well with intense flavor foods like chili con carne, while lemonade and iced tea or even white wine spritzers (wine and Sprite™ or 7-UP™) are perfect for light salads and delicately flavored soups like seafood bisques. Lighter tasting beers like Corona™ are perfect with tortilla chips and salsa. Hot freshly made coffee complements sweet pastry or pudding or pie desserts.

A beverage basically has two purposes at a meal. The first is to quench thirst, either with something neutral like ice water or with something flavorful that also contrasts with the flavor of the food while still being complementary. The second is to clear the palate so that the next bite or bites of food will provide the most intense taste and comparative texture. In other words, if we consume a whole steak or bowl of chili without taking sips of a suitable beverage after every few bites we will actually miss out on a lot of the flavor and aroma available from the food due to overwhelmed taste buds and olfactory (nose) overload. A spoonful of a creamy soup or bisque is appreciated more after a sip of a light neutral white wine, like a French white burgundy or a Pinot Grigio.

Note that breads work well in combination with beverages to provide contrasts in texture and taste and to reset your taste buds and your nose. Thus it is wise to provide breads, crackers and the like that also complement the beverages as well as the food entrees and side dishes. If a cracker has an intense flavor then it should be served with a light tasting cheese and/or meat and vice versa, and the beverage should not compete with the intense flavor. This does not mean the beverage has to be mild, but it must live in its own flavor world. The perfect example is the dessert of Port wine, Stilton cheese and fresh fruit like pears and white grapes. The wine has intense and sweet flavor, while the cheese has intense and comparatively dry bleu/cheddar flavor and texture. The light moist fruit clears the palate for the next sips of wine and bites of cheese, making this sequence of eating very enjoyable. A neutral tasting cracker is a nice addition with that dessert.

Most of us have heard about using red wines with red meats and white wines with fowl, white meats like veal and pork, and seafood. That is good advice and beyond the basic advice is the selection of the red or white wine that addresses the age of the guests but more importantly the intensity of the taste of the entrée. This means a Cabernet Sauvignon that works well with an intensely flavored grilled steak is less appropriate for a lightly seasoned lamb chop. There a lighter red wine like a Merlot or a Pinot Noir or a Malbec is more appropriate so as not to overpower the taste of the lamb chop. The seasoning used with fowl or pork or seafood should help determine the selection of white wine. More tart Chardonnay is right for creamy dishes, while buttery Chardonnay is best for more highly seasoned dishes. White Burgundy, Fume Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Grigio are excellent choices also as they are more neutral in taste and will clear the palate without in any way competing with delicately or strongly flavored fowl, veal, pork or seafood. They leave a clean and neutral aftertaste.

Sweeter wines like Riesling also have a place, for some of our foods accentuate sweetness and sometimes also tartness, thus the complementary aspect is best

realized with a Riesling wine. For example, wiener schnitzel with hot German potato salad and hot pickled red cabbage provide a neutral and sweet and tart environment that calls for a white wine that will not contrast too strongly with the food. Thus, Riesling is perfect. The cheaper white wines like Reunite Bianco™ that are relatively sweet and favored by younger adults with unsophisticated taste are better used just for drinking, so do not even attempt to match them with foods.

Blush wines like rosé or Zinfandel are true neutral territory and they can be used without much concern regardless of the entrée being served. This is true because those wines do not have intense flavor or character and they cannot truly be called reds or whites. They are simply there in a kind of non-participation sort of way other than to cleanse the palate and/or quench thirst. That does not mean they aren't good in their own right in terms of beverage taste. Rosé d'Anjou is a light French rosé wine with only 10.5 percent alcohol that has excellent clean taste and is perfect with poultry or creamy seafood dishes.

Sangria is the perfect beverage to provide fruity flavor, quench thirst and also provide some alcohol for a whole host of different foods. While sangria is based on red wine, the wine used is typically a mild, low alcohol content table wine, with light taste compared to other red wines. And sangria has a large component of fruit and fruit juice. Because sangria is best served chilled for taste it is best with highly seasoned food and hot foods. It is suitable for all guests regardless of age.

Chianti is a strongly flavored red wine produced and favored in Italy for pasta dishes that use intensely flavored red sauces of any type. In this instance, any wine with a milder or lighter flavor would simply be lost in terms of being able to taste it and thus appreciate the taste. Chianti is most inappropriate with Italian or French cooking that features white sauces or delicate seafood, like linguine carbonara or veal piccata or veal Marsala or linguine with white clam sauce or mussels in white wine and butter and garlic. Use light white wines like Pinot Grigio for those dishes.

Now we take a brief look at beers and ales. Basically they come in four types in terms of flavor and carbonation and alcohol content. Light beers like Coors Light™ are low in alcohol, carbohydrates and taste. Carbonation is also typically light. They quench thirst best and they compete with nothing so they are suitable if not very exciting for almost any dish that is not sweet. In general, almost all beers are bad choices for sweet foods, with a few like Bock beer or stout excepted for certain foods. Musty strong beers like Heineken™ and most stout beers are best used with intensely flavored foods. Lagers like Corona™ are suitable for most any use except sweet foods, as lagers have some character without intense

flavor. Utility beers like Budweiser™ are harsh with carbonation and medium in flavor and best used with foods like salty French fries and hamburgers. The very finest beers are made in Europe, like Budvar™, and those beers are for true beer aficionados who simply want to taste the beer. Top quality European beers should seldom be used while eating any food other than light salty snacks as it is a waste of great beer. Ales come in many varieties, like beers, and you drink those simply to get more alcohol, and sometimes more intense taste. Ales are not suitable for delicately flavored foods.

Non-alcoholic beverages are usually best for desserts with the possible exception of after dinner liqueurs. The earlier remarks about complementing the tartness or sweetness or neutrality of any given food with a corresponding beverage apply to non-alcoholic beverages in the same way. In general the more intense the character of the beverage the more intense the flavor of the food should be and vice versa. This means mild drinks like iced tea can be adapted in strength, sweetness and tartness (using lemon) to fit almost any food selection. Lemonade is very refreshing and it also can be a good fit with most foods provided tartness and sweetness are controlled to match the food being served. In short, there is no "right" recipe for iced tea or lemonade as both can be adapted to the event. They are versatile. Other non-alcoholic beverages are very much food dependent, like eggnog. Dairy products are typically neutral or sweet and they do not mingle well with tart foods. Sodas vary in taste intensity from utterly neutral like Sprite Zero™ to richly flavored colas and root beers and some orange sodas. Picking the right soda to go with any given food is primarily a matter of choice but if you have learned anything while reading this section you know to match light with light and strong with strong.

This concludes my general comments on beverages. Experience is the best way to learn about all beverages, so try drinking all types in the company of a lot of friends at a party you hold, with no food being served other than possibly some neutral crackers, simply to develop your knowledge of what people like, including yourself. Take time to discuss what foods might go best with the beverage you and your friends taste, and by all means write the conclusions for each beverage as it is discussed around the room. Keep the portions small lest you gain a house full of drunks! Minimize your cost by holding the event as a tasting party in which you assign each person or couple to bring a few specific beverages in quantities sufficient only for tasting by the group. Start with the lightest tasting beverages and conclude with the strongest tasting beverages, and use plain water between tastings to clear the palate.

Banana Daiquiri - ☺♥

This beverage is a fine way to use extra bananas. Why make banana bread when you can make an outstanding tropical drink?

I made this drink and I was very pleased. It is creamy and all the flavors combine to make a delicious cold treat.

Ingredients: (makes two to three drinks)

2 medium ripe bananas, peeled and chopped

½ cup of coconut milk (or 1/3 cup of coconut cream)

2 tablespoons of fresh lime juice

2 teaspoons of sugar

½ cup of light rum

1 ounce of triple sec

1/4 cup of orange juice

1 scoop of vanilla ice cream

2 cups of ice cubes (12 to 16 regular ice cubes)

lime twists for garnish

maraschino cherries for garnish

toothpicks to hold the garnish

2, 12 ounce glasses (of your choice), frozen

Directions:

Add the ice cubes, bananas, coconut milk, lime juice, sugar, rum, orange juice, vanilla ice cream and triple sec to a blender.

Blend on low speed for 30 seconds, then blend on high speed until smooth.

Pour the banana daiquiri into the frozen glasses and garnish with optional lime twists and maraschino cherries on a toothpick.

Enjoy!

Bloody Mary - ☺♥

This drink is delicious using prepared horseradish instead of Worcestershire sauce, but feel free to use either or some mixture of both to achieve your ideal drink.

The Bloody Mary has been used as a brunch beverage for a long time. Indeed, it is sometimes used to get some "hair of the dog that bit me" to counteract a hangover. It is actually quite nice at any time of day.

Ingredients: (makes two drinks)

1, 12 oz. can of either tomato juice or V8® juice, chilled

1/2 cup of 100 proof vodka

1 oz. of fresh lime juice

2 tsp. of prepared horseradish or 1 tsp. of Worcestershire sauce

1/2 tsp. of Tabasco or other type of hot sauce, like Sriracha

1/4 tsp. of Sea salt

1/4 tsp. of coarsely ground black pepper

1 stick of celery, cut in half

Directions:

Refrigerate the juice until it is chilled.

Pour the juice into a one quart bowl.

Stir in the vodka, lime juice, horseradish (or Worcestershire sauce, or both), and Tabasco sauce and season the drink with the sea salt and pepper.

Fill two 12 ounce glasses half full with ice cubes.

Pour the mixed Bloody Mary contents evenly into each glass.

Garnish each drink with half a celery stick.

Serve the drink with a straw.

Enjoy!

Chocolate Malted Milk Shake - ☺♥

Carnation® Malted Milk Powder is a product we used twenty years ago and earlier to make the finest milk shakes you might imagine. Then the product started disappearing from supermarket shelves. A few weeks ago I visited the only supermarket in the area that carried the malted milk powder, only to learn that even they no longer sold it.

I used to get quite frustrated when I couldn't find products I needed due to supermarket inventory management decisions. Then, along came Amazon®, and suddenly a whole new world of food choices became easily available. Yes, I found Carnation® Malted Milk Powder for sale on Amazon® in a larger container size than I had ever seen in a supermarket, yet not really all that large (42 ounces vs. 14 ounces).

I noted that Amazon® also had three other brands that I never heard of, and I liked that a lot! Suffice it to say that I bought the Carnation® product in the larger size and I am loving having it available now for ice creams and different milk shakes, including vanilla and strawberry. The point is that I didn't have any malted milk type of recipe in Food Nirvana before now due to the difficulty I had finding a local source for the malted milk powder.

Oh, as always, watch out for the shysters on Amazon® who will sell you a small amount of product for a high price. I paid 57 cents per ounce for what I bought, with free shipping.

Well, the search for good malted milk powder has now changed much for the better. I have a fine chocolate malted ice cream recipe in Food Nirvana and now I'm adding this recipe for the milk shake. Yes! Even better, I was able to buy one of the old fashioned electric mixers used at soda fountain shops in the past to make milk shakes ... a Hamilton Beach® model for a mere \$29 through Amazon®.

If you've had malted milk shakes of any flavor before you know how wonderful they are compared to an ordinary milk, flavoring and ice cream milk shake.

Need I say more? Oh, yes, before I forget, I've also made vanilla and strawberry milk shakes with the malted milk powder and they too are "to die for" good. Simply use pure vanilla extract or strawberry syrup instead of the Hersheys® Chocolate Syrup.

Let's get started ...

Ingredients: (makes about 1 pint of milk shake)

4 to 6 oz. of ice cream

2 oz. of heavy cream

3 tbsp. of Carnation® Malted Milk Powder

1/4 cup of Hersheys® Chocolate Syrup or 3 tbsp. of Hersheys® Unsweetened Cocoa Powder

8 oz. of 4% butterfat milk (Vary the amount of milk based on the amount of ice cream you use. The total volume of the milk shake is to be about 16 ounces) ... more ice cream, less milk, etc.

Directions:

Simply dump all of the ingredients into a blender or, if you have one, the stainless steel mixing cup of a Hamilton Beach® milk shake mixer.

Start the blender/mixer on low speed and once the ingredients have started to mix advance the speed to high. Blend for 30 to 60 seconds at high speed.

If you are using a Hamilton Beach® type of mixer you may want to hold the cup and tilt it while the mixer is running so you can angle the cup for the agitator to connect with all of the ice cream and blend it in.

Pour the completed milkshake into one, pint size chilled glass, or, into two eight ounce size chilled glasses.

Drink slowly and make noises of great pleasure and taste satisfaction ... that will be so easy!

Tell all the people you really care about how to buy the malted milk powder and how to find this recipe, so they can please all those that they love.

What a fine ending for a recipe ...

Enjoy!

Concord Grape Wine - ☺♥T

I happened to see a bottle of Welch's® concord grape juice at the supermarket that caught my attention. It was mostly pasteurized concord grape juice with some other grape juices (all from concentrate) fortified with vitamin C and a smidgen of citric acid to brighten the taste and, get this ... no preservatives! That means you can make wine using that grape juice! And you can make wines from their red grape juice and their white grape juice, which is mostly juice from white Niagara grapes. I put my recipe for the white Niagara grape wine into Food Nirvana and it is similar to this recipe.

In the old days preservatives like potassium sorbate were used to keep the public from being able to make wine from fruit juices ... but the current world of insistent, pure food customers has actually, for once, done us a favor!

So I made the wine. I am very pleased and I am providing the detailed (and somewhat technical) recipe below for your use and enjoyment, plus some technical discussions to teach you the rudiments of making wine. The wine tastes fine and it contains about 13% alcohol. It cost about \$2.17 per 750ml bottle. And now? Now that this method is proven to be good I've ramped up the quantity I make to 2 1/2 gallons (a case of 12 bottles of wine) in each batch. Just remember to check out the grape juice bottle ingredients carefully if/when you buy the juice to verify that you have 100% grape juice and that no preservatives were used. Else, all you get after all the work is old, yeasty, overly sweet grape juice! Yuck!

As purchased (\$4.79 per 2 quart bottle), the Welch's® concord grape juice is advertised as having 9.9 ounces of sugar in 2 quarts of juice. Old time winemakers like me know that the ideal amount of sugar for making wine varies from 2 to 3 pounds of sugar per gallon of "must" (a winemaker's term for juice plus other ingredients) that will become wine via yeast fermentation. Well, this wine is only supposed to be sweet in a minor way, so you can taste the unique grape flavor, so if you do the arithmetic you will see that the total amount of sugar used in the recipe below is just 2 pounds per gallon ... or in this case, 1 pound per two quarts of grape juice ... more than half of which was provided by the nice folks at Welch's® (or so they say, more detail follows below). The cost of the added sugar, if you buy it via Walmart® in a 25 lb. bag, is 25 cents, or maybe a bit more!

If you happen to buy a device called a hydrometer (about \$25 via Amazon®) you can measure sugar content in the grape juice with fairly high accuracy, and that is a good idea for the sugar content of any grape juice may vary from bottle to bottle. In any event, if you get a hydrometer you want your final sugar content before fermentation to be shown on the scale as 24 degrees Brix (or a few degrees

higher if you want a higher alcohol content [above 12.5% to 13%] in the wine), which means 24 grams of sugar within 100 grams of grape juice, or, using a different accompanying scale, Specific Gravity of 1.100. Note that the grape juice, as purchased, showed a sugar content of 15 degrees Brix. The scary part was that initial adjustment of the sugar content to achieve 24 degrees Brix only elevated the degrees Brix to 22.5. More follows ...

Another device that is truly nice is a refractometer (about \$25 via Amazon®) that measures the degrees Brix, the SG (Specific Gravity), and from which you can often get a close estimate of the percent alcohol in your completed wine. The refractometer will be used to assure the correct sugar content of the sweetened grape juice (24 degrees Brix or higher) ... it will show the specific gravity, and by measuring the residual sugar at the end of fermentation it provides you knowledge of how much sugar was converted into alcohol ... also how likely the wine is to be sweet, neutral or dry. Well, the refractometer, just like the hydrometer, showed the degrees Brix to be 22.5 instead of 24 after adding the indicated amount of sugar to the must. Read on ...

I had to add one extra ounce of sugar to the 2 quart volume of grape juice to get the degrees Brix up to 24. That worked. Both the refractometer and the hydrometer agreed with each other precisely. But why was this necessary? The reality is the stated amount of sugar in the grape juice cannot be accurate. Perhaps they were adding sugar based on the sugar content of an earlier batch of grape juice, all batches of which depend on the ripeness of all the grapes used in a given batch. Now, that is why we use instruments to know more accurately what we have, and eliminate confusing results that might happen any time, as we test the wine for any batch after fermentation. Ergo, if the percent of alcohol in the wine is significantly lower than what should have happened, then what was the cause? The point ... make a small but important investment in measuring equipment so you are not part of a poor return guessing game each time you make wine.

One last point about degrees Brix ... it is a measure of all dissolved solids in the must, not just the sugar. In general the non-fermentable dissolved solids in the must (acids, minerals, etc.) are about 2.5% of the total dissolved solids, which is mostly sugar, so the true degrees Brix corrected for non-sugar solids has roughly 2.5% less sugar than that indicated by the refractometer. A similar offset applies to the Specific Gravity measured using a hydrometer. Brix to SG conversion = $4 \times \text{Brix}/1000 + 1$.

Be sure to use clean, freshly washed equipment (as listed below) to avoid bacteria and wild yeasts. You can buy the wine air lock and rubber stopper at any wine arts store, or online at Amazon® or Ebay® or other commercial web sites. Ditto

the plastic tubing. The rest of the items you already have at home. If not, you best buy all the wines you want to drink and forget this recipe.

On checking the pH (acidity) of the grape juice, sugar and yeast mixture for my trial batch of wine, I found it was 3.5 ... which was fine for the wine being made. No chemical additions were necessary. You do have to check the pH as yours may be quite different and you may need to add up to 3.8 grams of potassium carbonate per gallon of juice at the start of fermentation. Why check? The pH of the grape juice I used for my "second" batch of 2.5 gallons was 2.85, which means the grape juice, as purchased, was not consistent in level of acidity, and that means the final wine may taste acidic if you don't adjust the pH, and acidic tasting wine is not pleasant. For the record, natural grape juices contain a variety of organic acids (like tartaric, malic, etc.) that work just fine in producing an ideal pH for making wine (most of the time... sometimes we have to convert malic acid into lactic acid to reduce total acidity in white wines like chardonnay) ... provided the grapes are ripe with optimal sugar content.

Now, how can you measure pH without spending a lot of money for a pH meter? They can cost anywhere from \$100 to \$300. The answer is cheap yet effective paper strips that measure pH that, again, you can easily buy cheaply via Amazon®.

Here is an end of the recipe type of variation that is quite special ... General directions for carbonating the concord grape wine to make it a sparkling wine. My method requires the equipment and the procedure that is described in Food Nirvana in the recipe for Lemon-Lime soda. Be sure to read it. Once you master making the wine you definitely want to make some of it into sparkling wine. What a fine treat!

Okay ... no more background talk ... let's get started ...

Ingredients: (small 2 quart batch, yields 4 ounces more than 2, 750ml bottles of wine)

2 quart bottle of Welch's® concord grape juice (with no preservatives)

1 gram of Red Star® Premier Blanc active dry yeast for winemaking (or alternatively, 1/2 tsp. of Fleischman's® active dry yeast normally used for baking)

6 ounces of white sugar (weigh it using an electronic kitchen scale) ... or, whatever turns out to be necessary via measuring instruments discussed above

Potassium carbonate (get it via Amazon®, cheaply. You may or may not need to add this chemical to adjust grape juice pH in any given batch)

Tartaric acid powder (via Amazon®. Optional. Used for pH adjustment if the must is too alkaline [pH higher than 3.75])

Equipment:

A kitchen scale that can measure in tenths of a gram, or, you might buy an inexpensive milligram scale via Amazon®.

Empty, clean 2 quart bottle with a screw on cap

Wine air lock in a 1" diameter (small end) single hole rubber stopper (#8 size)

Flexible plastic tubing for siphoning (42" long, 1/4" ID)

8 ounce canning jar with lid and ring

2 clean 750 ml wine bottles with screw on caps

1, one gallon glass or plastic pitcher

Directions:

Pour two and one half cups of the grape juice into a Pyrex® or similar glass one quart measuring container. Pour the rest into a one gallon pitcher.

Add the 6 ounces (or more a bit later after you measure the "real" amount of sugar in the must) of white sugar to the one quart container and stir/mix until it is dissolved. If necessary to assist getting the sugar to dissolve, warm the mixture briefly in the microwave oven. Then stir until the sugar is dissolved.

Add the sugar syrup to the juice in the pitcher and mix it well. Then use your hydrometer or refractometer to check the degrees Brix or the Specific Gravity. If the degrees Brix is less than 24, or the Specific Gravity is less than 1.100, then figure out how much additional sugar you need to add to the pitcher, and do so with stirring.

Pour 8 ounces of that mixture into the 8 ounce canning jar, seal it with the lid and the ring, and keep it in the refrigerator until it is used later. The main reason for doing this is the volume of the grape juice plus the added sugar will be more than two quarts, so it won't all fit into the plastic bottle at the same time.

Add the yeast to the remaining grape juice and sugar mixture, mix it in, cover the pitcher with plastic wrap and let it sit for one hour. Side notes: The typical amount of yeast to be used, as recommended by the producer, is about 5 grams

for making 5 gallons of wine. I chose to increase that amount to 1 gram for two quarts of wine, but 1/2 gram might work okay. Sometimes a product called yeast nutrient, which is diammonium phosphate, is added to stimulate the yeast to reproduce quickly. You can read about that in lots of Internet articles on winemaking. But do not use yeast nutrient when making this wine, for excess yeast activity will overflow your fermentation setup with foam and make a mess.

Stir the mixture and pour all of it into the grape juice bottle.

Measure the pH of the "must." Use either a pH meter or paper pH strips (cheap). If the pH is lower than 3.00 then adjust the pH via a small (very small, less than a gram) addition of potassium carbonate to obtain a final pH of about 3.25. Start with 0.3 grams/quart and mix well and recheck the pH. Continue checking the pH and adjusting if necessary, but do not exceed a rate of 3.8 grams of potassium carbonate per gallon of must, or in this example a maximum of 1.9 grams for 2 quarts of must.

Okay, now you know what to do if the starting pH is too low. But what if it is too high, like 3.75? Fermentation will increase the pH naturally and you want the final pH to be no higher than 3.5, or the wine may become spoiled during storage via bacterial growth. The answer is to add some tartaric acid powder to the starting must until you get the pH down to about 3.25. Yes, you can easily buy the tartaric acid powder cheaply via Amazon®, etc. But add it in very small increments, fractions of a gram, with stirring and remeasuring pH to arrive at your goal without going too far.

Let's proceed. Wet the rubber stopper, put the air lock/rubber stopper into the top rim of the grape juice bottle snugly and fill the air lock reservoir half full with water, then put on the air lock plastic cap.

Let the "must" ferment for 7 to 10 days in a room 70 to 78 degrees F, in a relatively dark place. When the fermentation is about done there will be very slow bubbling of expelled carbon dioxide gas in the air lock. Wait until it is bubbling at a rate of about 1 bubble per minute before continuing to the next step.

Rack the wine using the plastic tubing and the empty 2 quart bottle. That means siphon all but the dead yeast cells on the bottom of the grape juice bottle into the 2 quart bottle, minimizing exposure to air by keeping the ends of the plastic tubing under the surface of the liquid in both containers. When you have siphoned most of the wine there will be an ounce or two of leftover liquid mixed with the dead yeast cells and all of it is to be discarded. Rinse the dead yeast cells from the grape juice bottle, ergo, clean it with hot tap water.

Put the reserved (refrigerated) canning jar of grape juice and sugar mixture into the grape juice bottle. Then add the siphoned wine from the 2 quart bottle, again by careful siphoning to avoid air exposure as much as possible. Fill it up only to within one inch of the bottom of the air lock. Then pour any excess wine into the 8 ounce canning jar, put the lid on it and put it into the refrigerator.

Wet the rubber stopper and put the air lock back into the top of the grape juice bottle.

Let the wine finish fermenting for five to ten days (until there is no longer bubbling in the air lock), then again rack the wine as before, siphoning the wine into the 2 quart bottle. Then add the remaining wine from the refrigerated 8 ounce canning jar.

After cleaning the grape juice bottle, siphon the wine back into it close to the top and seal the bottle with the original bottle cap.

Let the wine rest for one week and check to see if it should be racked again. That means if any film of dead yeast cells is seen from the underside of the grape juice bottle it must be eliminated via another careful racking. Also check the pH of the wine. If it is in the range of 3.25 to 3.50 it is perfect. If it is lower than 3.25 taste it and decide if you want to add some potassium carbonate to increase the pH to no higher than 3.5. If the pH after fermentation is above 3.50 you should add some tartaric acid powder to reduce the pH to the range of 3.25 to 3.50 to avoid wine spoilage during storage.

Let the wine rest in the refrigerator for two weeks to clarify. It should clarify nicely, with any formed particulates (like potassium bitartrate) going to the bottom of the bottle (there may be none). If the wine remains cloudy (mine did not) you can/may filter it many different ways ... the choice is up to you. I have a filter system that uses a tank of carbon dioxide gas to gently push the wine through a fine filter (0.45 microns) and then into wine bottles. You shouldn't need to filter the wine, but if you decide to do it you can use the Internet to identify various chemicals used to clarify wine and instructions for how to use each one, like plain unflavored gelatin.

Bottle the wine in the two 750 ml wine bottles using the plastic tubing/siphoning and pour any leftover wine into the 8 ounce canning jar. Screw the caps on the wine bottles.

Determine the alcohol content by using a few drops of wine from the canning jar and the refractometer. How? Read the SG scale of the refractometer and if it is even slightly above 1.000 you can subtract the ending SG from the starting SG and multiply by 131. For example, if the starting SG was 1.100 and the ending

SG is 1.001 then the alcohol percentage is 12.97 ... but if the refractometer shows an ending SG of 1.000 or a Brix of zero then you need to check the SG more accurately with the hydrometer as it is likely to be down in the range from 0.980 to 0.999, which the refractometer will not display, and you will need to use one of the bottles of wine, slightly decanted, temporarily to perform that test. So let's assume the ending SG is 0.990 ... then the percentage alcohol is 14.4. An alternate method that is generally accurate if the fermentation is approximately complete is % alcohol by volume = ((starting SG - 1) times 1000) divided by 8, so if the starting SG is 1.100 the % alcohol is 100/8, which is 12.5. But that is only an approximation as the true ending SG is not used in the calculation.

Taste the wine from the 8 ounce canning jar. You deserve to enjoy/sample what you have made, even if it hasn't aged.

You can store the wine for a month or so but I suggest using it within a few months. I recommend refrigeration to support any further precipitation of potassium bitartrate. Also, our crude method of siphoning the wine exposed it some to oxygen in the air, so it won't last for long in the best shape. Alas, both bottles of wine from my first batch were consumed within a week! And then I ramped up the amount to 2.5 gallons (five bottles of grape juice) using a glass carboy, which yielded 11 bottles of wine. And I got 12 bottles in the batch after that. Friends got some, and my sweetheart loves the wine, so I guess I'll have to hide some for my own use!



If you want you can chill the wine, or, serve it at room temperature. We enjoy a slightly sweet wine like this one both chilled and at room temperature.

Drink! Yes, this is very good wine! If you want to become sophisticated and professional after this experiment then read the full Food Nirvana article for Wine Making. For example, you might guarantee that no residual fermentation can occur after bottling by adding a small amount of powdered potassium sorbate to the wine before bottling it ... 0.8 grams per gallon for this wine, and twice that amount if adding sweeteners to a wine after fermentation. As before with the other chemicals, that chemical can be purchased cheaply via the Internet. I also recommend buying a good technical book on winemaking to teach you principles instead of simply following recipes. I use Philip Jackisch, "Modern Winemaking", Cornell University Press, 1985.

Enjoy! After all, it is only \$2.17/bottle (or maybe a bit more) ... and that is very inexpensive for a delicious wine. My sweetheart Peggy says it qualifies as a fine wine. I think maybe she had a bit too much wine!

Maybe you will want to gift some nice wine to close family or very good friends.

Doing this recipe was pretty easy, wasn't it? Fun too, not to mention inexpensive. Now that you know how easy this is, why not make a larger batch? Buy a 2 1/2 or 5 gallon glass carboy (buy two of whatever size you choose [think about why]) and have at it. They are not expensive, and they will last forever if you handle them carefully. And glass, unlike plastic, will not provide any surface cracks that might harbor bacteria or wild yeast.

A final thought ... if you decide to make wines often then it is very useful to maintain a notebook with measurement information for each batch made, plus environmental conditions, so that you develop a fine sense of how small changes in ingredients or procedure or even room temperature affect the final product.

Dandelion Wine (and more) - ☺♥

As a young man in the late 1960's I decided to make dandelion wine. Let me say that the wine I made at the age of 25 was far beyond my expectations. It was delicious, so much so that I had a Long Island doctor wanting to swap recipes for my wine and his private creamy cheesecake recipe. So we did. Seldom do young people get lucky in their first attempt to make a great wine. I did. It was serendipitous, not super brilliance on my part. I happened to find a recipe created by someone else who really did know their way around the subject of making wine. Now, note that I was a chemist, so I was a quick study not only in techniques but also the chemistry behind wine making and the conditions, like pH (acidity) that could make or break a wine. Let's say all the right stuff came together. I did my part. The results were memorable.

I stopped making all types of wine for a number of years after a notable failure with a batch of concord grapes for making a sweet grape wine in the mid-1970's. Then in the mid-1980's I saw a fine crop of dandelions on my front lawn and I decided to use them to recreate my successes in the 1960's. I figured, I can't lose, so just go do it. My, was I wrong. Something didn't come out right and the cloudy stuff I had at the end of fermentation and racking was certainly not good, let alone great.

I thought about pouring the five gallon batch down the drain. Then I reconsidered, remembering that aging dandelion wine for a few months can certainly improve the quality. I had nothing to lose so I bottled it in 20, one quart mason canning jars and I put them on a high shelf in a basement closet where it was completely dark.

I totally forgot about that batch of wine and I had no reason to open that closet for many years. But in 1992 I did open it and happen to notice all those quart jars from eight years ago. Curiosity got the best of me. I expected nothing good at all. But I pulled out one jar and examined it. It had a deep amber color, which made no sense to me at all. I stored it in our refrigerator to chill it and then poured enough into a shot glass to try it. And now you are about to learn why the recipe title for the dandelion wine has the parenthetic "and more" addition.

Ka Pow!!! I simply could not believe my taste buds or my nose. This stuff was out of this world great. It certainly was no longer dandelion wine. It had aged into nothing less than a very fine sherry, comparable in every respect to Harveys® Bristol Cream, except that my sherry, on testing, was 16 percent alcohol, and Harvey's® is a fortified wine with 20% alcohol. Wow! I then had 20 quarts of excellent sherry as a long aged product of a failed batch of dandelion wine.

Today, in 2015, the very last bottle is kept in safe storage by my oldest son, Ray, Jr. Perhaps my progeny will have a toast to my memory when I am gone.

How could this happen? Sherries are made from grapes, not dandelions! Sherries, unlike normal wines, are exposed to air so oxidation takes place, intentionally.

Let me cut to the chase. My dandelion wine was made with a few pounds of raisins included. It also tasted oxidized to me after fermentation, so the fermentation lock clearly leaked. Thus, the flavor that I found to be objectionable after fermentation. Ah, but after 8 years of aging in sealed jars it was a totally different story. The idea is that chemical reactions in wine typically continue to occur after fermentation. In this instance, an oxidized wine of high grape (raisin) content was stored in the dark for 8 long years and the aging certainly did involve further chemical reactions, some due to the oxygen in the wine.

So, why the long story leading to sherry when the objective is to make excellent dandelion wine? I think it is pretty obvious. Sometimes we get lucky and our failures can turn into successes if we are patient. One never knows ...

Now, returning to the present, I happened to think about dandelion wine today and I looked up various Internet recipes to see what was available. Why? Well, my recipe memory is somewhat murky ... it was not recorded and saved. So I needed a refresher in regard to ingredients. I remembered the special procedural steps perfectly well, and I remembered all the necessary ingredients, but I did not remember the exact amounts. Hence my Internet search.

I was appalled at the terrible collection of recipes and instructions provided via the Internet. Clearly no one provided essential procedural steps or any explanation of the role of the various ingredients. Indeed, most of the recipes I saw lacked key ingredients and had utterly useless procedural steps that would have no impact whatever in the final quality of the wine being made. Sheer nonsense! I am sure most of the contributors mean well in their efforts to share, but their recommendations are pathetic. At that point I knew I had to step in and straighten out the mess. You will be able to make excellent dandelion wine with my recipe, and you will know why you are doing the various steps and using the specific ingredients.

Okay, let's get on with the making of very fine dandelion wine. The recipe below is for making five gallons of wine in one five gallon glass carboy. I will explain the role of the various ingredients in the directions section. Do note that I am reconstructing my recipe from memory plus reading online recipes. I may have

to make a batch or two to be certain everything is exactly right. And I will get back to you via this recipe in terms of any later changes that I decide are necessary. Anyway, have at it ... this recipe should work very well. And it may improve later.

Makes five gallons of dandelion wine

Ingredients:

1 ten quart bucket of freshly picked dandelion blossoms, compressed, with no stems or leaves.

2 quarts of boiling water

Preliminary preparation: Pour the boiling water over the blossoms and mix the water with the blossoms. Cover the bucket and allow the contents to cool. Use a sieve and pour the bucket liquid through a funnel into a sterilized five gallon glass carboy. Press the blossoms hard in the bucket to extract as much liquid as possible for the carboy. Discard the blossoms.

15 pounds of sugar

12 ripe oranges, sliced thinly

6 large lemons, sliced thinly

3 one pound boxes or bags of Sunkist® brown raisins

1 packet of champagne yeast

Discussion:

Wash the oranges and lemons thoroughly before using them in this recipe to remove any chemical coatings designed to retard molds and fungus growth. After slicing the fruit it is best to squeeze the slices to produce juice that is then added to the carboy. Push each slice of pressed fruit into the top opening of the carboy.

Similarly, the three pounds of raisins should be rinsed thoroughly and then added to the carboy.

Put about two cups of warm water (110 degrees F) into a two cup glass measuring cup. Add one tablespoon of sugar and the packet of yeast and stir thoroughly until the sugar is dissolved and the yeast soaked. Cover the measuring cup with plastic wrap and set it aside in a warm place for thirty minutes. At the end of that time the yeast culture should be noticeably foamy.

Stir it and recover and let it sit for another 30 minutes while you do the remaining steps of completing the carboy contents.

The use of 3 pounds of sugar per gallon of wine is very much on the high side, but necessary to create a sweet wine with up to 16 percent alcohol by volume. It is essential to not add the sugar all at one time. Instead, heat one gallon of water in a two gallon pot and gradually add the 15 pounds of sugar while stirring, the idea being to have all the sugar dissolved in to water to form a thick syrup. Dispense three quarts of the syrup into three one quart mason canning jars and seal them tightly.

Directions:

Pour the remaining syrup from the pot into the carboy via a funnel.

Add two gallons of fresh water (not chlorinated tap water!) to the carboy and swirl it to mix the contents well.

Add the yeast culture and mix the carboy contents well.

Now estimate how much additional water you need to add to the carboy to bring the total volume up to 4 and 1/4 gallons. Add that amount of fresh water and mix well.

At this point there should be enough space within the carboy to later add the remaining three quarts of refrigerated sugar syrup. They will be added at four day intervals, one at a time, with mixing of the carboy contents after each addition, followed by careful wetting and reseating of the fermentation lock.

Put a fermentation lock on the top opening of the carboy and store the carboy in a dim or dark room with the temperature between 60 and 70 degrees F.

Store the three quart jars of sugar syrup in the refrigerator. They will be used individually later as described above.

More Discussion:

The process of using yeast to convert sugar into alcohol, etc., will not proceed properly if too much of the sugar in this recipe is added all at once. That is why you make a sugar syrup, use one fourth of it initially, and make one quart additions to the carboy every four days. That gives the yeast time to ferment the sugar present and be ready for more sugar syrup, leading finally to a wine with a high alcohol content of 16 percent. If you fail to follow the instructions the wine alcohol percentage may only be around 7 percent and the wine will be

sickeningly sweet, which is not what you want. That is called a stuck fermentation, which for this wine is the end of the road, and a nasty end at that!

Okay ... you made your last sugar syrup addition. Now you watch the progress of the fermentation. When bubbles no longer pop up in the fermentation lock, about a week or two, the fermentation is complete. At that point the best procedure is to rack (siphon) the wine into another five gallon carboy using plastic tubing ... and avoiding picking up the dead yeast cells and other gunk left in the original fermentation carboy.

After racking, put the fermentation lock on the second carboy, making sure it is wet first to assure a good seal. Then let the wine age for three months.

After aging the wine should be very clear. There should be a small amount of residue at the bottom of the carboy. Again siphon the wine away from the residue, only this time siphon it into individual bottles. Seal the bottles well and store them in a dim or dark place. You may then chill and drink the dandelion wine whenever you want it.

If you followed the directions carefully you will be drinking a very nice wine.

Enjoy! This wine goes very well with fresh fruit, crackers and cheese. It is also fine by itself.

Remember that dandelion wine is a sweet wine so it is best served very cold. It is not served with meal entrees. It is more like a dessert wine.

Eggnog - ☺♥

I discovered that Food Nirvana lacked a great recipe for eggnog and that is unacceptable.

I looked for but never found the exact recipe for the fabulous eggnog that Marie used to make during the Christmas holidays. But I remembered enough to recreate it close enough to know it will be very good. I will, of course, test the recipe and make any necessary minor changes. Do note that you can omit the rum or substitute the hard liquor of your choice, but if you use no alcoholic beverage then add the equivalent amount of milk instead so the eggnog remains thick but not overly thick.

Ingredients:

12 large or extra large eggs (separated into yolks and whites)

3 pints of heavy cream

1 cup of milk

1 cup of granulated sugar

1 1/2 cups of light rum

1/2 tsp. of salt

2 tsp. of vanilla extract

finely ground nutmeg

Directions:

Beat the egg yolks on medium speed until they are light in color. Add the vanilla extract and beat for one minute.

Add the sugar and continue beating until the yolks/vanilla mixture and sugar are well mixed, about one to two minutes. Add the milk and continue mixing for one minute.

Add the rum while beating on a low speed. Chill the mixture in the refrigerator, covered, for three hours.

Add the salt to the egg whites and beat at high speed until peaks form.

Whip the heavy cream at high speed until it is stiff.

**Fold the whipped cream into the yolk, sugar, vanilla, milk and rum mixture.
Then fold in the beaten egg whites.**

Chill for one hour in the refrigerator, covered.

Serve in a pre-chilled punch bowl and sprinkle lightly with the nutmeg.

Frozen Margarita - ☺♥

This recipe makes three quarts of terrific frozen margaritas. It is very simple. My great friend Barbara Blair provided it and she got it from friends Pat and Lew in Texas.

Ingredients:

12 ounce can of frozen limeade concentrate

12 ounces of Cuervo® Gold tequila (or your tequila of choice)

6 ounces of Cointreau® liquor

2 ounces of 7-UP® or Sprite®

Many hard frozen ice cubes

Directions:

Put the frozen limeade concentrate, tequila and Cointreau® into a blender. Mix on high speed for one minute. Let the foam settle and then adjust the volume to exactly one quart with 7-UP® or Sprite® and mix briefly.

Pour half of the mixture (16 oz.) into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, seal it and put it into the freezer for later use.

Turn the blender on to a medium speed and add ice cubes two at a time through the small opening in the blender cap, waiting about five to ten seconds between each addition, until the blender is full (about 48 oz.).

Pour the blender contents into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, seal it and put it into the freezer.

Remove the saved contents in the one quart Ziploc® freezer bag from the freezer and pour them into the blender.

Repeat the previous process with the ice cubes.

Use the saved one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag and beverage from the freezer and pour the contents of the blender into it. Seal it and return it to the freezer for later use.

Serve when needed in chilled margarita glasses. Have rim salt available for guests who like it.

Ray's Salsa and a bowl of white corn tortilla chips are a fine accompaniment.

Frozen Pina Colada - ☺♥

This cocktail is among the most popular and for good reason ... it is delicious, not to mention that drinking a few of these make the world pleasant and a bit fuzzy!

Ingredients: (3 servings)

2 cups of frozen pineapple chunks

2 cups of ice cubes

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup of Cream of Coconut (not Coconut Cream)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of full-fat unsweetened coconut milk or heavy cream

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup of white (light) rum

Juice of 1 lime (about 2 tablespoons)

Pineapple slices and/or Maraschino cherries, for garnish (optional)

3 chilled or frozen 12 ounce glasses

Directions:

Put the pineapple, ice, cream of coconut, coconut milk (or heavy cream), rum, and lime juice into a blender.

Blend until the contents are smooth and frosty.

Pour the frozen Pina Colada into the glasses and garnish them with pineapple slices and/or Maraschino cherries, if desired.

Serve immediately.

Enjoy!

Frozen Strawberry Margarita - ☺♥

The following two drink recipes are simple, scratch variations of a regular frozen margarita and they are very nice with the addition of strawberries. The best strawberries to get the most flavor will be very ripe. Note that the ingredients in Recipe #1 make six drinks, and the ingredients in Recipe #2 make two drinks. Try both recipes at different times to find which one you like best. Adjust amounts or number of batches according to the needs for your event. Note that if you need to make multiple batches then each frozen batch can temporarily be poured into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag and sealed and placed in the freezer until needed. That method allows you to complete all preparations in advance of your event.

Recipe #1:

Ingredients: (makes 6 drinks)

4 cups of ice cubes, or as needed depending on ice cube shape and size [see the directions]

12 fluid ounces of tequila

4 fluid ounces of triple sec

16 ounces of frozen cleaned and hulled strawberries

2 tablespoons of sugar or 3 tablespoons of simple syrup

8 ounces of frozen limeade concentrate (2/3 of a 12 ounce can)

1/4 cup of Sea salt spread into a ring on a saucer for coating the rims of the glasses (or use powdered sugar if you want a sweeter drink)

2 or 3 or 6 frozen, 12 ounce margarita glasses (put them into the freezer two hours before you plan to make the drinks)

Directions:

Put all of the ingredients except the ice cubes and the sea salt into a blender, then put on the lid and blend on low speed until the mixture is uniform.

Add the ice cubes one at a time through the hole in the blender lid while blending on medium speed. If your blender has no hole opening in the lid then put half of the ice into the blender while it is turned off, put the lid on, then blend for one minute. Then process the other half of the ice cubes the same way.

After all the ice cubes have been added and blended, stop the blender, let the contents rest for a minute, and then check the volume of frozen strawberry margarita.

If it is 64 ounces or more then the blending is done.

If the volume is less than 64 ounces, add more ice cubes, then blend, then check the volume a time or two until the final volume is 64 ounces (2 quarts).

Put 1/4 cup of sea salt (or optionally, powdered sugar) on a saucer and spread it around to make a ring of salt slightly smaller than the diameter of the glasses you plan to use on the inside of the ring, and slightly larger than the diameter of the glasses on the outside of the ring.

Wet the rim of each glass by dipping it lightly into the frozen margarita, and then keep it upside down and put it very briefly into the sea salt (or powdered sugar) to coat the rim of the glass. Then stand it upright.

It is time to drink some fine cocktails! Pour the frozen strawberry margaritas into the glasses and serve the drinks!

Enjoy!

Recipe #2:

Ingredients: (makes 2 drinks)

4 ounces of tequila

2 ounces of orange liquor (Grand Marnier or Cointreau or Triple Sec)

2 ounces of freshly squeezed lime juice (or one ounce each of lime juice and lemon juice)

2 tablespoons of sugar

16 frozen, cleaned and hulled, large ripe strawberries

2 cups of regular size ice cubes

Lime wedges (for wetting the rims of the glasses)

1/4 cup of sea salt spread out into a ring on a saucer (for coating/salting the rims of the glasses)

2 frozen, 16 ounce margarita glasses

Directions:

Clean and hull the fresh, ripe strawberries and put them on a plate in a single layer, then put the plate into the freezer for at least three hours before you plan to make the margaritas.

Put the glasses into the freezer at least two hours before making the margaritas.

Process the tequila, orange liquor, lime/lemon juice, sugar, frozen strawberries, and ice cubes (one at a time through the hole in the lid, or in half batches if your blender has no hole in the lid) in a blender on low to medium speed until smooth.

Turn off the blender to let the contents settle while you prepare the frozen glasses.

Make the ring of sea salt on a saucer roughly as large as the diameter of the frozen glasses rims.

Rub the rims of the frozen margarita glasses with the lime wedges to wet them, then turn each glass upside down and place the rim briefly in the sea salt to coat it.

Set the glasses upright.

Pour the frozen strawberry margaritas into the frozen glasses and serve the drinks.

Enjoy!

Gin and Tonic - ☺♥

This simple drink is simply my favorite. Recently a new brand of tonic water came on the market that is worlds away from anything I have tasted since my youth. Q-Tonic™ is expensive at about \$1.75 per 8 ounce bottle, but the taste and carbonation are really good. It is made from the original ingredients that used to be used when the drink gin and tonic was created. That means using bark from a tree in South America to get the quinine, and agave to provide some sweetness instead of sugar or corn syrup, and a carbonation level that is closer to that of champagne.

Well, I won't buy Q-Tonic™ often because of the price, but now and then I will. I have researched making tonic water since I can carbonate any beverage. I got the bark in powdered form and I am experimenting with making tonic water. When I perfect the recipe I will jump up and down and cheer. There is an entry for making tonic water in the Food Nirvana Beverages section, but at this point it is under development.

Ingredients:

2 Shots (2 oz.) of Tanqueray® Gin

¼ cut fresh lime

12 oz. glass filled with ice cubes

Tonic water to fill the glass after adding the other ingredients

Directions:

Squeeze the cut lime to get some lime juice into the empty glass.

Drop the cut lime into the glass.

Fill the glass with ice cubes.

Add the gin. (A Jigger sized shot glass filled to the top is 2 ounces, or use a ¼ cup measuring cup.)

Add the tonic water to fill the glass.

Stir gently to mix contents.

Enjoy thoroughly.

Get relaxed. You will get very relaxed if you drink more than one.

Don't drive ... why ruin an otherwise perfect experience?

Cheers!

→ I really like fresh lime with this drink, but fresh limes can be expensive and their freshness life in a refrigerator is limited. After a few days the uncut limes start to turn olive green in color and that is bad for appearance and for taste. What to do? There is a really simple and totally effective answer. First I buy the limes in bulk at Costco®. Sometimes, like in the late fall, I buy two large bags of limes at a time, so I don't have to travel to Costco® very often. Then I cut each lime in half, put the halves in a small bag and vacuum seal them. Finally I put the vacuum sealed lime bags back into the bulk purchase bag and freeze all of it in the deep freeze. When I want fresh lime I thaw one small bag in the microwave oven for 30 seconds. Voila! I use this method to have both fresh limes and lemons for many uses year round. You gotta' love that vacuum sealer! What convenience!

Iced Tea - ☺♥

When you want a refreshing drink on a hot day make either lemonade or iced tea. This iced tea recipe, Ray's own, is attested to by multiple construction workers as the only way they could keep working on very hot days in the sun. Hey, it is simple and very good. Exceptionally refreshing. Try it.

Makes one gallon

Ingredients:

13 Lipton® 100% natural tea bags

2 cups of sugar

2 1/2 quarts of ice cubes

1 3/4 quarts of water

lemon slices (optional)

Directions:

Put 2 cups of sugar into a one gallon plastic or tempered glass pitcher.

Put the tea bags on a counter and pull off the stapled tabs from the ends of the strings.

Align the strings and bags for six of the tea bags and tie the ends of the six strings together.

Repeat that process for the remaining seven tea bags and then tie the ends of the two groups together.

Put the tied tea bag groups into a one quart Pyrex® measuring cup and fill it 2/3 full with water.

Bring the mixture to a boil in a microwave oven on full power, about four or five minutes, and let it boil for 30 seconds. Then shut off the microwave oven.

Put the ice into the one gallon plastic or tempered glass pitcher, and then lift the tied tea bags from the Pyrex® cup with a fork, holding them over the ice cubes, allowing them to drip over the ice.

Dispense the hot tea from the Pyrex® cup over the ice cubes.

Return the tied tea bag groups to the measuring cup and fill it 2/3 full of water.

Mix the pitcher contents well with a long wooden spoon.

Repeat the earlier boiling process in the microwave oven and then repeat the dripping and dispensing steps described above.

Now wrap the tied tea bag groups around a soup spoon and squeeze them over the pitcher to get the last of the liquid tea from the bags.

Mix the pitcher contents well and add any required additional water to bring the total volume to one gallon.

Keep the iced tea covered and chilled in the refrigerator for up to one hour until it is served.

Serve the iced tea in tall glasses with or without ice cubes and with or without a slice of lemon.

Expect compliments. This tasty iced tea will really quench your thirst as well as provide energy.

Tonic Water Recipes - ►

I often wondered why the taste of a Tanqueray® and Tonic drink seemed to become ever more bland. At first I blamed the change on the gin. Later I realized the tonic water we buy has changed a lot since the 1980's. This became really apparent when I happened to buy a four bottle pack of the very expensive product, Q-Tonic®. That tonic water has real flavor, but I'm damned if I'm going to pay their rip-off price. Thus, I went looking on the Internet for recipes to make tonic water. I decided to pick the best five recipes I could find and then assimilate them into one recipe. But first, each recipe is presented individually, so you can understand the various ingredients used, procedures, problems and different, ultimate results.

My recipe follows the five Internet recipes shown immediately below.

Recipe #1:

4 cups of water

1 cup of chopped lemongrass (roughly one large stalk)

¼ cup of powdered cinchona bark

zest and juice of 1 orange

zest and juice of 1 lemon

zest and juice of 1 lime

1 tsp. of whole allspice berries

¼ cup of citric acid

¼ tsp. of Kosher salt

Combine the ingredients in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Once the mixture starts to boil, reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer for 20 minutes.

Remove the pan from the heat and strain out solids using a strainer or chinois. You'll need to fine-strain the mixture, as it still contains quite a bit of the cinchona bark. You can use a coffee filter and wait for an hour or more, or do as I do and run the mixture through a French coffee press.

Once you're satisfied with the clarity of your mix, heat it back up on the stovetop or microwave, and then add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of agave syrup to each cup of your hot mix. Stir until combined, and store in the attractive bottle of your choice.

You now have a syrup that you can carbonate with seltzer water.

To assemble a gin and tonic, use $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce of syrup, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces of gin and 2 ounces of soda water over ice.

Recipe #2:

Many contemporary tonic waters include a host of preservatives and the oft-maligned high-fructose corn syrup. It was these additions that led me to experiment with developing my own tonic, using only natural ingredients and unprocessed sweetener. For ease, I created a flavored syrup that can be added to soda water and gin as needed, controlling the sweet-bitter balance of each drink. A good source for cinchona bark is herbspro.com. This tonic has a more pronounced flavor than any store-bought tonic, so try pairing it with a gin that has some weight, like Aviation® from House Spirits®, or Gin 209® from Distillery 209®.

Ingredients:

4 cups of water

3 cups of pure cane sugar

3 Tbsp. of quinine (powdered cinchona bark; available in some herb stores or

6 Tbsp. of powdered citric acid (found in the bulk section of most well-stocked grocery stores)

3 limes, zested and juiced

3 stalks lemongrass, roughly chopped

Directions:

In a medium saucepan, bring the sugar and water to a boil until the sugar dissolves, then turn the heat down to low.

Add the quinine, citric acid, lemongrass, lime zest and lime juice. Stir well and simmer for about 25 minutes, until the powders are dissolved and the syrup is thin and runny.

Remove from heat and let cool. Strain out the large chunks through a colander, then filter through cheesecloth or coffee filters to refine. This step can take a while—and many filters—as the bark is a very fine powder, so be patient.

Funnel the syrup into sterilized glass bottles, cover tightly and store in the refrigerator for up to several weeks.

Recipe #3:

Ingredients:

4 cups of water

3 cups of pure cane sugar

3 Tbsp of quinine (powdered cinchona bark)

6 Tbsp. of powdered citric acid – check bulk bins at grocery stores

3 limes – zested and juiced

3 stalks lemongrass, roughly chopped

Directions:

Make a simple syrup by bringing the sugar and water to a boil until the sugar dissolves. Turn heat to low.

Add the quinine, citric acid, lemongrass, lime zest and lime juice. Stir and simmer for 25 minutes. The powder should be dissolved and the syrup thin.

Remove from heat and cool. Strain out any large chunks, then filter through cheesecloth or coffee filters to refine. This can take quite a bit of time and many filters. It helps to let the mix stand overnight in the refrigerator to settle out some of the fines, and then carefully pour the liquid off of the top.

Pour into sterilized glass bottles, cover and store in refrigerator.

Process notes:

With a bit of testing, it became obvious that the simple syrup mixed with quinine bark is what really slows the filtering. I made concentrate of the herbal ingredients, filtered it separately, and then added it to the simple syrup. This worked well, and I was able to cut the entire process to a couple of hours, but I found the tonic didn't stay in suspension as well as it should. One has to keep stirring the drink, which waters it down. It also left a bit of an edge to the drink,

that didn't mellow over time. Being a purist, this was unacceptable, but in a pinch ...

Kevin Ludwig suggested that I make the tonic according to his recipe, and let it settle out for five days or so before filtering. Most of the sediment settles out into a gluey mass at the bottom of the jar. If you pour it off carefully and then do the filtering, it is much easier. The tonic also mellows a bit during the process. I think this is the best solution so far, though the filtering is still a bit of a pain.

Here are the best gins to use when making a gin and tonic:

Junipero® Gin, made in small quantities by the distilling branch of the Anchor brewery in San Francisco, comes on strong with the traditional gin flavors of juniper and citrus, hitting all the right notes.

Cadenhead's Old Raj® from Scotland, at 110 proof, or 55 percent alcohol, is by far the most powerful gin. While Old Raj® packs a punch, its muscularity comes across as bright and in control.

Tanqueray® and Tanqueray No. 10® at 94.6 proof are the next best.

Recipe #4:

This was my first time making tonic syrup, and I was extremely pleased with the result. Not only does it save me from pouring half-full bottles of flat tonic down the drain, it is less sweet and far tastier. In perusing tonic water recipes online, one of the things that surprised me is that most call for cinchona bark powder. Filtering powders out of liquids can be annoyingly time-consuming, and is something I'd like to avoid if at all possible. Fortunately, cinchona bark is also available in "cut" form, although it is a bit harder to come by. I wound up purchasing a 16 oz. bag from Penn Herb Company®. It's a large amount, but it's totally worth it if you're a big tonic drinker. And I only wound up straining the mixture twice: once through a sieve to catch the big stuff, and once more through a coffee filter to remove the small particulates. Less filtering time = more drinking time!

Homemade Tonic Water

Ingredients:

4 cups of water

1/4 cup of cut cinchona bark

1 small lemongrass stalk

zest and juice of 1 orange

zest and juice of 1 lemon

zest and juice of 1 lime

1 tsp. of whole allspice berries

1/4 cup of citric acid

1/4 tsp. of kosher salt

3/4 cup of agave (or a little over 1 cup of granulated sugar)

Directions:

Avoid direct hand-to-bark contact as much as possible. Amidst all those large chunks are zillions of teeny tiny splinters.

Combine all ingredients except the agave/sugar in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes.

Remove from heat and let cool for a bit, then pour mixture through a sieve to remove the large pieces.

Run remaining mixture through a coffee filter to remove the small particulates. (You may need to stir it a little bit to keep things from backing up.)

Once you've finished filtering, return the mixture to the stove and place over medium heat.

Add agave/sugar, and stir until combined.

Remove from heat and let cool, then transfer to a jar and store in the refrigerator.

To make your tonic syrup last even longer, add an ounce of high-proof vodka.

To make a gin and tonic, combine 3/4 oz. syrup, 1 1/2 oz. gin, and 2 oz. of seltzer over ice.

Serve and enjoy!

Recipe #5:

The Ultimate Tonic Water

Ingredients:

A scant 1/4 cup of cinchona bark

One quart (four cups) of water

Juice and zest of two limes (or lemons if you want a brighter "right of the pond" taste)

1/4 cup of citric acid (also known as sour salt at some local grocers)

1/4 teaspoon of sea salt

1 3/4 cups of cane sugar

Sparkling water

Directions:

In a small pot, boil the water with the cinchona bark and lime juice at a low simmer for 30 to 45 minutes.

Filter the resulting "tea" through a coffee filter to remove the debris from the cinchona bark and lime zest.

While the liquid is still hot, add the sugar, salt and citric acid and stir vigorously.

Cool the syrup in your refrigerator.

After the syrup has cooled, if you want to try plain tonic water, add 1 part syrup to 2 to 3 parts sparkling water to taste. You've just created the most elegant, woody and deep-flavored tonic water. Ever.

To make the perfect homemade gin & tonic, start with a hearty gin such as Junipero® or Tanqueray Classic®. Into your favorite gin & tonic glass pour:

2 parts gin

1 part tonic water syrup

3-4 parts sparkling water

Drop a few ice cubes into your glass, admire the unique amber color of your beverage, and quaff with delight.

My Food Nirvana Recipe:

Like many of my attempts to develop a "best" recipe, my first assumptions about ingredients, amounts and procedure did not result in my sought result. I was not happy because the flavor of the quinine, the sought aromatic character of the drink, was lacking. The gin was fine and the drink somewhat tart as I violated my own recipe by using only half the amount of sugar my recipe specified. I also learned that at least two good sized stalks of lemongrass are necessary to make 1/2 cup of chopped lemongrass, so I actually used two stalks instead of one. Beyond that, my vacuuming apparatus was faulty and it didn't seem to matter very much because the tonic tea that I had made and allowed to settle, and decanted, flowed through the coffee filter just fine without any vacuum assistance. On one hand, I need to work on improving my vacuuming apparatus. On the other hand, the tonic tea flow through the filter was plenty fast, which surprised me, for in all the other recipes the guys whined about very long filtrations and plugging of filters with cinchona powder. In other words it is possible that a vacuum apparatus will not be necessary at all.

These learning's lead to a variety of thoughts. First, I need a target taste, and for that I have to buy some Q-tonic, for without a well determined goal point I will be chasing a rainbow. Second, I have be sure the cinchona powder I purchased is of decent quality, for I was most unimpressed by the lack of quinine flavor. I will check out my tonic syrup with ultraviolet light and see how it measures up to a product like Q-tonic®. Third, I will use a proper Rubbermaid® container instead of the brand I actually used for the first attempt at vacuuming the tea through a coffee filter. Fourth, I think I will use a better quality coffee filter as the one(s) I used too easily develop holes in the bottom seam/crimp area. Perhaps I will use a basket type filter and avoid any seam or crimp. Finally, once I am sure of the aromatic quality from the Q-tonic® I will be able to experiment with different herbs and spices, and likely better quality cinchona powder, to achieve my goal of having perfect tonic water.

Ingredients:

4 cups of water

¼ cup of cinchona powder or bark

3 limes, juiced and zested

¼ cup of citric acid

¼ tsp. of sea salt

2 cups of sugar

1 large stalk of lemongrass, chopped

Directions:

Avoid all direct contact between the cinchona bark/powder and your skin to avoid getting splinters.

Add all of the ingredients except the sugar into a 2 quart saucepan.

Bring the mixture to a boil on medium heat and simmer it on very low heat for 30 minutes.

Strain the mixture through a fine sieve into a 1½ quart canning jar or similar jar with a lid.

Put the lid on the canning jar and refrigerate the liquid for five days. This will give lots of time for most of the cinchona particles to settle out naturally at the bottom of the jar.

Decant all but the cinchona sediment on the bottom of the canning jar into a bowl. Wash the canning jar to discard the cinchona sediment.

Use my vacuum filtering process/method to filter out all remaining cinchona bark/powder particles and thus clarify the tonic tea as described immediately below. If you cannot use my process/method then use one of the methods described in one of the earlier recipes.

My vacuum filtering process/method requires a conical style paper coffee filter, a small circular piece of fine mesh screen, a large funnel, a 1½ quart Rubbermaid® container with a soft edged, tight sealing lid that has two holes in it ... one for the funnel tube (must be a tight seal, you might use a soft O-ring to assure a tight seal) and one for a vacuum seal valve/port, and a plastic tubing connection from the vacuum seal valve/port to the accessory port of a vacuum sealer. See the picture below. The fine mesh screen is very small, perhaps ½ to ¾ of an inch in diameter, and it simply rests inside the funnel at the top of the funnel tube, immediately below/beneath the coffee filter, to provide physical support to the coffee filter, so that the filter bottom is not torn out and sucked down through the funnel tube. The conical shape coffee filter should fit into the funnel snugly. All components except the coffee filter and the plastic tubing and the vacuum sealer should be sterilized before use.

Pour a small amount of the tonic tea (about ½ cup) into the coffee filter, turn on the vacuum sealer and turn it off before the vacuum level (your vacuum sealer

should have a vacuum gauge) can exceed 15 inches of mercury. Avoid a higher vacuum as that will simply destroy the coffee filter. Repeat this process until all the tonic tea has been processed/drawn through the filter and is clarified and held in the Rubbermaid® container. Use a new coffee filter if the one you are using becomes clogged with cinchona bark/powder particles.

Pour the clarified tonic tea into a saucepan and add the sugar. Bring the mixture to a simmer and mix to dissolve all the sugar. Let the finished tonic syrup cool to room temperature. Then pour the syrup into a clean/sterilized canning jar, cold vacuum seal it with your canning jar vacuum sealer accessory, screw on and tighten the lid ring and refrigerate the sealed canning jar. The syrup should remain fresh and useable for up to a month if kept refrigerated with the lid kept tight. You might also choose to add ½ cup of your chosen gin to the syrup and mix it before storing that mixture in the canning jar, to enhance shelf life in the refrigerator. You may have to use more than one canning jar to accommodate the volume of the syrup if you have added gin.

How to use the syrup:

First, here are the best gins to use when making a gin and tonic:

Junipero® Gin, made in small quantities by the distilling branch of the Anchor® brewery in San Francisco, comes on strong with the traditional gin flavors of juniper and citrus, hitting all the right notes.

Cadenhead's Old Raj® from Scotland, at 110 proof, or 55 percent alcohol, is by far the most powerful gin. While Old Raj® packs a punch, its muscularity comes across as bright and in control.

Tanqueray® and Tanqueray No. 10® at 94.6 proof are the next best gins.

I like to keep my gin in the freezer and my tonic water (or in this case carbonated water) in the refrigerator. That keeps the ice cubes from rapid melting and avoids diluting the drink.

Use one ounce of syrup with two ounces of gin and four ounces of carbonated water to make a gin and tonic in a chilled 12 ounce glass. Add ice cubes to the drink to almost fill the glass and use one small wedge of fresh lime, lightly squeezed around the rim of the glass and dropped into the glass. Stir/mix gently.

Enjoy!

Note: If you make carbonated water as I do then your only significant expense for the drink is the gin! Refer to the Food Nirvana recipe for lemon-lime soda to see how to make carbonated water easily and cheaply. The cinchona powder cost

me \$28, including the shipping, for one pound of product. That quantity is enough to make 16 quarts of tonic syrup. In turn, each quart of tonic syrup makes 32 drinks. In other words, \$28 divided by (16 times 32) equals about 5½ cents per drink for the cinchona powder for the tonic syrup. The other ingredients used to make the syrup (limes, sugar, lemongrass, citric acid) for one drink add up to 8 cents. The lime slice for the drink costs 5 cents (because I buy bags of limes at Costco®) and the carbon dioxide gas to make a single drink when you make your own carbonated water is 3/4 of a cent. Thus, excluding the cost of the gin, the cost for one drink prepared my way is 18¼ cents! The gin will vary in cost from \$1 per drink to \$2 per drink depending on which gin you use and where/when you buy it. As I use Tanqueray® that I buy for \$29 for a 1 and 3/4 liter bottle my gin cost is roughly \$1, bringing the total cost of the drink to about \$1.20. Now that is my way of fighting inflation! Ordering a TNT in a bar will cost anywhere from \$5 to \$8 (or more!) and it won't taste nearly as good because of their inferior tonic water and less than the right amount (and sometimes a phony variety) of Tanqueray® gin.

Lemonade - ☺♥

When you want a refreshing drink on a hot day make either lemonade or iced tea. This lemonade recipe, straight out of the old Better Homes and Gardens® cookbook, is simple and delicious. I made one modification and that was to use juice from one fresh lime as part of the lemon juice requirement. This drink is excellent with either gin or vodka over ice cubes on a hot summer day. It is very simple and very good and quite refreshing. You may find yourself having more than one!

Makes one quart

Ingredients:

1 fresh lime, juiced

3 fresh lemons, juiced, enough to make the lime and lemon juice mixture volume exactly one cup

3/4 cup of sugar

3 cups of water

9 lemon and 3 lime slivers cut from the skins of the juiced lime and lemons

Directions:

Put the sugar into a one quart glass pitcher.

Use a juicer, either manual or electric to process the lime and the lemons.

Remove any lemon seeds from the juice with a spoon.

Add the juice to the pitcher.

Add three cups of water to the pitcher and mix the contents well.

Cut the lemon and lime slivers from the skins of the juiced fruit and add the slivers to the pitcher.

Mix again and then refrigerate the lemonade until it is used.

Serve the lemonade over ice cubes in tall glasses, perhaps with a shot of gin or vodka added prior to the lemonade.

Stir and drink. Yummy!

Lemon-Lime Soda - ☺♥T

In the "Technology at Home" section earlier in this book I mentioned making seltzer, or, carbonated water for Marie, using a tank of carbon dioxide gas, plain water and a one liter plastic seltzer bottle, for about six cents per bottle. Recently Janet wanted to drink Sprite® and we happened to be out of that product. We could have driven five to ten miles to reach a store that would sell that beverage. Instead, I decided to save money on the beverage and the transportation and make lemon-lime soda. In unpleasant economic times the individualist will succeed, albeit with a false start or two. Other folks become victims of the economy. We won.

I used lemons and limes that we had purchased in bulk at Costco®, cut in half, vacuum sealed and frozen. On thawing them in the microwave oven they once again were perfect for the juice extractor. We had empty tonic water bottles and we surely had water and plenty of sugar.

Now I must digress to describe the device used to connect the bottle of water, etc., to the source of the carbon dioxide gas. First, some years back I searched the Internet to find information on carbonating beverages at home. Most of the sites were simply retailers of very expensive little seltzer units, but one had a truly creative design that I decided to make and use any time I wanted a carbonated beverage. I now describe that design.

Pep Boys® used to sell metal tire valves used for high pressure truck tires, in packs of two for a few dollars. These types of valves can be obtained from different sources, notably tire businesses that work on trucks. A bit of searching on your part in your geographic area will locate what you need. I know because I attempted to buy addition valves from Pep Boys® recently and learned that they no longer carried that product. So I walked to a tire business, Sullivan Tire Company®, and got some for free of much higher quality (made of thick brass) than those that used to be sold by Pep Boys®. You might guess that Sullivan's is now where I buy new tires. Well, let's get on with the discussion.

The bottom of the outside of the valve (of the old Pep Boys® product and other products) has a flat collar and above that threads and a shim and a nut. The inside spring loaded red colored seal assembly is removed from the tire valve by unscrewing it and it is discarded. The valve is used with the bottle cap by first drilling out plastic from the center of the top of a cap from a bottle of seltzer water to a diameter that will barely allow the valve to fit into the hole. The soft blue seal that typically comes inside the bottle cap is to be drilled also and retained. The valve is inserted through the hole from the underside of the cap,

through the blue seal and the white cap. Then the shim and nut are put onto the stem and a small adjustable wrench is used to tighten the nut onto the top of the shim to make an airtight seal. Thus, the collar of the valve is on the underside of the cap and the plastic of the blue seal and the cap is sandwiched between the seal and collar below and the shim and the nut on the top of the cap.

Plastic high pressure tubing that you can buy at Home Depot® connects the top of the tire valve to the regulator on the tank of carbon dioxide gas. Simply use stainless steel hose clamps on each end to securely attach the tubing. A simple open/close valve is used to turn the gas supply to the tube on or off. See the photographs below.



About 35 pounds per square inch (psi) pressure is set via an adjustment screw on the secondary gauge of the tank regulator as that will be perfect to force the carbon dioxide gas into solution in the bottle. After connecting a bottle of ice cold water (use your deep freeze to make it very cold, with a little ice, but not completely frozen) to the cap and valve unit you turn on the gas supply and shake the bottle vigorously for 30 seconds. Then you close the gas supply valve and unscrew the cap and valve unit from the bottle of now carbonated water. Actually, you unscrew the bottle from the cap and valve unit. You then screw on the regular bottle cap tightly and that is all there is to it.

Note that while this recipe is for lemon-lime soda that you can use root beer extract or any of many other flavorings to create the soda you want. Technically, you can buy Coke® syrup wholesale in a one gallon bottle if you can find a supplier. As always, you have to go looking to get what you want, but it is mighty easy online.

I strongly recommend visiting a web site named www.naturesflavors.com where you will find flavor concentrates for anything you might imagine. They have 287 different types of flavor concentrates. I used them to purchase the black raspberry concentrate I use when making black raspberry ice cream. The flavor concentrates can be used in many ways besides ice cream and beverages, for

example, baking or puddings, salads, fruit salads, etc. The flavor choices go far beyond fruit flavors too. All prices are the same.

A word about cost is in order. I buy the one gallon quantity of concentrate to get the best volume pricing. It costs about \$114 and that includes the shipping. That sounds very expensive until you realize that a gallon of concentrate will make 768 liters of soda, so the cost per one liter bottle for the concentrate is only 15 cents. The concentrate is very stable but if you want to guarantee freshness for many years then freeze most of it in 4 oz. or 8 oz. vacuum sealed packs and use them as needed. You might also split the cost and the product between four or more friends, and that simple act makes the cost easy to bear ... and everyone gets to have fun.

Let's look at the cost of the other ingredients to get a complete picture. The carbon dioxide gas will cost 6 cents. One pound of sugar is about 2½ cups. We buy sugar at Costco® for \$14 for 25 pounds. Thus, the cost of the sugar to make one liter of soda is 14 dollars divided by 125 bottles, or, 12 cents. The really good part is that sodas made with sugar instead of the high fructose corn syrup used in commercial sodas taste one hell of a lot better. As usual, it is a quality of life issue.

Thus, to make one liter of very high quality soda will cost you a total of 33 cents, if you use the concentrate. If you use fresh fruit the cost will be 78 cents per liter, but you get a nice dose of vitamin C and superior taste. If you buy one liter bottles of soda at the supermarket the cost will vary from 79 cents to well over a dollar a bottle, you get no vitamin C, and the taste is inferior due to the use of high fructose corn syrup. To make things even better, you are recycling bottles and saving the environment!

Ingredients:

1 lemon (or buy lemon-lime concentrate from www.naturesflavors.com

and use about one half teaspoon (or less) of the concentrate)

1 lime

1/2 cup of sugar

1 liter plastic soda bottle and cap

Water (I use the already chilled water from our refrigerator dispenser)

Directions:

Extract the juice from the lemons and limes and pour it into the soda bottle using a strainer and a funnel. That will eliminate the fruit pulp and any seeds.

Alternatively you can use a lemon-lime flavor concentrate and put it directly into the soda bottle.

Add the sugar using a funnel and fill the bottle about half full with water.

Cap and then shake the bottle to dissolve most of the sugar.

Fill the bottle to within 1½" from the bottom of the neck with water.

Cap the bottle tightly, shake it again, and put it into the deep freeze for about 1 hour in the coldest place in the deep freeze. Some ice should form during that time, but not much.

Remove the bottle from the freezer, stand it upright and remove the bottle cap and connect the carbonation cap and valve assembly tightly.

Turn on the gas pressure valve.

Shake the bottle vigorously for thirty seconds.

Shut off the gas supply valve.

Stand the beverage bottle vertically.

Remove the cap and valve assembly from the carbonated beverage bottle, allowing some gas pressure to release gradually, without losing beverage, by alternately loosening and tightening the cap.

Screw the regular cap onto the bottle tightly.

Refrigerate the bottle of soda until you are ready to serve it.

Serve. It will be very well carbonated and very tasty.

Enjoy ... and laugh about the retail price and the inferior flavor of the soda sold at the supermarket. Get kudos for reusing the plastic bottles/saving the environment.

Long Island Iced Tea - ☺♥

When you want to get smacked quickly this is the drink to make. It works. Drink more than one and you will become unreliable ...

The recipe below is okay but I like to use lime instead of lemon and I add a teaspoon of sugar.

Makes two drinks.

Ingredients:

2 cups crushed ice

1 ounce vodka

1 ounce gin

1 ounce light rum

1 ounce white/light tequila

1/2 ounce Triple Sec

2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon (or lime) juice

1/2 cup cola, or to taste

2 lemon (or lime) wedges

1 tsp. sugar (optional)

Directions:

Put all of the ingredients except the cola and lemon/lime wedges into a cocktail shaker.

Cover and shake vigorously to combine and chill.

Pour the mixture, ice and all, into 2 glasses or beer mugs that have been chilled in the freezer and top off with the cola.

Garnish with lemon/lime wedges.

Serve.

Pretty soon the world is a softer, nicer place, kind of fuzzy at the edges.

Declare success!

My memory of the best Long Island Iced Tea I ever drank is one of more pucker power than this recipe provides. Basically that means some fresh lemon or lime juice should be added until the desired result is obtained. Have fun experimenting!

V-8 Vegetable Juice - ☺♥

This recipe is one I was given by my dear cousin, Joan Bliss. I love the commercially made V8® product but this was/is an opportunity to use some of my crops, especially my tomatoes, and a few purchased vegetables to make a homemade version of V8® Vegetable Juice. The economics surely favor making it. Even better, the end product can be used like tomato juice in various recipes, like soups, even in a Bloody Mary. When I made my first batch of V-8 juice, what I learned really changed my original plan for making the juice. I experimented as I made the juice and modified my procedures based on the most obvious changes to my earlier expectations. In any event, you profit from my experiments, and the V-8 juice is no exception. I am exceptionally pleased with my results. The recipe provided below is one you can take to the bank! Your homemade V-8 juice will be very superior in taste and nutrition compared to the commercial V8® product, and you control the salt content. It has a slightly sweet taste.

Speaking of salt content, the recipe Joan provided had canning salt in it, but no potassium chloride, which is a valuable addition to provide potassium in your diet. I add both sodium chloride and potassium chloride (NoSalt®), limiting the sodium chloride to essentially half the sodium amount as used by the Campbell Soup Company® in the commercial V8® product. This simply means the consumer can add additional salt later if it is wanted, but he/she does not have to worry about excessive dietary salt/sodium chloride from this beverage.

I also added ascorbic acid powder, which is Vitamin C, to provide the advertised 170% of required daily intake for adults. Why? Well, the boiling of the tomato juice and other ingredients in making the V-8 juice destroys some of the natural vitamin C content, and there is a dilution effect relative to Vitamin C content from the addition of vegetables that are not high in Vitamin C content, like lettuce and celery.

I noted that the commercial V8® product contains an unspecified additive, "natural flavoring," and an unspecified amount of citric acid. Citric acid adds tartness, which keeps the product from having a flat taste. It also functions to some extent as a preservative by increasing the acidity of the beverage. I suspect, however, that the commercial purpose is to take advantage of the antioxidant effect of citric acid, thus retaining the color of the beverage by avoiding darkening due to oxidation when in contact with air. Fresh lemon juice can be substituted in small amounts with a roughly equivalent result (we all know that lemon juice in water keeps cut fruit from turning brown, which is nothing other than a result of exposure to air/oxidation). The key point is to get the tartness

and anti-oxidant effect without making a lemony taste happen, which as it turns out was not a problem at all. As to the "natural flavoring" I recall the celery flavor being very evident in the commercial V8® product so I added two pounds of celery root, or, celeriac. I also added celery seed, which I grind/powder first using a small food processor.

You can find ingredients like pure citric acid powder and ascorbic acid powder online at sites like www.bulkfoods.com and typically purchase one pound quantities of the pure products at a very low price. This method of supplying your food pantry is something you do very infrequently for the products do not degrade if kept in sealed bags or other sealed containers, and you will have enough product for years of use in making many different foods. I refer to the commercial product, NoSalt® as a good source of potassium chloride and you will find it or an equivalent product in the spice section of any good supermarket. Some folks like to mix it 50:50 with table salt for table use in all foods, to reduce sodium consumption and enhance potassium intake.

Ingredients: (Makes about 16 pints [two gallons] of juice)

2 large cookie trays, each filled one layer deep with fresh, large, very ripe tomatoes

2 large red beets

4 large carrots

1 green bell pepper, diced - Note: This ingredient is not used in the commercial product but it is a great source of vitamin C

1/2 pound of fresh spinach

1 large head of lettuce

1 bunch of fresh parsley, chopped

1 large bunch of celery, chopped

2 pounds of celeriac (celery root)

1/4 cup of celery seeds, ground/powdered in a small high speed food processor

1 bunch of watercress

1/2 cup of sugar

Canning salt or Kosher salt - Amount to be determined based on the final volume of juice - Do not use iodized (table) salt as it will cause undesirable darkening of your vegetable juice.

Potassium Chloride (NoSalt®) - Amount to be determined based on the final volume of the juice

Citric acid powder or fresh lemon juice - Amount to be determined by taste preference

Ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) powder - Amount to be determined based on the final volume of the juice

Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution at the rate of one fluid ounce per gallon of juice (optional)

Directions:

Quarter and then crush the tomatoes a few at a time in a large, 2 1/2 to 3 gallon pot (or you might process the quartered sections very briefly first, in a food processor, on low speed to avoid chopping the seeds). Note that the actual volume of juice you will get depends on the size of the tomatoes, but you are aiming to get at least one and one half gallons of tomato juice after cooking, not counting the skins and seeds, and preferably a bit more.

Here is an easy way to tell if you will have enough juice. Use a food processor to chop the tomatoes so there is no air space present when you put the processed tomatoes into the pot. After all the processed tomatoes have been added to the pot, measure the volume. If you have one and three-quarter gallons or more then proceed with the recipe. Otherwise, process additional tomatoes to get to the required pre-cooked volume.

Add 1/2 tsp. of citric acid powder to the pot, or, three tbsp. of fresh lemon juice.

Bring the tomato juice and solids to a boil on high heat, covered, stirring every few minutes, and then simmer on very low heat for 30 minutes, covered.

Process the juice and solids through a colander to remove the seeds and skins. Discard the skins and seeds.

Put the tomato juice back into the pot and measure the volume of the tomato juice. It should be a minimum of one and one half gallons. If not, you must process additional tomatoes to make enough juice for this recipe as given.

Add the powdered celery seeds and the sugar.

Wash and shred/grate the beets and carrots (but do not peel them or you will sacrifice vitamin content, e.g. vitamin A and vitamin C) using a food processor and add them to the pot.

Cut the celery roots into quarters and peel them with a high quality potato peeler. Then process the celery root quarters with the food processor, along with the celery. Add these vegetables to the pot.

Bring the mixture to a boil on high heat, covered, stirring every few minutes.

Simmer the mixture gently on low heat for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, and adding the rest of the vegetables half way through the simmering period, per the next instruction.

Wash and chop the green pepper, parsley and lettuce. Add them and the spinach and watercress to the pot, mix well and simmer during the last 15 minutes of the previous simmering cycle, with the pot covered with a lid.

Remove the pot from the heat and keep it covered with a lid.

Allow the pot of vegetables/juice to cool to 150 degrees F or lower, covered with a lid.

Process the juice and solids in batches with a blender (very carefully as hot materials tend initially to blow out of the top of the blender) for about one or two minutes each to puree the vegetables.

You will notice that your V-8 juice is darker in color than the commercial V8® juice because you included all the green vegetables in the puree process. It was the smart thing to do, nutritionally and in taste. Your V-8 juice will be quite thick with lots of vegetable content, better than the commercial V8® product. If you insist on having a color closer to that of tomato juice then you can make an equivalent volume of tomato juice (two gallons) separately and combine the two juices, but if you do that then the chemical additions below have to be doubled.

Refrigerate the blended V-8 juice overnight, covered.

Measure the final volume of the juice (you should have essentially 2 gallons, plus or minus one pint) and add appropriate amounts of canning salt, potassium chloride (NoSalt®), ascorbic acid and some additional citric acid (or lemon juice), and mix well.

You must use a very high quality kitchen scale to accurately measure the acid and salt additions, that displays weights in both English and metric units and is sensitive/displays weight accurately to the tenth of a gram. Kitchen scales of that

level of sensitivity are hard to find so you might instead use a very sensitive electronic scale that you can purchase from Cabela's® online for about \$70, the model XT-1500 Reload Scale, that is sensitive down to 0.05 grams. It is a very wise purchase, and a product you will use often for many years for precise chemical additions for many recipes, which means the upfront cost should not be an issue for you at all.

Assume half of the original vitamin C (ascorbic acid) content was lost during boiling. Add that amount of ascorbic acid (roughly 150 mg per pint) to the juice and mix well. This should result in the V-8 juice providing about 170% of the currently recommended daily intake of vitamin C, which is about 200 mg. If you don't want to do the arithmetic simply add 2.5 grams of ascorbic acid to the two gallons of V-8 vegetable juice.

Assume the juice as processed has only 10% of the required amounts of sodium chloride and potassium chloride (Roughly 750 mg of each type of salt per pint is the required total amount, but reduce your addition by the 10% you have already in the original juice. Thus, the juice needs an additional 675 mg of sodium chloride per pint to match the commercial version of V8® juice). Per my comments earlier in this recipe I recommend adding only half that amount of sodium chloride initially so that the folks who drink the V-8 juice later can adjust the salt content to their liking. In other words, adding 337 mg per pint times 16 pints equals 5.4 grams of sodium chloride to be added now. Now add about 500 mg per pint of the potassium chloride (NoSalt®), or 8 grams total. Add the required amounts of both types of salt as indicated (unless you want very low sodium juice), mix well, and taste the juice. You should definitely notice the taste change.

Add additional citric acid, perhaps 1/4 tsp. at a time and mix well and then taste the juice and decide if additional citric acid is needed to increase tartness. But do not add a total of more than one additional teaspoon of citric acid powder. Alternatively, you may use fresh lemon juice instead of citric acid, perhaps two tablespoons at a time, mixing well and tasting the juice to decide if further addition of lemon juice is appropriate.

Add the sodium benzoate solution at the rate of one fluid ounce per gallon of juice (optional).

Be sure to mix the juice very well to assure all the added products are completely dissolved and evenly distributed within the juice.

Dispense the well mixed, seasoned chilled juice into one pint vacuum sealing bags and vacuum seal each bag. Alternatively, you may can the juice in pint or quart canning jars.

If you didn't use the sodium benzoate, store the vacuum sealed bags of the homemade V-8 juice in the deep freeze flat, to minimize and make uniform the bag thickness.

To use the frozen V-8 juice, simply defrost a package of it in a microwave oven until it is still cold but not frozen.

Alternatively, if you used the optional sodium benzoate solution you can store vacuum sealed bags of the juice in your refrigerator and the juice will remain fresh for easily six months.

Enjoy!

White Niagara Grape Wine - ☺♥

I happened to see a bottle of Welch's® white grape juice at the supermarket that caught my attention. It was mostly pasteurized white Niagara grape juice with some other grape juices (all from concentrate) fortified with vitamin C and a smidgen of citric acid to brighten the taste and, get this ... only a small amount of potassium metabisulfite as a preservative/antioxidant to keep the juice from darkening on exposure to air. That means you can make wine using that grape juice! Simply aerate the juice during initial processing before fermenting it to eliminate most of the dissolved sulfur dioxide gas.

In the old days preservatives like potassium sorbate were used to keep the general public from being able to make wine from purchased fruit juices ... but the current world of insistent, pure food customers has actually, for once, done us a favor!

So I made the wine. I am very pleased and I am providing the somewhat technical recipe below for your use and enjoyment. The wine tastes fine and it contains about 14% alcohol. It cost about \$2.17 per 750ml bottle. And now? Now that this method is proven to be good I've ramped up the quantity I make to 2 1/2 gallons (a case of 12 bottles of wine) in each batch. Just remember to check out the grape juice bottle ingredients carefully if/when you buy the juice to verify that you have 100% grape juice and that no fermentation inhibiting preservatives/amounts were used. Else, all you get after all the work is old, yeasty, overly sweet grape juice! Yuck!

As purchased (\$4.79 per 2 quart bottle), the Welch's® white grape juice is advertised as having 9.9 ounces of sugar in 2 quarts of juice. Old time winemakers like me know that the ideal amount of sugar for making wine varies from 2 to 3 pounds of sugar per gallon of "must" (a winemaker's term for juice plus other ingredients) that will become wine via yeast fermentation. Well, this wine is only supposed to be sweet in a minor way, so you can taste the unique grape flavor, so if you do the arithmetic you will see that the total amount of sugar used in the recipe below is just 2 pounds per gallon ... or in this case, 1 pound per two quarts of grape juice ... more than half of which was provided by the nice folks at Welch's® (or so they say, more detail follows below). The cost of the added sugar, if you buy it via Walmart® in a 25 lb. bag, is 25 cents, or maybe a bit more!

If you happen to buy a device called a hydrometer (about \$25 via Amazon®) you can measure sugar content in the grape juice with fairly high accuracy, and that is a good idea for the sugar content of any grape juice may vary from bottle to bottle. In any event, if you get a hydrometer you want your final sugar content

before fermentation to be shown on the scale as 24 degrees Brix, which means 24 grams of sugar in 100 grams of the grape juice, or, using a different accompanying scale, Specific Gravity of 1.100. Note that the grape juice, as purchased, showed a sugar content of 15 degrees Brix. The scary part was that adjusting the sugar content to achieve 24 degrees Brix only elevated the degrees Brix to 22.5. More follows ...

Another device that is truly nice is a refractometer (about \$25 via Amazon®) the measures the degrees Brix, the SG (Specific Gravity), and from which you can get a close estimate of the percent alcohol in your completed wine. The refractometer will be used to assure the correct sugar content of the sweetened grape juice (24 degrees Brix) ... it will show the specific gravity, and by measuring the residual sugar (remaining degrees Brix) at the end of fermentation it provides you knowledge of how much sugar was converted into alcohol ... also how likely the wine is to be sweet, neutral or dry. Well, the refractometer, just like the hydrometer, showed the degrees Brix to be 22.5 instead of 24 after adding the indicated amount of sugar to the must. Read on ...

I had to add one extra ounce of sugar to the 2 quart volume of grape juice to get the degrees Brix up to 24. That worked. Both the refractometer and the hydrometer agreed with each other precisely. But why was this necessary? The reality is the stated amount of sugar in the grape juice cannot be accurate. Now, that is why we use instruments to know for certain what we have, and eliminate confusing results that might happen any time, as we test the wine for any batch after fermentation. Ergo, if the percent of alcohol in the wine is significantly lower than what should have happened, then what was the cause? The point ... make a small but important investment in measuring equipment so you are not part of a poor return guessing game.

Be sure to use clean, freshly washed equipment (as listed below) to avoid bacteria and wild yeasts. You can buy the wine air lock and rubber stopper at any wine arts store, or online at Amazon® or Ebay® or other commercial web sites. Ditto the plastic tubing. The rest of the items you already have at home. If not, you best buy all the wines you want to drink and forget this recipe.

On checking the pH (acidity) of the grape juice, sugar and yeast mixture for my trial batch of wine, I found it was 3.0 ... which was fine for the wine being made. No chemical additions were necessary. You do have to check the pH as yours may be quite different and you may need to add up to 3.8 grams of potassium carbonate per gallon of juice at the start of fermentation. Why check? The pH of the grape juice I used for my "second" batch of 2.5 gallons was 2.85, which means the grape juice, as purchased, was not consistent in level of acidity, and that means the final wine may taste acidic if you don't adjust the pH, and acidic

tasting wine is not good. For the record, natural grape juices contain a variety of organic acids (like tartaric, malic, etc.) that work just fine in producing an ideal pH for making wine (most of the time... sometimes we have to convert malic acid into lactic acid to reduce total acidity in white wines like chardonnay) ... provided the grapes are ripe with optimal sugar content.

Now, how can you measure pH without spending a lot of money for a pH meter? They can cost anywhere from \$100 to \$300. The answer is cheap yet effective paper strips that measure pH that, again, you can easily buy cheaply via Amazon®.

Here is an end of the recipe type of variation that is quite special ... General directions for carbonating the white grape wine to make it a sparkling wine. My method requires the equipment and the procedure that is described in Food Nirvana in the recipe for Lemon-Lime soda. Be sure to read it. Once you master making the wine you definitely want to make some of it into sparkling wine. What a fine treat!

Okay ... no more background talk ... let's get started ...



Ingredients: (small 2 quart batch, yields 4 ounces more than 2, 750ml bottles of wine)

2 quart bottle of Welch's® white grape juice (with no preservatives)

1 gram of Red Star® Premier Blanc active dry yeast (or alternatively, 1/2 tsp. of Fleischman's® active dry yeast used for baking)

6 ounces of white sugar (weigh it using an electronic kitchen scale)

Potassium carbonate (get it via Amazon, cheaply. You may or may not need to add this chemical to adjust grape juice pH in any given batch)

Equipment:

A kitchen scale that measures to one tenth of a gram (or buy a milligram scale inexpensively via Amazon®)

Empty, clean 2 quart bottle

Wine air lock in a 1" diameter (small end) single hole rubber stopper (#8 size)

Flexible plastic tubing for siphoning (42" long, 1/4" ID)

8 ounce canning jar with lid and ring

2 clean 750 ml wine bottles with screw on caps

1, one gallon glass or plastic pitcher

Directions:

Pour two and one half cups of the grape juice into a Pyrex® or similar glass one quart measuring container. Pour the rest into a one gallon pitcher.

Add the 6 ounces (or more a bit later after you measure the "real" amount of sugar in the must) of white sugar and stir/mix until it is dissolved. If necessary to assist getting the sugar to dissolve, warm the mixture briefly in the microwave oven. Then stir until the sugar is dissolved.

Add the sugar syrup to the juice in the pitcher and mix it well. Then use your hydrometer or refractometer to check the degrees Brix or the Specific Gravity. If the degrees Brix is less than 24, or the Specific Gravity is less than 1.100, then figure out how much additional sugar you need to add to the pitcher, and do that addition with stirring.

Pour 8 ounces of that mixture into the 8 ounce canning jar, seal it with the lid and the ring, and keep it in the refrigerator until it is used later. The main reason for doing this is the volume of the grape juice plus the added sugar will be more than two quarts, so it won't all fit into the plastic bottle at the same time.

Add the yeast to the remaining grape juice and sugar mixture, mix it in, cover the pitcher with plastic wrap and let it sit for one hour.

Measure the pH of the "must." Use either a pH meter or paper pH strips (cheap). If the pH is lower than 3.00 then adjust the pH via a small (very small, less than a gram) addition of potassium carbonate to obtain a final pH of about 3.25. Start with 0.3 grams/quart and mix well and recheck the pH. Continue checking the pH and adjusting if necessary, but do not exceed a rate of 3.8 grams of potassium carbonate per gallon of must, or in this example a maximum of 1.9 grams for 2 quarts of must.

Okay, now you know what to do if the starting pH is too low. But what if it is too high, like 3.75? Fermentation will increase the pH naturally and you want the final pH to be no higher than 3.5. The answer is to add some tartaric acid powder to the must until you get the pH down to about 3.25. Yes, you can easily buy the tartaric acid powder cheaply via Amazon®, etc. But you are unlikely to need it when making this white wine as the white grape juice tends to have a lower pH than red/purple grape juice.

Stir the must and pour all of it into the grape juice bottle.

Let's proceed. Wet the rubber stopper, put the air lock/rubber stopper into the top rim of the grape juice bottle snugly and fill the air lock reservoir half full with water, then put on the air lock plastic cap.

Let the "must" ferment for 7 to 10 days in a room 65 to 75 degrees F, in a relatively dark place. When the fermentation is about done there will be very slow bubbling of expelled carbon dioxide gas in the air lock. Wait until it is bubbling at a rate of about 1 bubble per minute before continuing to the next step.

Rack the wine using the plastic tubing and the empty 2 quart bottle. That means siphon all but the dead yeast cells on the bottom of the grape juice bottle into the 2 quart bottle, minimizing exposure to air by keeping the ends of the plastic tubing under the surface of the liquid in both containers. When you have siphoned most of the wine there will be an ounce or two of leftover liquid mixed with the dead yeast cells and all of it is to be discarded. Rinse the dead yeast cells from the grape juice bottle, ergo, clean it with hot tap water.

Put the reserved (refrigerated) canning jar of grape juice and sugar mixture into the grape juice bottle. Then add the siphoned wine from the 2 quart bottle, again by careful siphoning to avoid air exposure as much as possible. Fill it only up to within one inch of the bottom of the air lock. Then pour any excess wine into the 8 ounce canning jar, put the lid on it and put it into the refrigerator.

Wet the rubber stopper and put the air lock back into the top of the grape juice bottle.

Let the wine finish fermenting for five to ten days (until there is no longer any bubbling in the air lock), then again rack the wine as before, siphoning the wine into the 2 quart bottle. Then add the remaining wine from the refrigerated 8 ounce canning jar.

After cleaning the grape juice bottle, siphon the wine back into it close to the top and seal the bottle with the original bottle cap.

Let the wine rest for one week and check to see if it should be racked again. That means if any film of dead yeast cells is seen from the underside of the grape juice bottle it must be eliminated via another careful racking.

Let the wine rest in the refrigerator for two weeks to clarify. It should clarify nicely, with any formed particulates (like potassium bitartrate) going to the bottom of the bottle (there may be none). If the wine remains cloudy you can/may filter it many different ways ... the choice is up to you. I have a filter system that uses a tank of carbon dioxide gas to gently push the wine through a fine filter (0.45 microns) and then into wine bottles. You shouldn't need to filter the wine, but if you do you can use the Internet to identify various chemicals used to clarify wine and instructions for how to use each one, like plain unflavored gelatin.

Bottle the wine in the two 750 ml wine bottles using the plastic tubing/siphoning and pour any leftover wine into the 8 ounce canning jar.

Screw the caps on the wine bottles. Taste the wine from the 8 ounce canning jar. You deserve to enjoy/sample what you have made, even if it hasn't aged.

You can store the wine for a month or so but I suggest using it within a few months. Our crude method of siphoning the wine exposed it some to oxygen in the air, so it won't last for long in the best shape. Alas, both bottles of wine from my first batch were consumed within a week! And then I ramped up the amount to 2.5 gallons (five bottles of grape juice), which yielded 11 bottles of wine (due to my error during racking instead of 12 bottles). Friends got some, and my sweetheart loves the wine, so I guess I'll have to hide some for my own use!

If you want you can chill the wine, or, serve it at room temperature. We enjoy a slightly sweet wine like this one both chilled and at room temperature.

Drink! Yes, this is very good wine! If you want to become sophisticated and professional after this experiment then read the full Food Nirvana recipe for Wine Making. For example, you might guarantee that no residual fermentation can occur after bottling by adding a small amount of powdered potassium

sorbate (0.8 grams/gallon) to the wine before bottling it. As before with the other chemicals, that chemical can be purchased cheaply via the Internet.

Enjoy! After all, it is only \$2.17/bottle (or maybe a bit more) ... and that is very inexpensive for a delicious wine. My sweetheart Peggy says it qualifies as a fine wine.

Doing this recipe was pretty easy, wasn't it? Fun too, not to mention inexpensive. Now that you know how easy this is, why not make a larger batch? Buy 2 1/2 or 5 gallon glass carboys (buy two of whatever size you choose [think about why]) and have at it. They are not expensive, and they will last forever if you handle them carefully. And glass is superior to plastic for sterilization.

Maybe you will want to gift some nice wine to close family or very good friends.

Winemaking - ☺♥

I was recently thinking about sharing some of my knowledge of winemaking with readers of this book. My interest in that hobby isn't shared by many of my acquaintances, but as I reflected on my experiences I realized I have much to offer, but only to those who will take a near professional interest in the subject. If you really love great wine and are interested in making great wine this section might be right for you. Do know up front that the cost for equipment to do a professional job making great wine is pretty high ... until you factor in cost averaging across many bottles of wine, or realize how much you actually spend on commercial wines. I concluded that if I didn't capture my experience here it would likely be lost forever. Thus I will now begin a narrative to describe background and then essential winemaking information.

I made my decision to invest my time and money in winemaking back in 1997 based on economic considerations, because my wife Marie and her friends were serious consumers of good quality Chardonnay wines ... at about \$15 a bottle. It adds up quickly. A bit over 100 bottles buys the equipment I recommend later. My payback period for the equipment on that basis alone was less than six months! But before getting to that story I want to provide earlier background that ultimately led to my decision to make great wine.

My experiences in wine making go all the way back to 1968, and across the years I've made some excellent blackberry, dandelion, sherry, Chardonnay and Merlot wines. I also made some marginal plum, fig and Concord grape wines. It was a mixed bag with more art than science in the early efforts, and certainly limited knowledge. As you might expect the results varied a lot.

Again going backwards in time, during 1989 I flew to California to meet with Marie who was there on business. We planned to spend some time just enjoying San Francisco for a few days at the conclusion of her business meetings. What happened on the first day is that I took a walk up one of the hills while she was in a meeting and I found a store that sold wine. By sheer good fortune I bought a bottle of Chardonnay that I took back to surprise and share with Marie, and it was so buttery and smooth and delicious that we both were really happy. I never forgot that experience and I later regretted losing the label from that bottle, for today I cannot tell you who made that wine. I only remember that it was in a black bottle.

By serendipity our great friends Bob and Lois Kitiuk gave Marie and me a very expensive and excellent bottle of Chardonnay wine in July of 1997 to celebrate our wedding anniversary. It cost \$50 a bottle, which at that time was quite

expensive, and the wine was '96 Cakebread Cellars® Reserve Chardonnay. The wine was so good and so buttery and so smooth that I decided that I simply had to try to duplicate it, and that was the beginning of my professional quest to make great wine.

I decided to use my knowledge of chemistry and obtain all the right equipment and analyze all of the important aspects/endpoints of the Cakebread Cellars® product as if I ran a laboratory. What I was doing was setting specific measurable goals that I would attempt to match making my own Chardonnay wine. I then acquired a superb technical book on wine making along with essential equipment, and then I located a small vineyard that grew only Chardonnay and Merlot grapes, to perfection. Fortunately for me harvest time was arriving just in time for me to get the very best grapes. Beyond that I used my knowledge in science and engineering and some creativity to create a winemaking environment and process unlike any I ever read about. The short version of this story is that I was completely successful in my first attempt to exactly clone the Cakebread Cellars® Reserve Chardonnay. I was delighted beyond belief and I then proceeded to make a Merlot wine of similar perfection, but against no specific retail product as a standard.

All in all I gained a great amount of knowledge and I was proud of my success, realizing that my experience relative to the wide world of wines was still very limited. That didn't matter to me as I had perfect wines to present to my wife and the knowledge that I could make more at any time at a very low price. Thus began my capture of all that I did that today I can share with you. Let's proceed.

Prepare to spend between \$1500 and \$2000 just to get most of the right equipment. The real payback comes when you make wine for many years and get the cost per bottle for equipment down to about \$1. If you made and drank (with your friends and family, of course) a case of 12 bottles of wine every month it would take you 11 years or more to cost average your equipment cost down to \$1 per bottle. If consumption were to average instead a bottle a day (due to entertaining, of course) it would take only 4 years to cost average the equipment cost down to \$1 per bottle.

When you add in the cost of consumables for making the wine and testing it and the grapes the overall cost per bottle will still be around \$4. That depends on how much you have to spend for the grapes ... but it provides you great wine, not ordinary wine. Beyond that, if you typically pay \$10 for a bottle of average wine instead of making your own excellent wine for \$4 per bottle, you have wasted money as well as missed a much higher quality enjoyment. Why be mediocre when you can be great?

It is wisely economical to save empty wine bottles as they can individually be used many times as long as you clean and sterilize them between uses. Note also that the size of your wine bottles can vary based on consumption rate after opening. In general two adults will drink one 750 ml bottle of wine at a meal, so if four adults are having dinner why not open one 1500 ml bottle instead of two smaller bottles? An alternative to bottling is to use a large stainless steel storage vessel with a tap and with a nitrogen or carbon dioxide head system to keep air out. By so doing you fill one or more carafes with wine instead of having to deal with bottles.

The best commercial wines vary in price from about \$25 per bottle to \$75 per bottle or more. This means that fewer than 2 percent of all wines sold qualify in terms of quality and cost and volume of sales. The other 98 percent are mostly okay, with a few horrible exceptions best used by pigs trolling in bad neighborhoods. Your wine should at least compete favorably with wines that cost \$25 to \$50, and it will be up to you to balance the rate of return between economics and quality of life.

I have puzzled over how to approach this subject. Should I share most of my experiences from my early efforts up to the present or should I confine my subjects to only the very best of the best? This is not a trivial consideration for I have made different types of wine across many years with equipment ranging from plastic gasoline cans to very expensive Italian stainless steel fermentation vats. The truth is I have had successes and failures in all of those environments, and those experiences have been an important part of me learning to make great wine.

My experiences can help anyone serious about making great wine to avoid mistakes and to creatively compete with the high-end producers. It is up to you to decide whether you are simply a wine drinker or a lover of great wines ready to take your turn at creating perfection. Well, I will provide some of my recipes in Food Nirvana (see Concord Grape Wine) and engage in dialogue with those serious enough to purchase the right wine making and testing equipment and then ask for the recipes by email. Otherwise, providing my recipes and procedures will not guarantee great wine, for there are serial dependencies starting with grape selection that involve special chemicals, particular strains of yeast and bacteria, testing and testing materials, and special processing in making the wine using very specific methods and equipment.

If you read beyond this point I will assume your interest is piqued and that you are ready to make a commitment to making great wines. If that is not true then you should not waste your time, as I will be getting into technical material quickly. I do not mind if you stop here, for some of us are best as thankful

recipients of great wines from their more determined friends. Alas, choose your friends carefully!

I know of only one person across the years who made great wine at home, with me as one of his happy recipients. But his simple Concord grape wine was unforgettable. Perhaps you will be lucky too as a creator of fine wines and/or as a delighted guest. As you might expect our individual tastes and preferences in wines vary a lot. Wines vary from dry to sweet, from white to blush to red for grape wines, from low alcohol content of around 8% to high alcohol content of around 16% or higher for fortified wines like port or sherry that are around 20% alcohol.

Low alcohol content wines are used regularly at meals in Europe and even the children share in the delightful tastes. There is not the childish issue of drunkenness or the foolishness of governments or religions trying to oppress the populations. In the USA, however, wine aficionados find it necessary to avoid/exclude government interference and religious zealots from ruining the beautiful experiences of making and drinking fine wines. In the Orient rice wines are common and the best of them are quite enjoyable when used as intended. Similar to Europe, families can enjoy responsible drinking at meals, and social drinking in larger amounts is reserved for special occasions, like, is it Friday evening?

A good rule of thumb for the home winemaker is to have an alcohol goal of 13% to 14%, which mirrors that of most commercial wines made in the USA. The primary reason is that wines of lower alcohol content tend to spoil unless very involved steps are used in processing and bottling to avoid wild yeasts and bacteria that will grow in/on and spoil the bottled wine (for example, pasteurization). I will later provide some techniques for the home winemaker to use successfully with lower alcohol percentage wines.

Another rule of thumb is to stick with making grape wines instead of wines from other fruits. The reason is that the natural chemicals in grapes that yield superior wine and long storage life are not present in other fruits. That means it is more complicated to make other fruit wines successfully, and mostly wines made from other fruits are more of a novelty than a beverage to be used regularly. Thus, I strongly recommend focusing on one or two types of grape wine until perfection is achieved rather than trying to make many kinds of wine, grape or other types, and confusing your learning process. I focused on making Chardonnay and Merlot.

Much has been written about the use of chemicals like potassium metabisulfite in fairly high concentrations to destroy wild yeasts and bacteria so that they do not

interfere with and potentially ruin a wine while it is fermenting ... or after it is bottled. My experience tells me that creating and maintaining a sterile environment is the easier and more reliable way to make and bottle great tasting wine. I do not agree with the book experts and my successes are proof of the utility of my methods, which I will describe generally later. Beyond my procedural thoughts and taste considerations, the presence of excessive sulfites provokes an allergic response in some people who might otherwise really enjoy wines.

What I have to share, from this point forward, addresses only my methods for making Chardonnay wine, though I have used a near identical process for making great Merlot wine.

Let's assume you have acquired Chardonnay grapes and you have washed them, crushed them and pressed them to extract the juice. Ideally you will have tested individual grapes from the harvest with a refractometer first for dissolved solids content, which in a drop of grape juice from a lightly squeezed grape is essentially only sugar. The ideal reading from the refractometer is 24 degrees Brix, which is a long established standard of grams of dissolved sugar per 100 grams of grape juice, for making medium dry white wines in the range of 13% to 14% alcohol.

As you will learn now a refractometer measures light diffraction according to Snell's Law and it looks like a small telescope with a funny inclined front end prism with a hinged cover instead of a lens like you would find on a telescope. You put a drop of grape juice directly on the center of the prism surface and close the cover to spread the juice out over a larger surface area of the prism with uniform thickness. You then point the refractometer toward a light source like the sky close to the sun (but not at the sun!) and look through the eyepiece. You will notice an illuminated scale measured in degrees Brix and also likely specific gravity, and there you will see a faint horizontal line that is the indicator of the dissolved sugar content of the grape juice.

Home winemakers can adjust sugar content to the ideal by adding sugar to the grape juice or by diluting the grape juice with water. But the most perfect and completely ripe grapes that will make the very best wine will have a dissolved sugar content that will measure in at 24 degrees Brix. What is not evident by simply measuring the dissolved sugar content is the presence of the right amounts of other chemicals found in grape juice like tartaric or malic acids and other natural organic chemicals that provide bouquet that are essential to making great wine.

The other natural organic chemicals give the grapes and the wine unique fragrance and/or bouquet and they will not be present in ideal amounts in grapes that are not fully ripe. They will also be less than ideal in grapes that were grown with inadequate or improper soil nutrients, sunlight, temperature, water (timing specific rainfall) and chemicals to destroy such things as fungus or bacteria or virus on/in the grape leaves or vine or roots. Such deficiencies can be observed and tasted if the winemaker obtains grapes directly during visits to different vineyards. Otherwise the home winemaker has to hope for the best and make chemical adjustments as necessary, noting that trace amounts of natural organic chemicals that provide fragrance and/or bouquet are not even available to be purchased and added.

Well, given that you have or make grape juice that has the right dissolved sugar content, the first thing you have to realize is that the juice has been exposed to a lot of air and equipment contact during crushing and pressing. All the wild yeasts and bacteria that may be commonly found in the air and on the equipment you used will, if not eliminated, ruin your efforts to make great wine. You thus have two choices, using chemicals like potassium metabisulfite in fairly high concentration to kill all life forms before trying to ferment the grape juice, or, by using pasteurization to accomplish the same task in combination with small amounts of potassium metabisulfite. I use the latter method.

Note that it is important not to overheat the grape juice during pasteurization else very important volatile natural organic chemicals that provide flavor, fragrance and/or bouquet will be destroyed. Do not exceed 165° F and do not hold the juice at that temperature for more than three minutes. Use only a stainless steel pot ... never aluminum or any other metal. It is optimal to use a stove with a gas burner for instant reduction of heat as the pasteurization temperature is approached. Process the grape juice during pasteurization with a stainless steel spoon and a candy making or an instant read thermometer in two or three quart batches, stirring during heating, and then add each pasteurized batch to a five gallon glass carboy that has been previously sterilized with 180° F water and a suitable concentration of potassium metabisulfite. Keep the top of the carboy covered with plastic wrap between additions of pasteurized juice. Use a sterilized wide mouth plastic or stainless steel funnel to transfer the juice from your stainless steel pot (again, use only stainless steel) into the carboy, returning the funnel into a pot of 180° F water between batches to keep it sterile.

If you have followed my directions you now have one or more five gallon carboys of completely sterile grape juice that has not lost any essential chemicals or in any other way been harmed. You have a small amount of the very necessary potassium metabisulfite present because of your initial sterilization of the carboy.

Do note that in filling each carboy about a pint of the volume available at the top must be left empty for the later addition of a yeast culture and possibly even later a malolactic bacteria culture. Note also that the grape juice must be allowed to cool for some hours to get back to room temperature before adding the yeast culture. Move each carboy to the location you will use during fermentation when it is about done cooling. I used a hand truck with straps to keep the carboys in place, individually, and I moved them from the kitchen to the basement and then lifted them onto a bench, very carefully (they weigh about 50 lbs.). I chose the cellar because the temperature there would be maintained naturally between 55°F and 70°F, which is important during fermentation. The ideal fermentation temperature range is 60° F to 70° F. Fermentation is too slow below 60°F and too rapid above 70° F.

You can test the sulfur dioxide present in the grape juice from the potassium metabisulfite by using a small chemical measuring device called a titrette, which is discarded after the test. Additional potassium metabisulfite can be added at this point if necessary to achieve a level of 15 parts per million sulfur dioxide, which is about half of the normal recommended concentration but sufficient since the grape juice was pasteurized. Also, excessive sulfur dioxide will retard or even destroy fermentation, so I stay on the light side.

Use a top quality wine yeast (Champagne variety) along with a supply of yeast nutrient (diammonium phosphate). Mix the yeast packet (one per carboy) with one cup of cooled (105°F) sterilized water in a one pint Pyrex measuring cup that has been first sterilized by boiling water and then cooled to 105°F, covered with plastic wrap. Add the yeast nutrient and one half teaspoon of sugar and mix the ingredients well, then cover the container with the plastic wrap and keep it in a warm place (75°F to 85°F) for about two hours. At that point you should see considerable foaming activity as the yeast is activated. When that is true, even if it takes an additional two hours, you can again mix the contents carefully and dispense them into the carboy, once again putting the plastic wrap on the top of the carboy. The neck of the carboy should not contain any liquid, and if you plan to later do a second, malolactic fermentation, as I do, then allow for at least three cups of liquid to be added to the pure grape juice, without causing the liquid to rise into the neck of the glass carboy.

Use a device called an "air lock" to replace the plastic wrap on the top of the carboy. An air lock is typically a two or three piece plastic container that holds a small amount of sterilized water in a configuration that only allows gas to escape from the carboy and no air to get into the carboy. The air lock has a tapered plastic tube on one end that goes through a hole in a tapered rubber stopper and that combination is used, wetting the stopper first around the outside surface

with sterilized water or even coating it lightly with a product like Vaseline®, to plug the top of the carboy.

The location you select to conduct fermentation should be no warmer than 70°F. The ideal temperature is actually around 60°F but 70° F or less is fine. Do not even attempt fermentation at temperatures below 50° F or higher than 72°F. In the first case fermentation will be far too slow, even though commercial wine makers sometimes ferment grape juice at temperatures around and below 50°F, and in the second case fermentation will be hot and occur far too fast with undesirable results of multiple types likely.

I will make no attempt in this section to cover the complex chemistry that occurs or can occur during fermentation. All most of us typically think about is the conversion of dissolved sucrose and fructose into ethyl alcohol, water and carbon dioxide gas. But the reality is that the success of that fermentation process and the development of a high quality wine are dependent on a whole lot of other chemistry considerations. For example, the acidity of the wine due to the presence of tartaric and malic acids will affect fermentation. Also, at different times during fermentation the presence or absence of sulfur dioxide gas in solution will aid in keeping chemicals you don't want from forming. Of course, the presence of the small amount of potassium metabisulfite I use during carboy sterilization provides that sulfur dioxide gas in solution. Later additions of potassium metabisulfite are recommended by the professionals, perhaps to compensate oxidation during racking (to be explained shortly), but I did not find any further chemical addition to be necessary.

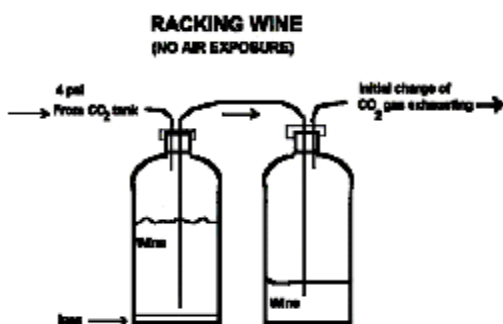
Other considerations include residual potassium metabisulfite or, technically, sulfur dioxide gas dissolved in the finished wine, total acidity before and after fermentation, and pH, which when too high allows easy spoilage of the wine after bottling, residual sugar that will affect taste and also indicate whether or not the fermentation was successful, and of course the actual percentage of alcohol. All of these things are measured with essential testing supplies and equipment and sometimes controlled with special chemicals, like potassium carbonate and sometimes tartaric acid powder.

For those of you who want a professional, more scientific treatment of wine chemistry I refer you to the book, *Modern Winemaking*© by Philip Jackisch, who is a research chemist wholly involved in commercial wine making and who is an editor of wine publications as well as other writings. The book is excellent and it is my bible for winemaking even though I have a few personal methods that I prefer over what Jackisch and others recommend. I will explain my reasoning later.

Fermentation rate is typically measured by the number of times in a minute that a bubble of carbon dioxide gas escapes through the air lock. As fermentation completes you will notice three things. First, the wine pretty much clarifies. Second, the dead yeast cells or lees form a sticky mess on the inside bottom of the carboy. Third, the fermentation rate slows to one bubble per two or three minutes or less.

At the conclusion of primary fermentation it is important to get the wine away from the lees so that any further undesirable chemical activity, including having a yeasty tasting wine, is avoided. The process of moving the wine from one carboy to another and leaving the lees behind is called racking. During the racking process, which is typically accomplished by siphoning, the wine is exposed to air and at this stage in the wine making process that is highly undesirable. Air exposure/dissolved oxygen in the must that was actually useful early in fermentation to assist yeast reproduction is now the enemy as oxidation of wine is very bad except for special wines like port or sherry. Racking may be done more than once, particularly and especially if after the initial racking additional lees form and/or some fermentation resumes. You will learn that my process is immune to air exposure now.

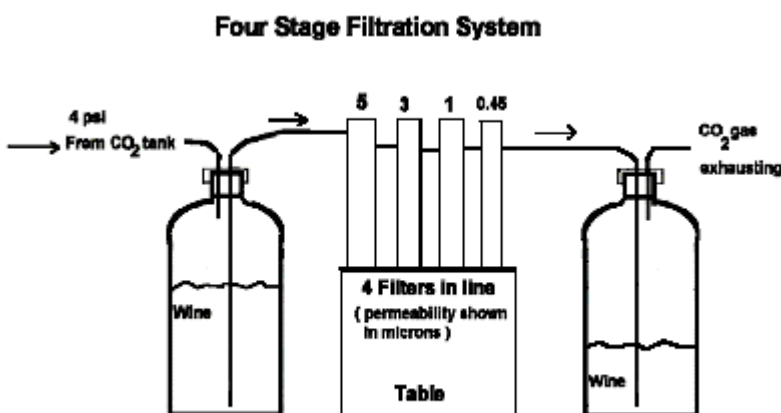
Here is where I used my determination, imagination and my education in chemistry and physics to depart from all the literature directed towards folks who make wine at home. The typical process described for racking the wine involves siphoning it from one carboy to another, which exposes a lot of the wine to a lot of air. That is most undesirable and demands further additions of potassium metabisulfite, so I designed my own system for racking that is truly superior and equal to or better than the most demanding commercial practices. See the diagram below.



The secret is in maintaining a completed closed system for the wine, from the beginning of fermentation all the way through the ultimate bottling of the wine. I

accomplished that set of daunting tasks with a tank of carbon dioxide gas with a zero to thirty psi two stage regulator, a lot of plastic and glass tubing, 27 different brass valves and connections to a water faucet and a drain.

I also created within that configuration a four-stage filtration system that immediately preceded bottling and which totally clarified the wine and removed all traces of yeast and/or bacteria (0.45 micron filter), such that the bottled wine was sterile and stable and would not and could not undergo any later fermentation of any type. See the diagram on the next page.



➔ **Special safety note:** Carbon dioxide gas is heavier than air and it will accumulate in any small enclosed basement work area and become very dangerous to anyone working in that area because you can asphyxiate breathing that gas rather than air that contains the right amount of oxygen. The point is to ventilate the work area while you are working there continuously with a fan that provides fresh air from outside the work area and which thus helps exhaust the carbon dioxide gas from the enclosed work area. If you ever start to feel lightheaded or experience tunnel vision immediately leave the work area, else you will collapse to the floor and be breathing pure carbon dioxide gas, and then you will die.

I have never read or heard about anyone doing exactly what I did (maybe they died trying!). My specific solutions to many classic problems of wine making were unique and, except for one of the filters (which are reusable many times), inexpensive. But even I have further plans to improve my process by adding refrigeration/freezing temperatures prior to final filtration to conduct a process called cold stabilization. Cold stabilization is one way to precipitate out excess tartaric acid from the finished wine so that it can't be present in excessive amounts in the final product and later precipitate out, creating a questionable

wine appearance. The cold stabilization procedure is one way to effectively reduce wine acidity that does not involve addition of chemicals. Measuring acidity and in some instances deciding to do something about it are common in winemaking. Cold stabilization is only useful for small amounts of acid reduction, and if you find yourself with a highly acidic wine then potassium carbonate can be used to reduce acidity. Moderate acidity (0.8% or less) can be reduced with potassium bicarbonate, followed by chilling to promote precipitation of potassium bitartrate.

What I intentionally avoided telling you earlier in detail is that the fermentation process I actually used is a double fermentation, the second part of which is bacterial, not yeast based. The special bacterial fermentation is started after normal yeast fermentation is well underway. It involves the injection of a special bacterial starter into the carboy that looks much like the yeast starter, but which converts the diacid, Malic acid, into a monoacid, Lactic acid. The process halves the acidity of the wine due to the presence of Malic acid, creating a Chardonnay that is buttery and smooth instead of sharp and acidic. The name for that process is a malolactic fermentation. It is a bit more complicated than simple fermentation as the lees must be mixed well with the fermenting juice multiple times during the fermentation with an inserted wing stirrer powered by an electric drill. That procedure does or can introduce some amount of air during fermentation simply by the physical process of temporarily removing the air lock to insert the stirrer to perform the stirring, which you can compensate with low flow rates of carbon dioxide gas around the opening of the carboy. Note here especially the importance of not using much potassium metabisulfite earlier in the process of making the wine because the resulting sulfur dioxide gas in solution in the carboy will inhibit or destroy the malolactic fermentation. There is plenty of time at the end of all fermentation and racking steps to adjust wine sulfite content.

The preparation of a malolactic bacteria starter is more complicated than making a yeast starter. In particular it is more difficult to get the bacteria to reproduce and consume yeast extract (a small amount from a cube of baker's yeast can serve in place of a yeast extract nutrient), sugar, etc. Sterilized apple juice mixed equally with water is better than water alone for making a starter. Bacteria sensitivity to the carboy fermentation environment can actually result in the destruction of the starter when it is introduced into the carboy, unless steps are taken earlier to acclimate the bacteria to the environment in which it will be used. That means that small additions of the partially fermented wine are made periodically to the starter to gradually change the acidity, provide alcohol tolerance, etc. Also, the period for developing a robust starter can be up to two days or longer. Finally, the starter should be given time beside the fermentation

carboy to equalize temperatures. It is surely worth the time to be careful, else the malolactic fermentation fails and the wine remains acidic instead of becoming buttery and smooth. Note that the volume of the starter when ready for the carboy will be about two cups.

The bacteria for a malolactic fermentation has in recent years largely been replaced with special enzymes to accomplish the same task. I have yet to use the enzymes so I cannot comment on degree of effectiveness or ease of use. Do note that the process of a malolactic fermentation creates some noxious gases that have to be purged from the wine before bottling. That is a real benefit of my enclosed pressurized carbon dioxide racking system, for all bubbling and noxious gas removal is done away from oxygen, and as you now understand that is highly desirable.

After both fermentations are complete the wine is racked. I do that by removing the air lock and replacing it with an air tight flexible plastic cover with two glass tubes in it. Do not use lubricated rubber stoppers during racking as the gas pressure will pop them off the top of the carboys. I fasten the plastic covers tightly to the neck of the carboys using stainless steel hose clamps. I then use carbon dioxide pressure via the short tube to push the wine out of the carboy into an empty carboy, via the long tube and plastic tubing, etc., to connect to the second, empty carboy that also has an air tight plastic cover (and has been flushed with carbon dioxide gas). The wine from the first carboy is pushed out through the long tube, which I adjust (depth and position, later tilting the almost empty carboy very slowly) during the racking process to capture wine but not the lees. A mere 4 to 5 psi pressure of carbon dioxide gas is enough to drive the entire system in all aspects, ultimately including final filtering after a few rackings. Thus, as I later bottle the wine output from the final filter I first replace the air in the bottle with carbon dioxide gas from a separate tube so that the wine from the bottling tube never is exposed to air. Corking (use the newer types of polymer, not actual corks) follows immediately, bottle by bottle. But more recently most winemakers avoid both and use screw on caps, which are perfectly fine.

A final part of the enclosed system I created that needs to be mentioned is that all components back flush first with tap water, then with potassium metabisulfite in water, then with pure carbon dioxide gas. That is a beautiful cleaning process ... the carboys never have to be moved and the only exposure to air is from that naturally dissolved in the tap water, which at that point doesn't even matter ... the wine is long gone. Sometimes I use a long bottle brush with a cleaning agent (sodium carbonate) to assist the cleaning process, in particular if some juice components stick to the glass high in the first carboy, but, I never have to move

the carboy(s). The first carboy in the process, however, must be returned to the kitchen to receive pasteurized juice from new grapes for the next batch of wine, after potassium metabisulfite and hot water re-sterilization.

For those of you who still wonder how carboy to carboy movement of wine and later cleaning water is done, think about one long glass tube in each carboy and also one very short tube. Now you can picture two way flows that with the proper use of the 27 valve system and much interconnected plastic tubing provides transport for wine, water, chemicals and the carbon dioxide gas. Even the four stage filtration system gets back flushed, which cleans the filters completely for the next use. In that situation a final higher pressure forward gas flush is used to remove all liquid from the filters and filter containers. When that isn't sufficient to empty the filter container the filter container is unscrewed from a top housing section and the water is dumped and the gas flush is repeated to dry the filters.

I have discussed or mentioned many kinds of equipment, chemicals and other supplies in this rather long winemaking section. These things vary in ease of acquisition from trivial to virtually impossible depending on where you live. Your local wine arts clubs and stores are grossly inadequate. For that reason I am providing you the information necessary to order literally all of it, straight from the land of great winemaking in CA. Napa Fermentation®, owned and operated by Pat (now deceased/he was a great guy) and Colleen Watkins in Napa California, is my source for everything except grapes. They have it all, they know what to recommend and they ship everywhere. They carry high quality equipment and chemicals and general supplies. You can find their web site using Google® and the words Napa Fermentation. Jackisch's book, mentioned earlier, contains the names and contact information for companies that sell very specialized wine additives that Napa Fermentation® does not sell. You may never need any of the special additives.

The Internet is also the medium to use to seek high quality grape juice or "must" if you do not live in an area that grows the grapes you want to use. Quality suppliers will ship four or five gallon buckets of frozen must that has been treated with potassium metabisulfite to you. You must, however, be very careful to deal with a quality business lest they send you inferior product, as in "must" from grapes that were not fully ripe and thus deficient in quality in multiple ways, regardless of dissolved sugar content as delivered, which might have been done by sugar addition.

I had the advantage of visiting the vineyard and personally testing sugar content with my refractometer, and cutting the grapes from the vines with the grower. His grapes were perfect in every way. We then used his equipment to crush and press the Chardonnay grapes, and later to crush but not press Merlot grapes

(you leave the skins in long enough to color the wine before pressing). In one instance I returned home with filled carboys of Chardonnay juice secured in my vehicle with seat belts. In the other I filled a 20 gallon plastic barrel with the crushed Merlot grapes and juice and transported it very carefully home, covered with a tight fitting lid and strapped and stuffed between other materials so it could not fall over during transit. I used my smaller wine press at home to process the crushed Merlot grapes into juice 24 hours later.

My cost was 90 cents per pound for Chardonnay grapes and \$1.10 per pound for Merlot grapes. I spent a total of \$90 for 100 lbs. of the Chardonnay grapes and the yield at the end of winemaking was 13 gallons, which is 50 liters or 67, 750 ml bottles. Thus, my cost per bottle for Chardonnay grapes was \$1.35. Wow! And the cost for the Merlot grapes, which yielded the same amount of juice per pound of grapes, with me doing the pressing at home, was thus \$1.65 per bottle.

The grower's name is Manuel Silva. He is Portuguese and he came to the USA sometime prior to 1997 to buy and operate a vineyard and a small winemaking operation. He is a good guy. He runs a first class operation. We need more people like him all over the USA. Update: as of this revision, the year is 2023 so I do not know if Manuel Silva is still in business.

I conclude this section without providing any specific winemaking recipe here and that is intentional. For those who want to make fine wine I am available to provide more information via email and also by direct conversation. You can, of course, see my recipes for Concord Grape wine, Dandelion Wine, and White Niagara Grape wine in Food Nirvana. What I will provide now to conclude the winemaking section is a partial list of equipment/supplies necessary to make wine using good technical methods and some of my own special methods.

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Winemaking Supplies and Materials

4 or more 5 gallon glass carboys (that size is easy to handle yet holds a good volume of juice/wine)

100 feet of ½" inside diameter clear flexible plastic tubing

100 ½" diameter stainless steel hose clamps

2 one inch diameter stainless steel hose clamps

4 three inch diameter stainless steel hose clamps

21 feet of ½" outside diameter (3/8" inside diameter) clear glass laboratory tubing (7, 3 foot lengths will work fine)

Wine press

one gallon stainless steel pot

one long stainless steel spoon

one short stainless steel spoon

four one hole rubber stoppers to fit the carboys and the air locks

one candy thermometer

one pint Pyrex measuring cup

one set of stainless steel measuring spoons

one large mouth plastic or stainless steel funnel that fits the carboy opening

four air locks

petroleum jelly

four flexible plastic air tight carboy covers with two holes for glass tubing

25 brass or stainless steel valves

large tank of carbon dioxide gas

zero to thirty psi two stage regulator

eight cases of wine bottles

100 polymer corks

one corking machine

one wine thief

one pH meter

pH meter buffer solutions (4, 7 and 11 pH, 100 ml bottles)

refractometer

sulfur dioxide titrettes for testing residual wine sulfites

phenolphthalein solution

sodium hydroxide solution (0.1 Normal)
2, 10 ml pipettes and one 50 ml burette
laboratory stand with clamps to hold the burette
glass stirring rod
various size beakers (50, 100, 200 ml)
various size Erlenmeyer flasks (50, 100, 200 ml)
potassium metabisulfite
potassium carbonate
tartaric acid
yeast (Pasteur Champagne)
yeast nutrient (diammonium phosphate)
Baker's yeast
sugar
malolactic bacteria culture (Leuconostoc oenos ML 34 strain) or more modern enzymes
hydrometer
paper chromatography paper, jar and chemical
plastic tubing adapter for tap water connection
four stage cartridge filtration system
a "wine thief" tube
spring loaded bottle filling tube
scale to weigh chemicals accurate to +/- 0.02 gm
cartridge filters of permeability sizes 5, 3, 1 and 0.45 microns
wine bottle labels
wine bottle decorative caps
Vinometer or ebulliometer to measure wine alcohol percent

wing stirrer for carboys

electric drill

hand truck

nylon straps for the hand truck

carrying handles that fit the necks of the carboys

corkscrew (buy a really good one ... you will thank yourself later)

wine glasses

small wood blocks to position/tilt a carboy during racking

bottle brush to clean carboys

20 gallon plastic barrel with tight fitting lid

the book, Modern Winemaking© by Philip Jackisch

large ventilation fan

Research notebook to record all winemaking events in detail for future reference

BREADS, BUNS AND DONUTS:

Almond Flour Bread - ☺

My wife was on a special diet to reduce gluten intake so we started making foods like bread and pancakes using mostly almond flour. The recipe below is my second attempt to make this bread, and as usual I created a composite of a few Internet recipes.

I liked the results of my first attempt but I modified the recipe to improve it. I noted that the bread was yummy with a small amount of honey spread on it so I added honey to the recipe. I also noted that the bread needed to be sweeter anyway so I doubled the amount of sugar.

Due to the low gluten content of the dough/batter, the rising effect of the yeast is really fast ... so much so that the normal rising time of one or two hours is reduced to about ten minutes.

Ingredients:

2 cups of almond flour

1 1/2 cups of regular flour

2 extra large eggs

1/8th ounce of Active dry yeast (one half of a package)

2 tbsp. of sugar

3 tbsp. of honey

1/4 cup of melted butter

1/2 tsp. of baking powder

1 cup of milk, warmed

1/2 tsp. of salt

Directions:

Set the oven temperature to 350°F.

Mix the yeast into the one cup of warmed 105°F milk. Add the sugar and stir until dissolved. Let this mixture rest in a warm place for ten minutes.

Mix the eggs and melted butter and honey in an electric mixer with a regular beater.

Add the baking powder and the salt and continue to mix.

Add the yeast mixture and continue to mix.

Add the flours gradually mixing on low speed until the flours mix with the liquid ingredients, then increase the speed to medium.

Mix the dough for three minutes. It will be a loose dough, similar to a batter.

Put the dough into a buttered glass bread pan (or two).

Put the glass bread pan(s) in a warm place for ten minutes, on a cookie tray.

Check the amount of rising of the dough and when it has doubled in bulk it is ready to bake.

Bake the bread for about 45 minutes, on the cookie tray, checking for doneness with a toothpick. If necessary, bake for an additional five to ten minutes.

Put the bread pan(s) on a wooden cutting board and let the bread cool to room temperature.

Use a knife around the edges of the bread to loosen it and remove it from the pan(s).

Serve the bread with butter, and perhaps some honey.

Apple Fritters - 😊♥

I decided to put a recipe for Apple Fritters in Food Nirvana because they are so delicious and easy to make. This recipe works very well and you will be pleased.

The main task with frying the fritters is to make sure they are not more than one inch thick, and, fry them just long enough to cook the interior, which will be about three to four minutes per side.

Have fun making and eating the apple fritters and don't be surprised if your family asks for them often.

Ingredients: (makes 18 medium size apple fritters)

1 quart of vegetable oil for deep frying

1 1/2 cups of flour

2 tbsp. of sugar

2 tsp. of baking powder

1/2 tsp. of salt

2/3 cup of milk (or a bit more if the batter is too thick)

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

1 tbsp. of vegetable oil

3 cups of apples, diced

Coatings:

I provide directions here for two different types of coatings. The choice is yours. They are both great.

If you want a sugar and cinnamon coating then use the ingredients and direction immediately below and later in the recipe.

1 cup of sugar mixed with one tsp. of ground cinnamon in a wide, shallow bowl

If instead you want a glaze coating like glazed donuts, then whisk together 1 1/8 cups of powdered sugar, 1 tsp. of vanilla extract and three tablespoons of milk. After the fritters are made and still warm, place each one in the glaze, flip it over, lift it out of the glaze with a large fork to let excess glaze drip off, then put the fritter on a plate.

Now we'll proceed with directions for making the fritters.

Directions:

Heat the quart of vegetable oil in a deep skillet to 350 degrees F. Be sure to use a quick read frying thermometer for accuracy.

Core and dice the apples while the oil is heating. It is not necessary to peel them.

Put the raw apple pieces into a wide shallow bowl and microwave them until they are hot, as in starting to form steam within the microwave oven, perhaps two to three minutes. Remove the bowl and set the diced apples aside.

In a large bowl, stir together the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt.

Pour in the milk, eggs and one tbsp. of vegetable oil and whisk until the batter is well blended.

Mix in the diced apples and whisk or stir until they are evenly distributed.

If the batter is too thick (which can happen due to differences in flour) add a bit of milk and mix again.

Drop by spoonfuls or small ladles of the batter into the hot oil and fry until golden on both sides, about 3 minutes per side depending on the batter thickness. Note that you do not want to have thick fritters, ergo larger than one inch thick, as the interior will not have time to cook before the exterior gets too dark.

Fry in small batches, like three or four fritters, so the fritters are not crowded and so the oil temperature is maintained. Be sure to test one fritter for doneness as you do not want raw batter inside the fritter. If necessary, adjust the frying time for both sides.

Remove the fritters from the hot oil using a slotted spoon and drain them briefly on a wire rack or on paper towels.

Check the oil temperature between batches and make sure it is 350 degrees F before starting each batch.

Roll the drained warm fritters in the bowl containing the cinnamon and sugar mixture to coat them evenly. Alternatively, use the glaze recipe provided earlier, along with directions for using the glaze.

Place the fritters only one or two layers deep on one or more plates.

Serve warm.

Banana Nut Bread - ☺♥

This dessert type of bread is yummy when it is made properly. That means, among other things, the finished product should be moist but not compacted. The batter has to rise enough during baking to result in a moist cake like consistency.

The addition of a sprinkling of Demarara sugar crystals on top of the raw batter results in a delicious top crust. Do it.

Ingredients:

- 1, 1/4 lb. stick of butter, softened**
- 3 extra large or 2 jumbo eggs**
- 3/4 cup of brown sugar**
- 1 tsp. of pure vanilla extract**
- 1 cup of coarsely chopped walnuts**
- 3 very ripe large bananas, coarsely mashed**
- 1 tsp. of baking soda**
- 1/2 tsp. of baking powder**
- 1/3 cup of plain yogurt or sour cream**
- 1/2 tsp. of cinnamon**
- 2 cups of flour**
- 1/2 tsp. of salt**
- 2 tbsp. of Demarara sugar crystals**

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Grease lightly with butter a 9-by-5-inch glass loaf pan.

In the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the flat beater, mix together the butter and brown sugar on medium speed until creamy, about 1 minute. Add the

bananas and eggs and mix until smooth. Add the yogurt or sour cream and mix just until combined.

In a second bowl, stir together the flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, salt and chopped nuts. Add the flour mixture to the banana mixture gradually and mix just until combined.

Pour the batter into the prepared glass loaf pan. Then sprinkle the top of the batter with the Demarara sugar.

Bake the banana nut bread for 60 to 70 minutes.

Halfway through the baking period (at 30 minutes) put aluminum foil over the top of the loaf and the sides to keep it from becoming too dark.

A toothpick inserted into the center should come out clean after 60 minutes of baking. If not then bake for 5 to 10 more minutes without the aluminum foil covering.

Remove the banana nut bread loaf pan from the oven and put it on a wood cutting board.

Let the bread rest in the loaf pan for 5 minutes, then turn the loaf out onto a wood cutting board and let it cool completely. Cut the loaf into thick slices if you are ready to serve it. Otherwise, wrap the cooled loaf tightly in plastic wrap and then in aluminum foil.

Serve the banana nut bread either at room temperature or slightly warmed in the microwave oven, with butter or cream cheese. Yummy!

Beer Bread - ☺♥

This recipe is compliments of my cousin Joan. I am highly pleased that this simple bread is so delicious. It is fine with butter spread on it and it is excellent as buttered toast.

I found some other recipes that suggest variations by adding cheeses or herbs or spices, and I will be enjoying those too. Think 1 1/2 cups of mixed grated Cheddar and Gruyere cheeses for one loaf of bread.

Thanks, Joan! What a nice break from more complicated yeast bread recipes!

Ingredients:

3 cups of all purpose flour

1 1/2 tsp. of salt

4 1/2 tsp. of baking powder

3 tbsp. of sugar

12 oz. of beer

1/2 stick of butter

Directions:

Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Spray a bread pan with Pam® or other cooking oil spray, or wipe it lightly with vegetable oil.

Whisk the dry ingredients together in a 2 quart bowl.

Add the beer while stirring with a large wooden spoon and then mix the dough thoroughly.

Dump the dough into the bread pan and pack it to avoid air pockets and spread it evenly.

Bake the bread at 350 degrees F for 40 minutes.

Remove the bread from the oven to a wooden cutting board.

Melt the 1/2 stick of butter in a small cup in the microwave oven (about 20 seconds) and then brush the melted butter evenly over the top of the bread with a pastry brush.

Return the bread to the oven and bake it for 10 more minutes, then remove it and put in on the wooden cutting board.

Allow the bread to cool in the bread pan for five minutes, then cut around the outside sides and the ends of the bread with a knife to help release the bread from the bread pan, then dump the bread on to the cutting board.

Let the bread cool to room temperature, then wrap it in plastic wrap and put it into a Ziploc® freezer bag, with most of the air expelled, to keep it fresh.

Once cool the bread slices nicely with a serrated bread knife.

Enjoy!

Buttermilk Honey Bread - ☺♥

Food Nirvana has contained only a few bread recipes for the past ten years (2010-2020). Recently I expanded my interests to include simple bread making ... sort of the opposite of my earlier interest in the more complicated procedure for making Sesame Semolina Bread. Why? There is usually an easy answer, and that is the case this time.

As of March 2020 many of we older folks are self isolating to avoid the COVID-19 virus, which is often fatal for people in our age group, particularly those with existing health problems, like my sweetheart, Peggy. Thus, I have laid in supplies to allow us to self isolate for up to six months. Is that overkill? Yes, of course, but there was no guide up front to predict the extent and the duration of the timing of the pandemic. Yes, I am conservative, and I make allowance for the possibility (albeit small) of extended periods of unsafe exposure in public places.

The above having been said, the circumstances were perfect for extending the recipe range of Food Nirvana, so I ordered and received a bread machine to make bread. And note that I am also comfortable with making bread by manual procedures and baking it in my oven, as well as making it using my new bread machine.

My inventory of flour and other pertinent ingredients was/is extensive. I've been in the perfect environment to use, further develop, and finally record a few really good bread recipes for what we can make at home. I should also mention that, having started down this path, I acquired a few different encyclopedias of regular and bread machine bread making.

Why do anything worth doing half way? It is very important to mention using a high quality bread flour, like the King Arthur® brand. It is equally important to use the vital wheat gluten to achieve the perfect level of moisture, chewiness, flavor and tenderness of the bread. I bought Anthony's® Vital Wheat Gluten inexpensively via Amazon®.

I have learned, however, that use of All Purpose flour works well as long as the gluten content is increased. I/we like our bread to be somewhat chewy, not crumbly.

Note that I am not attempting to become any type of bread expert. My intent is simple but very important. I want to make excellent bread of a few types, reliably, such that I do not miss buying those breads from bakeries or supermarkets. For the moment, that is wise. For the future, it is a matter of quality of life.

If you follow the steps and ingredients listed in this recipe you may well stop buying many commercial loaves of bread. There is a massive difference in quality and level of enjoyment in eating homemade bread that results from this recipe, which calls for using a bread maker or bread machine that mixes the dough ingredients and does all other steps through baking.

The steps for using typical bread machines at home are virtually identical. Put in the ingredients in a specific order. Turn on the machine. Wait. Ultimately, remove the finished bread and allow it to cool to near room temperature. Then you can slice it with a serrated edge knife or electric knife without fear of the soft loaf collapsing. Trust me, it is worth the wait. Slather a slightly warm piece with soft butter and indulge. You will be wearing a very happy smile. Later you will find the bread also makes excellent toast.

Ingredients: (makes one, 1 1/2 pound loaf of Buttermilk Honey bread)

1 1/2 cups of Buttermilk

1 1/2 tbsp. of honey

2 tbsp. of soft butter

3 cups of All Purpose flour (15.0 ounces by weight ... use a kitchen scale and be precise)

2 tbsp. of vital wheat gluten

1 1/2 tsp. of salt

2 1/4 tsp. of Bread Machine Yeast

Directions:

Put the Buttermilk, honey, soft butter and salt into a microwave safe bowl. Heat the mixture in the microwave oven to slightly warm, about 105 degrees F. It is smart to use an instant read thermometer to avoid overheating the mixture.

Whisk the mixture until everything is uniform and then pour it into the bread machine pan.

Add the flour and the vital wheat gluten to a two quart bowl and whisk them briefly until they are well combined.

Add the flour and vital wheat gluten mixture to the bread machine pan.

Sprinkle the yeast over the top of the flour and gluten.

Close the lid and start the bread machine, setting it for a medium crust and a 1 1/2 pound loaf, and using the standard menu choice for a white bread.

Go away for a few hours until the machine beeps, indicating the bread has been baked.

Dump the bread out of the bread maker pan on to a wood cutting board and let it cool to room temperature.

You can store the cooled loaf of bread in a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag to keep it fresh until you use it.

To use the bread, cut slices of it to the thickness you want with a serrated edge knife or an electric knife. I also like to wrap the cut end of the loaf of bread with plastic wrap to keep it moist and soft.

Enjoy the delicious result in whatever way you decide to use the bread.

Cinnamon Pecan Raisin Sticky Buns - ☺♥T

This first recipe creates great sticky buns, but after the primary recipe an alternate dough recipe is provided (brioche), and then the full recipe for Joanne Chang's (Flour Bakery®) sticky buns, which are reputed to be the very best, but I don't know because I haven't tried them. If you have not made sticky buns before, do this first recipe and then consider trying the more complicated recipes later. Experience is a great teacher.

Ingredients:

Dough:

1/4 cup of warm water (105°F to 115°F)

2 tsp. of active dry yeast

1/3 cup of sugar

1 cup of milk

1 extra large or jumbo egg

4 Tbsp. of soft butter, plus more for greasing the proofing bowl

1 1/4 tsp. of salt

4 to 4 1/4 cups of all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting

Filling:

1/2 cup of firmly packed light brown sugar

1 Tbsp. of ground cinnamon

4 Tbsp. of soft butter

3/4 cup of toasted chopped pecans

Topping:

3/4 cup of firmly packed light brown sugar

4 Tbsp. of butter

3 Tbsp. of Dark corn syrup

6 Tbsp. of honey

1 1/2 cups (6 ounces by weight) of coarsely chopped pecans

3/4 cup of dark Sun-Maid® raisins

Directions:

Make the dough. In the pre-warmed bowl (run hot water over the outside of the bowl before using it) of an electric mixer, combine warm water, yeast and 1 tsp. sugar. Stir to dissolve and let sit until foamy, about 5 minutes.

Add the milk, butter, remaining sugar, egg, salt and 3 cups flour. Mix on low speed until blended. Switch to a dough hook and then, again on low speed, slowly incorporate the remaining cup of flour. Increase the mixer speed to medium, kneading the dough until it is smooth and slightly sticky (add a little more flour if too wet, or a little milk if too dry), about 3 to 5 minutes.

Shape the dough into a ball and place it in a large, buttered bowl. Turn the dough over in the bowl to coat it all over with the butter from the bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Let the dough rise in a warm place until doubled in volume, about 1 hour (or 2 hours if not in an entirely warm place). After the dough has risen, punch it down. Turn it out onto a lightly floured cutting board and let it sit 20 minutes covered.

Toast the 3/4 cup of pecans pieces on a cookie tray in a 300°F oven for five to ten minutes, checking every few minutes and stirring the nuts to have them toast evenly. Do not let them burn. Remove them from the oven when finished.

Make the filling. Combine the brown sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl. Melt the butter separately. You will use a pastry brush later to spread the melted butter on the rolled out dough.

Roll the dough out into a 12" x 18" rectangle. Brush it with melted butter and sprinkle it with cinnamon-sugar mixture, then sprinkle it with the toasted chopped pecans. Starting with the long side, roll the dough into a cylinder. Place it seam side down on a flat surface and cut it crosswise into 15 slices.

Make the topping. In a 1-quart saucepan, combine the brown sugar, butter, honey and corn syrup over low heat; stir until the sugar and butter are melted. Pour the mixture into a buttered 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish. Sprinkle the 1 1/2 cups of raw coarsely chopped pecans evenly on the topping. Then sprinkle the raisins evenly on the topping.

Place the dough slices, flat side down, on top of the prepared topping. Crowd them so they touch. Cover them with plastic wrap, leaving room for the buns to rise. Let the dough rise for 60 minutes or store overnight in a refrigerator.

Preheat the oven to 375° F. Bake the buns until golden, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and immediately and carefully invert it onto a serving tray or platter or plate. Scrape any leftover topping from the baking dish and apply it to the buns. Let the buns cool slightly and serve them warm with butter.

Variations:

Some bakers use a topping that contains cream and a small amount of salt, as well as honey, brown sugar and butter. The mixture is cooked first on medium heat without the cream as if you are making caramel, except it isn't necessary to heat to a soft ball stage. Instead, heat on medium until all ingredients are dissolved, then add the cream a little at a time while whisking. Let it cool to room temperature. It is then ready to be poured into the baking dish, after which the pecans and raisins are added.

The idea is that the cream increases the volume of the topping and creates a very sticky, sticky bun. This method was developed by Joanne Chang, who owns the Flour Bakery® in Boston, MA, and her sticky buns are reputed to be without equal.

The next variation is to use a type of dough called brioche. It is commonly used by commercial bakers, including Joanne Chang, and now we will take a look at the ingredients and procedure for making/using a basic sweet brioche dough.

Basic Brioche Sweet Dough:

1/3 cup of warm water.

3 extra large eggs.

2 egg yolks.

¾ cup of butter, softened.

3 1/3 cups of all-purpose flour.

¼ cup of white sugar.

½ teaspoon of active dry yeast.

You can make the brioche dough in a manner similar to regular dough procedure shown in the first sticky bun recipe, but beat it in an electric mixer long enough to totally incorporate the butter, which is added last in small pieces, until it becomes easy to work.

Moving on ...

Now for the **big** variation. I found Joanne Chang's recipe for sticky buns on the Internet after watching her make them on TV, and it is printed below. I can't wait to try it! Do note that missing parts of the process are the reality regarding what is shown on TV, and the recipe doesn't tell you all the little tricks you need to know ... So I added my corrections in *Italics*.

Flour's Famous Sticky Buns - ?



Ingredients:

Goo:

3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks; 170 grams, 6 ounces) unsalted butter

1 1/2 cups (345 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar

1/3 cup (110 grams) honey

1/3 cup (80 grams) heavy cream

1/3 cup (80 grams) water

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

Filling: (This looks to be filled with errors, like no butter? Perhaps the high amount of butter in the dough compensates.)

1/4 cup (55 grams) light brown sugar

1/4 cup (50 grams) granulated sugar

1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon (*This has to be an error! Try 1 teaspoon at least.*)

1 cup (100 grams) pecan halves, toasted and chopped

Directions:

First, make the goo. In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Whisk in the brown sugar and cook, stirring, to combine (it may look separated, that's ok). Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the honey, cream, water, and salt. If necessary, strain the mixture to remove any undissolved lumps of brown sugar. Let it cool for about 30 minutes, or until cooled to room temperature. You should have about 3 cups. (The mixture can be made up to 2 weeks in advance and stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.)

Divide the dough (if you make the amount per the recipe below) in half. Use half for this recipe and reserve the other half for later use.

On a floured work surface, roll out the brioche into a rectangle about 12 by 16 inches and 1/4-inch thick. It will have the consistency of cold, damp Play-Doh® and should be fairly easy to roll. Position the rectangle so a short side is facing you.

In a small bowl, stir together the brown sugar, granulated sugar, cinnamon, and half of the toasted pecans. Sprinkle this mixture evenly over the entire surface of the dough. *That is stupid. Keep the nuts separate and then sprinkle them evenly after you have sprinkled the surface with the sugars and cinnamon.* Starting from the short side farthest from you and working your way towards yourself roll up the rectangle like a jellyroll. Try to roll it tightly, so you have a nice round spiral. Trim off about 1/4- inch from each end of the roll to make it even.

Use a bench scraper or a chef's knife to cut the roll into 8 equal pieces, each about 1 1/2-inches wide. (At this point, the unbaked buns can be tightly wrapped in plastic wrap and frozen for up to 1 week. When ready to bake, thaw them, still wrapped, in the refrigerator overnight or at room temperature for 2 to 3 hours, then proceed as directed.)

Pour the goo into a 9 by 13-inch baking dish, covering the bottom evenly. Sprinkle the remaining pecans evenly over the surface. Arrange the buns, evenly spaced, in the baking dish. Cover the buns with plastic wrap (*It is smart to smear butter or oil on the plastic wrap surface that will touch the dough, so the dough won't stick to the plastic wrap.*) and put the baking dish into a warm spot to proof until the dough is puffy, pillowy and soft and the buns are touching-almost tripled in size, about 2 hours.

In this procedure Joanne doesn't completely cover the goo with the buns, like the earlier recipe. I watched her make them on TV. She packs hers in the order 2, then one, then 2, then one, then 2 as observed from the long side of the baking dish.

Position a rack in the center of the oven, and heat to 350°F. Bake until golden brown, about 35 to 45 minutes. Let cool in the dish on a wire rack for 20 to 30 minutes. One at a time, invert the buns onto a serving platter, and spoon any extra goo and pecans from the bottom of the dish over the top.

The buns are best served warm or within 4 hours of baking. They can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 day, and then warmed in a 325°F oven for 10 to 12 minutes before serving. *But what about freezing, vacuum sealing, storing frozen until wanted, and then thawing in a microwave oven, followed by the regular oven warming just described?*

Now for Joanne's brioche dough recipe ...

Brioche Dough for Sticky Buns: (makes a double batch)

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups (350 grams) unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more if needed

2 1/4 cups (340 grams) bread flour

3 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast

1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon (82 grams) sugar

1 tablespoon kosher salt

1/2 cup cold water

6 eggs

1 3/8 cups unsalted butter, room temperature, cut into 12 pieces

Directions:

Using a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook*, combine the all-purpose flour, bread flour, yeast, sugar, salt, water, and 5 of the eggs. Beat on low speed for 3 to 4 minutes, or until all the ingredients are combined.

*** I prefer to use the regular mixer beater early in the mixing process as it is far superior to the dough hook for early mixing. I use the dough hook later, after the butter has been added and thoroughly incorporated. Thus, I use a dough hook only when it is right to use it, as in the kneading process.**

Stop the mixer, as needed, to scrape the sides and bottom of the bowl to make sure all the flour is incorporated into the wet ingredients. Once the dough has

come together, beat it on low speed for another 3 to 4 minutes. The dough will be very stiff and seem quite dry.

Joanne never does tell us when to use the sixth egg, so I recommend adding it now, prior to the butter, with enough mixing to incorporate it into the dough.

With the mixer on low speed, add the butter, 1 piece at a time, mixing after each addition until it disappears into the dough. Continue mixing on low speed for about 10 minutes, stopping the mixer occasionally to scrape the sides and bottom of the bowl. It is important for all the butter to be thoroughly mixed into the dough. If necessary, stop the mixer occasionally and break up the dough with your hands to help mix in the butter.

Once the butter is completely incorporated, (*NOW is the time to use the dough hook*) turn up the speed to medium and beat until the dough becomes sticky, soft, and somewhat shiny, another 15 minutes. It will take some time to come together. It will look shaggy and questionable at the start and then eventually it will turn smooth and silky. Turn the speed to medium-high and beat it for about 1 minute. You should hear the dough make a slap-slap-slap sound as it hits the sides of the bowl. Test the dough by pulling at it; it should stretch a bit and have a little give. If it seems wet and loose and more like a batter than a dough, add a few tablespoons of flour and mix until it comes together. If it breaks off into pieces when you pull at it, continue to mix on medium speed for another 2 to 3 minutes, or until it develops more strength and stretches when you grab it. It is ready when you can gather it all together and pick it up in 1 piece.

Put the dough into a large bowl or plastic container and cover it with plastic wrap, pressing the wrap (*Ahem! Butter the wrap first on the side that will touch the dough, or butter the top of the dough and the rest of its surface so it also won't stick to the bowl*) directly onto the surface of the dough. Let the dough proof (that is, grow and develop flavor) in the refrigerator for at least 6 hours or up to overnight. If you want, you can freeze the dough in an airtight container for up to 1 week and use it later.

FOR THE RECORD:

I often find that recipes provided via the Internet screw up or miss key ingredients, recommend sub-optimal procedures and in general yield a product that somehow doesn't quite measure up to the real thing. A case in point was the Hotel DuPont® Macaroon recipe, which produced a runny dough that can't possibly be used to create simple macaroon cookies that look like or taste like the ones served at the hotel. Thus, the creative cook must modify the provided

recipes to create the desired top quality product. If you are worth your salt you will drive towards perfection.

For the dough handling in the above sticky bun recipe, Joanne never uses a proofing oven until just before baking. I can understand letting the dough proof in the refrigerator initially to develop flavor, but effective proofing includes rising time, and for that I recommend the later use of the proofing oven, which is maintained at about 100° F, just prior to rolling the dough to form the buns. Thus, the dough from the refrigerator, unless obviously fully risen, should be placed in the proofing oven for 30 to 45 minutes prior to rolling the dough. Let the yeast do its job in optimal conditions.

Cornbread - ☺♥

This is a cornbread recipe I got via the Internet and modified to suit myself. Yes, I am happy. You will be too if you make this cornbread.

Ingredients:

2 cups of all-purpose flour

2 cups of yellow cornmeal

1 1/3 cups of granulated sugar

2 teaspoons of salt

2 tbsp. baking powder

2/3 cup of melted butter

2 large eggs

2 cups of milk

Directions:

Grease a 9" x 13" glass oven baking dish or a large (12") cast iron skillet with butter and set it aside.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Put the flour, cornmeal, sugar, salt, and baking powder in an electric mixer bowl . Mix on low to medium speed to combine.

Add the melted butter, the milk, and the eggs. Mix on medium speed just until the mixture comes together. If needed use a soft spatula to get all dry ingredients into the mixture and mix briefly.

Pour the batter into the prepared baking dish (or cast iron skillet) and bake for 35 to 40 minutes until the top is a deep golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.

Serve the cornbread hot with honey or butter or both.

Enjoy!

Cranberry Nut Bread - ☺♥

Our neighbors Mark and Kendra are fine friends. A few days ago Kendra gifted us with a loaf of Cranberry Nut bread that is great! She used the Raisin variation instead of dried cranberries. Kendra shared the recipe that she got from the Internet and now I'm putting it into Food Nirvana, with somewhat modified directions, for it certainly qualifies as top notch. And it is very easy to make.

I'm anxious to make the cranberry version, and I hope you make this "No Knead" bread too. You will love it.

Ingredients:

3 cups plus 2 tbsp. of all purpose flour

2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of instant yeast

3/4 cup of chopped walnuts

3/4 cup of dried cranberries (Variation: raisins)

1 tbsp. of honey

1 1/2 cups of warm water (95 to 100 degrees F)

Directions:

Stir the first five ingredients together in an electric mixer bowl.

Stir the honey into the water in a small bowl.

Add the liquid mixture to the mixer bowl.

Mix on low speed until the ingredients come together.

You may need to use a soft spatula to get all of the dry ingredients mixed into the dough.

Remove the beater and cover the bowl with plastic wrap, then let the dough rise at room temperature for 16 to 18 hours.

Transfer the dough to a floured work surface, have flour on your hands, and shape the dough into a ball.

Put the ball of dough on to a sheet of parchment paper.

Score an X on the top of the ball of dough with a sharp knife.

Cover the dough with a damp cloth and let it rest for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 475 degrees F while the dough is resting.

Put a Dutch Oven, including the lid, into the baking oven and preheat it.

After the 30 minute resting period uncover the dough and put the parchment paper and the dough into the Dutch Oven.

Put the lid on and bake the bread for 25 minutes.

Remove the lid and bake it for an additional 8 minutes.

Remove the Dutch Oven from the baking oven and turn the bread out on to a wire rack to cool.

After 20 minutes the bread is ready to cut and serve hot. Or you can serve it later at room temperature. Be sure to provide butter.

Keep any leftover bread stored at room temperature in a sealed bag with the cut end covered with plastic wrap.

Use the bread within a week.

Enjoy!

Dinner Rolls - ☺♥

Who doesn't love warm, soft, chewy dinner rolls? Or hot, crusty, chewy dinner rolls? Well I do, so here is a recipe (with a crusty variation) to please you. And it is quite simple.

My sweetheart Peggy and I really enjoy dipping pieces of the crusty version of the rolls in a small dish of the Food Nirvana version of Carrabba's® dipping oil. Try it. Making the dipping oil is easy. Look for the recipe in Appetizers.

Directions for making the crusty roll variation are provided at the bottom of this recipe.

Ingredients: (makes 27 to 32 rolls depending on what method you decide to use to bake them)

1 package (1/4 ounce) of active dry yeast

2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon of sugar, divided

1-1/2 cups of warm water (105° F maximum), divided

1/2 cup of butter, melted, plus room temperature butter for lightly coating the dough rising bowl and the baking dishes

2 jumbo or extra large eggs, at room temperature

1/4 cup of instant nonfat dry milk powder

1-1/2 teaspoons of sea salt

4 to 5 cups of all-purpose flour (use 1/2 cup of vital wheat gluten for part of the flour if you have it)

Directions:

Dissolve the yeast and 1 teaspoon of sugar in 1/2 cup of the warm water in a large electric mixer bowl.

Add the melted butter, eggs, milk powder, salt, 3 cups of flour, and the remaining sugar and water. Beat on medium speed for 3 minutes.

Stir in enough of the remaining flour to form a soft dough, ergo add some, mix it in, decide if you have a soft dough, etc.

Turn the dough onto a floured wood cutting board and knead it until it is smooth and elastic, about 6 to 8 minutes. Or, simply knead it in the electric mixer bowl for four minutes using the mixer dough hook.

Place the dough in a lightly buttered two quart bowl, turning it once to coat the top. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough rise in a warm place until it is doubled in size, about 1-1/2 hours. Use a 100 degrees F proofing oven if you have that setting on your oven.

Put the dough on a large wooden cutting board and punch the dough down.

Divide/cut the dough into 27 pieces with a pastry cutter or a sharp knife, then shape each piece into a ball by hand. You may want to lightly dust your hands in flour.

Place 18 of the balls in a lightly buttered 13" by 9" baking dish and the remaining balls in a lightly buttered 9" by 9" square baking dish.

Cover both baking dishes with buttered plastic wrap and let the dough rise until it is doubled in size, about 45 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 375° F.

Bake the rolls until they are golden brown, about 17 to 20 minutes. Cool the rolls briefly on one or two wire racks.

Serve the rolls warm, with butter, pulling them apart as needed.

Crusty Variation: What if you like warm dinner rolls to be crusty on the outside and chewy on the inside? If that is your choice then make and put 32 pieces of dough on to two parchment paper coated baking sheets, with the dough pieces separated equally from each other and from the sides and ends of the baking sheets, covered with buttered plastic wrap, for the final rising of the dough. Then preheat the oven to 450 degrees F, and put a cast iron skillet on the lowest oven shelf. When you remove the plastic wrap from the risen rolls, sprinkle a small amount of kosher salt on the top of each roll, then put the baking sheets into the oven (both if they fit, otherwise do two separate bakings) and pour one cup of water into the hot cast iron skillet and quickly close the oven door. After five minutes of baking, reduce the oven temperature to 375 degrees F and bake for 12 to 14 more minutes.

Remove the baking sheet(s) from the oven and let the rolls cool. Serve them warm, with butter.

Enjoy!

French Breads - ☺♥

Note that with this recipe you can choose to make either the batard or the baguette type of French bread. You can also decide to use the alternate recipe at the end of this recipe to make instead sesame seed topped crusty soft rolls. Whichever size/shape you choose you will be quite pleased. All you do is adjust the size/shape of the dough prior to rising and also check the internal temperature of the loaves during baking to get exactly the right internal temperature of 190 °F.

French batard bread is about a foot long and about four inches wide on either end and six inches wide in the middle of the loaf. It is known as the crude form of a baguette, where the baguette is typically almost twice as long and uniformly thin from end to end. Thus, a baguette has somewhat less soft chewable interior for a given amount of dough. And the crusty soft rolls option makes individual servings easy as there is no need to cut a loaf or a baguette.

The batard has a crispy crust but it is soft and doughy inside, which makes it perfect for sandwiches, garlic bread, or sliced as a side for a meal. The crisp baguette is better used for tearing and dipping in seasonings in olive oil, served warm, but if you decrease baking time for the baguette you can get a somewhat chewy crust and make great sandwiches with that bread also. The crusty soft rolls are simply served fresh, warm and with butter.

I found a fairly authentic (and simple) recipe for the batard bread on the Internet and I decided to make a few improvements and breach the authenticity by adding a small amount of vital wheat gluten to the given recipe. Why? For starters I have no real knowledge of the gluten content of flours used in Europe (vs. in the USA) for making baguettes or batards, and I don't want a bread dry in the interior of the loaf that will go stale within a day. Note that some baguette/batard recipes are complex and I chose to avoid them.

One of the sought characteristics of this European style bread is a soft, chewy internal texture with large holes. That is achieved by limiting the variety and effect of ingredients on texture and the number of times the dough is made to rise before baking. In other words, fine texture breads typically have three rising periods for the dough, while the batard texture is gained by having a very long single rise to greatly expand the dough volume. Then the risen dough is handled carefully when forming it into a loaf so as not to lose most of the effect of the first rise. A short second rise is allowed to compensate volume loss from handling the risen dough and forming it into the batard loaf shape. Thus, when it comes to letting the dough rise, be patient. The initial rising time can be quite long.

Plan on 3 to 5 hours for the rising portion of the bread making process. The time variation is related to whether you let the dough rise at room temperature (72 °F) or instead use a 100 °F proofing oven. Obviously the warmer environment hastens the rise.

During the first and longest rising time the dough will develop significant air pockets. You will form the dough into a loaf or a baguette at the end of that period (or not if you are making crusty soft rolls), thus eliminating the largest air pockets. The smaller air pockets are what will make the dough inside the bread airy when it is baked. If you choose the crusty soft rolls option you already have the final roll shapes and merely need to press the risen dough pieces lightly, individually, to eliminate any large air pockets.

The trademark aspect of batard bread is the large, irregular holes inside the loaf, so you want to avoid squeezing the dough too much during handling.

But, once the dough has risen initially, you do need to shape it into a batard shaped loaf (or into a baguette shape, or have crusty soft rolls per the last part of this recipe).

Then it is time for a short final rise and then the baking. Simply follow the directions below.

Note that you can easily make a half recipe of the ingredients shown below, which is smart if only a few people are eating what you make. No one wants day old stale French bread or rolls ... you want all of the product to be eaten (or frozen) on the day it is baked.

Ingredients: (makes 2 batard loaves or 2 baguettes or 24 crusty soft rolls)

1 ½ cups of lukewarm water (105 °F)

3 ½ cups of bread flour

4 tsp. of vital wheat gluten

2 1/4 tsp. of activated dry yeast (one small package)

2 tsp. of sea salt

Vegetable oil

Corn meal

Melted butter (optional)

Raw sesame seeds (optional)

Directions:

For making the dough:

Combine the yeast and the 1 ½ cups of lukewarm water in an electric mixer bowl. Ensure that the water is warm enough to activate the yeast – at about 105°F. Use an instant read thermometer to ensure the correct tap water temperature. Mix the yeast into the water with a spoon to moisten all of it and then allow the yeast to proof (become slightly foamy, sort of) for five minutes before continuing.

Combine the salt, the flour and the gluten with a whisk in a 2 quart bowl, then add that mixture to the water and yeast mixture slowly while mixing on low to medium low speed using the electric mixer paddle attachment. Then increase the mixer speed to medium after the flour mixture is added. If necessary, temporarily stop the mixer and scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl with a soft spatula to assure the ingredients get evenly mixed. Then continue mixing.

Once the dough ingredients are well blended/come together, stop the mixer and then knead the dough for three to five minutes using the mixer dough hook attachment on medium speed, until the dough takes on a kind of bouncy quality. If you can press your finger into the dough and it bounces back, it is ready for the long initial rising period.

If you are making the batard loaves or the baguettes continue with the next instructions. If instead you are making Crusty Soft dinner rolls, go to the end of this recipe for the Alternate recipe directions.

Cut the dough in half on a lightly floured cutting board and form each piece into the shape of a ball.

Transfer the dough balls into two, 2 quart bowls that have been lightly oiled with vegetable oil. Roll each dough ball around in the oil to coat the entire surface.

Cover the bowls loosely with plastic wrap and let the dough rise at room temperature (72 °F) or in a 100 °F proofing oven. You will need about 3 to 5 hours, until the dough balls are triple their original size.

For shaping the dough:

Dust the cutting board with a bit of flour. You can also dust your fingers with flour if necessary to prevent the dough from sticking to them as you work with it.

Place the dough balls on the floured area. They may have developed large bubbles during the rising time, and these bubbles are okay to pop. Then gently

and lightly lengthen the dough balls and let the air out where any other large bubbles have formed.

Shaping the dough can be slightly tricky. Form each lengthened piece into a slightly oblong shape, ergo slightly thicker in the middle and somewhat thinner on each end. The pieces should be a bit shorter than a foot, so don't stretch the dough beyond one foot in length.

Conversely, if you want baguettes instead of batard loaves you can lengthen the dough balls to 17" and make them uniform in diameter end to end.

Fold the ends of each piece of lengthened dough inward to eliminate any areas on the ends that are too thin.

Once that is done, you can roll the pieces back and forth very gently, if necessary, to even them out.

Optionally you can sprinkle the tops of the batard loaves with raw sesame seeds.

For Baking:

Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Place an oven proof bowl of two cups of water into the oven on a low shelf while it is preheating.

Place parchment paper flat on a 12" x 17" baking sheet, sprinkle it with corn meal, then place the shaped batard loaves (or the baguettes) on the parchment paper, separated from the sides of the baking sheet and from each other evenly by 2" or more on all sides.

Allow the loaves/baguettes to rise at 72 °F room temperature for one hour or in the proofing oven for 30 minutes, covered with a light weight damp cloth (muslin or a dish towel), for 30 minutes. Then remove the cloth carefully.

Slash the top of each loaf in three places diagonally and evenly spaced along the width of the loaf (see the recipe picture) with a sharp knife, about 1/4" to 1/2" deep, to get a classic baguette look (and to avoid having the crust crack during baking). If you are making baguettes then make six diagonal equally spaced cuts on each baguette.

Use a spray bottle of water and lightly spray/mist the surfaces of the batards or the baguettes immediately before putting them into the oven.

Bake the batards/baguettes on a high oven shelf for about 20 minutes, turning the tray around after the first ten minutes. They are done when the internal

temperature is 190 °F (Use an instant read thermometer to check the internal temperature of the center of one of the loaves/baguettes). Then remove the baking sheet from the oven.

If you want you can lightly brush melted butter on the crusts with a pastry brush while they are hot. Then let the batards/baguettes cool to about room temperature before cutting them. Use a serrated edge bread knife to cut the loaves.

You now have warm and delicious French batard bread or baguettes.

Enjoy!

Alternate Directions for making Crusty Soft Rolls:

Weigh the dough and then divide it into 24 equal weight dough balls. They will be about 1 1/3 ounces each. Put the balls on two parchment paper covered baking trays in a 4 x 3 ball pattern with equal spacing between the balls and from the sides of the baking trays.

Spray the balls lightly with Pam® or a similar vegetable oil in spray form. Then spray or lightly oil two pieces of plastic wrap, each large enough to cover a baking tray.

Place the oiled pieces of plastic wrap over the dough balls, oiled side on top of the dough balls, and start the 3 to 5 hour rising period either at 72 °F or in a 100 °F proofing oven.

When the dough balls have spread out and risen in size to 2" in diameter the first rise is done.

Remove the plastic wrap pieces and then individually press on the dough in each ball gently to eliminate any large air pockets.

Optionally sprinkle raw sesame seeds on top of the dough. Trust me, this is a great idea.

Again cover the dough with the plastic wrap and allow the dough to rise a second time for one hour at 72 °F or 30 minutes in a 100 °F proofing oven.

Remove the risen dough from the proofing oven if you used one. Let the dough rest while you preheat the oven to 450 °F, ideally on a convection oven setting.

Place an oven proof bowl of two cups of water into the bottom shelf of the oven while it is preheating.

Remove the plastic wrap pieces from the risen dough.

Use a spray bottle of water and lightly spray/mist the exposed surfaces of the risen dough.

Put the baking trays of risen dough into the top two shelves of the oven. After five minutes reverse the shelves for the baking trays and turn them around front to back.

Bake for five minutes longer then again turn the baking trays around front to back and bake another five minutes.

Remove the baking trays from the oven and let the rolls cool to a warm temperature.

For best results, serve the rolls while warm soon after baking, along with butter. They should be eaten the same day they are made. OMG! They are fabulous ... I bet you can't stop eating them until most (or all) of them are gone!

Yes ... Enjoy!

French Donuts - ►

Dunkin' Donuts® locations sometimes have a French Donut that is shaped like a hypoid gear smoothed over at the top and the bottom edges. It is glazed. The donut is light, soft, airy and rich because it is made with eggs instead of being a yeast raised donut. I love that type of donut so I decided to start making them and add them to the recipe book when I know they are top quality. Well, I guess I was a bit anxious as I added the recipe from the Internet (already modified, of course) before even trying to make the French Donuts. I am reporting back now with my preliminary results.

My first attempt to make these donuts was not impressive. I am working on better techniques for forming the donuts and introducing them into the hot oil. I have an alternate method for putting them into the oil shown in the directions. I also think I may need a bit more flour than called for in the ingredient list below.

The oil temperature is something I find troubling, for on one hand the high temperature gets the maximum rapid expansion of the egg-based dough. On the other hand, the high temperature can result in too rapid browning, and it is almost at the smoking point of soybean oil, so a slightly overheated taste can be imparted to the donuts. Beyond those considerations there is the reality that the best donuts are those where there is no hint of residual oil on the donut, and too low a frying temperature will result in greasy donuts. Perhaps a different oil like peanut oil might improve the results. I need to try different approaches and upgrade this recipe once I find a superior way to make French Donuts.

Ingredients:

**1/2 cup of butter
1 cup of boiling water
1 cup of sifted flour
4 eggs**

Directions:

Heat three quarts of soybean oil in a six quart pot to 375°F.

Heat the water and the butter to boiling in a small saucepan on medium heat.

Pre-heat the electric mixer bowl in hot water. Dump the butter and water mixture into the hot empty bowl.

Add the flour to the mixing bowl and mix the ingredients vigorously until the mixture becomes very thick and leaves the sides of the bowl.

Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Continue mixing until the glaze appearance disappears.

Put the mixture into a pastry bag.

(The aluminum foil method below sucks. Spray a polymer spatula with Pam®, squeeze out a circle of dough onto the spatula. Put the spatula into the hot oil and the donut will release easily.)

Cut out 4 inch squares of aluminum foil and spray them with Pam®.

Squeeze out circles of the dough mixture onto each piece of aluminum foil.

Slip the dough from the foil into the 375°F oil. Do only four pieces at a time.

Fry until golden on one side and turn over with a fork or a spatula, about one minute per side.

Use tongs to remove the donuts from the oil and place the donuts on a paper towel to drain off excess oil.

Make a glaze of 1 cup of powdered sugar and 1/8th cup of milk, adding ½ tsp. of vanilla, using a wide shallow bowl.

Dip each warm donut into the glaze using tongs. Cover both sides with the glaze and put the donut on a rack to cool.

Do not cover the donuts or enclose them in a container or the glaze will liquefy.

Eat them while they are very fresh. Enjoy!

Glazed Donuts - ☺♥

Food Nirvana needed a great recipe for making glazed donuts at home. I found a typical recipe on the Internet (they were almost all identical) and I modified it virtually totally as it resulted in having donuts that were barely okay but certainly not great (too dense and cakey) and no competition for the very light and soft, slightly chewy glazed donuts made commercially. The good news is that, after some research and making a few batches of donuts with creative changes, I was very successful. Lucky you!

Note that recipes like this can (and should be) be a work in process until the magic moment when it all comes together to create your version of perfection. For example, I figured that I could enhance rising during frying by using extra egg white in the batter. I based that thought on the fact that French Crullers use only eggs and no yeast at all, and they rise a lot and are very fluffy and tender. The bottom line? Yes, additional egg white made a noticeable, nice difference.

I learned through making white bread that the addition of a small amount of vital wheat gluten made a terrific difference in quality. The gluten increases moisture and chewiness without any toughness, ergo it imparts great texture, so gluten is definitely in my recipe below. You can buy it online cheaply via Amazon®. I purchased a brand named Anthony's in a four pound bag and that amount will last for a long time for making breads and donuts.

I also learned that scalding the milk at 180 degrees F destroys milk proteins that can keep the donuts from being light and fluffy. After heating, the milk is allowed to cool to 105 degrees F. Thus, I recommend doing that step first instead of simply warming cold milk to 105 degrees F for mixing in the yeast and a teaspoon of sugar and starting fermentation.

One key to having great glazed donuts is making sure the dough rises a lot, and in frying the formed donuts at 365 degrees F. This means you adjust the dough rising time to have it somewhat more than double in size. It also means you tightly control the oil temperature, adjusting the heat as necessary before and during each frying cycle. Use an instant read thermometer to measure the oil temperature.

Similarly, on the final rising of the donuts, make sure they do expand to at least twice their starting size. The best glazed donuts are very light in texture so you don't want to fry them until they are at the optimal/large size.

Transferring the donuts to the hot oil after the final rise can be a problem because they are very soft and light and easily distorted in shape or even within

one donut made to stick together side to side, eliminating the hole in the donut. You do not want shape distortion or any part of the donut sticking to any other part. For that reason I have recommended doing the final rising on a lightly oiled baking sheet that then allows donuts to slide off the end of the baking sheet easily, assisted by an oiled spatula, into the hot oil without shape distortion.

The choice of flour is important. In particular, higher gluten bread flour will work much better than all purpose flour to get the best donut texture. The King Arthur® brand of bread flour has the highest gluten content of typical commercial flours (12.7%) so that is the best brand to use. Don't waste your time using all purpose flour unless you plan to add all of the needed gluten ... which should be 15% of the total flour weight. Acquire vital wheat gluten via Amazon® and use it in this recipe as even the King Arthur® bread flour doesn't have quite enough gluten to make perfect donuts. Note that measuring one cup of flour is best done using a kitchen scale. Bread flour weighs 5.5 ounces per cup. All purpose flour weighs 5 ounces per cup. Cake flour weighs 4.5 ounces per cup.

I discovered that otherwise very plain tasting donuts were amped up a lot in flavor by adding ground cardamom to the batter. You would never be able to identify it during tasting of a glazed donut but it surely enhances the flavor. What that means is you don't have to put flavoring agents like vanilla in the glazed coating you use. In fact, that will detract from the optimal taste.

Here is a side note about making filled donuts: The JoePastry.com web site has superb directions for making raised filled donuts using a sponge dough method, which is not part of this glazed donut recipe. Some time later I will likely capture and modify that recipe and put it into Food Nirvana as a new recipe for making filled raised donuts. Think jam filled or cream filled or pudding filled with or without icing on top or dusted with powdered sugar.

Ingredients: (makes about 16 [or more] donuts and 16 [or more] donut holes)

For the donuts:

1 ¼ cups of milk (scalded at 180 degrees F then cooled to 105 degrees F)

1 tbsp. of active dry yeast

2 jumbo or 3 extra large eggs, plus two egg whites

1/4 cup of butter, barely melted

1/4 cup of Crisco® shortening, barely melted

1/4 cup of granulated sugar

3/4 teaspoon of salt

2 tsp. of ground cardamom

1 1/3 tbsp. of vital wheat gluten

4 cups of King Arthur® Bread Flour, plus a tiny bit more for rolling out the dough (4 cups equals 22 ounces by weight. Use a kitchen scale to weigh the flour to be accurate.)

Pam® or equivalent cooking oil in a spray can

2 or 3 quarts of canola or peanut oil, for frying, plus a tiny bit more to coat the dough rising bowl.

For the glaze:

4 cups of powdered sugar

5/8 cup (or slightly more) of milk

1/4 cup of honey

Directions:

Scald the 1 1/4 cups of milk by heating it in a heatproof bowl to 180 degrees F in the microwave oven. Then let the milk cool to a temperature of 105 degrees F.

Combine one teaspoon of the sugar and the tablespoon of yeast with the milk. Stir lightly to mix in the yeast and sugar and let the mixture sit until it is a bit foamy, about 10 minutes.

Melt the butter and the Crisco® in a small heatproof cup in the microwave oven and lightly mix them with a spoon.

Use an electric stand mixer (think Kitchen Aid®) with the regular beater and mix the eggs, butter, Crisco®, remaining sugar, cardamom and salt for two minutes on medium speed. Then add the yeast mixture and mix until the combination is well blended, about one minute.

Add the vital wheat gluten slowly and then mix for one minute on medium speed.

Add half of the flour slowly, mixing on low speed, until it is well combined, then mix in the rest of the flour slowly, mixing until the dough is uniform in texture.

Increase the mixing speed to medium and mix for about three minutes. Scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl with a soft spatula to get all of the flour into the dough about half way through the mixing.

At this point the dough should be coming together. If not, then mix it for an additional minute. If necessary, add a tablespoon of flour and continue mixing for one minute.

When the dough starts to come together (it will be sticky) stop the mixer and replace the beater with a dough hook. Then knead the dough on medium low speed for five minutes. If the dough climbs up the dough hook stop the mixer temporarily and push the dough back into the bowl with the soft spatula, then continue the kneading for the remaining time.

Remove the dough hook and let the dough rest in the mixing bowl for ten minutes.

Lightly coat the inside of a three quart bowl with a little canola oil or peanut oil. Transfer the dough to the bowl, roll it around to coat it very lightly with the oil, and cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Let the dough rise at a warm room temperature (at least 72 degrees F) or in a proofing oven at 100 degrees F until it at least doubles in size, about 1 hour.

Cut or tear the dough into four roughly equal size pieces. Use your hands to form each piece into roughly a 1 1/2 inch diameter tube. Flatten the ends of the tube against the dough. Note that the extra gluten will cause the dough to be very elastic so rolling it out in the next step to the proper thickness will make you laugh (or swear) as it will tend to come back together before you can cut out the donuts.

In turn, put each tube of dough onto a lightly floured surface, and roll it to approximately 1/2-inch thickness. Your goal is to have rolled dough just wide enough for the diameter of the donut cutter or concentric cookie cutters or drinking glass and shot glass, any of which can be used to cut out the donuts and donut holes. The dough from each tube should easily be sufficient to make four donuts plus four donut holes.

Cut out the donuts and donut holes with a donut cutter, concentric cookie cutters or a drinking glass and a shot glass.

Put the cut out donuts and donut holes on two lightly oiled baking sheets so that there is plenty of room (at least 1 1/2 inches) between each donut, and one inch between the donut holes. The baking sheets should have one edge or more

without any high side because you will later gently slide each donut from a baking sheet into the hot oil for frying.

Knead the scraps of dough together from the four tubes briefly by hand into a ball, and let the dough rest for a minute before continuing/completing the rolling and cutting out process.

Roll the combined scraps of dough to form additional donuts. Repeat the kneading, rolling and cutting of leftover dough, as needed, until the scraps are less than what is needed to make one donut. That leftover dough can be cut or torn to form additional small balls of dough about the size of the cut out donut holes.

Cover the donuts and donut holes lightly with plastic wrap after spraying them lightly with Pam® or a similar product. That will keep the plastic wrap from sticking to the donuts later.

Let the donuts rise in the warm kitchen or in the proofing oven until they are puffed up and delicate, about 45 minutes.

Make the glaze using the following directions while the dough is rising:

Put the honey into a shallow cereal bowl and gradually mix the 5/8 cup of milk into it with a whisk until the mixture is uniform. Pour the mixture into a two quart bowl.

Whisk together gradually the 4 cups of powdered sugar and the milk and honey mixture until the glaze is smooth and uniform. You want the glaze to flow freely to make it easy to thinly coat the donut surfaces after frying. You can add an additional amount of milk with mixing as necessary to thin out the glaze. The idea is a spoon dipped into the glaze and then held above the bowl should result in most of the glaze easily flowing back into the bowl fairly quickly while leaving the spoon surface coated about 1/32 of an inch thick with glaze.

Pour/dispense the completed glaze back into the shallow cereal bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and set it aside.

Now you can rest and have a cup of coffee or glass of juice while the donut dough is rising.

About 15 minutes before the donuts are done rising, put the canola or peanut oil into a heavy-bottomed pot, or a large wok, or a Dutch oven or a very deep skillet over medium heat, and heat it to 365 degrees F. Be sure to use an instant read thermometer to monitor the temperature and adjust the heat to keep the oil at 365 degrees F during the frying of the donuts.

Remove the trays of donuts from the proofing oven (if you used one). Then set the oven to 140 degrees F.

Meanwhile, place paper towels underneath two cooling racks on two different baking sheets. The towels will capture any oil drips from the fried donuts, and then later any glaze that drips from them, making cleanup simple.

Carefully add a few donuts to the oil, about four per batch. Use an oiled spatula to help them individually slide off the baking sheet into the oil without excessively distorting the shape of the donut.

When the bottom halves of the donuts are golden, after about 45 seconds of frying, use a slotted spoon and a small spatula or tongs to flip them, then fry them for another 45 seconds until they are golden on the second side. Then quickly remove them from the hot oil with a slotted spoon, placing them on one of the cooling racks.

Repeat the frying steps for each remaining batch of four donuts, adjusting the heat as needed to keep the oil at 365 degrees F.

Now put all of the donut holes into the hot oil.

Donut holes cook fast, in about one minute if mixed gently in the hot oil. Use a slotted spoon to stir them slowly in the oil and continue stirring and flipping them over (as best you can) until they are light golden in color, then remove them individually or a few at a time as they become done with the slotted spoon to one of the cooling racks.

When all the frying is done remember to turn off the heat under the oil.

Put the donut covered cooling racks/baking sheets into the 140 degrees F oven. Let the donuts and donut holes equilibrate in temperature in the oven for about ten minutes.

Remove the cooling racks/baking sheets from the oven.

Now it is time to glaze the donuts. Stir the glaze. If it seems to be too thick you can warm it for 30 to 45 seconds in the microwave oven. You might also add just a bit more milk and stir until the glaze is uniform in thickness. Or you can do both to achieve uniformity and the right viscosity for the glaze.

Dip each donut individually into the glaze, then flip it over with one or two dinner forks so it is covered on the top and on the bottom. If you want the donut to be glazed all over the outer surface then use a fork to press the donut lightly into the glaze.

Remove each donut from the glaze bowl using the forks through each side of the hole in the donut. Hold the donut above the glaze bowl and let any excess glaze drip back into the bowl for about ten seconds. Put each glazed donut onto one of the cooling racks.

After all the donuts have been glazed then glaze the fried donut holes by mixing them with a fork a few at a time gently in the remaining glaze in the bowl, then removing them with the forks and placing them on the cooling racks.

The glaze on each of the donuts and donut holes will dry within about ten minutes of being glazed.

The donuts are now ready to eat, and I'll bet you can't eat only one!

When you are ready to store the remaining donuts (if any) do not put them into a closed container or the glaze will liquefy and make the donuts soggy. Cover a few dinner plates of them, only one layer thick, lightly with plastic wrap and eat the donuts within a day. They are best when perfectly fresh.

You might also try freezing some of them on a baking sheet in the deep freeze for later use. In that situation I suggest very lightly vacuum sealing the frozen donuts individually. Later, they can thaw at room temperature after removal from the vacuum sealed bags. You might hasten that process by microwaving a frozen donut on a saucer for no more than 10 seconds on high power.

Enjoy!

Irish Soda Bread - ☺♥

I decided to try making this type of bread to accompany our St. Patrick's Day dinner of corned beef (with horseradish cream sauce) and cabbage and potatoes and carrots. I'm glad I did. This bread is very tasty!

Irish Soda Bread does not use yeast for rising. The dough rises from using baking soda and buttermilk.

The dough is particularly sticky, so keep your hands and a wood cutting board floured when handling the dough.

Ingredients: (makes one loaf of bread)

4 cups of bread flour, plus 1/4 cup more for dusting a cutting board and your fingers

1/4 cup of granulated sugar

1 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of baking soda

6 tbsp. of butter (cut into 18 pieces), plus 1 tbsp. to grease the skillet

1 3/4 cups of cold buttermilk (naturally cultured)

1 extra large or jumbo egg, cold

1 cup of dried cranberries

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Have a shelf in the center of the oven (top to bottom).

Generously grease the inside bottom of an 8" (diameter at the bottom) cast iron skillet with 1 tbsp. of butter.

Put the flour, sugar, salt and baking soda in an electric mixer bowl and mix on low speed for three minutes.

Increase the mixer speed to low/medium and slowly add the pieces of butter, then mix on low to medium speed for five minutes.

Add the cranberries and mix on low speed for one minute.

Whisk together the cold buttermilk and the cold egg in a 2 quart bowl, then add this mixture slowly into the flour mixture while mixing on medium speed. Mix only until the dough starts to come together. (The idea is that the acid content of the buttermilk will react chemically with the baking soda and create bubbles of carbon dioxide gas. You don't want to lose that gas as it has caused the dough to rise, so don't over mix the dough.)

Transfer the dough to a floured wood cutting board, flour your hands, and then shape the dough just until it forms into a round loaf. It should be shaggy. If it is too sticky to handle, dust it (and your hands) lightly with flour.

Transfer the dough to the buttered cast iron skillet, then use a sharp knife to score the top of the dough with a large and deep cross cut (+).

Bake the bread on the center shelf of the preheated oven at 375°F for 60 minutes. It should be lightly golden on top.

Tap the top of the bread with a large spoon. It should sound hollow inside. If so, it is done baking. If not, then bake it for an additional five minutes.

Turn off the oven. Tip the loaf of bread from the skillet on to a wood cutting board. Transfer the loaf to a wire rack to cool. Let it cool for one to two hours.

Use the bread within 2 days of making it, or you can refrigerate leftover bread, tightly covered with plastic wrap, for up to a week.

This bread is delicious plain or buttered or with any of many fruit preserve toppings. It is the perfect addition to the traditional St. Patrick's Day meal of corned beef and cabbage and potatoes and carrots.

Ice cold beer is a fine beverage for that meal, or serve any carbonated soft beverage to young people.

Enjoy!

Pita Bread - ☺♥

If you are taking the trouble to make souvlaki (gyro meat) you should go all the way and make pita bread for your gyro.

It is almost impossible to replicate the pita bread made in the Middle East, because home kitchens typically don't have brick ovens capable of reaching temperatures of 800 to 900 degrees F.

This recipe comes close, so I know you will enjoy the pita bread you make.

Actually, the pita bread came out great, and my sweetheart and I first used it warmed with an herb and olive oil dipping oil ... like the Carrabba's Dipping Oil recipe in Food Nirvana. Yummy! Then, I made a real gyro and Wow! I sure was pleased!

Ingredients:

1, 1/4-ounce package of active dry yeast

1/2 cup of warm water (110 degrees F)

1 teaspoon of granulated sugar

3 cups of all-purpose flour or bread flour

1 1/4 teaspoons of salt

1 cup of lukewarm water (105 degrees F)

A can of Pam® spray canola oil

1/2 cup of flour (or more) for rolling the dough

Directions:

Mix the yeast into 1/2 cup of 110 degrees F warm water, using a one cup Pyrex® glass measuring cup or a similar container. You can check the temperature of the water with an instant read thermometer to get the temperature right before adding the yeast. Too high a temperature, like 120 degrees F, will kill the yeast.

Add the sugar and stir until it is dissolved. Let the mixture sit for 10 minutes until the mixture is becoming frothy on top. Froth is a sure indicator that the yeast is fine as it lets you know the yeast is active and already fermenting the sugar you provided.

Combine the flour and salt in a large electric mixer bowl.

Start the electric mixer on low speed.

Slowly pour in the 1/2 cup of yeast water, followed by 1 cup of 105 degrees F lukewarm water, and mix on low to medium speed for two minutes to combine the ingredients.

Use a soft spatula to scrape the ingredients down the inside of the mixing bowl. Knead the dough using the electric mixer on medium speed. This could take three to five minutes (or longer). When the dough has become elastic and sticks together, it has been successfully kneaded. You will probably use the soft spatula twice during the kneading, stopping the mixer temporarily to scrape down the dough from the inside of the mixing bowl.

You may find the regular mixer beater to be fine for kneading the dough, or, you may choose to use a mixer dough hook accessory. As noted above, you may/will also need to scrape down the inside of the mixer bowl once or twice during kneading with a soft spatula to make sure all of the ingredients are being combined and kneaded.

Once the kneading is done, remove the beater and the bowl from the mixer. Use the soft spatula to get all the dough from the beater. Scrape down the dough from the inside of the mixer bowl and into the pile of dough at the bottom.

Use the can of Pam® and lightly spray the inside surface of the mixer bowl. Also lightly spray the exposed surface of the dough. Then turn the dough upside down by tilting the bowl and rolling the dough, and make sure all of the dough surface on the bottom is sprayed lightly with Pam®.

Allow the mixer bowl to sit in a warm place, covered with plastic wrap or a damp, warm dish towel, for about 2 hours or until the dough has doubled in size.

Handling the risen dough to make the pita bread is a pain in the butt unless you keep your hands and the pieces of dough well floured. Remember to do so and you will curse less!

Once the dough has doubled in size, flour your hands and remove it from the mixer bowl, place it on a floured wood cutting board, roll it around gently to coat it with flour, and form it into the shape of a 2" diameter fat cylinder by hand. Cut the dough in half and put one piece back into the mixer bowl. Then roll the remaining dough into a 12" long cylinder and cut pieces from the roll to form a total of 6 smaller pieces, rolling each of those pieces by hand into the shape of a ball.

Place the balls on the floured wood cutting board. Let them sit covered by plastic wrap for 10 minutes.

Heat the oven to 500 degrees F with the rack placed at the very bottom position of the oven.

Put an 11"x17" (or larger) baking sheet into the hot oven to preheat it.

Use a rolling pin, and some flour, to dust the top of each of the six balls of dough and roll them into circles 5 to 6 inches in diameter and roughly 1/8 to 1/4 inch thick. I like to do that on a 24" length of floured 12" wide plastic wrap on a hard counter as it makes the flouring, rolling, dough circle removal and stacking of the well floured circles on a paper plate easy.

When the six balls of dough have been rolled, put four of the dough circles onto the baking sheet. Don't be dismayed if your circles are somewhat different than perfectly round. Life ain't perfect, here or in the Middle East.

Bake the circles of dough for 4 minutes until the pita bread puffs up. Then turn the pieces over and bake them for 2 more minutes.

While the first four dough circles are baking you can process the second half of the dough from the mixing bowl to make six more balls and then dough circles, well floured and stacked on a paper plate.

At the end of each batch of baking, remove each baked pita from the baking sheet with a metal spatula and place it on a wire cooling rack.

While the pita bread pieces are still warm, use the spatula to gently push down on each puffy area to flatten it.

The batch of completed pita bread pieces can be removed from the wire rack as they cool and placed on a paper plate while the next batch of dough circles is baking.

Repeat the above baking steps for the second group of four dough circles. Then do the last four dough circles.

When all of the pita bread pieces are completely cool (room temperature), put them into a sealable storage bag and seal it.

Use the pita bread within a day or two, warming each piece briefly (10 seconds) in the microwave oven before serving it.

Alternatively, you can freeze the pita bread in the sealed storage bag and use it within a month.

Note that you can serve pita bread with a seasoned dipping oil, tearing off bite size pieces and dipping them in the flavorful oil and herbs ... And then wolfing them down and feeling really good about life. You might want a nice chilled, crisp white wine like Pinot Grigio with that snack.

Enjoy!

Ray's Mediterranean Olive Bread - 😊♥

Food Nirvana has contained only a few bread recipes for the past ten years (2010-2020). Recently I expanded my interests to include more bread making ... and early successes have caused me to expand the types of bread I make. This recipe makes an artisanal type of French bread with a crisp, slightly salty crust and delicious pieces of kalamata olives inside. Serve this bread in thick slices, warm, with butter. A nice chilled glass of a light white French Burgundy wine or a Pinot Grigio is a fine accompaniment, as is some cheese of your choice.

I decided to create this recipe based on a lot of reading about different ingredients and different processing steps. Thus, I did not get this recipe out of a book or the Internet. Instead, it is a composite of many of the various things I have read, plus an idea or two of my own. As I made it, using three rising intervals, the grain of the bread is fine. You can have larger air pockets if you want by eliminating the second rise step. Also by doing the final rise overnight in the refrigerator.

Note that you can choose to substitute many different types of vegetable pieces instead of using the kalamata olives. Think perhaps of bits of hot peppers, or sautéed onion or shallot pieces, or chopped chives, or minced sautéed fresh garlic. There also is almost no limit to the variety of dried herbs you might use to create unique flavors.

The recipe shows the King Arthur® brand of bread flour as it has the highest gluten content of common bread flours. You could substitute all purpose flour if you remember to use additional vital wheat gluten beyond what is called for in this recipe, at the rate of 1 additional teaspoon per cup of flour. I purchased Anthony's brand of vital wheat gluten via Amazon® as it had the best price.

The directions look complicated but the doing of the steps is simple and obvious, so don't let the directions frighten you off.

Ingredients: (makes one, 1 pound loaf of French style bread)

1/2 cup of milk

1/2 cup of buttermilk

1 tsp. of sugar

2 cups of King Arthur® bread flour (11 ounces by weight ... use a kitchen scale and be precise)

2 tbsp. of butter

1 tsp. of sea salt

4 tsp. of vital wheat gluten

1 tsp. of Kosher salt

1 egg white

1/4 cup of water

1 1/2 tsp. of Active Dry Yeast

12 pitted Kalamata olives

Vegetable oil

Corn Meal

All purpose flour for dusting olive pieces and the cutting board used to roll out the dough

Parchment paper

Directions:

Pit 12 kalamata olives, then cut each one into four pieces. Put the pieces on a paper towel, spread out. Put another paper towel on top and press to make the paper towels absorb the liquid from the olive pieces.

Put the olive pieces into a cup and add two tablespoons of flour. Then coat the olive pieces evenly with the flour using your fingers. Set the cup aside.

Scald the 1/2 cup of regular milk to a temperature of 180 degrees F in the microwave oven, using an instant read thermometer to check the temperature. Mix the 1 tsp. of sugar into the milk. Then, let the milk cool to a temperature of 105 degrees F. That will take about ten minutes.

Add the yeast to the 105 degrees F milk and mix it in with a spoon. In about ten minutes you will see the mixture foaming, indicating that the yeast is active and ready to use.

While the yeast is blooming, warm the butter and the buttermilk for 20 seconds in the microwave oven. Then put the butter and buttermilk into the bowl of a stand mixer.

Put the flour, the gluten and the sea salt into a two quart bowl and whisk them briefly to mix them.

Add half of the flour mixture to the stand mixer bowl gradually while running the mixer on medium low speed. Then add half of the yeast and milk mixture to the mixing bowl and continue running the mixer on medium low speed.

Add the second half of the flour mixture to the mixer bowl gradually while running it on medium speed. Then add the other half of the yeast and milk mixture to the mixing bowl and mix until the dough starts to come together, about one minute.

Replace the regular mixer beater with the dough hook and knead the dough for three minutes on medium speed. At this point the dough should be well formed and ready to be placed in a bowl for the first rise.

Lightly oil a 2 quart bowl with vegetable oil, then put the dough into the bowl. Use a bit more oil to assure the top of the dough is oily. Then cover the bowl with plastic wrap.

Place the bowl aside in a warm room or put it into a 100 degrees F proofing oven. Let the dough rise until it fills the bowl.

Take the plastic wrap from the bowl and gently punch down the dough. Then put the plastic wrap back on the bowl and again let it rise until it fills the bowl.

Remove the bowl from the proofing oven (if you used one). Then set the oven temperature to 500 degrees F.

Place an oven proof bowl of water on the bottom shelf of the oven.

While the oven is heating, whisk together the 1/4 cup of water, the egg white, and the 1 tbsp. of Kosher salt, in a small bowl.

Sprinkle flour generously on an 18" long wooden cutting board. Then dump the dough on to the middle of the cutting board.

Dust a rolling pin with flour and roll the dough out to a length of 17 inches, allowing it to become less wide at each end and stay wide in the middle.

Place the Kalamata olive pieces evenly over the surface of the dough. Then roll up the dough from one side all the way to the other side, making a tube of dough about 18" long.

Put parchment paper on a baking sheet and sprinkle the paper with corn meal. Then place the dough tube on the corn meal.

Let the dough rise again covered with a damp dish towel, on a counter surface for about 20 to 30 minutes. Then remove the dish towel.

Using a butcher knife, cut diagonal slits across the top of the risen dough every inch from one end to the other, each slit roughly 1/4" to 1/2" deep.

Brush the water, egg white and salt mixture all over the exposed surface of the dough.

When the oven is at 500 degrees F put the baking sheet on to middle shelf of the oven and set a timer for ten minutes.

When the timer signals the ten minute mark reduce the oven temperature to 350 degrees F.

Set the timer for 15 minutes and continue baking the bread. Note that you can be precise in knowing when the bread is baked. Instead of simply following a fixed time period as indicated in the next step, check the internal temperature of the bread with an instant read thermometer. When the internal temperature of the thickest part of the bread is 190 degrees F the bread is done baking.

When the 15 minute baking time is done remove the baking tray from the oven.

Brush the top of the loaf with melted butter.

Let the loaf cool to close to room temperature, then cut of some slices, butter them and really enjoy eating the bread!

Ray's Rye Bread - ☺♥♥♥☺ T

This sandwich type of bread is yummy when it is made properly. That means, among other things, the finished product should be slightly moist but not compacted. My goal was to make a perfect rye bread with enough gluten in it to stay soft and slightly chewy. Think about a stack of tender, moist, hot pastrami with melted Swiss cheese on top, or simply a similar stack of corned beef, with the sandwich bread grilled on the outside (using a thin coating of butter and a hot skillet) and coated on the soft interior side with deli brown mustard. You want rye bread robust enough to hold the contents with a texture that is not dry.

My experience with rye breads available at the supermarket isn't all that good. Typically the bread is sliced too thin, the loaves are rather small and expensive, and the bread isn't strong enough structurally to hold a nice large stack of steaming, hot pastrami, etc. The slices of bread tend to break due to their thinness and drier texture. I intended to (and did) fix all of those deficiencies.

Based on what I did, some people would say I made a version of pumpernickel bread, because I used whole rye flour. But given at least four varieties of rye flour I simply chose the one reputed to have the best taste. I got lucky. The brand of whole rye flour I bought is excellent. Also, I used the best bread flour and also high quality gluten (see below).

Okay, it came out as perfect rye bread for hot sandwiches. It is also delicious at room temperature simply with a light spread of butter, and especially as rye toast. You might also enjoy ham and Swiss on rye with mustard as a cold sandwich. Anyway, now you too can make it and enjoy it.

Note that the dough, when forming initially in the electric mixer bowl using the paddle accessory, will be fairly dense, so you may have to process it in two batches. I use a powerful Kitchen-Aid® stand mixer with a 6 quart stainless steel bowl, and any mixer you might use of lower power or size will require you to make the dough in two batches. Only mix as long as needed to form the dough, which will happen quickly once all of the flours have been added to the mixing bowl.

Put the dough hook accessory on the electric mixer and knead the dough for about eight minutes.

You will put the kneaded dough into a 3 quart bowl that contains a small amount of canola oil. Then roll the dough in the oil to coat the surface of the dough. Then cover the bowl with plastic wrap and keep it in a warm place. I use a proofing oven that operates at 100 degrees F.

Allow as much time as needed for the dough to rise, both initially and just before baking. That means the rising times may (likely will) be two hours instead of one hour, especially for the first rise.

Finally, note that I have put a steaming step into my recipe that begins when the risen dough is put into the oven to bake. Initial steaming has multiple benefits, but the reason I do it is to get a perfectly crispy crust.

Ingredients:

2 1/2 tsp. of Active Dry Yeast (I buy jars of Fleischmann's® active dry yeast)

1 1/2 cups of lukewarm water (100 degrees F)

2 cups of King Arthur® bread flour (To get the desirable extra gluten of their bread flour [12.7%])

1/2 cup of Anthony's® Premium Vital Wheat gluten (This is used [generously] because rye flour only has a small amount of a type of gluten [secalin] that is poor in helping dough rise)

1 1/2 cups of rye flour (Use whole rye flour if you can. I use "One in a Mill®" brand imported whole rye flour)

1 1/2 tsp. of sea salt

2 tbsp. of brown sugar

2 tbsp. of dark Karo® syrup

3 tbsp. of canola oil, divided

1 or 2 tbsp. of caraway seeds

Pam® canola oil spray

Directions:

Mix the yeast with the lukewarm water in a large (6 quart) electric mixer bowl. Let it rest for 10 minutes.

Whisk together the three flours with the salt in a separate 3 quart bowl.

Add 2 tbsp. of the canola oil and the rest of the ingredients (except the Pam® spray) to the electric mixer bowl and mix on low speed for two minutes.

Gradually add two cups of the flour and salt mixture to the electric mixer bowl while mixing on low speed.

Mix for three minutes, then slowly add the remaining flour and salt mixture, then mix on low to medium speed until a dough forms. Use a spatula if needed, temporarily stopping the mixing, to force all ingredients down to the bottom of the mixing bowl and away from the inside surface.

A fairly dense dough will form. If it is too dense for the electric mixer to process with the paddle accessory then do it in two batches.

Put the kneading accessory (dough hook) on the electric mixer and knead all of the dough for eight minutes on low to medium speed.

Put the remaining one tablespoon of canola oil (or maybe a bit more) into a 3 quart bowl, spread it around the bottom and a couple inches up the inside of the bowl.

Transfer the kneaded dough to that bowl, rolling it around to coat the dough surface with the oil.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it into a proofing oven (100 degrees F) or set it aside in a warm place, for one to two hours, until it has doubled in volume.

Punch down the risen dough gently and put it into a bread pan or baking dish (4" x 12" or 5" x 9") that has been sprayed with Pam® (unless you are using a non-stick baking pan). Form the dough to fill the pan/baking dish end to end.

Spray the top of the dough lightly with Pam®.

Cover the bread pan/baking dish loosely with plastic wrap. That starts the period of the second and final rise of the dough.

Put a 12" diameter cast iron skillet on a low oven shelf. Be sure to use/put a baking stone on a middle oven shelf for the bread pan/baking dish if you have one. It provides evenly distributed heat.

Preheat the baking oven to 350 degrees F when the dough in the bread pan has been rising for one hour. Hold the oven temperature at 350 degrees F for a minimum of twenty minutes to allow extra time for the baking stone and the cast iron skillet temperatures to actually be at 350 degrees F.

Let the bread finish rising on a counter or in the proofing (not baking) oven for one to two hours. Check the bread after one hour, and if it is fully risen then get ready to start the baking. It is important to allow enough rising time for the top of the dough to be 1" or 1 1/2" higher than the top of the baking pan/dish.

Remove the plastic wrap from the risen dough and cut a series of shallow slits in the dough (using a lame if you have one or else a very sharp knife) about one inch apart, side to side.

Heat 1 1/2 cups of water in a Pyrex® or similar microwave safe 16 ounce glass measuring cup to boiling in the microwave oven, about 3 minutes.

Put the baking pan/risen/slit dough into the oven on a middle shelf, on the baking stone (if you have one).

Pour the boiling water into the cast iron skillet and immediately close the oven door.

Bake the bread for 30 to 35 minutes or until it has an internal temperature of 195 degrees F to 205 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer to test the internal bread temperature by puncturing the top of the center of the loaf with the tip of the thermometer probe and sticking it into the center of the loaf of bread.

Remove the rye bread from the oven, invert the loaf pan/baking dish and let the bread fall gently onto a cooling rack on a wood cutting board. Turn the bread upright. Set the baking pan/dish aside.

Allow the bread to cool to room temperature. This will take about two hours.

Store the cooled bread in a cellophane (or plastic) wrapper, then in a plastic bag type of bread wrapper, and seal them tightly with a twist tie. Double wrapping the bread preserves freshness.

When you are ready to eat some of the bread then slice it as thick as you like (1/2" to 5/8") with a bread knife. Then close the bread wrappers and seal them with the twist tie.

From what I've read, this type of bread has a short shelf life of about three days ... unless you seal it and freeze it. My rye bread is fine for at least five days. I'm smiling.

In some future experiment I will use calcium propionate and potassium sorbate to avoid any possible mold growth and to extend freshness shelf life. That variation worked well when making Scali bread and I'm betting it will work great with rye bread too. But for now I am thoroughly enjoying what I made.

Enjoy! This bread is very tasty with perfect texture.

Scali Bread - ☺♥♥♥☺

Scali bread is an Italian type of bread with a crispy crust and a soft center. It was created by the Scali family in Boston, MA, and has become a regional specialty. Yes, it is popular, and for a very good reason. It is delicious!

I studied different Scali bread recipes via the Internet and decided to combine the best of the choices of ingredients and directions for making the bread. And then I decided to modify my composite recipe to create some needed shelf life changes in Scali bread. But if I modify the recipe to provide longer shelf life then I also have to address and avoid possible formation of mold. I figured I can improve that situation in major ways and this recipe is the result. It is fairly complex, but most definitely worth doing, especially if you already know how to make different breads. One item I skipped by intent ... the braiding of the dough to create a braided loaf of bread, for that is purely cosmetic.

This recipe is not for beginners as it entails many procedural steps, two days to complete making the bread, some special equipment, and two preservative chemicals and one risen bread stabilizer not typically found in home kitchens. That said, this is quite the educational, experimental recipe for educated/dedicated home chefs/bakers, ergo those of us who love perfection! And the two special chemicals, the risen bread stabilizer and other special ingredients like vital wheat gluten can be bought easily and cheaply via Amazon®. My overall goal was/is to make excellent Scali bread with a longer than normal shelf life, for supermarket bakery Scali breads typically degrade in quality within a day or two after the wrapper is first opened.

I decided to make Scali bread for two special reasons: 1) My family loves fresh, crispy crust and soft interior Scali Bread, buttered, and 2) I decided to use some of Pepperidge Farm's® methods for improving bread quality and shelf life, specifically the use of calcium propionate, potassium sorbate (or in their case sorbic acid), and a second bread wrapper inside a regular soft polyethylene wrapper. The idea is the Pepperidge Farm® breads remain soft and do not become moldy for weeks, if at all. What a giant improvement over typical store brands of bread ... also more expensive but worth every cent. It makes sense to follow their lead and improve the quality (enjoyment) of bread baked at home.

Beyond those changes I intended to increase the chewiness of the Scali bread by including [adding] vital wheat gluten in this recipe and reducing the corresponding amount of bread flour. The goal is to have gluten be around 15% of the total flour weight, and this is achieved by knowing the gluten content of the flour you are using and then replacing some of it in the recipe with 100% gluten so that the total flour weight remains the same but with the higher

percentage of gluten in the total weight. King Arthur® bread flour is 12.7% gluten as purchased so within this recipe I needed to replace 1/4 cup of bread flour with 1/4 cup of gluten to get the total gluten amount up to 15%. You can use any all purpose flour or special flour where you know the percentage of gluten and then adjust the quantity of extra gluten as needed. Typical all purpose flours have about 9% gluten. I now use Ascorbic Acid also, at the rate of 75 parts per million (ppm), based on the weight of the flour, or 68 milligrams of ascorbic acid in this recipe for 908 grams of flour. Ascorbic acid works to maximize the size and stability of the bread dough while it is rising and after it has risen. That should accommodate the extra gluten and avoid having a dense texture in the baked bread.

Potassium sorbate kills yeast cells (as well as molds) so the only way to mix it into the dough successfully [which we will not be doing] is by using lipid coated crystals of potassium sorbate, in which there is no contact between the yeast and potassium sorbate until the heat of baking melts the lipid. Of course, by that point the yeast has already performed its function of causing the bread to rise. The lipid coated product is referred to as encapsulated potassium sorbate, and it is available to commercial bakeries but I have not found a source for the person baking at home. Instead, I have to lightly spray a solution of potassium sorbate in water all over the surface of the Scali bread immediately after it is baked, so the heat of the crust will quickly evaporate the water, leaving a fine and even coating of potassium sorbate everywhere on the surface of the loaf of Scali bread. The spraying approach is also used by many commercial bakeries.

One of the two Scali loaves made in this recipe will be spray coated with one ounce of potassium sorbate solution, so I need 0.001 times 24 ounces of potassium sorbate (weight of one loaf of bread) to get a total of one tenth of one percent potassium sorbate by product weight for one of the two loaves. So the ounce of the liquid mixture will contain one ounce of water plus 0.672 grams or 672 milligrams of potassium sorbate. Yes, it pays to have a milligram scale in your kitchen to supplement the ones that weigh in grams and ounces and pounds. For ease of handling it is better to make four ounces of the potassium sorbate solution and use that in a 6 ounce spray bottle better sized to your hand. Then, just keep an eye on the amount of liquid sprayed on to the baked bread so as not to exceed about one ounce. Following that thought you need about 2688 milligrams or 2.69 grams of potassium sorbate in 4 ounces of water.

The second loaf will not be sprayed with potassium sorbate solution so it can be used as a control to determine differences in shelf life (overall bread quality and mold resistance) between the two loaves during a two week testing period.

Here are the interesting results of my first experiment ... no mold on either loaf at 15 days after baking them. And bread quality was surprisingly good in taste and moisture and overall in avoiding staleness as a result of using the Pepperidge Farm® double bag method. The loaf with no potassium sorbate showed mold, finally, at day 19 after baking. The loaf with potassium sorbate solution sprayed on had no mold at day 19. I finished eating that loaf as toast on day 19. What I recognized in bread texture was the need to reduce the amount of olive oil, lower the total gluten percentage, and add ascorbic acid next time around to enhance and maintain dough rising right before baking. So I modified the recipe you see below with those changes. End of experiment number one. I now have to execute experiment number two with the changes I made.

The term Pate Fermentee used in this recipe is simply the French way of saying pre-fermented dough, which is similar to but not identical to what we often call sponge in bread making. Let's proceed now with making the Scali bread ... and remember to weigh the amounts of flour instead of relying on measuring cup accuracy.

Ingredients: (makes two, one and one half pound loaves)

One recipe of Basic Dough with Pate Fermentee, recipe follows

Raw sesame seeds, 3/8 cup or as needed

Now we get down to the dough ingredients ...

Basic Dough including the Pate Fermentee:

One recipe of refrigerated Pate Fermentee (1 3/4 pounds or 795 grams), shown below these basic dough ingredients

1 1/2 cups of 80 degrees F water plus 1.6 grams of calcium propionate, mixed to dissolve the calcium propionate [which will provide one tenth of one percent calcium propionate by weight of the baked bread].

1 teaspoon of white distilled vinegar (5% acidity) [used to acidify the solution and later the dough so the calcium propionate will be maximally effective - pH 5.5 or lower in a loaf of baked bread]

If you can, measure the pH after the liquids are mixed and if necessary increase the amount of vinegar to obtain a pH of 4.5 or lower. The pH of the liquid should measure around 4.5.

3 1/4 cups of King Arthur® bread flour (422 grams)

1/4 cup of vital wheat gluten (32 grams) [You can buy it via Amazon®. Look for Anthony's Premium Vital Wheat Gluten®]

1 teaspoon of instant dry yeast

2 1/4 teaspoons of Kosher salt

68 milligrams of Ascorbic Acid powder

1/4 cup of powdered dry milk

2 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

Pate Fermentee: (Make this first and refrigerate it, covered, overnight)

3 1/2 cups of King Arthur® bread flour (454 grams)

1 teaspoon of instant dry yeast

1 1/3 cups of room temperature (72 degrees F) water

Special equipment:

Baking stone(s), bench scraper/pastry knife, two 11"x17" metal baking sheets and two 11"x17" sheets of parchment paper.

One electronic scale that measures in ounces and grams, and a second electronic scale that measures in milligrams.

A pH meter [optional, but nice, and useful in other complex or chemically sensitive recipes for many types of foods]. My advice? Get one and learn how to use it.

One six ounce spray bottle (for the potassium sorbate solution) and one twelve ounce spray bottle (for plain water to moisten the dough prior to coating it with sesame seeds).

Cellophane and polyethylene bread bags and twist ties for each baked loaf of Scali bread.

Directions:

For the Pate Fermentee:

Whisk together the flour and yeast in a large electric mixer bowl, .

Add the water and mix on low speed until it is incorporated, about 3 minutes.

Knead the dough by hand for about two minutes to create a uniform density and moisture dough.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it in a warm place (about 75 degrees F). [I prefer using the 100 degrees F proofing option of my ovens.]

Let the dough ferment for 1 hour.

Refrigerate the dough for at least 12 hours and up to 24 hours in the covered bowl.

When ready, the Pate Fermentee will be roughly doubled in size.

For the Basic Dough mixed with the Pate Fermentee:

Mix the water, calcium propionate, and vinegar, then if you have a pH meter check the pH and if necessary increase the amount of vinegar. The pH should measure about 4.5 with the given mixture of water, calcium propionate and distilled white vinegar of 5% acidity.

In the electric mixer bowl, combine the pate fermentee, water mixed with calcium propionate and vinegar, and the olive oil. Use the electric mixer with a dough hook on medium low speed to begin mixing those ingredients.

In another bowl, whisk together the flour, yeast, powdered milk, ascorbic acid and Kosher salt. Add the flour mixture to the pate fermentee mixture gradually while mixing until the dough is cohesive, about 3 to 5 minutes. Allow the dough to rest for 10 minutes.

Knead the dough by using the electric mixer with the dough hook on medium speed for five minutes. Then remove the dough hook and the mixing bowl from the mixer.

Following kneading, put a teaspoon of olive oil onto the inner surface of the mixing bowl and spread it around so the underside and sides of the dough that touch the bowl do not later stick to the surface of the electric mixer bowl.

Cover the mixing bowl with plastic wrap [put a light smear of butter on the plastic wrap to avoid any possible later sticking of dough to the plastic wrap].

Place the bowl in a warm place (around 75 degrees F.) and let the dough rise for a total of 1 hour and 45 minutes. [The 100 degrees F proofing oven is better]

After the first 45 minutes, fold the dough and turn it over in the bowl. (It may somewhat deflate the dough, but that is only temporary.)

Let the dough rise, undisturbed, for 1 hour more. (The dough will rise considerably.)

Coat your hands lightly with flour, then turn the dough out from the mixing bowl onto a lightly floured wood cutting board. Let the surface of the dough get a light coating of flour to make handling of it easier.

Shape the dough gently into an approximate cylinder shape about 18 inches long.

Cut the dough into 2 equal size pieces with a bench scraper (pastry knife). Lightly round the ends of each piece and let them rest on the work surface for 10 minutes.

Shape the rested dough halves into French bread loaves [about 15" long and 2" to 3" in diameter and rounded on each end] and let them rest for 5 minutes.

Spray the loaves lightly on the top surface with water, and sprinkle sesame seeds generously onto the moistened dough.

Transfer the loaves to the backs of 2 baking sheets lined with parchment paper, then cover each lightly with lightly butter smeared plastic wrap.

Put a large cast iron skillet on a low oven shelf. If you have a high oven shelf remove it from the oven. [My addition to this recipe. More details follow.]

Place a baking stone [or stones] on a middle shelf in your oven and preheat the oven to 460 degrees F. Then change it to 450 degrees F on a convection setting.

Measure and dispense 2690 milligrams of pure potassium sorbate powder into a 6 ounce spray bottle. Add 1/2 cup of water and shake the bottle to mix the ingredients. Set the bottle aside.

Put the covered loaves of dough in a warm place, around 72 degrees F or warmer and let them rise for 60 to 90 minutes, until the dough has doubled in volume. Then carefully remove and discard the piece of plastic wrap from one loaf.

Working with 1 loaf at a time, slide the Scali dough, still on the parchment paper, onto the hot baking stone. How? Put the forward edge of the baking sheet near the back edge of the baking stone and tilt the other end of the baking sheet up to help the parchment paper and dough slide off the baking sheet, which helps cause the proper placement of the dough on the baking stone. The idea is you don't want to be trying to position the parchment paper and dough by hand inside the very hot oven.

Pour 3/4 cup of plain water into the preheated cast iron skillet, quickly close the oven door, and bake the bread until it is crusty and gold in color, about 30

minutes. Rotate the bread, front to back after 15 minutes of baking by sliding out the oven shelf and lifting and using two corners of the parchment paper to rotate the bread front to back. Check the bread after a total baking time of 25 minutes. Do not let the sesame seeds darken beyond medium tan in color. The bread is done baking when it is a medium gold in color. Note that the steam produced from the skillet during the early part of the baking will greatly aid in making a crispy bread crust.

Transfer the baked Scali bread to a cooling rack and immediately spray that first loaf all over with a fine mist using the spray bottle solution of potassium sorbate in water. Make certain the entire surface of the bread [top and bottom, etc.] is sprayed evenly. The heat of the crust will quickly evaporate the water. Note that only about one ounce of the solution should be required for spraying.

Let the Scali bread cool to room temperature on the cooling rack.

Repeat the plastic wrap removal, baking and cooling with the remaining loaf of Scali dough but do not spray the second loaf with potassium sorbate solution after baking.

Wrap each cooled loaf in a cellophane bag, then in a polyethylene bread bag and use twist ties to seal both the inner and outer bread bags. Identify the bag that contains the loaf of Scali bread that was treated with the potassium sorbate solution with a marking pen like a Sharpie®.

Enjoy! Cut thin slices from both loaves during the next two weeks, one or two slices from each loaf each day, and see if mold forms on the remaining bread in/on either loaf. Also, pay attention to the quality of the bread in freshness (softness, moistness) and taste as the experiment proceeds across the two weeks. Be sure to record your findings each day.

Draw your conclusions after the two week testing period, and if necessary modify the amounts of calcium propionate and potassium sorbate to be used the next time you make Scali bread. But do not exceed three tenths of one percent of the weight of the baked loaves for each preservative chemical.

Congratulations! If you completed making the Scali bread successfully you can now consider yourself to be experienced and ready to tackle other complex bread baking.

Sesame Semolina Batard - ☺♥

A few years ago my great friend Linda Lange introduced me to an exceptionally tasty and great texture sesame semolina bread from a Wilmington DE bakery named The Black Lab®. It was so good I silently vowed to learn how to make it. Recently I found a bakery in Milford NH named The Good Loaf® that made the identical product. My, was it good! But I didn't like the price so I went looking for a really good recipe. I wanted to make this stuff myself!

This recipe is from the Internet and I just tried it with our modifications with great success. It is the same type of artisan bread as the great sesame semolina batard I bought recently at a local bakery. But for \$6 per loaf at the bakery, or \$7.84 per loaf at the supermarket, I figured I could enjoy the bread and save a lot of money by making it at home. Thus, this was a new quest for perfection, very new for me, as I had no useful prior knowledge of bread making. I am thrilled with the results. And the cost is about \$1.30 per loaf.

In this recipe we get to see two types of unit conversions that demonstrate the value of the kitchen scale discussed earlier in this book in the "Equipment and Planning" section. First we convert grams of water to ounces, which as a liquid measure is 28 grams per ounce. Then we convert a dry weight of salt from grams to a volume and weight equivalent in teaspoons, and that works out to about 7.5 grams per teaspoon. Finally we use a dry measure for flour, in which we convert from grams to pounds and then to volume, in which 151 grams of flour is 1/3 of a pound (454 grams is one pound), which turns out to be one cup.

The general idea is that recipes from around the world will typically be shown with ingredient amounts/units of measure as commonly used in the country of origin for recipes. Thus we have to perform conversions to our way of using weights and measures. The kitchen scale is typically designed to measure weight in both the English and Metric systems, so it is invaluable to the home chef.

Sponge: (This is what you make first.)

A sponge is a wet combination of flour, water and yeast that after eight hours of fermentation is combined with other bread ingredients to make very superior bread in taste and texture.

Dissolve a 1/4 oz. package of active dried yeast or instant yeast in 1 cup of 110°F water. Use 1/4 cup of the resulting suspension for the sponge.

➔ (The extra $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of yeast mixture can be used with some flour and sugar to create a starter for other types of bread. Simply cover it with plastic wrap and store it in the refrigerator. If it isn't used within a few days it will sour, which is fine if you want to make a sourdough bread. Remember to keep feeding it a teaspoon of flour every few days to keep it active.)

Water: 135 gm ... which is divided by 28 to get ounces, or, 4 and $\frac{3}{4}$ ounces of water.

Flour: 150 gm of Bread flour plus 2 tbsp. high gluten flour. There is 454 grams in one pound, so the conversion yields about $\frac{1}{3}$ lb. of Bread flour, which as a volume measurement is one cup.

Dough:

Durum Flour, 250 gm (Semolina) which is $1 \frac{2}{3}$ cups

High Gluten Flour, 50 gm which is $\frac{1}{3}$ cup

Water, 205 gm which is a bit more than $\frac{7}{8}$ cup

Active dried yeast or instant yeast, $\frac{1}{4}$ oz.

Sponge from above

Salt, 9 gm, which is $1 \frac{1}{4}$ tsp.

Sesame seeds, 1 cup

I purchased Semolina and high gluten flours at excellent prices at Fisher's Country Store® in Cessna PA. Ditto sesame seeds. They have and (used to) ship food products you might have difficulty finding in your supermarket, and certainly for better prices. Enough said. Use the Internet.

Directions:

The night before baking, mix the sponge and ferment it for 8 hours in a warm place, as in a 75°F room, covered tightly. We shortened this process by using a 100°F proofing oven for 4 hours, so unlike the given recipe we were able to bake the same day.

The day of baking, combine the dough flours and water, mix and rest, covered, for 15-60 minutes. That procedure is called autolyzing, and it softens and moistens the flour(s) so that later required kneading time can be shorter, which will result in softer bread that has risen well. To save time, this can be done while the sponge is in its last hour of fermenting.

Mix the yeast listed for the dough recipe with the sponge and add that mixture to the rested dough. Mix for 5 minutes in the electric mixer with a dough hook. The dough should clean the sides of a stand mixer and the mixture should be uniform and glutinous, though it will not be that way when you first start mixing.

Sprinkle the salt on the dough and mix for another 2 minutes. The dough should be sticky but not "gloppy." The dough may be gloppy, so you can mix for up to 2 minutes more, but then go with it, however it comes out. Over mixing/kneading will hurt bread quality.

Scrape the dough into a bowl 3 times its volume (or leave it in the mixing bowl!), cover the bowl and let it ferment for 2 to 3 hours, folding the dough over on itself about six times, every 20 minutes for the first hour. (The dough will start coming together after a short time and it will still be sticky but smooth and puffy after 2 hours in a 75° F kitchen.) We used a 100°F proofing oven and got great results. Note that you will need to dust your hands lightly with flour to handle the sticky dough for folding. Do not intentionally put flour onto the dough to make it easy to handle or the finished bread will be tough due to excess flour.

Preheat the oven to 400°F and prepare your steaming apparatus of choice. You can use a 9"x13"x2" oblong glass baking dish on a rack under the bread rack with about one inch of boiling water in the dish just before you put the bread into the oven.

Scrape the dough onto your counter onto parchment paper. Pre-form the dough into two balls with flat bottoms. Let them rest for 20-30 minutes to relax the dough, covered, then form them into batards (slightly elongated fat loaves) or regular loaves as we did.

Roll the loaves in sesame seeds and place them, seam side down, on the parchment paper. Cover them well and allow them to expand until quite puffy. This might take anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes. Again, a proofing oven is a great way to accelerate the rising process. Do note, however, that we keep our house temperature at 70°F, not 75°F, so the proofing oven is also compensating for that environmental variable.

Spray the loaves lightly with water mist from a hand held spray bottle and score them on the top with one cut from end to end, about ¾ inch deep. Hold the knife at an angle to create what is called a nice "ear" along the top of the length of the finished baked bread.

Transfer the batards to the oven by sliding the parchment paper holding the batards onto a baking stone that has been preheated in the oven, or by sliding the parchment paper onto a flat cookie sheet (one without sides). Bake the bread

with steam for 15 minutes then continue to bake it up to another 30 minutes (without steam) until the bread is done baking. It should be golden-brown in color, and provide a hollow sound when thumped on the bottom. The internal temperature should be 205° F.

Cool the batards completely on a cooling rack before slicing.

Delicious!

→ Janet offered a very helpful suggestion, for the next time we bake this bread. She said the loaves will rise best if we confine them by putting the parchment paper into glass loaf pans, and then the dough onto the parchment paper during the final rising. That will result in a taller loaf, as otherwise the soft dough rises as much sideways as vertically if the dough is not contained in some shaped container. When it is time to bake the bread the loaf pans are eliminated and the parchment flattened for placement of it and the risen dough into the oven.

Thanks ... that is a great idea.

Sub Rolls - ☺♥

I've been looking for a decent recipe to make sub rolls, which in my opinion should be crisp or slightly crunchy on the outside and very chewy on the inside. This is in response to the lack of decent sub rolls in supermarkets and retail bakeries. The scratch recipe I provide next is excellent, but I have also figured out a lazy man's trick to have a very nice sub roll without 95% of the labor of making the scratch recipe. I provide the lazy man's variation at the end of this make it from scratch recipe. Be sure to check that out.

The recipe below is one I found on the Internet and have modified considerably ... specifically to use gluten flour to make the dough extra chewy, and steam from adding water to a very hot cast iron skillet to make certain the crust of the rolls comes out crisp/slightly crunchy. I also doubled the amount of sea salt.

Note that this recipe is similar to that for French bread in ingredients. Also for results. The difference is in loaf size. Think of four perfect loaves, each 12" long and 3" wide.

Looking at the recipe picture you will notice I used a curved, perforated, non-stick steel baking tray with curved indents for making four sub rolls ... or using more ingredients, four larger loaves of French bread. I purchased that baking tray via Amazon®. Actually, I got two trays for \$16.49. What a fine purchase!

You can use instead a flat baking sheet covered with parchment paper. The loaves/rolls may spread out more in width, which is okay for bread but is not recommended for sub rolls.

Below I show the weight of bread flour per cup to be used in this recipe, as well as the total volume in cups. Different types of flour weigh different amounts per cup, and the density of the flour when you put it into a one cup container may vary (loose or packed). For these reasons the only way to be truly accurate in the amount of flour you use is to have a kitchen scale and weigh the flour. Thus, bread flour weighs 5.5 ounces per cup, all purpose flour weighs 5.0 ounces per cup, gluten flour weighs 4.0 ounces per cup, and cake flour weighs 4.5 ounces per cup. Note that the given weights per cup for all but the gluten flour come from J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's excellent food science book, *The Food Lab*©.

Here is one additional very important learning from developing this recipe ... if you wrap a completed sub in plastic wrap and refrigerate it for two to three hours the rich combination of scents and flavors of the different ingredients merge/mix to create a super tasting and smelling sub. I was pleasantly surprised

by that change of practice from the normal practice of eating a sub immediately when it is made. Now I understand why patience is a virtue!

Ingredients: (makes four 12" long 3" wide sub rolls)

4 cups of King Arthur® bread flour (one cup of bread flour equals 5.5 ounces by weight. It is more accurate to measure the flour by weight instead of volume.)

1/2 cup of gluten flour (2 ounces by weight)

2 tsp. of sea salt

1 1/2 Tbsp. of active dry bread yeast (not instant yeast)

1/2 tsp. of sugar

2 cups of warm (110 degrees F) water (if your tap water is treated chemically then use bottled water)

1 extra large or jumbo egg whisked with 1 tsp. of water

1/3 cup of raw sesame seeds

1/2 cup of water for steaming the dough in the oven

Directions:

Turn the oven on to a proofing cycle (100 degrees F). If your oven lacks a proofing cycle you can let the dough rise in a warm area of the kitchen, but for roughly twice the amount of recommended rising time shown below.

Line a flat baking sheet without raised sides with parchment paper. Alternatively, use a special perforated curved loaf type steel nonstick baking sheet with four loaf positions instead of the baking sheet with parchment paper.

Put two cups of water and the 1/2 tsp. of sugar into a one quart Pyrex® measuring container. Heat the water in the microwave oven for about 30 seconds, until the temperature is 110 degrees F (use an instant read thermometer). Delay using the water if it is hotter than 110 degrees F or you will likely kill the yeast. Simply stir the water/sugar mixture and wait for a minute or two until the temperature drops to 110 degrees F.

Add the yeast to the water/sugar mixture and stir until all of the yeast is moistened/mixed in. Let the yeast proof for 10 minutes. It should be noticeably foamy. If not it is bad yeast or the water you used was too hot.

Combine 3 cups of the bread flour (16.5 ounces by weight) and the 1/2 cup of the gluten flour (2.0 ounces by weight) and the salt in a large electric mixer bowl. Mix briefly on low speed to combine those ingredients.

Pour the yeast and water mixture into the flour and salt mixture and mix using the electric mixer on low to medium speed until the ingredients are combined.

The dough should look shaggy at this point. Add the final cup of bread flour (5.5 ounces by weight) and mix on medium speed for a minute or two until the dough begins to be less sticky and more smooth. You may need to use a soft spatula to get all the flour from the inside surface of the bowl to mix into the dough.

Use a dough hook with the electric mixer and knead the dough on medium speed for about three to four minutes.

Divide the dough into four parts on a lightly floured wood cutting board. A pastry cutter is a great tool to use for that task. Roll each part with a rolling pin into a rectangle, about 6" x 10". Use flour as necessary to keep the dough from sticking to the rolling pin.

Tightly roll up each rectangle with light squeezing to form a 10" long log. Pinch the seam closed along the length and also on the ends of the log, then place each log onto the parchment paper covered baking sheet, seam-side down with 1 1/2" spacing between the rolls. Or, simply put each log into the center of a curved loaf baking sheet position, seam-side down.

Cover the four sub rolls loosely with a damp (moist but not wet) dish towel and place the baking sheet into the proofing oven (or on a warm kitchen counter).

Set a timer for 30 minutes if you are using a proofing oven. Otherwise let the dough rise for 45 to 60 minutes, until it is doubled in volume.

Remove the baking sheet with the raised rolls from the oven, and remove the damp dish towel from the rolls, then set the oven temperature to 425 degrees F.

Place a cast iron skillet on the lowest oven shelf. Be sure to have flat baking stones (about 12" by 20" total area) on a higher shelf.

Brush the tops of the raised unbaked sub rolls lightly with the whisked egg wash, then sprinkle them generously with the raw sesame seeds.

Gently place only the sub rolls on the parchment paper into the oven onto the baking stones when the oven is completely preheated (Allow an extra five minutes of heating after the oven indicates a temperature of 425 degrees F to assure the cast iron skillet and the baking stones have heated to that

temperature). You can slide the parchment paper and rolls together from the baking sheet onto the stones surface if you have used a baking sheet without raised sides.

Alternatively, simply place the curved baking sheet with the four sub rolls onto the hot stones surface. Note that you really want to buy this device. It works beautifully for handling the raised dough and keeping the rolls exactly 3" wide during baking.

Pour the 1/2 cup of water for steaming into the hot cast iron skillet. Then close the oven.

Bake the rolls at 425° for 20 minutes, or until the tops are browned and crusty.

Remove the rolls from the oven. Either lift out the curved baking tray or slide the parchment paper and sub rolls from the hot stone surface onto a flat baking sheet, holding on to a corner of the parchment paper to slide it and the rolls on to the baking sheet.

Allow the rolls to cool on a counter or cutting board for 20 to 30 minutes. Then use the rolls to make the subs, for wrapping and storing the rolls will result later in having a softer crust.

Note: The best way to prepare the roll when making a sub is to cut out long strips of the bread to create pockets to hold the sub contents. Otherwise the sub tends to dump out some of the ingredients when you eat it.

Make an end to end cut lengthwise on one side of a roll to a depth of about 2/3 of the width of the roll, using a serrated bread knife, then open the roll with some tearing of interior dough. Then use the bread knife to cut out a long strip of dough (roughly 1/2" deep by 1" wide by 10" long) on each side of the inside of the roll.

As for sub contents we like to use four types of meat ... domestic ham, prosciutto ham, Genoa salami and hot Capicola. For cheese we use a well flavored but soft provolone. I like to make my own mixture of olive oil, minced garlic, oregano and salt ... a pint at a time, and I use a pastry brush to spread that mixture on the inside of the sub roll before putting in the cheese and the meat. The exact olive oil mixture is shown in "The Sub" recipe in the "Sandwich Stuff" section of Food Nirvana.

When it comes to vegetables personal preference matters. I use very thin tomato slices cut in half, very thinly sliced salad onion, chopped lettuce, sweet pickle slices and sliced hot yellow banana peppers.

Enjoy! Make great subs!

Now let's do a lazy man's variation to this recipe ...

If you have loaves of frozen bread that need to thaw and rise and then be baked, like Rhode's® frozen bread, you can make a fine sub roll and eliminate 95% of the labor of the above scratch recipe.

The frozen bread requires anywhere from four to seven hours of thawing and rising time prior to baking. Typically you put a light coat of butter in a glass loaf pan and let the frozen bread loaf thaw and rise in that pan (covered with some buttered plastic wrap to avoid losing moisture), remove the plastic wrap after the rising is done and then bake the bread at 350 degrees F for 20 to 25 minutes.

I got a sneaky idea for changing that procedure, such that the end result would be a fine sub roll instead of a traditional loaf of bread.

I followed the normal procedure for thawing a frozen loaf in a glass loaf pan in a proofing oven. Done that way the bread is thawed but not risen after three hours.

Now here is the clever part ... take the thawed dough and reshape it on the piece of buttered plastic wrap into a long shape of a sub roll. Place the dough in one of the positions on a curved baking sheet (described in the scratch recipe above). Cover the dough with a moist (but not wet) dish towel (or in this instance with only one loaf to rise, a few moist paper towels) and let it rise for one hour in the proofing oven.

Remove the dish/paper towel and gently brush some egg wash onto the top and upper sides and ends of the risen dough, then sprinkle on raw sesame seeds. Cut three or four shallow diagonal slices (about 1/4" deep) into the top of the dough, spaced about 4 inches apart, so the sub roll doesn't split along the top during baking.

Set the oven at 400 degrees F and put a cast iron skillet in the oven on a low shelf. When the temperature reaches 400 degrees F put the curved baking sheet into the oven on a higher shelf, pour 1/3 cup of water into the cast iron skillet and close the oven door.

Bake the sub roll at 400 degrees F for 20 to 25 minutes, until the top of the sub roll is golden brown, then remove the curved baking sheet from the oven and let the sub roll cool to room temperature.

You now have an excellent sub roll without any significant labor to make it. And I know you will smile broadly as you enjoy it!

Tuscan Pane Bread - ☺♥♥♥☺ T

This Tuscan Pane Bread, or Pane Toscana, will have you coming back for more, and more. It is addictive. It has a crunchy and crispy crust and a soft crumb. Also a chewiness to give it texture.

I became interested in this type of bread after tasting a few versions sold by my local supermarket that were superb. You might guess that I checked out the ingredients they used, and then I decided to look for recipes.

I found the original recipe for what I have created here on the Internet and I significantly modified the Internet version to incorporate vital wheat gluten, calcium propionate powder and potassium sorbate solution. I also incorporated some of the ingredients and techniques used in Food Nirvana for making Scali bread that promote stability in risen dough. Note that you can buy vital wheat gluten, calcium propionate and potassium sorbate cheaply via the Internet. I typically use Amazon®, or other vendor sites if I don't like the prices I see for any given item on Amazon®.

The gluten causes the bread texture to become somewhat chewy (which I love) and the chemicals prevent mold from forming for many days/weeks after baking if you keep the bread fresh by storing it inside a tightly closed wrapper. Or even better, inside a double wrapper, like Pepperidge Farm® breads. You can find and purchase cellophane and other types of bread wrappers via the Internet.

I use the term boule in this recipe, which simply means a round loaf of bread. I also use the term biga, which is the starter fermentation product, ergo a mixture of some of the flour with water, yeast and a few chemicals that develops/rises over six hours (or overnight) and thus precedes the final making of the dough.

Tuscan Pane can be made with or without salt. Salt is not used in the Italian version, but I love sea salt so I use it in this recipe.

Note: You need a high quality, strong electric stand mixer to process the dough in this recipe. I recommend using one of the large capacity Kitchen Aid® stand mixers, not the type with the tilting head.

If you want to make rolls instead of a boule then divide the dough into 12 pieces with a pastry cutter after the first rise, roll them to make them round, then put them on a parchment paper covered baking sheet for the final rise (covered with oiled plastic wrap), then bake uncovered for 20 to 25 minutes at 400 degrees F. Remember to pour the cup of water into the preheated cast iron skillet at the start of baking, as described below.

Ingredients: (makes one, approximately two and one half pound boule [round loaf])

2 tsp. of active dry yeast (or bread yeast)

2 cups of 100 degrees F warm water

4 1/2 cups of unbleached all purpose flour

3/4 cup of vital wheat gluten (buy Anthony's® brand via Amazon®)

2 tsp. of sea salt (optional, add during kneading)

1.5 grams of calcium propionate powder (a decent quality regular kitchen scale will measure in grams)

1 tsp. of distilled white vinegar (5% strength)

Potassium sorbate solution (spray lightly on the entire hot baked boule surface)

50 milligrams of ascorbic acid powder (You will need a milligram scale to measure that amount. Buy one via Amazon®. They are not expensive.)

1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil for the dough

2 tbsp. of canola oil for the baking sheet

1/3 cup of corn meal (to dust the canola oiled baking sheet)

Canola oil to coat one side of the plastic wrap used to cover rising dough

Directions:

Day one:

First make the biga or starter dough, per the next directions. If you make it early in the morning you will be able to bake the bread the same day.

Warm two cups of water in the microwave oven to a temperature not exceeding 105 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer.

Bloom the yeast and water and calcium propionate and ascorbic acid and vinegar in a large (6 or 7 cup) electric mixer bowl for five minutes. Then add in 1 1/2 cups of flour and 1/4 cup of vital wheat gluten and mix on low speed for three minutes. Use a soft spatula to assure all the ingredients have been mixed together. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and set it aside and let the biga rise in a warm place (72 to 80 degrees F), about 6 hours or overnight.

Make the potassium sorbate solution that you will use after the bread is baked by mixing 4 ounces of water with 2.5 grams of potassium sorbate powder. Put it into a 6 ounce spray bottle. Later you will use only about 1 ounce of the solution for one boule, spraying it on the crust of the boule' of hot baked bread.

Day two: (or six hours later on day one)

If you want to season your Tuscan Pane with herbs and spices, check out the Tuscan Seasoning recipe at the end of this recipe. The time to add the seasoning is during the mixing of the biga and the flour(s) and salt.

Add 3 cups of flour and 1/2 cup of vital wheat gluten and the salt to the biga, and first mix all of it with the regular mixer beater, and then knead the dough using the kneading accessory until a smooth but soft dough forms. It should come off the sides of the bowl and shouldn't feel sticky. Knead in the olive oil and continue kneading in the electric mixer for five minutes, with the speed set to medium.

Add additional flour, a little at a time, if the dough starts sticking to the bottom of the mixing bowl. You may add, in total, up to one half cup of additional flour, but do not add more than necessary to allow successful kneading.

Place the dough in a canola oil coated three quart size (or larger) bowl, flip the dough over to coat the top with oil, then cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and set it aside for two hours or until it is doubled in size. I was amazed to find it tripled in size! Use a proofing oven if you have one.

Lightly oil a baking sheet with canola oil and then dust it generously with some cornmeal. This will make it easy to lift the boule from the baking sheet after baking.

Punch down the dough, put it on a wood cutting board, and shape it into a round loaf shape by pulling on the sides and tucking them underneath. Set the boule on the baking sheet to rise.

Cover the boule with plastic wrap that has been oiled on one side with canola oil. Let the dough rise for 1 ½ hours or until the boule has doubled in size. Meanwhile, get the oven ready to bake the boule in the last half hour of the rising time.

Place a cast iron skillet on the lowest shelf of the oven. If you have baking stones then place them on a shelf in the middle part of the oven. About half an hour before baking, heat the oven to 425 degrees F, using a convection setting if you have that option.

Remove and discard the plastic wrap from the risen boule.

With a sharp knife or razor blade, make four shallow, 1/8" deep cuts, evenly spaced, from one side, over the top center of the boule, and down the other side.

Place the baking sheet with the boule into the preheated oven on the middle oven shelf, then immediately add one cup of hot tap water to the cast iron skillet you already placed on the lowest shelf of the oven. Close the oven door immediately. The steam generated is what causes the bread to have a crispy crust.

Bake the bread for 40 minutes. Turn the baking sheet around 180 degrees after 20 minutes of baking. Remove the baking sheet from the oven after the 40 minutes of baking time.

Immediately spray the hot boule of bread with one ounce of the potassium sorbate solution, over the entire surface, top and bottom, and place the bread on a rack to cool. Note that the moisture from the spray will totally evaporate very quickly, leaving an invisible, dry coating of potassium sorbate on the crust. You will not taste it later.

Store the cooled bread in a cellophane or other type of bread wrapper and use a twist tie to keep it tightly closed. Put that into a second bread wrapper and use a twist tie to keep it closed. Double wrapping works wonders for helping to keep bread fresh for many days/weeks.

After the bread has cooled you can slice it as you want with a serrated knife or a bread knife. Note also that sharp serrated electric knives can be used if you want to cut the entire boule and serve the slices in a toweled basket for a meal.

This bread is delicious simply buttered, or used for sandwiches of many types, or simply made into toast.

Enjoy!

Below is a nice recipe for Tuscan Seasoning that you might choose to include when you make Tuscan Pane.

Tuscan Seasoning

I looked on the Internet to find seasonings that might be added to my excellent, but mild, Tuscan Pane. Below is the best recipe I could find that used simple ingredients found in most kitchens where people cook yummy foods from scratch. The recipe makes a bulk amount of Tuscan Seasoning to use for making many different foods.

The herb and spice combination below imparts a lot of different flavors into whatever dish you happen to be making. In other words, go easy, like one

teaspoon, until you learn how much you prefer in your foods. In consideration of a two pound plus loaf of Tuscan Pane I suggest using two teaspoons of this seasoning when making the Tuscan Pane dough with the biga and the flour.

This recipe provides an easy way to create your own Tuscan Seasoning, and you are free to exclude any ingredient you choose, or to add others. Ergo, play in the kitchen.

Ingredients:

6 tablespoon of dried basil

3 tablespoon of sea salt flakes

2 tablespoon of dried rosemary

2 tablespoon of dried oregano

2 tablespoon of dried thyme

1 tablespoon of powdered garlic

2 tablespoons of fennel seed

2 tablespoons of ground black pepper

1 teaspoon of dried chili flakes (optional)

Directions:

Add the spices to a mixing bowl and mix with a whisk.

Store the mixture in an airtight spice jar or a mason jar for up to 6 months.

Use this seasoning sparingly (like only one teaspoon) in any dish until you have a sense of how much might be best.

Variation: You can powder the above mixture using a Magic Bullet® mixer if powdering is your preferred way to introduce the seasoning to what you are making.

Yummy!

Unleavened Bread - ☺♥

This recipe is a remnant of my childhood memories of communions in church. I kind of liked the bread as a kid ... of course, I always felt starved!

This recipe may or may not be the same as what was used during my childhood, but who cares as long as the result is good?

Ingredients:

2 cups of flour

1/4 cup of butter, softened

1/2 teaspoon of sugar

1/3 teaspoon of sea salt

2/3 cup of warm milk

1 teaspoon of flaked salt (optional)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F.

Line an 11" x 17" baking sheet with parchment paper.

Mix the flour, butter, sugar and sea salt together in an electric mixer bowl, then add the milk and mix on low to medium speed until the dough is formed and is soft.

Form the dough into a tube about 12 inches long on a lightly floured wood cutting board, then cut the dough into 12 pieces and form each piece into a ball. Press each ball flat into a 1/4" thick disk with the heel of your hand.

Use a rolling pin to roll each disk to a thickness of 1/16th of an inch on the wood cutting board, lightly dusting with flour to keep the dough from sticking to the cutting board or to the rolling pin.

Lightly score each disk with a sharp knife in a crosswise pattern to create square shapes 1" on a side.

(optional) Sprinkle the disks very lightly with flaked salt.

Put four to six disks (whatever will fit without overlapping) on the parchment paper lined baking sheet.

Use a dinner fork to prick holes in the disks, once or twice per square.

Bake the bread in the preheated oven until it is done, about 6 minutes, then remove the baking sheet from the oven.

Use a spatula to move each disk of baked bread from the baking sheet to a plate, stacking the disks. Let the bread cool on the plate.

Repeat the baking steps for the remaining disks of dough.

Break up the cooled bread disks into squares and other loose pieces.

Store the cooled bread squares in an air tight container.

Serve the bread squares plain, or perhaps with some honey and cinnamon.

Enjoy!

White Bread - ☺♥

Food Nirvana has contained only a few bread recipes for the past ten years (2010-2020). Recently I expanded my interests to include simple bread making ... sort of the opposite of my earlier interest in the more complicated procedure for making Sesame Semolina Batard. Why? There is usually an easy answer, and that is the case this time.

As of March 2020 many of us are self isolating to avoid the COVID-19 virus, which is often fatal for older folks, particularly those with existing health problems, like my sweetheart, Peggy. Thus, I have laid in supplies to allow us to self isolate for up to six months. Is that overkill? Yes, of course, but there was no guide up front to predict the extent and the duration of the timing of the pandemic. Yes, I am conservative, and I make allowance for the possibility (albeit small) of extended periods of unsafe exposure in public places.

The above having been said, the circumstances were perfect for extending the recipe range of Food Nirvana, so I ordered and received a bread machine to make bread. And note that I am also comfortable with making bread by manual procedures and baking it in my oven, as well as making it using my new machine.

My inventory of flour and other pertinent ingredients was/is extensive. I've been in the perfect environment to use, further develop, and finally record good bread recipes for what we can make at home. I should also mention that, having started down this path, I acquired a few different encyclopedias of regular and bread machine bread making.

Why do anything worth doing half way? It is very important to mention using a high quality bread flour, like the King Arthur® brand. It is equally important to use the vital wheat gluten to achieve the perfect level of moisture, chewiness, flavor and tenderness of the bread. I bought Anthony's® Vital Wheat Gluten via Amazon®.

Note that I am not attempting to become any type of bread expert. My intent is simple but very important. First, I want to make excellent white bread, reliably, such that I do not miss buying that product from bakeries or supermarkets. For the moment, that is wise. For the future, it is a matter of quality of life. Perhaps later I will decide to make other types of bread.

If you follow the steps and ingredients listed in this recipe you may well stop buying commercial loaves of white bread. There is a massive difference in quality and level of enjoyment in eating homemade white bread that results from this

recipe, which calls for using a bread maker or bread machine that mixes the dough ingredients and does all other steps through baking.

The steps for using typical bread machines at home are virtually identical. Put in the ingredients in a specific order. Turn on the machine. Wait. Ultimately, remove the finished bread and allow it to cool to near room temperature. Then, and only then, can you slice it with a serrated edge knife or electric knife without fear of the soft loaf collapsing. Trust me, it is worth the wait. Slather a slightly warm piece with soft butter and indulge. You will be wearing a very happy smile.

Ingredients: (makes one, 1 1/2 pound loaf of white bread)

1 1/3 cups of water

1 tbsp. of vegetable oil

1 tbsp. of sugar

3 cups of King Arthur® bread flour (16.5 ounces by weight ... use a kitchen scale and be precise)

1 1/2 tbsp. of instant potato flakes

3 tbsp. of nonfat dry milk powder

1 tbsp. of vital wheat gluten

1 1/4 tsp. of Kosher salt

2 1/2 tsp. of Instant Bread Machine yeast (or other active dry yeast)

Directions:

Put the water into the bread machine pan.

Add the vegetable oil and the sugar and the salt to the bread machine pan.

Add the flour to the bread machine pan.

Add the gluten on top of the flour, not into the water.

Add the instant potato flakes and the nonfat dry milk powder on top of the flour and gluten.

Sprinkle the yeast over the top of the dry ingredients.

Close the lid and start the bread machine, setting it for a medium dark crust and a 1 1/2 pound loaf.

Go away for a few hours until the machine beeps, indicating the bread has been baked.

Dump the bread out of the bread maker pan on to a wood cutting board and let it cool to room temperature.

You can store the cooled loaf of bread in a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag to keep it fresh until you use it.

To use the bread, cut slices of it to the thickness you want with a serrated edge knife or an electric knife

Enjoy in whatever way you decide to use the sliced bread.

White Bread II - ☺♥

This recipe came originally from the Bread Dad web site. My objective was to find a recipe that used instant dry yeast instead of active dry yeast, yet does the baking in a conventional oven.

I modified the recipe directions to suit me, which means some directions from the original recipe have been removed or changed.

I also changed the ingredients to replace some of the bread flour with gluten to increase the percentage of gluten to 18% instead of using the 12.7% gluten content of only bread flour. The reason is I prefer a more chewy and soft bread.

I changed unsalted butter to plain butter as I also like more salty bread.

I added a steaming step to the baking using boiling water poured into a hot cast iron skillet. That produces a superior, crispy crust on the baked bread.

I sure am pleased with the results. The bread looks great and tastes great too.

Ingredients: (makes one, 1 1/2 pound loaf of white bread)

1 1/3 cups of whole milk (warm)

5 1/2 tablespoons of Butter (softened)

3 cups of King Arthur® bread flour

1/2 cup of Anthony's Premium® Vital Wheat Gluten

2 tablespoons of white granulated sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons of salt

1 1/2 teaspoons of instant yeast

1 to 2 tablespoons of canola oil (to coat the dough before it rises)

Equipment:

5" x 9" Bread Pan

12" diameter cast iron skillet

Cooling rack for the baked bread

Instant read thermometer

Directions:

Use the paddle accessory with a stand electric mixer.

Pour the milk into the mixing bowl and then add the other ingredients, except the canola oil.

Place the instant yeast in last, and the yeast should not touch the liquid (until the electric mixer is turned on and the ingredients start to be mixed). The easy way to do that is to form a depression in the top of the flour and put the yeast into it.

Mix the dough ingredients on low speed until the dough forms/comes together.

Exchange the paddle accessory for the dough hook and knead the dough for 7 to 8 minutes.

Put the dough into a three quart bowl that has been lightly coated inside with canola oil.

Roll the dough around in the canola oil to coat it, to prevent the dough exterior from drying during the rise.

Loosely cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough rise for 60 to 90 minutes until it doubles in size. I do this in a 100 degrees F proofing oven, but a warm kitchen is fine.

Shaping the Dough:

Sprinkle about 1/4 cup of flour on/around the surface of a large wood cutting board.

Remove the dough from the rising bowl and place it on the cutting board. Lightly roll it around in the flour.

Press down on the dough with your hands and create a “flattish” rectangle with the dough. The dough should be roughly 1 inch thick.

Roll up the dough into a tight “jelly roll”:

Pull one dough edge over the dough and lay it down 2/3 of the way across the dough. Flatten the dough back to a 1" thickness. Pull two corners of the dough you have just flattened to form triangles with bases that meet in the middle of the dough, left to right. Flatten the dough. Roll up the dough into a jelly roll shape, starting from the point of the dough, tightly pressing on the dough surface right before rolling over it. Do this about every inch until the jelly roll is done. Gently

form the roll into the internal length of the bread pan. Place the rolled up dough into the bread pan.

Press down on top of the dough so the edges of the dough press out to the sides of the bread pan. This will avoid gaps between the dough and the bread pan. That helps the bread to form a nice loaf shape without misshapen edges. Make sure that the top of the pressed down dough is roughly level (so one side isn't higher than the other).

Lightly spray the top of the dough with Pam® in order to prevent the dough exterior from drying out during the second rise.

Do the second rise of the dough:

Loosely cover the top of the bread pan and dough with plastic wrap. Set the covered bread pan aside (or into a proofing oven) for 60 to 90 minutes for the dough to rise into a loaf shape. Once the dough has risen 1 1/2" above the rim of the bread pan, the dough is ready to be put into the oven.

Note: You want the dough to fully rise during this stage. Don't try to shorten this rising time. If the dough is still significantly rising while it is in the oven, it is likely there will be undesirable crust/seam cracks or "bursts" form on the top of the loaf of bread. But note that using a lame to put shallow slits in the top of the loaf before baking will usually avoid cracks in the crust.

Bake the Bread:

Put a 12" diameter cast iron skillet into the oven on a low shelf.

Preheat the oven to 350 F about 20 minutes before you plan to put the dough into the oven. Make sure you have one shelf in the middle (top to bottom) of the oven to bake the bread. Use a baking stone on that shelf if you have one.

Note: Set a timer to go off 40 minutes into the second rising period. Given variability in the dough rising time, this can be a little early, but it is better to be early versus being late, and as needed you can wait until the second rise of the dough is complete. More importantly you can tell when to start preheating the oven so it is ready for baking the bread when the second dough rise is completed.

Use a lame or a very sharp knife to put shallow slits in the dough, side to side, one every inch along the length.

Use a 16 ounce Pyrex® or similar glass measuring cup and put 1 1/2 cups of water in it.

Microwave the water until it boils, then remove the measuring cup from the microwave oven.

Place the bread pan into the (preheated) oven on the middle shelf of the oven.

Pour the one and one half cups of boiling water into the cast iron skillet and quickly close the oven door. This creates the steaming environment that will yield a nice crispy crust.

Bake the bread for 37 to 42 minutes at 350 degrees F.

Rotate the bread pan in the oven 180 degrees after the first 20 minutes of baking to ensure an even browning on the surface of the bread.

After the first 37 minutes of the baking period, check the internal temperature of the middle of the bread with an instant read thermometer. The temperature should be between 190 degrees F and 200 degrees F. If it is, remove the bread pan from the oven, wearing oven mitts or using hot pads.

If the temperature is too low then bake for another 5 minutes and check again. Repeat if necessary until the internal bread temperature is at least 190 degrees F.

Gently empty the loaf of bread from the bread pan on to a wire cooling rack and stand the bread upright.

Brush some melted butter on to the top of the crust with a pastry brush. Butter “basting” helps to create a golden, buttery and tasty crust.

Allow the bread to cool on the wire rack for 1 to 2 hours before cutting it.

Slice some bread with a bread knife about 3/4" thick and spread soft butter on the slice.

Enjoy!

BREAKFAST AND BRUNCH DELIGHTS:

Asparagus Frittata - ☺♥

This recipe is compliments of the Internet. I made it when our Massachusetts friends, Russ and Sue Gale visited us at camp. The recipe is excellent and you will get lots of compliments.

Ingredients:

6 fresh eggs, at room temperature

Salt and pepper, to taste

2 tablespoons of grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for garnish

1 tablespoon of olive oil

1 tablespoon of butter

1 large leek, well washed and thinly sliced

2 bunches of asparagus, chopped into bite-size pieces

2 cups of baby spinach

Directions:

Preheat the broiler and place a rack 6 inches from the flame/heating element.

Crack the eggs into a large bowl; add the salt, pepper and grated Parmesan. Lightly whisk the mixture and set it aside.

Heat the oil and butter over medium-high heat in a 9" diameter oven-safe baking pan or skillet. Add the leek and sauté for 1 minute, stirring occasionally.

Add the asparagus and sauté for 3 minutes, or until it is almost fully cooked. Add the spinach and season the mixture with salt and pepper to taste.

When the spinach is almost fully wilted, spread the mixture across the bottom of the pan and pour the eggs over the top. Tilt the pan and turn it so that the eggs fully cover the vegetables.

Continue cooking the mixture. When the edges of the eggs start to separate from the sides of the pan/skillet, turn off the heat.

Place the pan/skillet under the broiler until the frittata is lightly golden on top and the eggs are fully set, about 5 minutes.

Immediately turn the frittata onto a large serving plate and garnish with extra Parmesan, if desired.

Cut the frittata into slices and serve it.

Blueberry And Sweetened Ricotta Cheese Crepes - ☺♥

I've made crepes numerous times per the regular Food Nirvana recipe for crepes, but I never made the sweet, filled variety. That changed as of today ... I researched a variety of recipes for sweet crepes made with blueberry pie filling and sweetened ricotta cheese. This recipe is a composite of the best ideas I found, and it is superb!

These are delicious dessert crepes, and it is nice that they are also easy to make. My sweetheart and I demolished two of them quickly once we tasted them. Thus, the recipe belongs in Food Nirvana for certain.

I hope you make and enjoy these crepes.

Crepe Ingredients: (makes six, 8" diameter sweet Crepes)

1 cup of flour

1/8 teaspoon of salt

3 tbsp. of sugar

1 cup of 4% butterfat milk

4 extra large eggs or 3 jumbo eggs

1/2 cup of lukewarm water

1/2 stick of butter, melted

3 tsp. of butter, separated, for coating the inside of the skillet

1/4 cup of powdered sugar to dust on to the finished, filled crepes

Filling Ingredients: (enough to fill six, 8" diameter crepes)

15 ounces of blueberry pie filling (roughly 2/3 of a 21 ounce can of pie filling)

10 ounces of ricotta cheese (about 1 1/4 cups of ricotta cheese)

1/4 cup of honey

1/2 tsp. of vanilla extract

Pinch of salt

Pinch of cinnamon

Directions:

Add together the flour, salt and sugar in an electric mixer bowl and mix on low speed for one minute.

Add the eggs and mix on medium speed for two minutes.

Use the microwave oven to melt the half stick of butter in a small cup, then add the melted butter to the mixing bowl, then mix for two minutes.

Add the lukewarm water and then the milk to the mixing bowl gradually and continue mixing for five minutes on medium speed. Use a soft spatula to scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl halfway through the mixing to assure all ingredients are thoroughly mixed.

The point is that you want the batter to be totally uniform and runny, and the long mixing period and use of the spatula assure that all ingredients will be completely mixed. Dispense the batter into a one quart bowl to facilitate scooping out the amounts you want to pour into the skillet.

Preheat a heavy bottom skillet with a bottom diameter of about eight inches on medium low heat and melt the one teaspoon of butter to coat the inside bottom of the skillet evenly.

Note that during cooking of successive Crepes you may need to remove the skillet from the heat to avoid having a skillet that is too hot. Note also as described below that you remove the skillet from the heat each time you are ready to flip a Crepe over to cook the second side. In any event, the butter in the skillet should not be allowed to turn brown, nor should the skillet smoke. Finally, you don't need to add butter to the skillet for each Crepe. You can make two Crepes before needing to use the next one teaspoon of butter.

Use a 1/3 cup measuring cup to pour batter for the first Crepe into the skillet. If necessary add a bit more batter so that you cover the entire bottom surface of the skillet. Also, if necessary you can tilt the skillet slightly to cause even batter distribution.

Cook for one to one and one half minutes, then remove the skillet from the heat. The top of the Crepe will be uncooked but will not have much if any runny batter on it.

Use a narrow, long bladed hard spatula to get underneath the Crepe, starting from under one edge and going across and underneath the center of the Crepe, then lift it from the skillet and flip it over onto the uncooked side in the skillet.

Cook for about one minute, or perhaps a bit more time if the skillet cooled too much during flipping, then lift the skillet and tip it and let the completed Crepe slide from the skillet onto a paper plate. If necessary you can use the spatula to assist in that process.

Repeat the above cooking instructions for the rest of the batter, adding and melting another teaspoon of butter in the skillet each time two Crepes have been made.

Stack the Crepes on top of each other as they are cooked. Then let them cool to close to room temperature.

Add the honey to the ricotta cheese and mix well.

Add the vanilla extract, the salt and the cinnamon to the honey and cheese mixture and mix well.

Fill each crepe with about 1/4 to 1/3 cup of blueberry pie filling and 1/4 cup of the sweetened ricotta cheese, creating lines of each beside each other midway between the center and an edge of the crepe.

Roll up each crepe and dust it with powdered sugar.

Enjoy!

Corned Beef Patties - 😊♥

My sweetheart, Peggy, told me about a recipe for excellent corned beef patties that her mom taught her to make. They are excellent and a big hit with her friends and family. Oh, yes! She made them for me and I heartily approve. Basically, the patties are made from cooked potatoes, raw green pepper pieces, julienned raw carrot pieces and corned beef. Once made they are fried in butter to a light but crisp golden brown on both sides, and they taste really good. You do want to try this recipe, for we have experimented a bit and actually improved it by combining canned corned beef with freshly cooked corn beef, which yielded excellent taste and texture.

The recipe provided below is for a fairly large batch size, so you may want to do the mixing steps in half batch quantities if you use an electric mixer with a bowl size of less than six quarts.

Ingredients: (makes 24 generous 1/3 pound patties)

- 3 to 4 lb. package of raw corned beef**
- 2, 14 ounce cans of canned corned beef**
- 4 very large or jumbo russet potatoes**
- 2 large fresh green bell peppers**
- 8 ounces of julienned raw carrot pieces**
- 2 large eggs or one jumbo egg**
- 1 to 2 tbsp. of milk**
- 3 tbsp. of butter**
- 1 tsp. of sea salt**
- 1 tsp. of black pepper**
- 2 to 3 tbsp. of butter for later frying**

Directions:

Cook the raw corned beef in lightly salted boiling water in a large pot for three hours, then remove it and allow it to cool a bit on a wooden cutting board to a warm temperature. Remove all fat from the corned beef using a fork and a sharp knife, cutting and scraping as necessary. Shred the defatted corned beef with the

fork and knife until you have a large pile of shredded corned beef with pieces anywhere from 1" to 2" long. Set aside.

Peel and chop the potatoes and cook the pieces in the boiling water used for the corned beef, for ten minutes, then drain them in a colander and put the potato pieces into a large electric mixer bowl.

Clean and dice the green peppers into pieces about 1/2" on a side.

Mash the potatoes with the electric mixer on low and then medium speed until there are no large chunks. Note that in this and all following mixing steps that you will likely want to temporarily shut off the mixer and use a spatula to push the food down from the sides of the mixing bowl and the beater(s), to assure thorough mixing.

Add the egg(s), the milk and the butter to the mashed potatoes and continue mixing on medium speed until the mixture is well blended.

Add the salt and the pepper and continue mixing for about one minute.

Add the canned corned beef to the potato and egg mixture in 1/4 cup amounts while mixing, until all of the canned corned beef is well mixed with the other ingredients.

Add the shredded cooked corned beef to the mixing bowl gradually while mixing on low to medium low speed. Mix only until the shredded corned beef is uniformly combined with the rest of the corned beef patty mixture.

Reduce the mixer speed to low and add the carrot pieces. Mix until the carrot pieces are uniformly mixed with the corned beef and potato mixture.

Repeat the above step for the green pepper pieces.

Stop the mixer and form patties by hand that are about three to four inches in diameter and about 1/3 pound in weight. It is smart to use a kitchen scale to get the proper weight before forming each patty.

Wrap each patty in plastic wrap and place the patties on a large cookie sheet covered with aluminum foil.

Freeze the patties in a deep freeze. At this point you can simply store the frozen wrapped patties in a plastic bag in the deep freeze, or, vacuum seal the frozen wrapped patties for longer freezer life. Return the patties to the deep freeze.

When you are ready to eat some of the patties then defrost them using a microwave oven while you are heating the butter in a large skillet on low heat.

Unwrap the thawed patties and put them into the skillet. Increase the heat to medium.

Fry the patties for about two to three minutes and then use a spatula to flip them over to fry the other side.

If you want the patties to be fried further then flip them and fry them for an addition one to two minutes on each side.

Serve the patties along with whatever else you decide to eat with them. You may want to make a few over easy fried eggs and put them on top of each patty, and serve that combination with buttered broiled English muffins and hot fresh coffee.

Enjoy!

Corned Beef Hash Patties - ☺♥

Well made corned beef hash is a real treat for breakfast ... or for that matter for an atypical dinner. I researched a number of Internet recipes and created the recipe below as a composite of best ingredients and procedures. I have provided two versions for preparing the potatoes. Both are fine. Version #1 is the easiest.

I made this dish and modified the recipe to optimize it in ingredients and procedures. One item in particular that I changed was to form the hash into patties before the final frying. That sure simplified the process of lightly browning both sides. Another big change, shown in Version #2, is to shred the potato and partially air dry it, then season it, then cook it in a hot oven to finish removing excess moisture. Ultimately, that results in having a corned beef hash patty with a great texture, ergo, having overly soft potato pieces is avoided, which is true for both Version #1 and Version #2.

Oh, it is a good idea to have freshly made coffee ready at serving time. Also some hot, buttered rye bread toast, which I have included in this recipe. I also suggest serving a cold fruit juice or cold melon pieces or a small, cold fruit salad. These items enhance the overall meal a lot by adding variety to colors, tastes, textures and warm vs. cold food temperatures.

Have fun and enjoy life!

Ingredients: (Makes four servings of two patties each)

2 tbsp. of butter for sautéing the vegetables

2 large cloves of garlic, minced (optional)

1 medium size onion, diced

1 large green bell pepper, diced

2, 12 oz. cans of canned corned beef

2 tbsp. of olive oil (for frying the patties)

1 tbsp. of butter (for frying the patties)

2 extra large or jumbo eggs, whisked in a large bowl

For the potatoes: (I've provided two different versions for the potatoes. Try both.)

Version #1 potato ingredients and cooking directions:

This is the easy version. Simply purchase frozen potato hash patties, thaw six of them in the microwave oven and then break them up into small pieces, season them lightly with salt and pepper, and sauté them on medium heat in 2 tbsp. of butter until they start to turn crisp. Then set them aside on a plate to cool. Then skip to the general directions given below, avoiding the steps specific to Version #2.

-- End of Version #1 potato ingredients and directions --

Version #2 potato ingredients:

1 very large or jumbo russet potato, peeled, shredded and rinsed using cold water to remove excess starch, then partially air dried

2 tbsp. of olive oil

1/2 tsp. of dried thyme (I like to use it in powdered form)

1/2 tsp. of dried oregano

1/2 tsp. of dried basil

1/4 tsp. of black pepper

1/4 tsp. of salt

-- End of Version #2 potato ingredients --

For the eggs:

4 extra large or jumbo size eggs

2 tbsp. of butter

For the toast:

8 slices of fresh, seeded (caraway seeds) rye bread

3/4 of a stick of soft butter

Directions:

Specific directions for Version #2:

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Peel and shred the potato. Wash the shredded pieces thoroughly in a colander with cold water to eliminate excess starch.

Squeeze excess water out by hand and then partially dry the shredded potato pieces on three paper towels, spreading the shredded pieces out evenly. Allow the pieces to air dry at room temperature for fifteen minutes.

Put the olive oil, thyme, oregano, basil, salt and pepper into a large bowl and mix them, then add the shredded potatoes a little at a time while mixing, as described next.

Gently toss the mixture with a pair of dinner forks to coat the potatoes with the olive oil and the herbs, etc. Continue adding portions of the shredded potatoes and mixing using the forks until all the shredded potatoes have been evenly coated with the herbs.

Lightly coat a baking sheet with olive oil.

Dispense the potato mixture by hand into a single, well spread out layer on the prepared baking sheet.

Place the baking sheet into the oven and bake for 15 minutes.

Remove the baking sheet from the oven and set it and the potato pieces aside.

-- End of Version #2 specific potato directions --

Continuation of general directions for Versions #1 and #2:

Set the oven temperature to 180 degrees F and put four dinner plates and one serving plate into the oven to pre-warm them.

Melt 2 tablespoons of butter in a large, heavy bottom skillet over medium high heat.

Whisk the two eggs in a large bowl. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

Add the garlic (optional), onion and bell pepper pieces to the skillet, and cook on medium heat, stirring often, until the onions have become translucent, about 3 to 4 minutes. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Do not let any of the ingredients start to turn brown in color.

Remove the vegetables, let them cool on a plate for about three minutes, then whisk them gently into the whisked eggs in the large bowl.

Stir the potatoes a small amount at a time into the vegetables and egg mixture and mix well with a large spoon.

Stir in the canned corned beef a small amount at a time and mix well with each addition.

Add 2 tbsp. of olive oil and 1 tbsp. of butter to the skillet and heat it on medium heat.

Spread the oil and butter around in the skillet with a spatula to totally coat the frying surface.

Make four hash patties about 3/4" thick by hand using only 1/2 of the corned beef and potato and vegetable mixture. You may want to divide the bowl contents in half first to assure using the right amount of the mixture for each patty. The patties will be very soft. Put each one as you make it into the skillet gently so it retains its shape. Then use a spatula to flatten the tops of the patties.

Fry the patties on the first side on medium heat for about 3 to 4 minutes. The idea is you want the surface to be crisp (but not burned) so adjust the time if necessary.

Use the spatula to turn over the patties and fry them on the second side for about 3 to 4 minutes or until they are crisp.

Remove the patties to the pre-warmed serving plate and put it back into the warming oven.

Repeat the hand forming/frying for the second four patties, putting a small additional amount of olive oil into the skillet first to cover the surface, if needed.

Put the second group of fried patties onto the warm serving plate and keep it in the warming oven.

Make eight pieces of rye toast, butter them, cut them diagonally, and put them onto the plate of warm patties in the oven.

Fry the eggs in a separate non-stick skillet with 1 tbsp. of butter on medium high heat, to make eggs over easy. Season the eggs lightly with salt and pepper.

To serve, put two hash patties side by side, touching each other, onto each of the four pre-warmed dinner plates, and top each pair of patties with a fried egg. Put four diagonally cut pieces of the hot buttered rye toast onto each dinner plate.

It is a good idea to have freshly made coffee ready at serving time. Ditto one or more of the fruit items mentioned earlier in this recipe.

Let your guests/family season the corned beef hash patties with salt and pepper to suit their individual preferences.

Enjoy!

Crab Hash - 😊♥

Peggy and I had leftover delicious crab cakes made with expensive lump crabmeat. One pound of lump crabmeat made six large crab cakes and we only ate three of them at dinner. So, what to do with the leftovers? Sure, they can be reheated and taste okay, but they will never be as good as when they are freshly made. I saw this as a significant problem given the cost of one pound of colossal lump crabmeat (\$30). Granted, good crab cakes can be made from \$18 per pound canned (pasteurized) crab meat, but still it is wasteful to spend even that much money just to have okay leftovers ... And note that there is no good way to use half a can of pasteurized crabmeat and easily preserve the other half while retaining high quality.

I never did solve the problem as stated. Instead, I happened one day to think about making corned beef hash and when I opened the refrigerator I saw the leftover crab cakes. That is when the idea occurred to me that the crab cakes could be used instead of a can of corned beef to make what should be a delicious hash.

Was my idea original? No. I actually was remembering a breakfast at a special diner in Maine with my great old buddy, Bob Payne. It was his idea to drive into Maine and seek out the diner. So we did. Among numerous breakfast entrees using seafood, they made crab hash and it was unique and delicious. I never thought about making it at home until that magic moment when I saw the leftover crab cakes in my refrigerator at the same time as I was thinking about making corned beef hash.

You now know what this recipe is all about. What you likely don't know is how delicious the crab hash is that I made. Let's say I no longer worry about having leftover crab cakes, for the crab hash is unique and mighty fine. For the record, my crab cakes (recipe in Food Nirvana) are very high in crab meat content and of relatively low content in other ingredients. I don't cheapen my crab cakes with a lot of useless filler.

I hope you try this recipe as it is very easy to make as shown. I took the easy way out by using hash brown potato patties purchased frozen at the supermarket instead of processing raw potatoes. As a result this dish can be made quickly ... in less than 20 minutes.

Ingredients: (Makes two generous servings of crab hash)

2 tbsp. of butter for sautéing the onion and the garlic

2 medium cloves of garlic, minced

1 medium size onion, diced

3 large leftover crab cakes, broken up into small pieces

3, 2 ounce frozen hash brown patties, thawed and broken up into small pieces

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

1 tbsp. of butter for frying eggs over easy

2 pieces of seeded rye bread to be made into rye toast

1 tbsp. of butter to butter the pieces of rye toast

Directions:

Heat the oven to 180 degrees F. Place two dinner plates and a one quart serving bowl into the oven to pre-warm them.

Melt 2 tablespoons of butter in a large, heavy bottom skillet over medium high heat.

Sauté the diced onion with stirring for about five minutes until it is translucent, but do not let it turn brown on the edges.

Add the minced garlic to the skillet, stir and sauté on medium heat for one to two minutes until fragrant.

Add the broken up pieces of hash brown patties to the skillet, mix well, and cook on medium heat for about three minutes.

Add the broken up pieces of the crab cakes to the onion and garlic and potato mixture.

Cook the hash for five minutes on medium heat, stirring often to keep it from sticking onto the bottom of the skillet. You can add one additional tablespoon of butter to the skillet to lubricate the bottom surface, which will help avoid having the hash stick to the skillet. The goal is to get some of the crabmeat in contact with the hot skillet bottom lightly browned during cooking, but not dry from overcooking.

Dispense the crab hash into the pre-warmed serving bowl and put it into the 180 degrees F warming oven.

Make two pieces of rye toast, butter them, cut them diagonally, and put them onto the top of the crab hash bowl in the warming oven.

Clean the skillet lightly and add one tbsp. of butter and heat on medium heat until the butter melts.

Break the eggs into the skillet gently and make eggs over easy. Salt and pepper the eggs lightly.

Make two hot plates of the crab hash with one egg over easy on top of each and the pieces of buttered rye toast around the perimeter.

Serve the hash along with hot coffee and some fresh fruit or fresh fruit salad on the side. Each person can season the hash to taste with salt and pepper.

Crepes - ☺♥

Life is fancy with great Crepes. You can make sweet Crepes as shown in this recipe, or skip the sugar and increase the salt to 1/2 teaspoon to make Crepes suitable for savory fillings like meats/fowl/seafood/cheeses, vegetables and sauces or gravies.

So, what are Crepes? They aren't pancakes as there is no rising agent like baking powder used, and they aren't eggs, though the egg content is high relative to the amount of flour used. Crepes are somewhere in between and buttery and thin and soft for easy cutting with a fork. In short, they are delightful and versatile for serving with many types of fillings and sometimes covering with sauces, gravies, or in the case of sweet Crepes, powdered sugar or fruit syrup or whipped cream. You may recall the classic Crepe dish, Crepes Suzette, with strawberries and whipped cream.

The recipe below is from *The Joy of Cooking*©, somewhat modified, and it is very good. I was completely successful and highly pleased starting with the very first time I ever made Crepes. It is easy.

Serve these Crepes with soft butter and warm maple syrup. Or you might serve them with fresh, halved, sweetened strawberries, or fresh blueberries, or both, and whipped cream. Or you might make a thickened, heated fruit compote using some sugar and some corn starch. Whatever you decide, if you make the sweet Crepes, remember to serve some bacon or sausage or ham, along with fruit juice or other fresh fruit if you are using maple syrup, and fresh hot coffee, to make a breakfast meal complete.

If you make the Crepes without sugar, for savory fillings, be sure to check out a variety of Internet recipes for different fillings. For example, you might use heated diced white meat turkey, turkey gravy, and a few long tender spears of lightly cooked asparagus, all inside the hot rolled up Crepe, with some additional gravy on top. A typical serving will be two Crepes, or three for people with large appetites.

Yummy!

Ingredients: (makes six to eight sweet Crepes)

1 cup of flour

1/8 teaspoon of salt

3 tbsp. of sugar

1 cup of milk

4 extra large eggs

1/2 cup of lukewarm water

1/2 stick of butter, melted

1 tsp. of butter for coating the inside bottom of the skillet

8 ounces of warmed pure maple syrup in a small bowl (optional)

1 stick of room temperature butter on a saucer for use with the maple syrup (optional)

Directions:

Prepare the other breakfast items first and use a 200 degrees F warming oven to keep the cooked bacon or sausage warm.

Put the small bowl of maple syrup into the warming oven.

Put the serving plates you plan to use into the warming oven.

Add together the flour, salt, and sugar in an electric mixer bowl and mix on low speed for one minute.

Add the eggs and mix on medium speed for one minute.

Use the microwave oven to melt the butter in a small cup, then add the melted butter to the mixing bowl, then mix for two minutes.

Add the milk and the lukewarm water to the mixing bowl gradually and continue mixing for five minutes on medium speed. The idea is that you want the batter to be totally uniform and runny, and the long mixing period assures that all ingredients will be completely mixed.

Preheat a heavy bottom skillet with a bottom diameter of about eight inches on medium heat and melt the one teaspoon of butter to coat the inside bottom of the skillet evenly.

Note that during cooking of successive Crepes you may need to lower the temperature to avoid having a skillet that is too hot. Note also as described below that you remove the skillet from the heat each time you are ready to flip a Crepe over to cook the second side. In any event, the butter in the skillet should not be allowed to turn brown, nor should the skillet smoke. Finally, you don't need to

add butter to the skillet for each Crepe. Typically you can make two to three Crepes before needing to use an additional one teaspoon of butter.

Use a one cup soup ladle to pour batter for the first Crepe into the skillet, moving the ladle while pouring to cover the entire bottom surface of the skillet. You probably will not need the entire cup of batter to do that. If necessary you can tilt the skillet to cause even batter distribution.

Cook for one to one and one half minutes, then remove the skillet from the heat. The top of the Crepe will be uncooked but will not have much if any runny batter on it.

Use a narrow, long bladed spatula to get underneath the Crepe, starting from under one edge and going all the way across underneath the center of the Crepe, then lift it from the skillet and flip it over onto the uncooked side in the skillet.

Cook for about one minute, or perhaps a bit more time if the skillet cooled too much during flipping, then lift the skillet and tip it and let the completed Crepe slide from the skillet onto a wax paper covered plate. If necessary you can use the spatula to assist in that process.

Repeat the above cooking instructions for the rest of the batter, adding and melting another teaspoon of butter in the skillet each time two or three Crepes have been made.

Stack the Crepes on top of each other as they are cooked, then put the stacked plate into the warming oven.

Remove and serve the Crepes with room temperature butter and warmed maple syrup, or with fresh fruit items with whipped cream or powdered sugar as described earlier.

Serve all the other breakfast items when you serve the Crepes.

Enjoy!

Fabulous French Toast Recipes - ☺♥

This recipe collection is really three different recipes for different types of French toast. I tried the fancy one (Crème brûlée) and Marie did the Bananas Foster, and they are terrific. Watch for my special instructions in the latter recipe.

Basic French Toast

Ingredients:

3 extra large or 2 jumbo eggs

½ cup milk

2 tbsp. sugar

¼ tsp. vanilla

6 slices day old bread

6 tbsp. butter

Fruit, syrup or confectioners' sugar

Directions:

Set the oven temperature at 200°F and put a saucer or small plate in the oven. It will be used to hold the French toast and to keep it warm.

Use your whisk to beat the eggs in a two quart bowl. Then add the milk, sugar and vanilla and whisk the mixture until it is well blended.

Pour the mixture into a large flat bowl or baking dish.

Melt three tbsp. butter in a large non-stick skillet on medium heat.

Soak three bread slices in the egg mixture, one at a time, turning each slice over twice to make sure that the bread absorbs the liquid on both sides. Put each slice into the skillet.

Cook the slices of bread in the melted butter on both sides on medium heat, turning over a few times until each slice is lightly browned and puffed slightly. Remove the slices to the warmed saucer or plate when done and return the saucer or plate to the oven.

Add three tbsp. butter to the skillet. Do the second batch of three slices like the first. Take the saucer or plate from the oven. Put the second batch on top of the first batch.

Serve the French toast with your favorite syrup or fruit, or dust it with confectioner's sugar. I like to warm maple syrup in a small dish in the microwave oven before making the French toast. Then I keep it in the 200° F oven to keep it warm. The warm syrup is perfect for the warm French toast.

Serve.

French toast for Bananas Foster

Bananas Foster is often associated with ice cream but here we have an interesting variety of French toast.

Ingredients:

6 large eggs

2 tsp. vanilla

½ cup whipping cream

6 tbsp. butter

8 slices French bread, preferably a few days old

Directions:

Make the batter by first whisking the eggs and the vanilla. Pour in the whipping cream and whisk until well blended.

Dip the bread slices into batter and soak thoroughly.

Melt 2 tbsp. butter in a skillet over medium high heat.

Place 2 slices of soaked bread at a time in the melted butter and cook each side until golden brown.

Repeat the process with the remaining slices of bread, adding more butter each time.

Serve the French toast slices with warm Bananas Foster syrup. The recipe follows.

Bananas Foster Syrup

Ingredients:

1½ cups good quality maple syrup

2 tbsp. butter

4 bananas, halved and sliced lengthwise

1 tsp. rum flavoring

Directions:

Heat the syrup over medium heat in a medium saucepan. Add the butter and stir until the butter melts and the syrup is bubbling.

Add the bananas and heat thoroughly for a few minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat and add the rum extract. Stir and return to very low heat to keep the syrup warm.

Serve.

Crème Brûlée French Toast

Zowie! Each French toast recipe gets more exciting than the previous one!

Ingredients:

½ cup butter

1 cup brown sugar

2 tbsp. light corn syrup

1 loaf of French bread

5 eggs

1½ cups half and half

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 tsp. Grand Marnier®

1/8 tsp. salt

Directions:

Heat the butter, brown sugar and corn syrup in a medium saucepan on medium heat until the butter melts and the mixture is smooth. Stir constantly while heating.

Pour the syrup into a 9 by 13 by 2 inch oven proof glass baking dish.

Cut the bread into 1 inch thick slices and trim the crust from each slice.

Arrange the bread in the prepared baking dish, cutting some of the bread into pieces so the entire bottom surface of the dish is covered. → (Ignore this step).

Beat the eggs, half and half, vanilla, Grand Marnier® and salt in a bowl using your electric mixer on medium speed. Pour the mixture over the bread. Chill, covered with plastic wrap, for 8 to 12 hours → (This step is basically bull. The product is perfectly ready to use as soon as the bread is soaked. Do that by hand using a spatula with each slice, dipping it into the egg mixture until it is thoroughly soaked, then slip each slice off the spatula into the baking dish and finally pour any extra mixture over the bread evenly.).

Bake the French toast at 350°F on the middle oven rack for 20 minutes, then cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and bake for an additional 20 minutes.

Serve.

Pop-Tarts - ☺♥

Pop-tarts are pretty easy to make for the young people, and there is no end to the variety of fillings or frostings you might choose to use. This recipe uses a brown sugar and butter and cinnamon filling and a simple vanilla cinnamon frosting on top. I suggest using enough butter in the filling to make it into a very thick paste, for that makes it easy to disperse the filling on a pop-tart bottom without it falling into the edge areas of the dough that will be used to pinch the top and bottom pieces together before baking.

Once you get started making these it is hard to stop. They are quite tasty! And remember to try fruit fillings, like blueberry pie filling.

Dough Ingredients:

2 cups plus 6 tbsp. of flour

2 tbsp. of sugar

1 tsp. of salt

1 1/2 sticks (12 tbsp.) of chilled butter

1/4 cup of chilled vegetable shortening

3 egg yolks

1/4 cup of milk

Filling Ingredients:

1/2 cup of brown sugar

4 tsp. of flour

1 tbsp. of butter, melted

1 tsp. of cinnamon

Egg Wash Ingredients:

1 egg

1 tsp. of water

Frosting Ingredients:

1 cup of powdered sugar

1/2 tsp. of cinnamon

1/4 tsp. of vanilla

5 to 6 tbsp. of heavy cream

Directions:

Line a 12" x 17" baking sheet with parchment paper.

Sift the flour, sugar and salt together into an electric mixer bowl.

Run the mixer on low speed for one minute to blend the dry ingredients.

Cut in the chilled butter in 1/2" cubes into the dry ingredients while mixing on medium speed.

Cut in the chilled vegetable shortening in teaspoon amounts into the dough mixture while mixing on medium speed for about three minutes.

Whisk the egg yolks together with the milk in a small bowl, then add it gradually to the dough mixture and continue mixing until the dough is formed.

Form the dough into a 2" thick rectangle, wrap it in plastic wrap and chill it in the refrigerator for one hour.

While the dough is chilling make the filling.

Mix the 1 tbsp. of melted butter, 1/2 cup of brown sugar, and the flour and cinnamon together in a bowl with a fork to make the filling.

Roll out the chilled dough on a lightly floured work surface to 1/8 inch thickness. Cut dough into 3" x 4" rectangles with a pizza cutter or a pastry knife.

Drop 1 tbsp. of the filling onto half of the rectangles, spreading it around but leaving a 1/2" wide dough border without any filling on it.

Cover the coated rectangles of dough with the remaining dough rectangles.

Press the outside edges of the pop tarts with a fork to seal the dough together for baking.

Take the dough scraps and reroll them to make the rest of the pop-tarts.

If you make pop-tarts with fruit filling remember to poke a few holes in the top of each pop-tart with a toothpick before baking.

Arrange the pop-tarts on the lined baking sheet.

Make the egg wash by whisking the egg and water together in a bowl.

Coat the tops of the pop-tarts with the egg wash using a pastry brush.

Bake them in the preheated oven until they are golden brown, about 25 minutes, rotating the baking sheet after the first 12 minutes of baking to assure evenly baked surfaces.

Cool the pop-tarts on a wire rack, at least 15 minutes.

Combine the frosting ingredients in a bowl and mix them with a soup spoon until you have an even consistency.

Coat the pop-tarts with the frosting using the soup spoon to put frosting on each one, and the back of a teaspoon to spread the frosting over the pop-tart tops.

Let the pop-tarts rest for five to ten minutes to let the frosting set.

Enjoy!

Smoothie - ☺♥

When you want a nourishing and refreshing breakfast drink make a Smoothie. This Smoothie recipe is compliments of my great friend, Linda Lange. I decided to put this recipe within the Food Nirvana category of Breakfast and Brunch Delights instead of within the Beverages section as it is truly a meal and not simply a beverage.

The basic idea is to blend a mixture of fresh and frozen and some liquid ingredients at high speed in a blender to create a slurry that can be drunk directly from a glass or by using a straw. Note that you can substitute some items; for example, use fresh cherries instead of cherry juice. I am considering using orange juice instead of coconut water. You may want to add additional ingredients as well. I plan to add seedless red grapes.

Fresh fruit purchased in typical supermarket quantities can be pre-processed, like hulling and cutting a pound or two of ripe strawberries, or cutting peeled ripe bananas into 1" chunks. Those cut fruit pieces can be kept separated from each other on a cookie tray and frozen in the deep freeze, and then put into plastic bags and left in the deep freeze for later use. That procedure assures that the fresh fruit will not degrade before it is used.

Makes two 12 ounce Smoothies

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of coconut water

1/2 of a ripe banana

1/2 cup of fresh or frozen ripe strawberries

1/4 cup of fresh or frozen blueberries

1/2 cup of vanilla yogurt

1/2 cup of cherry juice

1/4 cup of fresh or frozen pineapple tidbits

Directions:

Put all of the ingredients into a blender.

Run the blender on high speed until all ingredients are completely mixed. If you have too many frozen ingredients that keep the mixture from processing properly then take one cup of the mixture and microwave it until it is melted, then add it back into the blender and resume processing.

Serve the Smoothies in two chilled 12 ounce glasses, with or without a straw in each glass.

Enjoy!

Waffles - ☺♥

Here is a fine recipe for an excellent breakfast favorite. Enjoy ... even more if you have a side of bacon or sausage cooked in advance to serve with the waffles, and have freshly made coffee and fruit juice. Some folks might also like a side of eggs over easy.

You can easily halve the recipe ingredients shown below if only two people are eating breakfast. A half recipe provides two waffles for each person.

Ingredients:

2 cups of flour

1 Tbsp. of baking powder

1/2 teaspoon of salt

3 tbsp. of sugar

3/4 cup of heavy cream

3/4 cup of milk or cultured buttermilk (buttermilk is better)

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

1 Tbsp. of vanilla extract

1/4 lb. stick of salted butter, melted

2 egg whites, whipped until stiff (optional)

1 cup of fresh blueberries (optional)

Directions:

Prepare the other breakfast items first and use a 180 degrees F warming oven to keep the cooked bacon or sausage warm.

Put a 4 ounce bowl of maple syrup into the warming oven.

Put the serving plates you plan to use into the warming oven.

Preheat the waffle iron to the desired setting.

If you are planning to whip egg whites, use an electric mixer and beat the egg whites with the whisk attachment until stiff, then set them aside.

Whisk together the flour, salt, baking powder and sugar in a two quart bowl. Set the mixture aside.

Whisk two extra large or jumbo eggs in a one quart bowl.

Whisk in the cream, milk, melted butter and vanilla.

Pour the egg mixture into the flour mixture and whisk until blended.

If you whipped egg whites then slowly fold them into the batter, stopping short of mixing them all the way through.

Fold in the optional blueberries if you are using them.

Ladle the batter into the waffle iron in the amount recommended by the manufacturer, typically one half cup, and cook the waffle until it is done.

Remove the waffle to the serving plate in the warming oven.

Repeat the ladling and cooking for the remainder of the batter.

Serve the waffles with soft butter and warm maple syrup, or with fruit compote or with fresh berries and whipped cream. Other syrups may also be used.

Serve all the other breakfast items when you serve the waffles.

Enjoy!

CANDIES, CRÈMES, GLAZES, NUTS & DESSERT SAUCES:

A Guide To Making Chocolate Dipped Candy

The variety of chocolates available for making candy, and the many different ways of processing each, can be daunting to a novice. Recipes may specify a type or brand of chocolate that is not easy to find/buy, and the methods used for processing the chocolate can vary to the point the would be candy maker learns little and pretty much remains a confused novice. In the worst cases best efforts fail and the resulting candy is not good.

I acknowledge that there are many types of chocolate with different characteristics and taste, and depending on the end use the handling/processing may legitimately vary. But that is looking at the wrong end of the process. The home candy maker wants something straight forward and a list of ingredients that are easy to find and not too expensive. Otherwise, why make chocolate candy at home, ever?

Thus, the goal that matters is not how to become a chocolatier ... It is how to have fun at home and make dependably great candy. What matters is pleasing ourselves and those we care about. All the rest of the complexity is for people who insist on becoming, or appearing to become, experts on the subject.

I decided to create this guide to making chocolate coated candy to provide the home cook relatively simple procedures and choices of chocolate types to use. In short, I want to make it easy to make fine chocolate candy at home.

What I have not provided in this guide is any and all things that are not about chocolate dipped candy. For example, if you want a recipe for chocolate fudge you have to look elsewhere.

Let's begin ...

Here is a list of things to consider and to conclude before taking any actions related to purchasing ingredients:

Do you have ten to fifteen square feet of counter, island or table space to use when making the candy?

How much candy will you make? Five pounds? 100 pieces? A small batch to test if the candy is good?

How many pieces of candy will one pound of the chocolate you buy, when melted, coat?

If you are dipping candy centers into melted chocolate, do they have to be cold or frozen first to avoid having them fall apart during chocolate coating?

Have you made the candy centers already? If not, then note you have to do that first using whatever ingredients and procedure are required.

If your candies will use paper or plastic molds to obtain specific shapes, will you be dipping candy centers or pouring melted chocolate into molds that contain loose ingredients?

What kind of container should you use when you melt the chocolate, and what is the best way to melt it?

What materials besides the chocolate and the candy centers do you need to get ready to make the coated candy and what materials do you need during processing and after the candy has been made and needs to be stored? For example, you will need baking sheets, parchment paper and a good digital instant read thermometer.

How do you plan to introduce each candy center into the melted chocolate, make sure it is well coated, and then remove it, let it drip off any excess chocolate, and then let you move the candy to a non-stick surface (or paper or plastic mold) to cool and set?

Do you need to provide an environment with low humidity and a particular temperature range to help the chocolate set? Sometimes parchment paper lined trays of dipped chocolates are put into the freezer to shock the chocolate into setting quickly.

How will you handle the chocolate candy after it has set for storage in boxes or other containers? Do you need to use separators like waxed paper or parchment paper to keep the pieces of candy from touching each other?

How do you plan to store the containers of candy prior to using them? Will the environment be cool and dark?

How soon do you plan to use the candies or give them away, considering that the candy probably has a limited shelf life of one to three weeks? Typically you won't have vacuum sealing or inert gas infusion equipment to prolong candy shelf life. Be timely.

Okay ... Talk about daunting! Actually, if you aren't prepared to address the questions/steps mentioned above ... If you consider all of those steps combined to be too much ... Then at least you know you are not going to make chocolate coated candy. It is much better to know that before you spend money on any ingredients, right? Also, you don't have to read the remainder of this guide, so think of the time you will save.

Now I assume if you continue reading that you want to proceed to make chocolate coated candy. Nice. Let's learn and have fun ... And best of all simply love eating what we make!

Counter or table space required depends on how many baking sheets covered with parchment paper you want to use at one time, or, some equivalent consideration if you are using plastic candy molds, with or without paper inserts. The idea is that you can get about 12 to 15 pieces of candy on one baking sheet, so that defines how many baking sheets you need and how much resulting counter or table space. Do figure all of that out first, but note that you can have a secondary location to hold parchment paper covered baking sheets of candy while the chocolate is setting.

If you are using a recipe from a book or from the Internet there will be a given batch size indicated and a list of required ingredients and amounts. You can scale up or down to suit your wishes, noting that you can make the candy in a limited batch size to fit your environment and available time, and, over a period of hours or days make multiple batches if wanted. You might also want to consider if there is any benefit in having a helper or partner, both to divide the labor and for socializing.

Let's assume you have acquired all of the needed ingredients for the candy. The smart move is to lay out all of the equipment you will need, placed where it will be easily seen and accessed as needed. This includes even such simple items as spoons. In other words, think your way through each step of making the candy, and as you become aware of some item of equipment needed, get it and place it where it will be needed in your work space.

Now you are ready to use some of the ingredients, perhaps to make a filling for the candy. But note also that some intermediate ingredients, like caramel that you might have to make, might be needed at a specific time in the process and be in viscous form at that time for pouring or dispensing with some spoons. In short, you can't make it until just before it is to be used.

Thus, if you happened to be making something like peanut butter cups you would make the filling first, and possibly measure out a given number of pieces

of the filling, and maybe chill them before coating them with melted chocolate, whereas if you are making turtles you have to have roasted, salted pecan halves already placed in groups on parchment paper on a tray before you make the caramel that you will pour over each pile of pecan halves. Note also that candies that are simple to make, like coconut haystacks or chocolate covered nuts don't require any special preparation sequence.

The upshot of this part of the discussion is to sequence what you make to be certain you have everything needed for each step. Make what you can in advance. Avoid making in advance any time or elevated temperature dependent ingredient that is needed at a precise time in the process of making the candy. For example, melting the chocolate isn't done until immediately prior to using it.

Okay ... As each chocolate coated candy recipe will have unique ingredients and procedures there is no need to cover that subject in this general guide. We will now move on to considerations of what types and/or quality or brand of chocolate you will use in making your candy. The most important of these considerations is the quality of the chocolate, and typically that means a product that will be creamy and rich tasting and easy to use.

The first attempts by the home candy maker will likely not involve the use of more expensive block or button chocolates used commercially in making fine candy. The novice home candy maker does have easy access to good quality milk, dark and white chocolate, either in the supermarket or online through sources like Amazon®. For now, simply understand that there are many types of chocolate both in terms of intended end use and in terms of quality and specific content of chocolate ingredients.

For example, Hershey's® plain milk chocolate Symphony® bars in the 4.25 ounce size are convenient and of suitable quality for making creamy milk chocolate coated candies of many types. They are superior to the regular Hershey's® milk chocolate candy bar for making creamy chocolate coated candy. Though I won't go into detail here you should note that the specific ingredient contents of the chocolate you can easily buy in the supermarket vary considerably, making some quite suitable for making candy at home, and others totally unsuitable for that application.

For example, don't use baking chocolate and don't use chocolate chips of the type used in cookies. In general, higher quality and thus more expensive candy bars will produce superior results, in brands like Lindt® or Ghirardelli®. Just be careful that what you buy is what you want in milk or dark chocolate. And note that you can usually combine the two in whatever proportions appeal to you in

determining the final taste and texture of the chocolate coating of the candy you make. But I prefer buying white chocolate online.

If you search for better quality, variety and cost of chocolate online you will have many choices. Pay close attention to the quality ratings first, then the pricing, but note that the very same products are likely to be sold at vastly different prices by different suppliers. Amazon® does not protect the consumer from paying too much for a product. That is the responsibility of the consumer, not Amazon®. In short, buyer beware.

As you become more sophisticated in candy making you will likely move on to very high quality chocolate in bulk quantities and carefully store what you don't initially use; for chocolate, stored well sealed in dark cool places can literally last for years and still be good for making candy. I purchase 11 pound bars of Callebaut® milk, dark and white chocolates, of specific types best suited for making chocolate dipped candies, through Amazon®. I cut the bars into roughly one pound blocks and then vacuum seal them and store them well protected in my food pantry. I will use all of each type of chocolate within three years and then repurchase.

Callebaut® chocolate is very high quality Belgian chocolate. There are some other fine brands but I've found that Callebaut® is dependably excellent so I stay with that product brand. Chocolate of this high quality level, purchased in bulk, costs about \$7 per pound (with free shipping via Amazon®).

You will find that the cost per pound of the supermarket chocolate bar brands that I named above will be considerably more than \$7 per pound. But remember the quantities and choices will be convenient for your first efforts in making chocolate dipped candy.

If you do the arithmetic you will notice that I use less than a pound of chocolate a month on average. That really isn't a whole lot of chocolate, so the impression you get when someone mentions buying chocolate in bulk is not necessarily accurate. Once you start making chocolate dipped candies at home you will be surprised how much good sense it makes to buy the chocolate in the 11 pound bars or equivalent button form. Beyond that I use most of the chocolate I buy each year prior to Christmas, when I make various special candies to give away to loved ones and great friends.

Now it is time to move on to discussion of melting the chocolate and then using it for dipping. This is the most critical part of this guide to making chocolate dipped candy, for easily made mistakes during melting can turn your best efforts

into disaster if you become inattentive at a critical time in processing the chocolate.

There are two main considerations. First, if you significantly overheat any part of the chocolate, to temperatures in excess of 120 degrees F, you will have destroyed it. It will clump and not be creamy or melt properly. You may as well throw it away. Second, the chocolate brands I mentioned above are all tempered as purchased. What does that mean? It means the crystal structure of the chocolate, when it sets, will produce a glossy finished surface and a nice "snap" when a piece is broken off. The chocolate will be creamy. If the chocolate you purchase becomes overheated to a temperature of above 92 degrees F during melting the temper may be lost and you will be upset with the marginal quality of the candy you make - dull, too soft and not creamy, sometimes with light streaks on the surface. Avoid that. A sure way to have excellent chocolate is to take the time to temper it.

I now provide a very short general discussion of how to temper chocolate. You can, for simplicity, ignore tempering and just follow the later instructions carefully and don't overheat the chocolate while you are melting it. Okay, to temper milk chocolate heat 2/3 of it in a bowl in a microwave oven to a temperature of 105 degrees F, with stirring after short heating cycles. Then remove the bowl from the microwave oven and stir the chocolate and allow it to cool. When the temperature drops below 100 degrees F then start adding unmelted chocolate in small amounts with stirring to melt it, the goal being to get the chocolate temperature down to about 83 degrees F by the time the last of the added chocolate has been melted. Then warm the chocolate to 88 degrees F, with stirring, and it is then ready for dipping.

For dark chocolate, you can heat it initially to 110 degrees F, then stir and cool it until the temperature is 100 degrees F, then start adding small pieces of unmelted dark chocolate, with stirring to melt them while reducing the overall temperature of the chocolate. Once it is down to 84 degrees F with all chocolate melted then increase the temperature to 92 degrees F for optimal dipping.

You will melt the chocolate in the microwave oven. You will use a microwave safe plastic container or some other microwave safe container, but not glass containers. As mentioned earlier in this guide, glass containers may be made of materials and may be constructed such that they can develop hot spots during microwave heating, so they are not suitable for melting chocolate.

I use a wide, white, two quart plastic pitcher made by Rubbermaid® with a handle, a pouring spout and a rubber ringed bottom. That pitcher is rated for microwave safe operation as indicated by the special recycling symbol on the

bottom, consisting of three curved arrows in the shape of a triangle with the digit 5 inside the triangle. That is an indication of the type of plastic used to make the container, polypropylene, ... one that won't likely leach chemicals into the food you are heating due to its chemical and structural stability under conditions of high heat.

Note that plastic containers of any decent quality will have such a symbol on the underside and you can tell by looking at the enclosed digit or by the presence or absence of a wavy lines symbol whether or not the container is microwave safe. Any digit other than 5 in the recycling symbol most often indicates that the container is not generally safe for microwave use. The idea is that solvents used when forming the container may still be present and can get into the food product as they are expelled from the plastic during heating, ditto breakdown chemicals from overheating.

Do note that when melting chocolate the temperatures will not exceed 92 degrees F, which means virtually all concerns with using plastic in a microwave oven are moot when you use the type of container I recommended above.

I purchased 50 one quart bowls made of sugar cane fiber. I experimented with those bowls to see if they were suitable for use in melting chocolate. If they were then the home candy maker can buy them through Amazon® cheaply in units of 50 disposable bowls for roughly 29 cents per bowl. My thought was that the bowls will be reusable for melting chocolate. I expected the bowls to develop some heat, but even heat, due to the fact that sugar cane fibers have some hydroxyl groups in the fiber molecule, and as such they will be affected by microwaves and will to some extent heat. So it was. The bowls are fine for melting chocolate and they are reusable. You do not need to have any of these bowls but this process works and it makes life easier for all we chocolate candy makers.

Once you have the proper melting container you need to be sure you have a relatively small wooden paddle or a metal spoon for stirring the chocolate multiple times during the melting process. The idea is you want to use mechanical action to blend the melted chocolate with the unmelted pieces very well between heating cycles, which will equalize the temperature and thus keep any area from getting too hot.

As for the chocolate to be melted, if you buy it in button form it is directly ready to be heated. If you have chocolate in bar form you need to cut it on a wood cutting board with a butcher knife to create small pieces not more than 1/4" thick and preferably not larger than 1/2" on a side.

Given the fact that you need to stir the chocolate well multiple times you need to limit the amount of chocolate you melt at one time. I suggest starting with no more than half a pound, and then possibly adding more unmelted chocolate to the melted chocolate and mixing it in very well, then resuming heating and mixing, with the goal being to have about a pound of melted chocolate (if you need that much). That amount of melted chocolate is about perfect for candy coating, to provide depth for easy coating and a limited amount of chocolate so that you use all of it before the temperature drops below about 82 degrees F.

Speaking of temperature, let's define the right range for melting and using chocolate. First, make sure you have an instant read thermometer. Second, do not exceed 90 to 92 degrees F at any time during heating. Third, measure the temperature of the chocolate between heating cycles after stirring. If the temperature measures between 90 and 92 degrees F do not heat the chocolate further. Simply continue to stir it until all of the chocolate pieces are melted.

Now for the actual heating directions. Operate the microwave oven on full power. If you are melting half a pound of chocolate all at once then initially heat the chocolate for 45 seconds, then stir as best you can. The chocolate will not appear to be melted much at all, but it is still important to mix it. Next, microwave it for 15 seconds and repeat the stirring. There will likely still be a lot of unmelted chocolate, so after the stirring heat it again but for only 10 seconds. Repeat the stirring and heating for 10 second cycles until almost all of the pieces are melted. At that point simply stir until the chocolate completes being melted. Do not further heat the chocolate.

The best temperature range for coating the candy will be 83 degrees F (for white chocolate only) to 88 degrees F for dark or milk chocolate. In other words, if you are using milk chocolate, dark chocolate or a blend of the two then try to do all of the coating of centers when the chocolate is between 88 and 84 degrees F. Obviously the chocolate will start to cool immediately after heating, but you can measure the temperature and stir to make the temperature uniform, and when it reduces to 88 degrees F you can start the dipping process. Don't worry about the chocolate cooling too much if you work at a steady pace. You will use all of it before it cools too much. If it does start to stiffen before you have used all of it, a few seconds in the microwave oven will eliminate that problem.

About the dipping ... There are various tools used by candy makers to dip candy centers into chocolate and then remove the coated chocolate candy to a tray covered with parchment paper. The purpose of the parchment paper is to avoid having the candy stick tightly to any surface after the chocolate has cooled and set. For tools, I often find it easiest to simply use two dinner forks to turn the candy center over in the melted chocolate and to remove the coated candy, allow

it to drip off excess chocolate for a few seconds, and then move the piece of candy to the parchment paper.

I suggest you visit a candy making supplies shop or look online for the various simple plastic tools used for dipping. As you gain experience with different tools you will favor some particular tool or set of tools.

Once you have a tray of chocolate coated candy you want to move it to a safe place to allow the chocolate to set. I like to use relatively cold places to hasten the process, but if you want to be a perfectionist you can set the chocolate at a room temperature of 70 degrees F with low humidity (not more than 60% relative humidity) for up to 12 hours. After setting the candy pieces can be moved carefully into storage containers with cut out sections of parchment paper between layers of candy.

Once you have packaged the candy then store it in a cool and dark place that has no odors of any kind. You don't want the candy to pick up odors that might ruin later enjoyment. For that reason sealable plastic or metal canisters are favored for storage. You can always fill paper/cardboard boxes later when you are ready to give some of the candy away as gifts. Note that candy making supply stores have gift boxes and you can also find them via the Internet.

Okay, folks, that's it. The explanations, while long, were important to your success making chocolate dipped candy.

Enjoy!

Almond Bark - ☺♥

I like to make almond bark for Christmas and give some of it to family and close friends as a gift. A few years ago I thought that the addition of tiny pieces of maraschino cherries, both red and green, and tiny bits of pineapple, would make a pretty and festive holiday addition in the almond bark. I was right. The picture shown with this recipe does not have the fruit in it so you can't see how attractive my almond bark comes out.

I cut the fruits (each maraschino cherry was cut into eight pieces; each pineapple tidbit into four pieces) and dry the pieces briefly between paper towels to keep them from being wet. The drying avoids having the color from the fruit juice/syrup affect the appearance of the almond bark by migrating away from the fruit into the melted white chocolate surrounding it. Then I spread pieces of blanched chopped roasted almonds evenly on waxed paper on a cookie sheet, add the fruit pieces evenly all over, and then gently pour melted white chocolate over the nut and fruit pieces, to a thickness of 1/4". I let the candy cool and become firm, and I cut it into squares about 1 1/2" on a side. I store it in a sealed plastic food container with sheets of waxed paper between layers of the candy to keep it fresh.

For the 2012 Christmas season I decided to use candy molds of circular shape about two inches in diameter and about 5/16" deep. They worked very well and an unexpected benefit was the appearance of the candy after it became firm, for the underside displayed the fruit and almond pieces beautifully.

As you can see from my description of making almond bark it is very easy to do. You can use the fruit like I do or skip it and have excellent regular almond bark. You can even get fancy and use both milk chocolate and white chocolate, one after the other sets/becomes semi-firm, maintaining a total thickness of about 1/4".

The chocolate you use must be of high quality to make an excellent candy. I normally buy it online in ten-pound blocks for about \$70 to \$80 plus shipping. My advice is to buy the best brands, Belgian if you can find it, or, within the USA brands like Ghirardelli®, which will be less expensive but still pretty good. In short, making almond bark or any other candy with high quality chocolate is expensive, but well worth it when you taste what you have made. Quality trumps quantity, and that is what Food Nirvana is all about.

Ingredients:

2 lbs. of high quality white chocolate (not the Nestle® white chocolate chips or similar products)

1 cup of raw almonds to be blanched, chopped, and roasted (or more to suit your preference)

1/4 cup of red maraschino cherry pieces

1/4 cup of green maraschino cherry pieces

1/4 cup of canned pineapple tidbit pieces

Directions:

Set the oven temperature at 350 degrees F.

Blanch the raw almonds by putting them into a two cup Pyrex® glass measuring cup, adding water to cover the almonds, and microwaving the mixture on high power until the water boils. Drain the water and dump the almonds onto a cookie sheet. Squeeze the skins from them by using a rolling motion of the skin around the nut while pressing the skin towards the pointed end and the skins will come off easily. Dry the almonds with a two paper towels. Discard the skins.

Chop the almonds in half using a butcher knife on a wood cutting board, then spread the almond pieces evenly on the cookie sheet (or in candy molds). Put the cookie sheet into the oven.

Roast the almonds for five minutes, then use a spatula to mix them and redistribute them on the cookie sheet. Roast for an additional five minutes and remove the cookie sheet from the oven. Let the almonds cool and then put them into a bowl.

Clean the cookie sheet and cover it with waxed paper and distribute the almond pieces evenly on the waxed paper.

Chop enough maraschino cherries of both colors into eight pieces per cherry to produce 1/4 cup, pressed down lightly, of each.

Similarly, chop enough pineapple tidbits into four pieces each to produce 1/4 cup, pressed down lightly.

Put each type of chopped fruit on a separate paper towel, spread roughly evenly across most of the towel surface.

Place a second paper towel on top of each type of fruit and press down firmly and evenly all over the paper towel surface to cause liquid in the fruit to be absorbed by the paper towels.

Distribute the pieces of each type of fruit evenly on the cookie sheet (or in candy molds), but do not let any pieces of fruit be on top of the chopped almond pieces.

Chop the white chocolate into small pieces about 1/2" on each side. Put the pieces into a 9" x 9" glass oven casserole evenly and then microwave the chocolate on full power for one minute.

Mix the chocolate pieces that remain with the chocolate that has melted, then return the casserole to the microwave oven and microwave on full power for 45 seconds.

Repeat the mixing step. If any chocolate remains unmelted then microwave again for no more than 30 seconds. Repeat the mixing and microwaving steps as necessary, for microwave ovens vary a lot in power.

Mix the chocolate well to get any remaining softened pieces to melt.

Pour the melted chocolate gently and evenly over the almond and fruit pieces on the cookie sheet (or candy molds). Then use a fork as necessary to even out the surface of the chocolate and to cover any pieces of fruit or almond that are not coated with the chocolate.

Allow the candy time to set and become firm. If you used the cookie sheet method then cut it into pieces 1 1/2" on a side. If you used candy molds simply flex them to release the candy. Store the almond bark in a sealable container with layers of waxed paper between layers of candy.

Enjoy the candy whenever you want, and be sure to share this delight with family and friends.

Brined Nuts - ☺♥

While living in Switzerland I found myself missing good, salty fried peanuts, almonds, salty pumpkin seeds, etc. They were not easily found, at least as we had them in the USA in nut kiosks when I was young ... hot and salty. The only time I found really great use of peanuts in Europe was in Paris, France, where street vendors sold the famous French burnt peanuts, which were sweet, slightly salty and only somewhat burnt, roasting on screens over small grills. They were yummy and we have nothing even remotely like them in the USA. This recipe is not about burnt peanuts for I have yet to try making them here. This recipe is about an idea I had in Switzerland for taking a variety of nuts and seeds as purchased and improving them.

Peanuts are available in many ways in the USA. There are dry roasted peanuts for health conscious people who want to avoid fats, and indeed fats are somewhat avoided by not frying the peanuts, but not a lot given the inherent fat content of peanuts ... and they taste lousy. The unsalted varieties are even worse. Many canned peanuts that have been fried and salted are at best okay ... few of them are what I would call yummy, and I have sampled many brands. Peanuts freshly fried and salted are rarely available, but when you can find a bar or other business that fries raw peanuts in small batches the resulting product is truly good. I know that by experience, for I do that also at home.

The peanuts I like best out of what we have commonly available commercially are the ones in shells that have been salt brined and roasted in the shell. They do have a small labor component in breaking the shells, however, and I wondered many times in the past why the nuts are not available brined in salt, roasted, without shells?

The confluence of that musing with the reality of poor nut selections in Switzerland led me to create what I wanted. I started by purchasing 500 gm packages of raw Pepitas. They were unsalted, not roasted and rather boring, so I decided to fix that problem, and my method gave such great results that I soon extended the method to include peanuts and almonds. In general, hard nuts and seeds are fine in this process, but I would not use softer nuts like pecans or walnuts.

Ingredients:

1 lb. raw or canned fried peanuts (or almonds, Pepitas, pumpkin seeds, etc.), unshelled

1 pint of water

¾ cup Kosher salt (or any other salt ... sea salt will be very good)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 300°F.

If you plan to brine almonds then it is best to blanch the almonds first and then to pinch them to remove the skins. It is unnecessary to blanch peanuts as the skins typically come off during the brining process, and if they don't it doesn't matter as they taste good anyway. Bitter almond skins, however, detract from the flavor.

Put the water and the salt into a one or two quart saucepan. Heat the mixture on high heat while stirring until most of the salt dissolves.

Put the nuts into the salt brine and stir well. The brine should barely cover the nuts, and if it does not then add just enough water to make that happen. Stir well.

Bring the mixture to a boil and reduce the heat to low. Let it boil gently for about three minutes.

Remove the nuts to a cookie sheet with a slotted spoon, leaving the brine in the saucepan. You can save the brine later in a plastic container and reuse it, adding water or salt as necessary each time a batch of nuts is processed.

Spread the brined nuts around the cookie sheet so they are not touching.

Put the cookie sheet into the preheated oven for 10 minutes. This applies to peanuts or almonds or other larger nuts, but not to flat seed products.

Note that peanuts and almonds will process well by this recipe, but Pepitas, pumpkin seeds and other small or flat seeds will burn if allowed to remain in the oven for more than a few minutes per side. Check them carefully every few minutes and stir them around with a spatula and remove them as soon as they have a light powdery salty surface.

Stir the peanuts/almonds with the slotted spoon or a spatula to promote even drying, then let them continue to bake/roast for 5 minutes.

When the nuts are dry, showing a lightly powdery salty surface, with no evident moisture remaining on the nuts or the cookie tray, remove them from the oven and spread them evenly in a large shallow bowl.

Let the hot nuts lose residual moisture for at least one hour, then put them into a Ziploc® freezer bag and seal it to keep moisture out.

Eat the nuts whenever you want. They will be crunchy, salty, delicious and not oily.

The brining process eliminated the oil from when the nuts were earlier fried by the manufacturer. If you started with raw nuts there wasn't any excess oil to eliminate.

Butter Crunch - ☺♥

I was looking for a recipe for chocolate and almond coated Butter Crunch like what my mother used to make each Christmas. I found a likely candidate on the Internet and modified it, and I made major improvements to the directions. I am reporting back with fine results. Enough said. You want to make this delightful candy.

Yield: 48 small bars

Ingredients:

1/2 lb. of butter plus more for greasing a baking sheet

3/4 cup of brown sugar

1 1/4 cups of white sugar

2 tbsp. of light corn syrup

2 tbsp. of water

3 cups of raw whole shelled almonds

1 1/2 lbs. of very high quality milk or dark dipping chocolate (like Callebaut®)

Directions:

Set the oven at 350 degrees F.

Blanch the 3 cups of raw whole almonds. Do that by putting them into a one quart glass Pyrex® measuring cup, cover them with water and microwave on high until the water boils. Drain the water from the almonds and dump them onto a baking (cookie) sheet that has a low lip/sides around the perimeter. Squeeze the skins from them by using a rolling motion of the skin around the nut while pressing the skin towards the pointed end and the skins will come off easily. Dry the almonds with a two paper towels. Discard the skins. Note that the low baking sheet lip will keep the almonds on the baking sheet during the next step.

Spread the almonds evenly over the surface of the baking sheet. Place the baking sheet in the oven and roast the almonds for five minutes. After five minutes, use a spatula to mix the almonds, turning them over and redistributing them on the baking sheet. Roast for an additional three to five minutes until the almonds have changed color from off white to very light tan. Immediately remove the baking sheet from the oven and dump the almonds onto a cool surface, like paper

towels on a kitchen counter. Spread the almonds to a single thickness to have them cool to room temperature quickly.

Chop the cooled almonds with a food processor to a medium (not coarse, not fine) consistency.

Prepare a baking sheet by lightly covering the inner surface and sides of the baking sheet with a small amount of butter.

Melt the 1/2 lb. of butter in a heavy/thick bottom one or two quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the brown and white sugars, the corn syrup, and the water, and stir until the sugar dissolves.

Once the sugar dissolves, use a candy thermometer and stir and boil the toffee mixture gently on low to medium low heat until it reaches 290 degrees F. Note: Keep the bottom of the candy thermometer away from the saucepan surface while heating the toffee so that you get an accurate measure of the temperature of the toffee. Remove the saucepan from the heat. Remove the candy thermometer and place it on a wood surface to cool.

Stir in 1 cup of the chopped roasted almonds and mix quickly. Pour the toffee onto the prepared baking sheet — it should then be spread into an even layer about 1/4 to 5/16 inches thick by using the back of a large buttered spoon or spatula to press the toffee down in any high spots.

Let the toffee cool for about 3 minutes, then use a pizza cutter or large sharp kitchen knife to cut the toffee into thin bars about 1" by 2". These will look like small pieces, but once they are dipped in chocolate and covered with the remaining almond pieces, they will be substantially bigger. After another 2 minutes, go over the cuts again as the toffee continues to harden.

Use the food processor again to chop the remaining 2 cups of medium chopped roasted almonds into finer pieces suitable for coating a piece of candy. Pour those small almond pieces into a shallow bowl.

Cover a new cookie sheet with waxed paper. Then sprinkle some of the finer pieces of chopped almonds onto the waxed paper, covering it evenly. These almond pieces will be the nut cover for the bottom of each piece of butter crunch.

Once the toffee is cool, break it into pieces along the lines you made, and trim/cut off any jagged edges. Then store the toffee pieces in a warm place. The ideal is to put a tray of them into an oven that has a proofing cycle or regular heat setting controls that allow you to set the temperature at 100 degrees F.

Break/cut/slice the dipping chocolate into small pieces no more than 1/8 inch thick and put a cup of them into a two cup thin plastic bowl suitable for use in a microwave oven and heat the chocolate in the microwave oven for 60 seconds. Mix the partially melted chocolate pieces with a spoon. If necessary, repeat the heating for an additional 15 seconds. Mix the remaining pieces of chocolate and the melted chocolate well. Repeat only if the remaining chocolate pieces do not melt into the melted chocolate when mixed well with a fork. The idea is that you want to avoid overheating the chocolate as that will destroy it. The highest optimal temperature for using melted chocolate for dipping is only 94 degrees F. I recommend checking the temperature after mixing. If it is below 90 degrees F then microwave it for only ten seconds and mix well. Repeat if necessary to get the chocolate temperature up to 90 degrees F but no more than 94 degrees F.

Dip each piece of warm Butter Crunch into the melted chocolate to coat it, then place it onto the almond pieces on the cookie sheet. After all the pieces that will fit on the cookie sheet have been chocolate coated and placed, then sprinkle the tops of each piece of butter crunch liberally with the finely processed almond pieces.

Repeat the entire chocolate preparation, coating and almond piece covering process until all the toffee pieces are coated with chocolate and almond pieces, using as many wax paper covered cookie sheets as necessary.

If you have a deep freeze that can accommodate the cookie sheets then put them into the deep freeze for ten minutes to "shock" the chocolate. Otherwise refrigerate the cookie sheets for 30 minutes.

Store the Butter Crunch in an airtight container, with wax paper between layers. You may store the sealed container of Butter Crunch in the refrigerator for up to two weeks, but for best taste and texture bring the Butter Crunch to room temperature before serving it.

Butterscotch Sauce - ☺♥

This is a simple and very nice recipe for a butterscotch sauce suitable to be poured or spooned over ice cream or pie ala mode, etc.

One of the more interesting things about this type of sauce is that heating it to a higher temperature than soft ball stage (235 degrees F) to perhaps 245 degrees F will turn the sauce into a soft caramel candy. And once you have cut pieces of soft caramel candy you might even decide to coat them with chocolate.

I know you will enjoy the sauce or the candy. Have fun!

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of brown sugar

1/4 cup of white sugar

1/4 cup of Karo® Light Corn Syrup

4 tablespoons of butter

1/4 teaspoon of Kosher salt

1/2 cup of heavy cream

1 teaspoon of pure vanilla extract

1 or 2 tablespoons of the liquor of your choice (optional)

Directions:

Combine the brown sugar, white sugar, corn syrup, butter and salt in a one quart heavy bottom stainless steel or copper saucepan.

Stir until well mixed, then bring the mixture to a boil over low to medium low heat without stirring.

Boil until the temperature is 235 degrees F. Use an instant read or a candy/frying thermometer.

Remove the sauce from the heat and immediately stir in the cream.

Return the saucepan to the heat and again heat without stirring until the temperature is 235 degrees F.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the vanilla and (optional) liquor.

Pour the sauce into an 8 ounce canning jar slowly, allowing any bubbles to break, then put on the lid insert and screw on the lid. If you have a bit of extra sauce left in the saucepan you can scoop it out with a spoon and let it cool and sample what you have made. You will be pleased.

Once the sauce has cooled to room temperature, store it in the refrigerator.

The sauce is pourable when it is warm and thicker when it is cold.

Remove the jar lid/insert and microwave the sauce for 30 seconds if you want a warm sauce. Otherwise you can use a spoon to get what you want.

Pour or spoon the sauce over ice cream or pound cake or even fruit like peeled pears.

Enjoy!

Butter Toffee Nuts - ☺

From time to time I get in the mood for toffee coated peanuts or almonds. A few evenings ago I decided to start making this simple but tasty snack. It goes well with almost any beverage, as it is both sweet and salty. I found an Internet recipe, thought about it and made a few modifications to suit me. I am pleased with the result so I decided to share this recipe. Why pay more for something that you can make easily at home?

Ingredients:

2 cups of blanched almonds or peanuts

1/3 cup of sugar

3/4 cup of water

1/4 tsp. salt

2 tbsp. butter

1 tsp. vanilla

Directions:

Turn the oven on and set it to 300°F.

If necessary, blanch the raw almonds or peanuts to remove the skins. To blanch, put the nuts into a saucepan and cover them with water. Then heat the water to boiling on high heat. After 30 seconds remove the saucepan from the heat and dump the nuts into a sieve and then spray them with cold water, mixing them by hand to make sure they are cool. Empty the nuts onto a plate or cookie sheet and squeeze the skins off between your finger and thumb. Discard the skins.

Add all of the ingredients into a 10" diameter non-stick skillet or a two quart non-stick saucepan.

Heat the skillet or saucepan on medium heat while mixing the contents with a wooden spoon until the mixture boils.

Reduce the heat to low and continue mixing it gently until most of the water boils off and the mixture becomes thick. This should take about five minutes. Do not let the mixture or the nuts burn. If necessary lower the heat.

Transfer the coated nuts and any extra toffee to a cookie sheet, spreading the nuts out evenly so they are only one layer thick.

Put the cookie sheet into the pre-heated 300°F oven and roast the toffee coated nuts for 15 minutes.

Stir the nuts to assure even roasting and even coating of them with the toffee.

Roast the nuts for an additional 15 minutes.

Transfer the nuts to a bowl and let them cool to room temperature.

The nuts will be best if they are allowed to lose moisture for an hour or two or even overnight. They should be crunchy inside with a thin shiny shell of sweet and slightly salty toffee all over the surface of each nut.

Variation:

I have yet to try this variation but it is all about thickening the coating of toffee on the nuts. A second batch of the toffee coating is made after the first roasting of the toffee coated nuts. The second batch of toffee is heated to the soft crack stage, which is 280° F. The previously coated nuts are then put into the second batch of hot toffee, mixed, and quickly returned to the tray and spread out evenly for the second roasting cycle of only about five minutes. The double layers approach should both thicken the toffee and make it quite crunchy. I'm looking forward to trying it.

Caramels - ☺♥

As shown below, this recipe is simple and good for making soft caramels. I found it in *The Joy of Cooking*© and I use it when making Caramel Nut Squares at Christmas.

More recently I modified this recipe to make the caramel component of the candy, Turtles. My modification was to use only 1/4 cup of light brown sugar and 3/4 cup of white sugar, all light corn syrup, and a bit more than 1/2 cup of heavy cream. The point is I was looking for a more blond type of caramel. The modifications worked great. If you are using this recipe with that type of end use then ignore the instructions later about pouring the caramel from the saucepan.

Overall, small variations in this recipe will produce different types of caramels, light vs. dark, mild vs. more intense in flavor. I suggest you think about the end use for the caramel and then decide how much of each ingredient to use.

Ingredients:

1 stick of butter

1 cup of light brown sugar

¼ cup of dark corn syrup

¼ cup of light corn syrup

½ cup of heavy cream

1 teaspoon of vanilla

Directions:

Put the butter, sugar and corn syrups into a heavy saucepan.

Heat on low, stirring until the sugar crystals are dissolved.

Use a candy thermometer and continue to heat the mixture on low until it reaches a temperature of 240°F. Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the cream.

Return the saucepan to the heat. Stir gently until mixture again reaches 240° F. This may take ten to fifteen minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the vanilla.

If you are making regular caramels, then pour/spoon the caramel from the saucepan while it is hot and easily worked, ergo, quickly.

I suggest using a lightly buttered cookie tray and smoothing the caramel into a pool about 1/4" thick.

Allow it to set for five minutes, and while soft use a pizza cutter or a sharp knife to cut/mark the caramel pool.

After the caramel is cool enough to hold a shape (15 minutes) then finish the cutting and wrap the caramels in waxed paper.

Here is an untested experiment: You might dust the caramels very lightly with powdered sugar and then wrap them in plastic wrap. The idea is the dusting product will keep the caramel from sticking to the plastic wrap.

Caramelized Peanuts - ☺♥

These peanuts are the great street vendor variety found in Europe and the Middle East, sometimes referred to as burnt peanuts depending on how dark they are after cooking. Extreme care must be used during heating to caramelize the sugar without overheating it, or the syrup will turn too dark (basically burn) and ruin the peanuts. Ergo, don't let the sugar syrup get too hot.

Note that the amount of stirring is significant and in the last stage a bit difficult, so be prepared to put some muscle into it for 5 to 10 minutes. Or better yet, have a young strong friend help.

Note also that you need to use an instant read thermometer ... one with a metal tip ... to check the temperature of the mixture as the sugar caramelizes.

You have the choice of making the caramelizing syrup either light, medium or dark in color and flavor intensity, per the description next. I suggest making the light version first (around 325°F to 330°F) and then decide after tasting the final product whether or not you want to use a darker version of the syrup in your next batch. If I were to make any change to this recipe it would be to increase the amount of sugar by perhaps 1/4 cup, because I love the taste of caramelized sugar.

Caramelizing of sugar begins at 320°F, producing a light golden colored syrup with a nutty flavor, and proceeds, if you want to use a higher temperature, to 340°F, producing a darker amber color and more intense caramel flavor. Once the syrup temperature is 340°F it should immediately be removed from the heat, for residual heat in the skillet or saucepan may increase the syrup temperature to the maximum useable temperature of 350°F.

Ingredients:

2 cups of raw shelled peanuts (with or without skins)

1 cup of granulated sugar

1/3 cup of water

1 to 2 pinches of sea salt (or more to suit your taste)

Optional: A splash of orange flower water or rose water

Directions:

Line a large baking sheet or pan with parchment paper. Set it aside.

Combine the peanuts, sugar, and water in a 12 inch diameter heavy-bottomed skillet. Cook the mixture over medium heat, stirring regularly until the mixture thickens into a syrup.

Continue cooking and stirring for about 10 minutes, or until the liquid evaporates and a sandy-textured sugar mixture coats the peanuts.

Lower the heat and continue stirring as the excess sugar in the pan begins to melt. This will take several minutes. Once a syrup begins to form, it will change in color from clear to golden to amber. Stir constantly, and be careful that the heat is not so high as to burn or darken the syrup.

When the syrup is a light-to-medium-amber color and the sugary coating on the peanuts has glazed, remove the skillet/saucepan from the heat.

Sprinkle the peanuts with the salt and optional orange flower water (if using) over the peanuts and stir.

Turn the peanuts out onto the prepared baking sheet or pan and quickly spread them out in a single layer. You can do that with two forks or two spatulas. Just do it quickly or the syrup will harden and you will have a large hard clump of peanuts.

Allow the peanuts to cool and the coating to harden before serving.

Be sure the peanuts have cooled completely before storing them in an airtight container. You might also vacuum seal them in single serving amounts, which is very convenient and guarantees perfect freshness with every serving.

Enjoy!

Chocolate Covered Easter Eggs - ☺♥

Marie provided these recipes and she made all of these chocolate eggs ... and they were great! I have modified the recipes with more detail and more modern procedures to assure success.

The three recipes below all use the same dipping procedure for the chocolate coating. You may choose to vary the mixture of chocolates, milk and dark, to what pleases you best. Typically coconut eggs are coated with dark chocolate, while peanut butter eggs are coated with milk chocolate. Fruit and nut eggs are good with a mixture of both types of chocolate.

You may or may not have the recommended brands of chocolate described in the coating/dipping procedure. If that is the case you may substitute using either Lindt® or Ghirardelli® high quality, high cacao content chocolate bars, noting that following that method is quite expensive. You are far better off ordering excellent quality chocolate in advance in bulk 11 pound blocks. I recommend the Callebaut® NV845 milk chocolate and one of their semi-sweet dark chocolate choices perfect for dipping, like No 811. You can buy the bulk chocolate blocks online via Amazon® to Worldwide Chocolates® with free shipping for roughly \$5 to \$8 per pound, depending on specific type of chocolate, and that is a terrific savings for a vastly superior chocolate. Leftover/excess blocks of chocolate are best stored vacuum sealed in a dark cool place to keep them perfectly fresh for later use ... even two years later!

Coconut Eggs:

½ cup of butter

8 oz. of cream cheese

2, one pound boxes of confectioners' sugar

14 oz. of shredded sweetened coconut

1 to 1 1/2 tsp. of coconut flavoring (Like Olive Nations® pure coconut extract)

2 tsp. of vanilla

Melt the butter and the cream cheese in a large saucepan on low heat. Turn off the heat. Add the sugar, coconut, coconut flavoring extract and vanilla and mix thoroughly. You will find that mixing using your hands is the easiest way to blend all the ingredients once the sugar has been incorporated into the butter

and cream cheese mixture. Put the mixture into a shallow serving dish and cover it with plastic wrap.

Chill the mixture $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 hour in the refrigerator.

Form the mixture into eggs about two inches long and roughly one inch in diameter in the middle and place them well spaced on parchment paper covered 12"x17" cookie sheets, slightly flattening the bottoms.

Dip the eggs in melted chocolate as described below.

Chocolate Coating Procedure:

Melt a mixture of one and one half to two pounds of small (shaved from a large 11 lb. chocolate block to roughly 1"x1/4"x1/4") pieces of Callebaut® High Cacao Dipping Chocolate (Milk and Dark), gradually and carefully using a microwave oven on high heat in multiple steps with intermediate stirring/mixing, using a three to five inch deep, six to eight inch wide microwave safe plastic or natural fiber bowl. Do not use a narrow top/deep bowl as that will make the stirring and the later dipping processes far more difficult. Do not use a glass or china bowl as they can easily overheat and destroy the chocolate. The ideal container is a bowl made of polypropylene with a microwave oven safety/use rating of 5. If the small symbol on the bottom of the bowl has the number 5 then that bowl is polypropylene and safe to use for melting chocolate.

Heat the chocolate in successively shorter periods with complete stirring after each heating. Start with one minute, then 30 seconds, then 10 seconds for as many 10 second periods as are required to completely melt the chocolate after stirring.

Aim for a temperature of 92 degrees F to melt the chocolate but do not exceed a temperature of 94 degrees F. Use a good instant/quick read thermometer and careful stirring/mixing between heating cycles to assure an even and correct temperature throughout the melted chocolate. The idea is that keeping the chocolate temperature at or below 94 degrees F will guarantee that the chocolate will not lose temper. Also, I watched a candy maker use a flat paddle as a stirrer so I tried it and found it to be perfect as chocolate that would cling to a spoon and be hard to remove during heating is easily scraped from a flat paddle stirrer back into the bowl.

Dip the eggs into the melted chocolate individually to coat them, move each egg around in the melted chocolate and then remove it using two dinner forks, allowing excess melted chocolate to drip back into the bowl of chocolate, then put it on a parchment paper covered cookie sheet and let it rest until all of the eggs

have cooled and the coating is solid, or alternatively follow the "shock" procedure described below. Typically, small chocolate dipped candy is removed from the bowl of melted chocolate using an inexpensive plastic tool with a thin loop at the bottom. Larger pieces like the Easter eggs are easily handled using two dinner forks, one in each hand, to rotate or flip the candy in the melted chocolate and then to get underneath it from both sides, lift it out of the chocolate, let excess chocolate drip back into the bowl and finally transfer the coated candy to the parchment paper.

If you have freezer space you can "shock" the chocolate by putting the cookie sheet with the coated eggs into the deep freeze for 15 minutes immediately following coating. That procedure will help to produce a glossy surface. Then wrap each egg individually with plastic wrap and put them into a container with a top that seals well, then store the container in a cool, dark place.

Eat the eggs within one week for maximum quality. If refrigerated they will last up to three weeks.

Peanut Butter Eggs: (Yields 36 eggs)

½ cup of butter

10 oz. of cream cheese

1 1/2 pounds of confectioners' sugar

3 1/2 cups of peanut butter

1 tbsp. of Olive Nation® Peanut Butter Flavor Extract (optional)

2 tsp. of vanilla

3 oz. of white chocolate

Melt the butter, (optional) peanut butter flavor extract, the cream cheese and the white chocolate in a large saucepan on low heat while stirring.

Put the melted mixture into the electric mixer bowl, then add the peanut butter gradually while running on medium speed. Add the vanilla and mix it in.

Add in the powdered sugar gradually while mixing on low speed and then mix on medium speed for three minutes.

Cover the mixing bowl with plastic wrap and chill the mixture for 1 hour in the refrigerator.

Form the mixture into eggs (squeezing each together in your hand) about two inches long and one inch thick in the middle and put them on parchment paper covered 12"x17" baking sheets with the bottoms slightly flattened.

Use the chocolate coating procedure shown above for the coconut eggs.

Fruit and Nut Eggs:

½ cup of butter

8 oz. of cream cheese

2, one pound boxes of confectioners' sugar

1 cup of Chopped Nuts (walnut halves, roasted almonds or pecan halves chopped into roughly four pieces each)

1 cup of cut Maraschino Cherries (each cherry cut into four pieces and all pieces pressed between paper towels to eliminate wetness) or 1/2 cup of cherry pieces and 1/2 cup of crushed canned pineapple pieces processed to eliminate wetness using paper towels

2 tsp. of vanilla

Cut the cherries on a cutting board and spread the cherry pieces on a paper towel. Put another paper towel on top and press to absorb the cherry syrup into the paper towels. Fill a one cup measuring cup with the pieces. Set the cherry pieces aside. As an alternative recipe, you can instead use 1/2 cup of the cherry pieces and 1/2 cup of crushed canned pineapple pieces that have first been thoroughly de-wetted using the paper towel procedure used for the cherry pieces.

Melt the butter and cream cheese in large saucepan on low heat. Turn off the heat. Add the sugar, chopped nuts, cherry/pineapple pieces and vanilla and mix thoroughly. If the mixture is too sticky to handle then add additional powdered sugar and mix. Repeat as necessary until the mixture is not excessively sticky. Note also that you can dust your hands with corn starch to make handling of slightly sticky products easy.

Put the mixture into a serving dish and cover it with plastic wrap and chill ½ to 1 hour in the refrigerator.

Form the mixture into eggs about two inches long and one inch in diameter in the middle and put them on parchment paper covered cookie sheets with the bottoms slightly flattened. If necessary, first dust your hands with corn starch. If you find the product to be too soft to hold an egg shape during later dipping in melted

chocolate then freeze the egg shaped pieces prior to dipping them in the melted chocolate.

Use the chocolate coating procedure shown above for the coconut eggs.

Confectioner's Glaze - ☺♥

Confectioner's glaze is the icing we typically see on glazed donuts or Danish pastry. It is simple to make and use. There are various recipes and they are basically alike, but I have provided two below for you see some variations and uses. You can also see the one I use with apple fritters in that Food Nirvana recipe.

Recipe #1: This one is for icing on Danish pastry

Ingredients:

1 1/4 cups of confectioners' sugar

3 tablespoons of milk

1/2 teaspoon of clear (or regular) vanilla extract

Directions:

Mix gently but thoroughly in a small bowl with a teaspoon.

Use on Danish pastry or similar pastries.

Recipe #2: This one is Alton Brown's recipe for glazed donut glaze

Ingredients:

1/4 cup of whole milk

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

2 cups of confectioners' sugar

Directions:

Combine the milk and the vanilla in a medium saucepan and heat the mixture over low heat until warm.

Sift the confectioners' sugar into the milk mixture.

Whisk slowly, until well combined.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and set it over a bowl of warm water.

Dip the doughnuts into the glaze, one at a time, and set each doughnut on a draining rack placed on a cookie sheet.

Allow the glaze to cool on the doughnuts for 5 minutes.

Serve the doughnuts.

Fried Jumbo Virginia Peanuts - ☺♥T

I purchased fifty pounds of raw jumbo blanched Virginia peanuts at \$1 per pound from the Wakefield Peanut Company® in Wakefield, Virginia in the year 2010. After shipping the cost was \$1.80 per pound, for shipping heavy items is expensive. Why did I do that? The reasons are pretty good. First, the final price including the shipping is far below what anyone will pay for jumbo Virginia peanuts in any other way. Second, I wanted to fry the peanuts myself and prove that they would be superior to anything I could buy. Third, I fill Christmas bags as gifts that contain a variety of special food items for close friends and family. Giving away many pounds of premium raw blanched peanuts, peanut oil and directions for frying seemed like a very inexpensive way to gift people with something very nice.

I learned about the peanut company from my Aunt Doris, whose husband, my Uncle Jim, used to buy the peanuts in bulk and give away five pound bags to his children and to his brothers. That is how I got to know just how great those fried peanuts could be, as my dad made them when we visited many years ago. I never forgot ... and now some years after my Uncle Jim died, I found out where to get the raw peanuts. Now you know too.

I vacuum seal pound and half pound quantities of the peanuts to keep them fresh. I also purchase the thirty-five pound bulk peanut oil jug at Costco® and some eight ounce canning jars with lids and I made peanut oil a gift to be used with the raw peanuts. Finally, when I had the perfect frying and processing recipe figured out, I typed the recipe and printed many copies of it so that I could include the recipe with the peanuts and the peanut oil. It worked exceptionally well, and a lot of recipients raved about the great taste later.

Thus, this recipe is what I do to fry raw jumbo blanched Virginia peanuts. And they are very, very good. My recipe is for small batches suitable for two people and I do the frying in a small skillet. It is easy and the peanuts are always perfectly fresh. I simply go to my supply of one pound or half pound vacuum sealed bags of raw peanuts and open one. The vacuum sealing keeps the peanuts fresh literally for at least five years, and that was a most interesting discovery.

I like to use sea salt with freshly fried peanuts, and it is extra enjoyable because I take fine granular sea salt and crush it to the consistency of popcorn salt by using an old fashioned mortar and pestle. Most recently I have started processing the salt in very small containers with a Magic Bullet® high speed food processor, similar to what I do to make powdered sugar from regular sugar.

Ingredients:

1 lb. of jumbo raw blanched Virginia peanuts

1 cup of peanut oil (or more if the peanuts are not covered by the oil)

1 tbsp. of sea salt, ground fine (regular salt is fine also)

Directions:

Put the raw peanuts and the oil into a small skillet with a thick bottom. Use enough oil to barely cover the peanuts, but allow enough space between the oil and the top of the skillet rim to avoid hot oil bubbling over the side ... at least $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Heat the mixture on high heat, stirring lightly, until the peanuts/oil start to bubble.

Reduce the heat to low and fry the peanuts, stirring lightly every minute to keep them well mixed, until you detect the peanuts changing color from off-white or very pale tan to light tan in color. They will bubble a fair amount as they fry and you have to stir them to break up the bubbles to detect the color changes.

When they are a light tan in color, immediately turn off the heat and quickly remove the peanuts with a slotted spoon to a baking sheet that has paper towels on it. Spread the peanuts out evenly with each spoonful so they are in a single layer. They will overcook and turn dark if left in a mound as retained heat from the frying process is considerable.

➔ Frying peanuts in the above manner accommodates any size of peanut. It does not demand constant temperature control, for unlike many fried foods peanuts will not come out soggy if fried in lower temperature oil. Lower temperature frying is desirable for peanuts as you have better control over when to remove them ... your response time window is longer. Peanuts actually have a very short frying time from the first bubbling until they are removed from the oil, anywhere from two to four minutes. It is up to the cook to decide when they are done frying. If you wait even one minute too long they will ultimately be too dark or even burned, even if they look okay as you remove them from the hot oil. You want to remove them when they appear to be too light in color, for they will finish frying outside the skillet and proceed to darken to a good medium tan.

Salt the peanuts with finely ground sea salt. Let them cool to a comfortable temperature for handling.

Dispense the peanuts from the tray onto a large platter or into two shallow large bowls.

Let them cool for ten to fifteen more minutes so that the centers of the peanuts lose residual moisture and are then as crunchy as the outer parts. If you start eating them too soon the centers will be chewy instead of crunchy.

Enjoy!

Hot Fudge Sauce - ☺♥

Serendipity continues. Today I made a batch of Rocky Road ice cream, and I varied the method for processing the chocolate ingredients a bit from what is in the recipe in Food Nirvana. Specifically, I gradually added cream to the chocolate ingredients that were almost melted in a saucepan on very low heat, but I decided not to add the vanilla. In all, I added one cup of heavy cream to the chocolate ingredients, along with $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. sea salt and I let it heat while I stirred so that all the chocolate would be well mixed.

When I removed the pan from the stove there was a small amount of steam rising from the top of the mixture, indicating that it was at a scalding temperature, likely around 180°F. I put the pan into the freezer and returned to use the contents about 20 minutes later.

Everything was quite cold but not frozen. Actually, it was colder than I needed it to be but still workable when added to the sweet cream base for the ice cream. There was some of the cream and chocolate mixture left in the saucepan and I decided to taste it.

Lo, and Behold! I always wondered how to make a great hot fudge topping for a sundae that would rival/exceed the best of the commercial sauces. Now I know. Now you will know too. It was easy to beat even the best commercial sauces as they mostly use corn syrup (bad!) and often cheat on the amount of chocolate used, and they are stupidly expensive! Manufacturers and supermarkets typically cheat those too ignorant to grasp and to control the quality of their lives.

Ingredients: (makes about 1 1/2 cups)

8 blocks of Scharfenberger® 82% cacao dark chocolate (typically used for making chocolate candy) where each block is $\frac{1}{2}$ " x $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". The weight is 2 ounces.

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Hersheys® chocolate syrup (the primary ingredient is corn syrup ... yuck!)

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup of Ghirardelli® Double Chocolate cocoa mix

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. of salt

1 cup of heavy cream (or a bit more after cooking to get the consistency you want)

Directions:

Chop the chocolate blocks into small pieces and put them into a small saucepan.

Add the chocolate syrup, the cocoa mix and the salt. Mix well.

Heat the mixture on low heat while stirring until the chocolate pieces are completely melted. Remove the pan from the heat multiple times during that process to keep the contents from boiling. Gradually add the cream to the mixture while stirring and while continuing to heat the mixture on low heat.

Stir continuously during the addition of the cream and afterwards until the mixture is completely uniform and starts to emit steam but not boil.

Remove the pan from the heat and allow the contents to cool to about 120°F. Then, if necessary, adjust the thickness by adding and mixing in some additional cream, but don't overdo it. Dispense the final product into a one pint canning jar. Put a canning jar sealing insert lid on top and seal it with a screw-on lid. Store the fudge sauce in the refrigerator and keep it there until you are ready to use it.

A minute or so in a microwave oven later (with the lid sections removed first!) will recreate the perfect hot fudge sauce for your hot fudge sundae or other dessert that calls for a hot fudge sauce.

Marshmallow Crème - ☺♥

Here is a simple recipe for making lots of great marshmallow crème at home. Why make it? The cost is far less and the quality much better than commercial stuff. It was quite difficult finding this recipe on the Internet ... I had to go to the third or fourth Google® page of web sites to find one that wasn't simply trying to sell the finished product! So, tell me why the retailers web sites are shown first even though my search specifically included the word "recipe?" Hmmm ...

Ingredients: (makes approximately two quarts)

3 egg whites

2 cups of light corn syrup

½ tsp. of Salt

2 cups of confectioner's sugar

1 tbsp. of Vanilla extract (or other flavor extract like coconut)

Directions:

Combine egg whites, corn syrup and salt in a large mixer bowl. Mix for a full ten minutes, first on medium speed for one minute, then at a higher speed. After ten minutes the mixture should look like marshmallow crème. Keep mixing and add the vanilla. Then reduce the speed and gradually add the confectioner's sugar and then mix at a high speed for one or two minutes, or longer.

The actual volume of marshmallow crème that you get will depend on how long you beat it at high speed, for some air is incorporated and the longer you beat the product the more air you will get. Thus, the final volume can vary from 1½ to 2½ quarts.

Spoon the marshmallow crème into one quart canning jars, tighten the lids and refrigerate. I use a wide mouth canning jar funnel to keep the marshmallow crème away from the top of the canning jar while I am filling it.

The marshmallow crème is great on sundaes or in making ice cream, smoores, etc. It will keep well in your refrigerator for more than a month. Eventually some of the corn syrup will collect at the bottom of the jar ... you can still use the product but I recommend making a fresh batch for optimum quality.

I indicated in the recipe above the idea that you can use flavors other than vanilla when making marshmallow crème. Here is an example: I decided to clone

the commercial product, Mallo Cups®. To do that I needed the final candy to have a nice coconut flavor overtone. It was quite simple to buy a coconut flavor concentrate from OliveNation.com and use a 1 tablespoons of it in the above recipe instead of vanilla. It was delicious and a perfect way to avoid introducing any liquid agent into the chocolate that might harm the texture. I did, of course, use some freshly ground coconut in the melted chocolate dispensed on the top of my Mallo Cup® clones. Yummy!

As you will see when you read my ice cream recipes, I use the marshmallow crème in two of them, and it is perfect for that use.

➔ Your local supermarket will charge between \$2.50 to \$3.00 for a pint container of light Karo® syrup, which was the corn syrup I used to use to make this recipe and my recipe for butterscotch candy. Then I saw light corn syrup at Fisher's Country Store® and the price was \$4.84 for a half gallon! Later I saw a gallon size in a restaurant supply store for about \$9. And the quality of both larger sizes was excellent. Need I say more?

Peanut/Almond Brittle - ☺♥

This is a great brittle and quick and easy to make, thanks to an unusually good Internet recipe. The only caveat is to have everything ready to use at once when needed, and to move as quickly as necessary, particularly at the end of the cooking process when the butter, vanilla and baking soda are used, right before the hot brittle is poured onto a cookie sheet. I have slightly modified the Internet recipe by adding more nuts and a small amount of vanilla.

The brittle is great. The recipe worked very well. A family member found this brittle in a bag of goodies given to the whole family at Christmas, and he proceeded to eat all of it at one sitting. I am not surprised.

Ingredients:

1 cup of white sugar

½ cup of light corn syrup

¼ tsp. of salt

¼ cup of water

1 cup of roasted peanuts or chopped roasted blanched almonds

2 tbsp. of butter, softened

1 tsp. of vanilla

1 tsp. of baking soda

Directions:

Put the sugar, salt, corn syrup and water into a heavy two-quart saucepan. Stir and bring the mixture to a boil over medium heat. Stir until the sugar is dissolved, then stir in the peanuts or almond pieces.

Put a candy thermometer into the saucepan and continue cooking on a low to medium low heat until the temperature reaches 300°F. Stirring is necessary as the final temperature is approached. Initiate some stirring around 260°F and thereafter about once a minute. I recommend using a long, medium size wooden spoon. A gradual instead of rapid increase in temperature is desirable especially as the final temperature is approached, so that it isn't quickly passed by, resulting in too high a temperature, which can ruin the brittle and burn/darken the almonds.

Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the butter, then the vanilla. Then add the baking soda and stir rapidly and thoroughly so the brittle can be poured ASAP from the saucepan before it cools too much and sets/hardens.

Pour/scoop the hot brittle out of the saucepan at once onto a cookie sheet, moving the saucepan quickly, to avoid having the brittle form a mound. Use the wooden stirring spoon or a spatula as necessary to flatten and form the hot brittle into roughly a rectangle about 14" by 12". Let the brittle cool close to room temperature, for about 20 minutes. Then it is time to pry the brittle from the cookie sheet. You may have to pry the brittle from the cookie sheet using a kitchen knife or thin spatula on one end to get started, but in general it pops off the cookie sheet in one or more large pieces without much trouble. Snap the brittle into bite size pieces.

Note that the cooled brittle should be stored in an airtight container to keep moisture from the air away from it, else you will wind up with yucky goo that sticks together instead of peanut or almond brittle. This is a perfect example of a product that will remain fresh best if vacuum sealed.

Peanut Butter Cups - ☺♥

I noticed a quality decline in Reese's® peanut butter cups, gradually, over many years, particularly with the filling. To me it tasted more sweet and less like peanuts. That got me thinking about possibly making peanut butter cups.

I also got annoyed with the "you never know how much you're going to get until the package is opened" problem. It was/is a constantly changing stupid packaging game to fool the consumer into accepting less product while enhancing company profits. The only defense for the consumer is to remember a decent price/weight relationship, do some trivial arithmetic, and respond accordingly ... buy or shun.

I've had notable successes with making chocolate candies so I decided to do a bit of exploring on the Internet and find a decent recipe for making peanut butter cups at home. I found one that looked pretty good so I tried it. Like many Internet recipes I have encountered, there were marked deficiencies.

Okay ... the overall results were okay but the brown sugar wasn't really melted into the peanut butter mixture, so it was noticeably crunchy granular in the final filling. Also, the peanut butter filling was too soft. Beyond that the peanut taste was weak.

I made changes to the recipe (included below) to correct those problems, including eliminating most of the butter, all of the indicated brown sugar and all of the vanilla. I made use of crushed salted dry roasted peanuts, to enhance peanut flavor, along with some concentrated peanut butter flavoring that I bought from OliveNation.com. Both enhancements were great in effects on the final product.

My final filling was a bit soft at eating time, but I decided I like it that way. If you want you can increase the powdered sugar in the recipe using an additional 1/4 cup, and that will make the filling more firm but not too firm.

The chocolate used for Reese's® peanut butter cups remains okay but fine couverture grades of Belgian chocolate (Callebaut® ... buy it via Amazon®), milk and dark, is a definite upgrade. So that is what I use in this recipe. Actually, I decided to try a 50:50 mixture of milk and dark chocolate. That was really nice.

Ingredients: (makes 24 large [each between 1.5 ounces and 2.0 ounces] peanut butter cups)

1 cup of peanut butter (try to get a brand with good peanut flavor and less sugar)

1 tbsp. of softened butter

1 tsp. of concentrated peanut flavoring

1 cup of powdered sugar

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 cup of crushed, salted dry roasted peanuts

3 cups of high quality melted chocolate (about 5 to 6 cups of shaved chocolate pieces or buttons)

Directions:

Combine all the ingredients except the powdered sugar and the chocolate in an electric mixer bowl and use the mixer on medium speed to beat together those ingredients until they are well-combined, about three minutes. Scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl and mix for one additional minute.

Gradually add the powdered sugar, about 1/4 cup at a time, mixing on low to medium speed until it is completely combined with the peanut butter mixture.

Use a plastic spatula to scrape down the sides inside the mixing bowl to assure all ingredients are combined well. Mix on medium speed for an additional two minutes.

Spoon the peanut butter cup filling into a shallow cereal type bowl and set it aside.

Cover a 12" x 17" baking sheet with parchment paper.

Keep your fingers lightly dusted with powdered sugar and form 24 filling balls about 3/4" in diameter from the peanut butter cup filling, putting them onto the baking sheet in six rows, four to a row.

Put the baking sheet in the refrigerator to chill the peanut butter cup filling balls.

Set out 24 regular size cupcake liners into two, 12 openings cupcake pans.

Put shaved pieces of chocolate (and/or chocolate buttons) into a large microwave safe polypropylene bowl or into a one quart heat resistant sugar cane fiber bowl. The sugar cane fiber bowls can be purchased through Amazon® in units of 50 for 29 cents each, and they are reusable, and they are the right choice for melting small amounts of chocolate, like one cup. Those bowls are the wrong choice if you are trying to melt more than one cup of chocolate pieces at a time, as they can develop hot spots on the bottom, so in that instance use a polypropylene bowl.)

If you plan to melt all of the chocolate at one time then you will need a bowl with a two quart capacity. I recommend doing the melting in two or three additions to the polypropylene bowl. That way you can mix it more easily and better control the temperature of the chocolate while heating it.

Prepare your chocolate by microwaving it in the bowl in one 30 second cycle on full power, and then in multiple 15 second (or less) increments (stirring well between each heating cycle) until the chocolate is completely melted. Do not allow the chocolate temperature to exceed 92 degrees F. You can use an instant read thermometer or a candy thermometer to check the temperature after each stirring cycle.

Spoon about one tablespoon of melted chocolate into a cupcake liner and use the tip of a teaspoon to spread the chocolate so the entire bottom of the liner is covered evenly.

Repeat that step for the other 23 cupcake liners.

Chill the chocolate coated cupcake liners in the refrigerator for ten minutes to partially set the chocolate.

Place a piece of chilled peanut butter cup filling in one of the cupcake pan openings on top of the bottom layer of chocolate, centered. Press on it with your finger to make it flat on top but DO NOT LET the filling touch the paper cupcake liners.

Repeat that operation until all 24 cupcake liners and all 24 pieces of peanut butter cup filling have been used. In the next step you will cover the filling pieces with melted chocolate, but remember the goal is to barely cover the filling pieces, not to fill up the cupcake liner. Doing it right will result in a peanut butter cup size that is generous and with the right ratio of chocolate to peanut butter cup filling. Use too much chocolate early on and you will not have enough chocolate to do all of the peanut butter cups.

Dispense melted chocolate over the peanut butter cup filling using a small ladle or even a soup spoon. But do not dispense more chocolate than necessary. Just barely cover the peanut butter cup filling and assure that melted chocolate has flowed around the filling down to the chocolate base. Use the underside of a teaspoon lightly to smooth out the top surface of the chocolate.

Repeat that step for the other 23 peanut butter cup positions.

Allow the peanut butter cups to sit undisturbed in a cool place until the chocolate has hardened/set. Enjoy!

Peppermint Patties - ☺♥

My sweetheart Peggy and I were sharing a box of Junior Mints® and I thought, why not make peppermint patties like the York® brand we knew as children? Back then I seem to remember a higher quality chocolate and a thicker coating. Thus, why not recreate the best of the past instead of allowing the present total profit orientation of most companies to distort the definition of great quality candy? I found various recipes for peppermint patties on the Internet and selected one and certainly modified it procedurally and in terms of some ingredients, as you will notice below, to create something that tastes like the real thing and is relatively easy to make.

Peppermint patties are very good with either milk or dark chocolate coating, or a blend of the two. I recommend buying a high quality chocolate made for dipping. If all you have available is your supermarket then pick a brand of chocolate like Lindt® to melt as the patty coating. I make a variety of chocolate candies so I buy 11 lb. blocks of Callebaut® Belgian chocolate, which is of excellent quality, via Amazon®.

I've now made the patties and I'm reporting back with results. Bottom line: The given recipe was okay in terms of ingredients, a bit light on the chocolate and on the peppermint extract, which I have corrected in the recipe below, but absolutely useless procedurally as there are a number of requirements and pitfalls not mentioned and some inadequate tools specified. I have corrected those deficiencies, after a bit of cursing.

I used a 60:40 ratio of Callebaut® milk and dark chocolate. That is a nice mixture.

Ingredients:

1 egg white from an extra large or jumbo egg

4 cups of sifted powdered sugar

1/3 cup of light corn syrup

1 teaspoon of pure peppermint extract (I use McCormick®)

1 1/4 pounds of high quality dark and/or milk chocolate suitable for making chocolate coated candies (do not use baking chocolate or cheap chocolate chips, and do not trust candy supply stores with their phony buttons of what they improperly call chocolate)

powdered sugar for dusting your hands and the tops of the patty balls before they are flattened, plus be sure to dust the waxed paper used on the cookie tray.

Directions:

Beat the egg white until it is stiff and forms peaks using an electric mixer on medium high to high speed.

Slowly add the powdered sugar while blending on medium low to medium speed. You will probably want to use a pastry spatula once or twice during the mixing to scrape the inside of the bowl to force the mixture to the bottom of the bowl.

Add the corn syrup and the peppermint extract, mixing until everything is well blended, again using the spatula as necessary, then knead the mixture until it has a smooth dough consistency. Note: This is a very stiff mixture so you must do the last part by hand kneading. You may want to dust your hands first with powdered sugar.

Dust the palms of your hands and fingers with powdered sugar. Form balls of candy about 1" in diameter by hand, placing them spaced 3" apart on a sheet of powdered sugar dusted waxed paper on a cookie tray. You may need a second cookie tray with powdered sugar dusted waxed paper to assure that you can process all of the kneaded candy.

So why would we have to dust waxed paper with powdered sugar? It turns out that without it the patties, before they are chocolate coated, will stick tightly to the waxed paper after freezing. You don't want that to happen.

Press each ball flat with the bottom of a glass tumbler to a thickness of 1/4". You may want to dust the balls of candy lightly with powdered sugar first so they don't stick to the bottom of the glass. Put the cookie tray(s) into the freezer for at least 30 minutes.

Okay. Now, while the candy is in the freezer, it is time to prepare the chocolate. Depending on the shape and thickness of the chocolate you plan to use the preparation can vary from very easy to somewhat more difficult. The point is that you want small pieces of chocolate in the plastic bowl referenced below, as that will facilitate easy melting. As I use chocolate in block form that is over 1" thick I have to use a heavy wooden cutting board and a very large, heavy butcher knife, to cut/shave sections of chocolate from the block. You will likely only cut or break your chocolate from chocolate bars easily into small pieces.

Reserve about 20 percent of the chocolate pieces, the shaved or grated or very small pieces for later use to temper the chocolate. Why? Melting the chocolate

typically causes it to lose the temper it had as purchased because quick melting raises the temperature above 108 degrees F and causes complete loss of crystal formation associated with well tempered chocolate.

The subsequent addition of half of the reserved pieces when the melted chocolate has cooled to around 106 degrees F will seed the chocolate with properly oriented crystals and as the mixture is stirred the temperature will drop to 98 degrees F or less because of the heat taken from the 106 degrees chocolate required to melt the added chocolate. The chocolate, while still melted, has been partially tempered, as evidenced by a notable thickening of it during stirring to finally melt the last of the added chocolate. The final part of the tempering is to add the other half of the reserved chocolate and continue stirring, which will cool the chocolate to below 94 degrees F and in the process complete the tempering.

Thus, the final temperature of the melted chocolate will be below the melting temperature that caused it to lose temper, yet it will be high enough to provide suitable melted chocolate for dipping. The implication is that dipping should be done fairly quickly so that the melted chocolate does not thicken and set during dipping, else the candy will have too thick a coating and also be unattractive. Some candy makers use a hair dryer to periodically warm tempered chocolate during dipping to avoid having it chill too much.

Okay ... enough talk. Let's do it!

Melt the 80 percent of the dark/milk chocolate in a plastic bowl made for use in a microwave oven. The bowl I use is made of polypropylene, and as the temperature will never exceed 110 degrees F there is no need to worry about solvents or other chemicals being released from the bowl into the food during microwaving.

Microwave the chocolate on the high heat setting for 1 minute. Stir. Then continue melting for an additional 15 seconds. Stir well to even the temperature throughout the bowl and to promote additional melting.

If it is necessary to melt the chocolate further, then microwave it for 5 seconds longer and stir well. Check the temperature with an instant or quick read thermometer. Aim for a temperature of 108 degrees F. Do not exceed 110 degrees F. If the temperature is below 108 degrees F then microwave the chocolate for an additional 5 seconds and stir well and again check the temperature. You want to complete the melting and stirring of this portion of the chocolate such that the final temperature is close to but not higher than 108 degrees F.

Now stir in half of the reserved chocolate and stir well until it is melted. You may notice the chocolate thickening as evidence of it being tempered while it cools.

When the temperature drops to 98 degrees F then add the remaining reserved chocolate and stir until it is melted. If you cannot get all of the added chocolate to melt you may microwave the mixture for no more than five seconds and then continue stirring to complete the melting of the added chocolate. Note that at this stage you do not want the temperature to exceed 94 degrees F or you risk losing temper.

The chocolate is suitable for dipping in the temperature range of roughly 85 degrees F to 92 degrees F, and the longer it is held within that temperature range the better the temper will be of the final candy. Thus, you can beneficially let your chocolate cool to below 90 degrees F before you start coating the patties.

Now we'll proceed to chocolate coat the patties. First, take no more than two patties at a time from the freezer as you want the patties to remain frozen until after you have coated them with the melted chocolate and placed them on new sheets of waxed paper on additional cookie trays. Why? At room temperature the patties are too soft to hold a shape during dipping. Second, the easiest way to coat the patties and remove them from the melted chocolate is to have the melted chocolate in a wide, shallow bowl. If the bowl you used to heat the chocolate isn't wide and shallow then transfer the melted chocolate to one that is wide and shallow and pre-warmed to keep the chocolate at the right temperature.

Place each patty individually into the melted chocolate and coat it completely by using 2 wide meat forks to flip it over to coat the second side. Use the forks underneath the coated patty to lift it from the melted chocolate. Let the forks drip off excess chocolate for about five seconds and then place the patty on the new waxed papered cookie tray(s).

Once you have chocolate coated all of the patties then put the cookie trays with the coated patties into the freezer. Keep them there for about 15 minutes, until the chocolate coating is firm/hard.

Wrap each patty with plastic wrap and store the patties in a plastic container with a tight lid. Store the container in a cool dark place.

Eat the patties within one week. Alternatively, you can keep them refrigerated for up to three weeks.

Enjoy!

Raisin Sauce - 😊♥

This dessert sauce is yummy served over warm gingerbread, and a dollop of whipped cream makes it even better. The raisin sauce can also be used with other types of spicy cakes.

Ingredients:

1 cup of warm water

1/2-3/4 cup of raisins

3/4 cup of packed brown sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons of cornstarch

1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon of softened butter

Directions:

Put the warm water and raisins in a small saucepan, heat on medium heat to a simmer, and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat.

In a larger saucepan add the brown sugar, cornstarch, cinnamon and lemon juice and mix well.

Add the hot raisin mixture and stir continuously, cooking over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the mixture thickens.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the butter.

Ladle the sauce over cut squares of warm gingerbread or other spicy cake.

Add a dollop or two of whipped cream (optional).

Enjoy!

Ray's Almond Crunch - ☺

I was thinking about creative ways to use almond flour, and I remembered that it is not powdery like regular flour but instead it is a fine granular product. I then thought about candy that uses nuts and immediately I got an idea. Why not make an Almond Crunch hard crack candy that contains almond flour and roasted almond pieces? The presence of the almond flour in a candy of that type affects texture. The finished candy is easy to bite and break and eat for that reason.

I quickly developed a simple recipe for a hard crack candy that would go well with the almond flavor and provide the right texture. Thus, the recipe below is what I used to make it. It is easy to make and quite tasty.

Ingredients:

2 cups of sugar

1 cup of light corn syrup

1/4 lb. of butter plus a small amount to lightly butter a cookie sheet

1/2 cup of honey

1/8 cup of dark molasses

1/2 tsp. of salt

2 tsp. of almond extract

2 cups of almond flour

2 cups of blanched, chopped, roasted almonds

Directions:

Set the oven to 350°F.

Blanch two cups of raw almonds in boiling water, remove and discard the skins, then dry the almonds with paper towels and roughly chop them on a wooden cutting board. Do the blanching by putting the almonds into a large Pyrex® measuring cup, filling it with water sufficient to cover the almonds, and then microwaving it on high power until the mixture boils. That can take from two to four minutes. Dump the almonds into a sieve over the sink to drain them, discarding the water.

Roast the chopped almonds for ten minutes in a 350°F oven on a large cookie sheet with high sides. After the first five minutes use a spatula to stir the almond pieces to assure even roasting, then continue with the last five minutes of roasting.

Remove the roasted almond pieces from the oven and pour them into a bowl.

Clean and then butter the cookie sheet lightly. Place the roasted almond pieces evenly on the cookie sheet and set it aside.

Melt the 1/4 lb. of butter in a three quart saucepan on low heat.

Add the sugar, corn syrup, honey, molasses and salt, stirring well with each addition to mix the ingredients.

Increase the heat to medium and continue stirring slowly until all ingredients are well mixed.

Reduce the heat to low and put a candy thermometer into the mixture.

Let the mixture temperature increase slowly to 300°F. Watch it carefully as it boils to be sure it does not boil over the top edge of the saucepan. If necessary remove the saucepan from the heat for a minute and then return it to the heat and continue cooking.

Remove the saucepan from the heat. Put the candy thermometer aside.

Add the almond extract to the hot candy and mix well.

Add the almond flour to the hot candy gradually and mix well. Try to do this within one or at most two minutes to avoid having the candy become hard while still in the saucepan.

Pour the candy onto the buttered cookie sheet prepared earlier.

Smooth the mixture over the surface of the cookie sheet evenly with a fork and allow the Almond Crunch to cool to room temperature.

Chop the cooled Almond Crunch into large pieces by pressing down on it using both hands with a meat cleaver. Then break the Almond Crunch into irregular bite size pieces, again using the meat cleaver.

Put multiple pieces of Almond Crunch into each of six, two or three cup size vacuum sealing bags, and vacuum seal the Almond Crunch to keep it fresh.

Enjoy! Kids will love this candy. Older kids too!

Root Beer Hard Candy - ☺♥T

I love root beer barrels and I wanted to make them so I found an Internet recipe and tried it. It turned out to be a pretty good recipe. Best of all it is simple, with few ingredients. As I developed my version of the recipe I soon realized I was making a teaching recipe for making and storing hard candy. So now you also have the benefit of my experience.

Pay close attention to the temperature (305 °F to 310 °F) while heating the ingredients, for if it isn't high enough when you stop the heating, you will wind up with sticky candy, and if it is too high then you will have burnt candy.

Use an instant read thermometer and take frequent temperature readings, especially once the temperature hits 260 °F and above, for the rate of temperature increase accelerates as the small amount of residual water is evaporated rapidly during the last few minutes of heating.

Note that this recipe can be used to make other flavors of hard candy simply by substituting the flavor concentrate of your choice for the root beer concentrate. One example is to use Mapleine® concentrate for maple flavored hard candy.

The best type of molds to use when pouring the hot syrupy candy are silicone molds as they are typically safe up to 450 °F. They also provide easy non-stick release of the pieces of candy once it has cooled to room temperature. Mold size per individual piece of candy should be relatively small for hard candies, in the range of 2 to 3 milliliters (ml) in volume.

If you don't have an appropriate candy mold you can line an 11" x 17" baking sheet with parchment paper and simply pour the hot syrupy candy onto the parchment paper and let it spread out to a thickness of about 1/8". Dust the surface generously with powdered sugar. Then break up the candy into bite size pieces after it cools to room temperature

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups of white sugar

3/4 cup of light corn syrup

1/2 cup of water

2 tsp. of root beer concentrate (you might later try experimenting with the amount of the concentrate you use after first using this recommended amount)

food colorings (optional but desirable)

powdered sugar (normally essential for dusting the hard candy once made to keep the pieces from sticking to each other [or to other surfaces])

silicone candy mold(s) (optional)

cellophane candy wrappers (optional)

sealable plastic bags, or an air tight container with parchment paper separation layers to store the hard candy pieces if they are not wrapped

Directions:

Mix the sugar, corn syrup and water in a heavy bottom saucepan. I use a French tin lined very heavy copper saucepan which is ideal when making delicate sauces or candies that might burn inside the saucepan if there is uneven heating of the saucepan bottom, resulting in uneven temperatures in different areas of the bottom of the saucepan. A heavy bottom saucepan avoids that problem by making heat distribution and thus temperature more even on the inside bottom of the saucepan.

Measure out the root beer (or other) concentrate and any food coloring and mix them together in a small container. I recommend using food coloring to enhance candy appearance. For this recipe use four drops of yellow food coloring, three drops of red food coloring and three drops of blue food coloring. That will result in a light brown color to the transparent candy.

Heat the sugar, corn syrup and water mixture slowly on medium heat to between 300 and 310 °F. Use an instant read thermometer lightly inserted periodically into the boiling candy mixture in different locations.

When the mixture is at or slightly above 305 °F, turn off the heat.

Add the root beer concentrate and the (optional) food coloring and stir to mix well.

Pour the hot syrupy candy into high temperature resistant silicone molds or onto a parchment paper covered baking sheet.

Dust the top surface generously with powdered sugar.

When the candy is cooled to room temperature release the pieces from the mold(s) onto a baking sheet that is covered with 1/4 cup of powdered sugar. Then finish coating the pieces of candy by hand with the powdered sugar.

If you used a parchment paper lined baking sheet instead of a candy mold you must break up the root beer candy into bite size pieces by hand after dusting/coating the top surface with 1/4 cup of powdered sugar. After breaking be sure to coat all the surfaces of the candy pieces by hand with the powdered sugar.

Be sure to have the entire surface of each piece of candy covered with powdered sugar. Store layers of the candy pieces, separated by layers of wax paper or parchment paper, in an air tight container.

Alternatively, if you buy cellophane type candy wrappers (a very good idea ... see Amazon®) you can wrap the candy pieces individually and store them in most any type of air tight container, or even in sealable plastic freezer or sandwich bags.

Finally, note that commercial root beer barrel candy is not dusted in powdered sugar. It is simply wrapped in sealed cellophane. You can approximate that too but only if your final

cooking temperature is 310 °F to eliminate all residual water from the hard candy. Then you wrap the pieces in cellophane and also use an air tight storage container, for we don't have means to seal the cellophane wrapping at home like what we find with commercial hard candies. Ergo, ambient high humidity can make exposed candy sticky from absorbed moisture, and that is most undesirable.

Enjoy!

Turtles - ☺♥

Many of us really like the candy known as Turtles, if we buy it from a quality shop, for it combines three of our favorite foods ... pecans, caramel and chocolate. How can anyone not like that combination? Okay, if you are a termite or herbivore I will understand. Otherwise ... You want to make turtles per this recipe.

This recipe is a modification of one I finally found on the Internet that happened to be superior to the rest of the poor recipes therein. Even this one had significant flaws in candy making fundamentals that I had to correct, but at least the recommended ingredients, or most of them, were proper.

So it is that I decided to make Turtles for the first time. I expected to make further modifications. Maybe ... Because I already knew about and already possessed all of the best ingredients! But one never knows for sure all that might be known about superior procedures, right? Read on ...

Okay (a day later) ... I made them. WOW!!! The only issue was my mistake in assuming that plain waxed paper would be sufficient as a non-stick underlayment on a baking sheet while making the turtles. Not true! They stuck fiercely to waxed paper due to the melted caramel applied earlier. It was an easy fix following that educational experience. Use parchment paper instead of waxed paper, and freeze the caramel and pecan combination for 20 minutes prior to coating the candy with melted chocolate. Thus, they don't stick tightly to the parchment paper and it is easy to pop them off, which I recommend doing whether you are planning to simply coat the tops with melted chocolate or dip the caramel/pecan pieces in melted chocolate to cover them completely.

Later, after the chocolate has set, the turtles won't stick to waxed paper or parchment paper, provided you store them upside down in layers separated by waxed paper or, right side up on parchment paper. The best solution to the sticky caramel issue is to dip the pecan and caramel clusters into melted chocolate so they are coated entirely with chocolate. An alternative is to make the final caramel temperature slightly higher than 240 degrees F to produce a less soft caramel that will have less of a tendency to stick to various surfaces. It is a tradeoff. I recommend that you experiment and decide what you prefer. I prefer to keep the caramel very soft so I stop heating it when the temperature is 240 degrees F.

Ingredients: (makes 24, 2 1/2" diameter large turtles)

8 ounces (two cups) of pecan halves (lightly roasted and lightly dusted with powdered sea salt)

One recipe of homemade caramel per the recipe shown at the bottom of this Turtles recipe, in viscous but runny form, right after cooking in the hot saucepan. Let me tell you, this is a no-brainer. This caramel is superb and puts anything you might find in a supermarket to shame.

16 ounces (or 24 ounces if you want to coat the turtles completely with chocolate) of finely chopped high quality chocolate, barely melted to a temperature at or below 90 degrees F. Use 8 or more ounces of dark chocolate and 8 or more ounces of milk chocolate, or the ratio of your choice. I like either all milk chocolate or a 3:1 ratio of milk chocolate to dark chocolate. Do not use junk like chocolate chips of the type used for making cookies. Buy Lindt® or Ghirardelli® or do what I do, which is to purchase very high couverture grade Belgian chocolate, a brand named Callebaut®, via Amazon®.

1/4 tsp. of powdered sea salt for lightly dusting the lightly roasted pecans (You can make it from plain sea salt using a small high speed blender/mixer like a Magic Bullet®, or by crushing the salt with a mortar and pestle)

Directions:

Roast the pecan halves on a baking sheet in a 300 degrees F oven for ten minutes, stirring and turning the baking sheet around after the first five minutes. Dump the pecan halves onto a wood cutting board and very lightly dust them with powdered sea salt and mix them to distribute the salt evenly. Let the pecans cool to room temperature.

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. It is helpful later if the baking sheets will fit into the freezer. It has to do with getting the finished turtles to release from the surface on which they are made if the soft caramel touches/adheres to the surface. That step is not necessary if the turtles are completely coated with chocolate.

Make small piles of pecan halves on the parchment paper sheets, each pile separated by an inch on all sides from other piles, using 4 to 5 pecan halves per pile. Keep the pecan pieces in each pile tightly together to reduce the size of air gaps so the melted caramel mostly stays on the pecans instead of mostly seeping through/around air gaps.

Make the homemade caramel per the recipe at the bottom of this recipe and use it directly in melted but slightly cooled form from the saucepan to cover most of the pecan surface in each pile, about two tablespoons of melted caramel per pile

of pecans in total. Do this in two steps to take advantage of the viscosity change of the caramel at different temperatures during cooling.

I use two soup spoons to make this process easy ... one to scoop out melted caramel from the hot saucepan and the other spoon underneath the first to help avoid dripping the caramel from the first spoon onto the parchment paper while getting it over one of the piles of pecans. Try not to get too close to the pecans while dispensing the hot caramel or the motion from releasing the caramel onto the pile will disturb the integrity of the pecan pile ... in other words hold the spoons about four inches above the pecan pile and let the caramel drizzle onto the pecan surfaces of one piece of candy slowly while you move the spoons gently to cover the middle area of the pecan pile surface, especially in the middle of the pile. Don't put caramel around the outer edges of the pecan pile.

Thus, you add about 1 tablespoon of runny melted caramel (after it has cooled enough to become slightly viscous) to the top of each pecan pile, such that it will attach the pecan halves to each other. Try to add it all too early and the melted caramel will run all over the place. Do it too late and it will be too stiff to process. I learned that doing the pouring in two steps is the best way to avoid overrun of the hot caramel. Ergo, on the first pass drizzle a tablespoon of hot runny caramel onto the middle of the pecans pile ... then by the second pass the caramel has cooled somewhat and thickened somewhat in the saucepan and you can easily dispense the second tablespoon of caramel on top of each piece of candy without it running all over. One way to keep the caramel from becoming too stiff while you are dispensing it is to keep the saucepan warm while you are using the caramel. Putting the hot saucepan on a wood cutting board instead of a granite counter will help keep the caramel warm. In the worst case you might have to gently reheat the remaining caramel in the saucepan to again make it soft enough to process.

Use a two quart microwave-safe plastic bowl, and add the 16 ounces (or 24 ounces) of small pieces of chocolate (8 ounces each or more of dark and milk chocolate or the ratio of your choice) and heat it in the microwave oven to barely melt it, about 45 seconds in the first heating cycle. Then mix/stir the chocolate with a metal spoon (avoid wood spoons to avoid moisture and/or odors from other foods). And why microwave safe plastic? Glass bowls can develop hot spots on the bottom that overheat the chocolate in those areas and cause it to lose temper.

Heat the chocolate next for 15 seconds, and thereafter in 5 second increments, if necessary, stirring after each heating period until the chocolate can finally be stirred smooth. That means some unmelted pieces should be present until the very end of the stirring to avoid having the chocolate lose temper by becoming

too hot. Use a quick read or instant read thermometer to check the temperature of the chocolate after each stirring. The point is you can retain the temper of the chocolate if it never gets above 32 degrees C, or 90 degrees F. The point is to take it one step at a time. Be patient. Let the chocolate melt gradually with stirring and a number of 5 second intervals in the microwave oven. Once it has all melted and the temperature never got beyond 90 degrees F you are good to go.

If you are simply coating the tops of the turtles with chocolate then add about 2 tablespoons of melted chocolate on top of each caramel topped pecan cluster by dolloping it evenly over the top and letting it flow evenly down the sides. It is normal for some of the bare pecan surfaces to stick out beyond the layer of chocolate ... that's why this candy looks like a turtle, hence the name. If instead you plan to coat the entire surface of the turtles with chocolate then dip each piece into a container of melted chocolate using two dinner forks, then remove it from the chocolate, letting it drip excess back into the container for a few seconds, then put the coated turtle back at its place on the parchment paper.

Note: The container I use to melt the chocolate is actually a microwave safe plastic pitcher, so I can literally pour the melted chocolate onto the turtles and don't have to use any spoon until I want to get the last of the chocolate out of the pitcher ... but that works only if you are not completely covering the turtles with chocolate. If you want to coat the turtles entirely with chocolate then use a deep/wide cereal bowl for dispensing the melted chocolate and dip and flip the turtles in the melted chocolate using two dinner forks, then let the excess melted chocolate drip back into the bowl for a few seconds and then transfer each completely coated turtle back to its place on the parchment paper.

Allow the Turtles to become firm on the parchment covered baking tray in the freezer for no more than 10 minutes before storing or serving them. And remember that any caramel on the bottom of the turtles will stick to parchment paper unless they have been frozen earlier and popped off, which allows you to separate them later from the parchment paper very easily. Once that is done they will not stick to the parchment paper even when they are at room temperature.

Turtles will keep for months in the refrigerator or freezer in an air tight container or up to three weeks in an air tight container stored in a dark, cool (65 degrees F) location. But note that you really do need to have an air tight container to avoid letting food odors or moisture ruin the quality of the turtles.

No matter which type of storage you choose, use an air tight container and form layers of the turtles, separated by pieces of waxed paper or parchment paper.

Enjoy! Oh, my! ... You certainly will enjoy this fine candy!

Homemade Caramel Recipe: (from The Joy of Cooking©)

Ingredients:

1/4 pound of butter (one stick)

1/4 cup of light brown sugar

3/4 cup of white sugar

1/2 cup of light corn syrup

1/2 cup of heavy cream

1 teaspoon of vanilla

Directions:

Put the butter, sugars and corn syrup into a heavy two quart saucepan.

Heat on low, stirring until the sugar crystals are dissolved.

Use a candy thermometer and continue to heat the mixture on low heat until it reaches a temperature of 240°F. Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the heavy cream.

Return the saucepan to the heat. Stir gently until the mixture again reaches 240° F, or higher to about 245° F only if you want a firmer caramel (I prefer keeping the caramel soft). This may take ten to fifteen minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the vanilla.

Use the caramel in melted form directly from the saucepan for the Turtles as soon as it has cooled barely enough to not be completely runny. Work quickly to avoid having the caramel cool too much and become too thick to process with the soup spoons.

White Chocolate Popcorn - ☺♥

Each Christmas Janet and I made many tasty treats to give away in gift bags to family and close friends. After we parted I started making them myself. One of the items Janet did in previous Holiday seasons was the White Chocolate Popcorn, and it sure was a hit with everyone. I didn't have any notion of the amount of chocolate to use with a quart bag of popcorn so I had to go slowly and figure it out as I proceeded.

As you might expect I have to be quantitative about most everything, especially Food Nirvana recipes, so I used the Internet to find a few recipes and I was not impressed. They were nothing but generalities. I experimented and learned what I believe is the right amount of white chocolate to use per quart of popcorn, and that information is shown in the recipe below. Now you have this recipe and you can make this delightful snack too. Enjoy! Do note that it is a bit more work than might appear on the surface. The very limited number of ingredients makes one think it has be simple. Well, it is simple but time consuming with a fair amount of labor.

Ingredients:

4 quarts of freshly popped popcorn (see below about type of popcorn)

Sea salt to taste

1 lb. of good quality white chocolate (I buy Callebaut® Belgian white chocolate via Amazon®)

Directions:

Make the popcorn and put half of it into a one gallon bowl with a wide top. I prefer white popcorn kernels, not the yellow ones, so I buy white popcorn kernels online from Brandmeyer Popcorn Company® in Iowa (www.iowastatepopcorn.com). I buy ten, two pound bags each time. The price is absurdly low, as is the shipping. The only alternative is to buy a jar of the white popcorn kernels in a brand like Orville Redenbacher's® at the supermarket, for an absurdly high price, otherwise you simply can't find white popcorn kernels in any supermarket. That is a disgusting and intentional change in our society, due to business greed.

Lightly salt the popcorn and mix the popcorn and salt together well with two large wooden spoons.

Melt 1/2 lb. of the white chocolate in the microwave oven, following the steps below.

Use a heavy butcher knife and a wooden cutting board and cut the chocolate into small pieces and shavings.

Put the chocolate pieces and shavings into a one quart non-glass bowl that is microwave oven safe.

Microwave the chocolate on full power for one minute, then remove the bowl and stir the chocolate with a fork to cover unmelted pieces with melted chocolate.

Return the bowl to the microwave oven and microwave the chocolate on full power for 30 seconds. As before, remove the bowl from the microwave oven and stir the contents with a fork for one minute to help any partially melted pieces of chocolate to melt into the already melted chocolate.

Repeat the microwaving procedure but for only 10 seconds. Remove the bowl and finish mixing the chocolate with a fork.

The chocolate is now completely melted and mixed and ready to use with the popcorn.

Drizzle/gently pour the melted chocolate over the surface of the popcorn, using a spoon to get most of the chocolate out of the bowl.

Immediately use the two large wooden spoons to mix the melted chocolate and the popcorn thoroughly so as to coat all of the popcorn with a thin layer of white chocolate.

You are now ready to package the white chocolate popcorn into two one quart (or slightly larger) bags. I use paper bags that I buy at the local candy making supply store that are polymer coated inside and thus waterproof and stain proof. The bags have closure ties at the top. See the picture shown with this recipe. Yes, they even have a see-through cellophane window in the bag. Below are the instructions for filling the bags.

I open a bag and place it in a tall plastic storage container slightly wider than the bag and about the same height. I then use a wide mouth canning jar funnel and place it into the top of the bag. Then I use the two large wooden spoons like a post hole digger to capture a good amount of the coated popcorn between the spoons, which I then put over the funnel and proceed to drop the coated popcorn into the funnel.

Typically you will have to use the spoons with each other to get all the popcorn from them and down through the funnel into the paper bag. Repeat the process until the bag is full.

Remove the bag from the plastic storage container and smack the bottom of it gently on a hard counter surface to cause the popcorn to settle in the bag. Repeat the filling process with that bag until it is again full. Then repeat the procedure to settle the popcorn in the bag.

At this point you are ready to seal the bag with whatever material/closure came with the bag for that purpose. Seal it and put it aside and proceed to do the second bag.

Repeat the entire above process for the other two quarts of popcorn and the second 1/2 lb. of white chocolate.

You now have four one quart bags of white chocolate popcorn sealed to keep the product fresh.

Use the white chocolate popcorn within two to three weeks while it is still very fresh. You can store it in the pantry.

This delightful and very tasty snack makes a great gift or snack item to bring to a party. It is the combination of crunch with both sweet and slightly salty flavors that does the trick.

Enjoy!

COOKIES & CAKES:

Almond Paste - ☺♥

Almond paste is used in a variety of recipes, for example, macaroon cookies and marzipan. It is ridiculously expensive in supermarkets for no good reason other than most people don't think to make it themselves. Do it once and you will never again buy the commercial stuff. I purchase three pound bags of almonds at Costco® or Sams Club® for \$11. I then vacuum seal the almonds in one cup quantities, and then I use what I need for various recipes. Of course, I have to blanch the almonds for some recipes, like this one. Simply put the almonds into a Pyrex® two cup measuring cup with enough water to thoroughly cover them and bring it to a boil in the microwave oven. That will take around two minutes. Let them boil for no more than 30 seconds. Then dump the contents into a sieve to drain the hot water. Dump the almonds onto a counter or cutting board. Squeeze the skins from them by using a rolling motion of the skin around the nut while pressing the skin towards the pointed end and the skins will come off easily. Dry the almonds with a two paper towels. Voila!

Ingredients: (makes 1 1/2 cups)

1-1/2 cups blanched almonds

1-1/2 cups confectioners' sugar

1 egg white

1-1/2 teaspoons almond extract (or more, or use Amaretto® to save money)

1/4 teaspoon salt

Directions:

Place the blanched dried almonds into a food processor. Cover and process them until the mixture is smooth. Add the confectioners' sugar, egg white, almond extract and salt. Cover and process the mixture until smooth almond paste is formed. This takes about one to two minutes.

You can use the paste immediately or put it into an airtight container. Refrigerate it for up to 1 month or freeze it for up to 3 months.

I like to use what I make immediately.

Anise Biscotti - ?

Biscotti are fairly common in the cookie aisles of supermarkets, bakeries, etc. but it always seems to me that a premium price is charged for what is in fact a simple to make cookie with inexpensive ingredients. Also, freshly made biscotti are fairly dry compared to other types of cookies and they will keep very well for a few months if properly stored, which means sealed away from air/moisture. You don't have to wolf down a pile of freshly made biscotti all at once to enjoy them. Thus I decided to include a biscotti recipe in Food Nirvana so my readers can enjoy biscotti without paying rip-off prices.

Anise Biscotti can be delicious and I found this recipe on the Internet at AllRecipes.com. It was given the highest five star rating so I expect it to be great, but I have yet to try the recipe. I will report back as soon as I do. The best part is that once you have a good basic biscotti recipe you can vary the flavoring ingredients easily, like using chocolate chips or various nuts or even other flavor concentrates like lemon or coconut instead of anise extract. I'm getting hungry just thinking about the many varieties!

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of white sugar**
- 1 cup of butter, softened**
- 4 eggs**
- 4 1/2 cups of all-purpose flour**
- 4 teaspoons of baking powder**
- 3/4 teaspoon of salt**
- 1/3 cup of brandy**
- 1 1/2 teaspoons of anise extract**
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract**
- 1 cup of sliced blanched almonds**
- 2 tablespoons of anise seed**

Directions:

Preheat your oven to 350°F.

Line two cookie sheets with parchment paper.

Beat the sugar and butter with an electric mixer in a large mixing bowl, until the mixture is light and fluffy.

Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition.

Combine the brandy, anise extract and vanilla in a small bowl or measuring cup.

In a medium bowl, combine the flour, baking powder and salt.

Alternately add the dry ingredients and the brandy mixture to the butter/sugar/egg mixture, beginning and ending with the dry ingredients.

Remove the bowl from the electric mixer and stir the almonds and the anise seed into the batter.

Drop the dough by spoonfuls onto the prepared cookie sheets, forming two, 2" wide x 13" long strips on each sheet. Smooth the dough into logs with moistened fingertips.

Bake about 30 to 35 minutes or until golden and firm to the touch. Place the cookie sheets on racks and cool the biscotti completely.

Reduce the oven temperature to 300°F.

Cut the cooled logs on the diagonal into 3/4" thick slices using a serrated edge knife on a cutting board. Then put the slices onto the cookie sheets.

Bake for about 20 minutes, turning after 10 minutes, until the biscotti's are dry and slightly brown. Remove them to a rack and let them cool to room temperature.

Store the biscotti in an airtight container.

Caramel Nut Squares - ☺♥

This is one of Marie's great recipes for Christmas cookies.

Ingredients for the Shortbread base:

1 1/2 cups flour

3/4 cup butter

1/4 cup powdered sugar

1/4 cup granulated sugar

Directions:

Heat the oven to 300°F.

Mix the flour, butter and sugars using an electric mixer. It will form a uniform dough when it is well blended. Press the mixture into a lightly buttered oblong rectangular baking dish, 9x13x2 inches. Bake for 20 minutes, then turn the baking dish around so the front of the baking dish faces the back of the oven (this ensures even baking in case your oven is less than perfect). Bake for 20 more minutes and see if the shortbread base is a light tan. If it is, remove the baking dish to a wood cutting board, otherwise bake for five more minutes. Then, keep the shortbread base baking dish in a warm 150° F oven until you are ready to use the caramel nut mixture described below.

Once the caramel nut mixture is made, immediately pour it over the top of the shortbread, spread it evenly with a knife, especially the chopped pecans, and allow it to cool to room temperature. Then cut the final layered product into squares about 1½ inch by 1½ inch.

Ingredients for the Caramel Nut topping: (Caramel recipe from The Joy of Cooking©)

1/4 lb. of butter

1 cup of light brown sugar

1/4 cup of dark corn syrup

1/4 cup of light corn syrup

1/2 cup of heavy cream

1 teaspoon of vanilla

1 cup of chopped pecans

Directions for the Caramel Nut topping:

Put the butter, sugar and corn syrups into a heavy saucepan.

Heat on medium heat, stirring until the sugar crystals are dissolved.

Use a candy thermometer and continue to heat the mixture on low heat until it reaches a temperature of 240°F. Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the cream.

Turn the heat to medium and return the saucepan to the heat. Stir gently until the mixture again reaches 240 °F. This may take ten to fifteen minutes. Be patient.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the vanilla. Then stir in the chopped pecans.

Put the shortbread baking dish on a wood cutting board.

Use the caramel nut mixture immediately per the earlier directions for putting the topping on the shortbread base.

Let the baking dish contents cool to room temperature.

When the dish is cool cut the product into 1½" by 1½" squares.

Store these cookies in a sealed container with waxed paper between layers to keep them fresh and to avoid having them stick to each other.

Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies - ☺♥

I've always best enjoyed chocolate chip cookies that were chewy instead of crisp. Many regular recipes produce a dryer, crisper cookie, so it was time to do some research and develop a better recipe.

I started with a chewy recipe from Alton Brown and modified the ingredients to achieve my goal ... more chewy and with interesting taste undertones. Using some gluten flour is one sure way to increase the chewy factor. Adding cardamom to the recipe produces a very pleasant taste undertone. Also, skip the white sugar and use only light brown sugar. The final improvement is to use high quality dark chocolate callets (buttons) that are used for making chocolate candy. I use Callebaut® No. 811 callets.

You do want to try this recipe as my sweetheart Peggy and I give it two thumbs up!

Ingredients: (makes 24 large cookies)

2 quarter pound sticks of cold butter

1 1/4 cups of all purpose flour

1/4 cup of gluten flour

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1 1/4 teaspoons of baking soda

1 tablespoon of ground cardamom

1 1/4 cups of light brown sugar

1 jumbo egg

1 jumbo egg yolk

2 tablespoons of whole milk

1 1/2 teaspoons of vanilla extract

12 ounces of high quality dark chocolate buttons (callets) used for making candy

1 cup of chopped walnuts

Directions:

Heat the oven to 360 degrees F and place the rack in the top third of the oven.

Partially melt the cold butter in a bowl in the microwave oven for about one minute and let it cool for a few minutes.

Put together both flours, the cardamom, the salt and the baking soda into a two quart bowl and whisk them together briefly.

Pour the butter into your stand mixer bowl. Add the sugar and beat the mixture with the paddle attachment on medium speed for 2 minutes.

In a separate bowl, whisk together the whole egg, egg yolk, milk and vanilla extract.

Set the mixer speed to low and work the egg mixture into the butter and sugar mixture. Mix until thoroughly combined, one to two minutes.

Gradually add the dry ingredients into the mixing bowl, mixing on medium low speed, and mix for three minutes. If necessary use a soft rubber spatula to scrape down the sides of the mixing bowl and mix the batter for an additional minute.

Once the batter is uniform, reduce the speed to low and add the chocolate callets gradually and mix for one minute.

Add in the chopped walnuts and mix them into the batter for one minute on low speed.

Spoon half of the batter into golf ball size portions on an ungreased 12"x17" baking sheet, to make a total of 12 cookies.

Bake for ten minutes, rotating the baking sheet 180 degrees after the first five minutes of baking.

Remove the baking sheet from the oven, let the cookies cool for one minute, then use a hard thin spatula to remove them to a cooling rack.

Use the baking sheet a second time to make the remaining 12 cookies from the other half of the batter.

When the cookies have cooled serve some with glasses of cold milk or hot cups of coffee.

Enjoy!

Chocolate Chip Cookies - ☺♥

This recipe is not for a traditional chocolate chip cookie. Sue Gale made a type of chocolate chip cookie that I never experienced before and that I simply have to share in Food Nirvana because they are so different and delicious compared to any chocolate chip cookie I have ever eaten. Sue got the recipe from a Martha Stewart Living© magazine, and ultimate credit has to go where it is deserved, to Martha's daughter, Alexis, who created the recipe.

What makes these cookies unique are two things: 1) they don't hold a shape while baking, and 2) they are as much a candy as a cookie, at least in my opinion. In any event they are fabulous. As I recall, the ingredients listed in the magazine were somewhat different in quantity for the brown sugar and the chocolate chips vs. the online version of the recipe, which has larger amounts of each. I have listed both versions for the brown sugar and chocolate chips, the second in parenthesis.

Sue served the cookies with a milk and Kahlua® beverage that is a perfect complement. Doesn't everyone love milk and cookies?

Enough of my prattle. Let's get on with it.

Ingredients:

3½ cups of flour, sifted

1 lb. softened butter

1½ cups brown sugar (or 3 cups)

1 cup white sugar

1½ teaspoons salt

2 teaspoons vanilla

4 large eggs

2 teaspoons baking soda

1½ cups of chocolate chips (or 2 cups)

Directions:

Mix the eggs using an electric mixer.

Add the sugars and the vanilla and mix thoroughly.

Add the softened butter and again mix thoroughly.

Add the flour, salt and baking soda and mix well.

Add the chocolate chips and mix briefly.

Put the cookie dough on a piece of plastic wrap, form it into a 2" diameter tube, wrap it and then freeze it.

Once the dough is frozen, preheat the oven to 375°F.

Put parchment paper on a cookie sheet.

Cut eight, ½" thick circles of cookie dough from the frozen dough tube and put them evenly spaced from each other and from the sides of the cookie sheet on the parchment paper.

Bake the cookies for five minutes, then turn the cookie sheet 180° around to assure even baking and bake the cookies for an additional four minutes.

Remove the parchment paper from the cookie tray with the cookies still on it and let the cookies cool to room temperature.

They will look really funky as the batter will have spread during baking to form an irregularly thin cookie of final size about four inches in diameter, and most of the chocolate chips will remain in the center of the cookie.

Gently remove the cookies, or, store them in a sealable container with the batches separated by the sheets of parchment.

Repeat the above baking steps for the remainder of the frozen cookie dough.

Serve the cookies as suggested above or with hot coffee or plain milk.

The cookies are soft and easily torn apart into bite size pieces, and "WOW" are they tasty!

Enjoy!

Coconut Sugar Cookies - ☺♥

I used the Food Nirvana recipe for lemon sugar cookies, modified, to make coconut sugar cookies. My first batch was hard from baking them too long and having a not quite right ratio of flour to sugar and butter. Now the recipe is fine. Even better, this is a very simple and quick recipe.

Note that you can use other flavorings instead of coconut to get whatever cookie flavor you want. For example, you could use almond extract instead of any coconut ingredient and add 1/2 cup of almond slices to the recipe. You might also make thumbprint cookies with strawberry jam or other kinds of fruit jams. Or, you could use a cup or more of small or crushed pieces of Heath® bars or Skor® bars to make a crunchy, chocolate delight.

This recipe makes three dozen medium size (3" to 3 1/2" diameter) crispy cookies. If you want, you can reduce the total baking time by about two minutes, to produce a more chewy cookie.

Ingredients:

3 cups of all purpose flour

1 1/2 cups of granulated white sugar

2, 1/4 pound sticks of butter, softened

2 tsp. of vanilla extract

2 tsp. of coconut extract (I use pure coconut extract that I buy online at OliveNation®.com)

1/2 cup of sweetened, flaked or shredded coconut

1/2 teaspoon of baking powder

1 tsp. of baking soda

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1 extra large or jumbo size egg

Demerara sugar crystals to sprinkle on top of the dough before baking the cookies (optional)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Whisk together the baking powder, baking soda, salt and flour in a medium sized bowl.

Mix the softened butter and sugar on medium speed for two minutes, using an electric mixer.

Add the egg, coconut extract and vanilla extract and mix until light and fluffy.

Add the shredded coconut and mix for one minute on medium speed.

Add the flour mixture one cup at a time to the mixing bowl, mixing on low speed for 30 seconds after each addition.

When all of the flour mixture has been added, increase the mixing speed to medium and mix for one minute.

Stop the mixer and move the mixing bowl beside a parchment paper covered 12"x17" baking sheet.

Use a 2 tbsp. scoop to extract dough from the mixing bowl for each cookie. Limit the amount of dough to exactly 2 tbsp. Space 12 of the dough mounds evenly on the parchment paper.

Flatten the dough mounds to about 1/3" thickness with the 2" diameter base of a water glass. First, grease the base of the glass with a film of soft butter, then place the base into some flour, then use the floured glass to flatten a dough mound. Repeat for the other mounds, placing the base of the glass into the flour as often as necessary to avoid having cookie dough stick to the base of the glass.

Sprinkle the (optional) Demerara sugar crystals on top of each flattened dough mound.

Bake the cookies for 12 minutes on a mid-level oven shelf. Turn the cookie sheet around halfway after the first six minutes to assure even baking of all cookies.

Remove the cookie sheet from the oven. Let the cookies cool for two minutes, then transfer them to a cooling rack using a spatula.

Repeat the above baking steps for the remaining two batches of cookies.

Allow all of the cookies to cool to room temperature.

Store the cooled cookies in an airtight container, or even in a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, sealed, to keep them fresh.

Enjoy!

Coconut Walnut Brown Sugar Cookies - ☺♥

This recipe is a creative variant of the Toffee Coconut Cookies recipe.

These cookies taste great! They are easy to make. You want to make them.

Ingredients: (makes approximately 60 small cookies)

2 cups of All Purpose Flour (10 oz.)

1/4 tsp. of Baking Soda

1/2 tsp. of Sea Salt

1 cup of Butter, softened

1 cup of Light Brown Sugar

1 Egg White

2 tsp. of Pure Vanilla Extract

2 tsp. of Pure Coconut Extract

1 tbsp. of Water

1 cup of Shredded Sweetened Coconut (packed)

1 cup of very finely chopped walnuts (I process walnut halves through a Kitchen-Aid® vegetable shredder accessory to get fine pieces)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 300 °F with two shelves in the oven, putting them at 1/3 of the oven height and 2/3 of the oven height.

Mix the softened butter and the sugar in the electric mixer on medium speed for three minutes.

Add the vanilla extract and the coconut extract and continue mixing.

Add the egg white and the water and continue mixing on medium speed.

Put the flour, salt and baking soda into a two quart bowl and whisk them together.

Add the flour mixture 1/3 cup at a time to the mixing bowl while mixing on low to medium low speed.

Mix the cookie dough for three minutes on medium speed.

Scrape down the sides of the inside of the mixing bowl with a spatula.

Add the coconut and the chopped walnuts and mix on medium speed for two minutes.

Remove the bowl of cookie dough from the mixer and set it aside.

Prepare two parchment paper covered 11"x17" baking sheets.

Dispense the cookie dough onto each baking sheet with a 1 tbsp. scoop.

Use a pattern of 3 dough mounds by 5 dough mounds on each sheet, with the mounds evenly separated from each other and from the perimeter of the baking sheet.

Put the baking sheets into the oven, one on each shelf.

Bake for twelve minutes.

Rotate the baking sheets, then swap the positions of the baking sheets on the shelves.

Bake for an additional twelve minutes.

Remove the baking sheets from the oven and allow the cookies to cool for a few minutes.

Use a thin spatula to transfer the cookies to a cooling rack.

Now repeat the dough dispensing and baking for the other 30 cookies.

Allow all of the cookies to cool to room temperature.

Store the cookies in an airtight container.

Enjoy!

Coffee Cake - ☺♥

I have memories of simple but very tasty coffee cakes I enjoyed as a young adult. One reason was they were inexpensive to make. Another reason was they could easily be called comfort food. Memories of the best of those cakes, ones with crunchy or crispy topping, stimulated me to find a recipe now. Per usual I examined numerous Internet recipes and captured one that looked fairly promising, then modified it to remove obvious errors (like a massive excess of cinnamon), then made additions to ingredients and changes in methods to guarantee fine results.

I made the coffee cake and my sweetheart Peggy and I are most pleased. Instead of using a single baking dish I used large muffin tins with paper inserts, such that the recipe as shown below made 12 large individual servings of coffee cake. I used some of the special ingredient combinations that you can find in superior muffins, like dried chopped cranberries and chopped walnuts. I also doubled the amount of chopped walnuts and used half of them in a crunchy sweet cinnamon topping.

Note that you can make the coffee cake using a conventional 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish instead of the muffin tins. If you do that then grease all of the interior of the baking dish with butter before dispensing any batter into it. Also, you may have to increase the baking time by 10 or 20 minutes.

You definitely want to make this coffee cake. I enjoy it best served warm with butter on the side, and of course the requisite cup of coffee. Yummy!

Ingredients:

Batter:

3 cups of all purpose flour

1 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of baking soda

1 cup of softened butter

2 cups of sugar

1 tbsp. of pure vanilla extract

2 cups of sour cream

4 extra large or jumbo eggs

1/2 cup of coarsely chopped walnuts

1/2 cup of chopped dried sweetened cranberries

1/2 cup of diced fresh or canned pineapple (optional)

Filling/Topping:

1 tbsp. of ground cinnamon

3/4 cup of sugar

3 tbsp. of soft butter

1/2 cup of chopped walnuts

Directions:

Set the oven temperature at 350°F.

Mix the first three ingredients of the Filling/Topping in a one quart bowl until well combined, then take half of the mixture and put it into a small bowl. Set that bowl aside.

Add the 1/2 cup of chopped walnuts to the original bowl and mix well. Set that bowl aside.

Now prepare the batter.

Mix the salt, baking soda and flour in a 2 quart bowl with a whisk. Set it aside.

Use an electric mixer and the mixer bowl and mix the 2 cups of sugar and the softened butter on low to medium speed until the mixture is light and fluffy.

Add the eggs and then the vanilla and continue mixing for two minutes on medium speed.

Reduce the mixer speed to low.

Add about 1/3 of the flour/salt/baking soda mixture and then 1/3 of the sour cream to the electric mixer bowl and mix for half a minute to one minute, just to combine the ingredients.

Repeat that process twice with the remaining dry mixture and sour cream, mixing after the last additions only until the batter is smooth.

Add the chopped walnuts, the chopped dried cranberries and (optionally) the diced pineapple and mix them into the batter on low speed for one minute.

Use 1/3 of the batter, evenly dispensing it into each of 12 paper muffin cups in one or two muffin tins. That will fill each cup roughly 1/3 full. Alternatively, if you are using a butter greased glass baking dish instead of muffin tins then simply dispense 1/3 of the batter evenly in the baking dish.

Use 1/2 of the cinnamon, sugar and butter mixture and sprinkle it into the 12 muffin cups (or glass baking dish) on top of the batter.

Repeat dispensing of the next 1/3 of the batter, then use the other half of the cinnamon, sugar and butter mixture as before.

Fill the muffin cups (or glass baking dish) with the remaining batter.

Use the chopped walnuts, cinnamon, sugar and butter mixture and sprinkle/dispense it evenly over the top of the batter.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes if you are making the cake in muffin tins, or until a toothpick inserted close to the center of a muffin cup comes out clean. You may have to bake the cake a bit longer if you are using a glass baking dish.

Cool the coffee cake(s) for 15 minutes on a wood cutting board.

The coffee cake(s) are now ready to serve with some butter on the side and with a cup of coffee, or milk for the kids. I like to cut an individual muffin size coffee cake serving into four pieces and put about 1 teaspoon of softened butter on each piece to melt. Yummy!

Creamy Cheese Cake - ☺♥

I discovered that one very important recipe was missing from Food Nirvana, one for a very creamy cheesecake. Oddly, of all the foods I made over many years I never made a cheesecake until now. I am guessing the reasons had to do with the fact my mother never made one, nor did my wife, Marie, who was an excellent cook. Beyond that we consumers are typically easily convinced that places like the Cheesecake Factory® must make the best cheesecake so why bother?

During the 2015 Christmas holidays I had a slice of salted caramel cheesecake from the Cheesecake Factory®. It looked beautiful, as do all of their special cheesecakes. But when I considered the taste and texture exclusive of the salted caramel topping and blond brownie bottom, I was not impressed. The cheesecake itself was too sweet and had too little flavor. It was overwhelmed by the strong tastes of the topping and the overly thick bottom crust.

Then an ancient memory came back to me. The year was 1969 and the event a family gathering of my then wife Pat's relatives in Asbury Park, NJ. One of the relatives by marriage was a physician from New York City. His food contribution to the gathering was his own home made creamy cheesecake. Mine was my home made dandelion wine.

We were both so impressed by each other's offerings that we decided to exchange recipes. Oh, how I wished I had never lost that recipe! Moving ahead to the present time, I had no way of getting that recipe. I did, however, have many opportunities, like everyone else, of doing Internet research and then using my food knowledge to identify the optimal recipe. Thus, the recipe below is one that I found and slightly modified and the cheesecake I just made is excellent. It is so good that it does not need any fruit or other topping, though I include topping instructions in the recipe.

So, why compete with the Cheesecake Factory®? The simple answer is that I now make a creamy cheesecake that is superior in texture and taste to their commercial offering. In short, I was not as pleased as I should have been with their expensive product. Well, I've done this type of competitive thing so often, with success, with other types of foods, that I saw no reason to hesitate relative to cheesecake. So be it. I hope you enjoy this recipe, which I obtained from the Internet and modified just a bit. And I must confess, the professionalism in the description of how to make a perfect creamy cheesecake truly impressed me. It was a rare find and I owe a debt of gratitude to the creator.

There is one other item I must mention. I did not have graham crackers so I made a crust using two cups of almond flour, 1/4 cup of sugar, 5 tbsp. of melted

butter, 1/4 tsp. of cinnamon and 1 tbsp. of water. It too is perfect. You can buy almond flour via the Internet. Peggy likes the crust far better than one made with graham crackers.

You will be very popular if you make and serve this cheesecake to family and friends. It is truly delicious!

Ingredients:

For the cheesecake:

2 pounds of regular Philadelphia® brand cream cheese

1 cup of sugar

2 tsp. of cornstarch

1/8 teaspoon of salt

1/2 cup of sour cream

2 teaspoons of fresh lemon juice

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

3 extra large eggs

1 egg yolk from an extra large egg

For the crust:

12 whole Nabisco® graham cracker rectangles (6 ounces), or use 2 cups of almond flour, 1/4 cup of sugar and 1/4 tsp. of cinnamon as I did

5 tablespoons of butter, plus extra to grease the pan

If needed, one or two tbsp. of water

For the topping: (optional)

One 21 oz. can of either cherry or blueberry thickened and sweetened pie filling

Equipment:

9-inch or 10-inch spring form pan (I used a 9" pan and 65 minutes of baking time)

Aluminum foil (use an extra wide roll)

Food processor (or use a rolling pin or wooden kitchen mallet and a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag)

Electric stand mixer

Measuring cups and spoons

Spatula

Roasting pan or other deep dish or deep skillet big enough to hold the spring form pan

Directions:

Preheat the oven and warm the cream cheese: Preheat the oven to 350°F with a rack in the lower-middle position. Take the blocks of cream cheese out of their boxes and let them warm on the kitchen counter while you prepare the crust, about 30 minutes.

Rub the pan with butter: Use your fingers to rub a small pat of butter all over the bottom and sides of the pan.

Wrap the pan in foil: Cut two long pieces of foil and lay them on your work surface in a cross. Set the spring form pan in the middle and fold the edges of the foil up around the sides of the pan, but not over the top. Note that if you use an extra wide roll of aluminum foil one piece may be enough to cover the bottom and sides of the spring form pan. The foil gives you extra protection against water getting into the pan during the water bath baking procedure.

Prepare the crust: Crush the graham crackers in a food processor (or in a Ziploc® freezer bag using a rolling pin or wooden kitchen mallet) until they form fine crumbs — you should have 1 1/2 to 2 cups. Melt 5 tablespoons of butter in the microwave oven or in a small pan on the stovetop and mix this into the graham cracker crumbs. The mixture should look like wet sand and hold together in a clump when you press it in your fist. If not, add extra tablespoons of water (one at a time) until the mixture holds together. Transfer it into the spring form pan and use the bottom of a drinking glass/tumbler to press it evenly into the bottom.

Bake the crust: Place the spring form pan in the oven (be careful not to tear the foil). Bake for 8 to 10 minutes until the crust is fragrant and just starting to brown around the edges. Let the pan and crust cool on a cooling rack while you prepare the filling. (I let my almond flour crust bake for 12 minutes and it did not brown around the edges.)

Mix the cream cheese, sugar, cornstarch, and salt: Combine the room temperature cream cheese, sugar, cornstarch, and salt in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Mix on medium-low speed until the mixture is creamy, like thick frosting, and no large lumps of cream cheese remain. Scrape down the beater and the sides of the bowl with a spatula. Then mix a minute longer on medium speed.

Mix in the sour cream, lemon juice, and vanilla: Add the sour cream, lemon juice, and vanilla to the bowl and beat on medium-low speed until combined and creamy. Scrape down the beater and sides of the bowl with a spatula. As before, mix on medium speed for one more minute, then again scrape down the beater and sides of the bowl.

Mix in the eggs and the yolk one at a time: With the mixer on medium-low speed, add the eggs and the yolk one at a time. Wait until the previous egg is just barely mixed into the batter before adding the next one. At first, the mixture will look clumpy and broken, but it will come together as the eggs are incorporated. Do a final scraping with the spatula and then mix on medium speed for one minute.

Stir a few times by hand: Scrape down the beater and sides of the bowl with a spatula. Stir the whole batter a few times by hand, being sure to scrape the bottom of the bowl, to make sure everything is incorporated. The finished batter should be thick, creamy, and silky. Don't worry if you see a few specks of unmixed cream cheese here and there; they will melt into the batter during baking and won't affect the finished cheesecake.

Pour the batter over the cooled crust: Check to make sure the crust and the sides of the pan are cool — if they are cool enough to touch comfortably, you can proceed. Pour the batter over the cooled crust and spread it into an even layer against the sides of the pan.

Transfer the spring form pan to the water bath: Transfer the pan to a roasting pan or other baking dish/deep skillet big enough to hold it. Bring a quart of water to a boil and pour some of the boiling water into the roasting pan/dish/skillet, being careful not to splash any water onto the cheesecake. Fill the container that holds the spring form pan with the boiling water to about an inch below the top edge of foil.

Bake the cheesecake: Bake the cheesecake at 350°F for 50 to 60 minutes. Cakes baked in a 10-inch pan will usually cook in 50 to 55 minutes; cakes in a 9-inch pan will usually cook in 55 to 60 minutes. The cheesecake is done when the outer two to three inches look slightly puffed and set, but the inner circle still jiggles (like Jell-O®) when you gently shake the pan. Some spots of toasted golden color

are fine, but if you see any cracks starting to form, move on to the next step right away.

Cool the cheesecake in the oven: Turn off the oven and crack the door open. Let the cheesecake cool slowly for one hour.

Run a knife around the edge of the cake and cool the cake completely: After an hour, remove the cheesecake from the oven and from the water bath, unwrap the foil, and transfer the spring form pan to a cooling rack. Run a thin-bladed knife around the edge of the cake to make sure it is not sticking to the inside of the pan (which can cause cracks as it cools). Let the cheesecake cool completely on the rack to room temperature.

Chill the cheesecake for four or more hours in the refrigerator: Chill the cheesecake, uncovered, for at least four hours or up to three days in the refrigerator. This step is crucial for letting the cheesecake set and achieving perfect cheesecake texture — so don't rush it.

(Optional) Top the cheesecake with the pie filling and serve: Take the cheesecake out of the refrigerator about 30 minutes before you plan to serve it. Unmold the cake from the spring form pan and then top the cheesecake with cherry or blueberry pie filling just before serving.

You can serve the cake right from the bottom of the spring form pan, as shown in the picture of the cheesecake I just made, or use a large off-set spatula to gently unstick the crust from the pan and transfer it to a serving platter. Leftovers (if any!) will keep, uncovered and refrigerated, for several days.

Date Pinwheel Cookies - ☺♥

These cookies were my best friend Morrie Shaffer's favorites. My experience making them for him tells me that the more dates and nuts you use the better. You can easily increase the amounts of dates and nuts shown below by 50 percent if you want a chewy cookie.

Ingredients:

Filling:

12 ounces pitted dates, chopped

1 cup water

1/4 cup sugar

2 teaspoons lemon juice

1 cup finely chopped pecans or walnuts

Dough:

1 cup butter, softened

2 cups brown sugar, firmly packed

2 eggs

3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

Directions:

In a saucepan, combine the dates, water, sugar and lemon juice. Bring the date mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the chopped nuts. Remove the pan from the heat. Set it aside to cool the contents to room temperature.

In a mixing bowl, cream the butter, brown sugar, and eggs until light and fluffy. In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking powder, salt and baking soda; stir to

blend. Gradually add the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture. Beat until just blended.

Divide the dough into three equal portions. Wrap each portion in waxed paper and chill them in the refrigerator, about 30 minutes to one hour or until they are easy to handle.

Between sheets of waxed paper, roll each portion into a rectangle, about 12 x 8 inches.

Remove the top piece of waxed paper and spread each rectangle with about 2/3 cup (or more) of the date mixture. The idea is that the date mixture should be divided into thirds and each part used with one rectangle of dough. Starting with the 12 inch side, lift the edge of the waxed paper. Peel the paper off as the dough is rolled, jellyroll fashion. Repeat with remaining portions and filling. Wrap the rolls in waxed paper and refrigerate them for several hours or overnight.

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Cut each roll into 1/4 inch thick slices and place them about 1 inch apart on greased (buttered) cookie sheets. Bake them for 10 to 12 minutes; cool them on cooling racks. The recipe makes 7 to 8 dozen cookies.

Ginger Square Cookies - ☺♥

These yummy cookies are very much like the old fashioned gingersnaps. They are well worth making and we can thank Marie for this one too.

Bake these cookies for 8 minutes in a 375°F oven.

Ingredients:

1/3 cup molasses

½ cup butter

2 cups flour

1/3 cup brown sugar

1 ½ tsp. ground ginger

½ tsp. baking soda

½ tsp. ground cinnamon

¼ tsp. salt

¼ tsp. ground black pepper

1/8 tsp. ground cloves

1 egg lightly beaten

Directions:

In a saucepan combine the molasses and the butter, then cook and stir over low heat until the butter is melted. Remove from the heat; pour the mixture into large bowl and allow it to cool to room temperature.

In a second bowl stir together the flour, brown sugar, ginger, baking soda, cinnamon, salt, pepper and cloves. Set the mixture aside.

Stir the egg into the cooled molasses mixture. Then stir in the flour mixture until the ingredients have combined to form dough. Divide the dough in half. On waxed paper shape each dough half into a 1½ inch square log, about 5½ inches long. Wrap and chill the logs in the freezer for about 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Slice the logs into 1/8 inch slices and place the pieces 1 inch apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Prick each piece several times with a fork.

Bake for 8 to 10 minutes or until the edges are firm and lightly brown. Transfer the cookies to wire racks, cool them completely; then sprinkle them with powdered sugar.

Gobs (Whoopee Pies) - ☺♥

Gobs are also known as Whoopee Pies. Whatever the name they are a real treat. Think of moist chocolate cake baked like two puffy cookies, each one about three to four inches in diameter and about one inch thick, and served with a thick layer of icing/filling between the two cake layers. Marie gave us this great recipe. She used to make them for the kids back in the early 1980's and they were very popular.

Ingredients and Directions Combined:

Cakes:

Cream together:

2 cups of sugar

½ cup of Crisco® shortening

2 extra large eggs

Add 1 cup of buttermilk (or 1 cup milk plus 1 tsp. lemon juice)

¾ cup boiling water

1 tsp. vanilla

Mix well and set aside.

Sift:

4 cups of flour

1 tsp. of baking soda

½ tsp. of baking powder

½ tsp. of salt

¾ cup of Hersheys® unsweetened cocoa

Mix the sifted ingredients with the creamed mixture to complete the cake batter. Drop the batter in 2 tbsp. amounts onto a non-stick cookie sheet allowing two inches clearance on all sides between the edges of the batter.

Bake at 450°F for 5 minutes. Allow the cakes to cool to room temperature on a rack before using the filling shown below.

Filling:

Mix together 5 tbsp. flour and 1 cup of milk and set the mixture aside.

Cream:

1³/₄ cups of powdered sugar

³/₄ cup of butter

¹/₂ cup of Crisco® shortening

¹/₄ tsp. of salt

5 tsp. of vanilla

Add the filling mixtures together and mix with an electric mixer until well blended and puffy.

Variation: Gobs made commercially in some areas contain an amount of marshmallow crème in the filling. The filling recipe shown above can be changed by adding one cup of marshmallow crème after the final mixing and then continuing to mix for an additional two minutes to incorporate the marshmallow crème into the filling. The recipe for marshmallow crème is in Food Nirvana under Candies, Crèmes, Nuts and Dessert Sauces.

Put a generous amount of filling (about 1/3 inch thick, or more) on the flat side of one cake and place another cake, flat side down, on top and press them together lightly to form the gob. Continue until all the gobs have been made. Wrap them individually in plastic wrap to keep them fresh. Store them in the refrigerator. Allow them to come to room temperature when serving them.

Hotel Du Pont® Macaroons - ☺♥

If you ever ate at the Hotel DuPont® Green Room in Wilmington DE you likely tried the macaroon cookies. They were the very best macaroons as the interior is slightly soft and has intense flavor. I got the recipe below from the Internet, presumably identical to that used at the hotel. The baking instructions were simply wrong. As usual, I worked on this one until I got it right.

Ingredients:

1 lb. of almond paste – see the recipe earlier in this section for almond paste

1 1/4 cups of sugar

3 or 4 egg whites depending on the size of the eggs (3 if jumbo, 4 if extra large)

1 cup of shredded sweetened coconut (optional, not part of the Internet recipe)

1 tsp. of vanilla (optional, not part of the Internet recipe)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

Mix the coconut (optional, but I use it) and sugar on slow speed with a mixer until they are well blended. Then add one egg white and mix until blended. Then add the almond paste in small amounts until the mixture is well blended. Add the rest of the egg whites and mix until smooth. You should refrigerate this batter for two hours if you expect to use this as a drop cookie recipe using a conventional cookie tray (Good luck if you decide to do that, for the batter will likely run while baking, unless you pre-blend the sugar and egg whites over a double boiler to a warm temperature.). But the best and easiest way is to use the mini-muffin tray method described below under variations, or the oblong baking dish method that makes rectangular macaroons.

If you decide to use cookie trays then grease the cookie trays lightly with butter. Drop about two teaspoons of batter per cookie, leaving two inches clearance on all sides (do only 12 per cookie tray). Bake no more than 15 or 20 minutes or until light golden or tan around the edges. Let the macaroons cool on the tray and then remove them gently with a flat spatula and transfer them to a wire cooling rack. Good luck! The batter ran all over for me, making nearly flat cookies.

Variations: Put the batter into mini-muffin tray compartments. There are two different ways to do this. For the first method you butter or spray Pam® into the

compartments. Alternatively, life is much easier if you use mini-muffin paper baking cups. Then, fill them half full or slightly more with batter and bake at 325°F for 25 to 30 minutes. Check for doneness (light golden or light tan on top) after 25 minutes and give extra time if needed. The actual baking time can vary from 25 minutes to 40 minutes based on how much batter you put into each compartment/baking cup. The macaroons should fill the compartments/baking cups and expand well above them during baking. This method produces a much superior macaroon as the batter cannot run and result in a flat cookie. Note again that the baking time required is proportional to batter height before baking. Too short a baking time will result in a cookie with a raw or undercooked center. For example, if a cupcake size product is made in a regular cupcake pan, the baking time will be around 45 to 55 minutes. I have also used a 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish and simply cut the baked macaroon pastry into rectangles. It worked wonderfully as the cookies had the identical texture, internal softness and the intense flavor as those served at the Hotel DuPont®. But my favorite method is to use paper baking cup inserts with the mini-muffin pans.

Macaroons should be eaten immediately or put into an airtight container and refrigerated.

This recipe makes about 60 cookie macaroons or 36 mini-muffin size macaroons or 24 to 32 macaroon pieces/rectangles.

Irish Carbomb Cupcakes - ☺♥

My thanks go to Lisa Swanson, Janet's niece, for this wonderful recipe. Lisa made these cupcakes and brought them as our dessert for our St. Patrick's Day dinner. They are really yummy!

Ingredients:

For the Cupcakes:

1 cup of stout (e.g. Guinness®)

1 cup of butter

3/4 cup of unsweetened cocoa powder (preferably Dutch-process)

2 cups of flour

2 cups of sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons of baking soda

3/4 teaspoon of salt

2 large eggs

2/3 cup of sour cream

For the Whiskey Ganache Filling:

8 ounces of bittersweet chocolate

2/3 cup of heavy cream

2 tablespoons of butter, room temperature

2 teaspoons of Irish whiskey (Bush Mills®)

For the Irish Cream Frosting:

3 to 4 cups of confections sugar

1 stick of unsalted butter, room temperature

1/4 cup to 1/2 cup of Bailey's Irish Cream®

Directions:

Make the Cupcakes:

Preheat the oven to 350°F and line 24 cupcake cups with foil and paper liners.

Bring the stout and butter to a simmer in a heavy, large saucepan over medium heat.

Add the cocoa powder and whisk until the mixture is smooth. Cool slightly.

Whisk the flour, sugar, baking soda and salt in large bowl to blend.

Using an electric mixer, beat the eggs and sour cream in another large bowl to blend. Add the stout-chocolate mixture to the egg mixture and beat just to combine.

Add the flour mixture and beat briefly on low speed. Use a rubber spatula and fold the batter until it is completely combined.

Divide the batter among the cupcake liners, filling them two-thirds to three-quarters of the way.

Bake the cupcakes until a tester inserted into the center comes out clean, rotating them once front to back if your oven bakes unevenly, about 16-18 minutes.

Cool the cupcakes on a rack completely.

Make the Whiskey Ganache:

Chop the chocolate and place it in a heatproof bowl.

Heat the cream until it simmers and pour it over the chocolate.

Let the mixture sit for one minute and then whisk it until it is smooth (if there are still pieces of unmelted chocolate after whisking for a couple of minutes, you can heat it over a double boiler, whisking constantly until it's completely smooth).

Add the butter and the whiskey and stir until they are combined.

Fill the Cupcakes:

Let the Ganache cool until it has a thick consistency but is still soft enough to be piped (you can put it in the refrigerator to speed up this process, but make sure to stir it every 10 minutes).

Meanwhile, using your 1-inch round cookie cutter, an apple corer, or a small sharp knife, and cut the centers out of the cooled cupcakes. You want to go most of the way down the cupcake but not cut through the bottom — aim for 2/3 of the way.

Put the Ganache into a piping bag with a wide tip (or a plastic bag with a corner snipped off) and fill the holes in each cupcake to the top. Technically, you're only supposed to fill the Ganache to the top of the cupcake, but I allowed mine to peak, so it looked like a little Hershey's kiss on top. I figured a little extra whiskey Ganache didn't hurt.

Make the Irish Cream Frosting:

Whip the butter in the bowl of an electric mixer for several minutes until very light and fluffy.

Slowly add the powdered sugar, a few tablespoons at a time while continuing to mix.

When the frosting looks thick enough to spread, drizzle in the Bailey's Irish Cream® and whip the frosting until all ingredients are well blended.

If the frosting is too thin, add another spoonful or two of powdered sugar and mix.

Ice and decorate the cupcakes. Use green sprinkles to make it festive for St. Patrick's Day.

Enjoy!

Jordan Marsh Blueberry Muffins - ☺♥T

My sweetheart Peggy talked about wonderful blueberry muffins that used to be sold in the now defunct famous Boston department store, Jordan Marsh. She tried making those muffins in the distant past but without success as the proposed recipes clearly lacked one or more key ingredients. Well, we decided to have another look and see if we could be successful now. The Boston Globe® has a recipe that claims it will produce blueberry muffins like the original ones at Jordan Marsh created by baker Nick Malgieri. We decided to give it a try after analyzing differences between that recipe and ones Peggy had used previously. The only ingredient we didn't have when making these muffins was the coarse or sanding sugar (large crystal sugar) used at Jordan Marsh as a muffin topping, so we used regular granulated sugar. I later found Demerara sugar at MySpiceSage.com and purchased it. Yes! Wise purchase.

As a side note, I was impressed by the recipe at a scientific or technical level as the effects of certain ingredients are bound to produce results very much like Peggy's description of the original Jordan Marsh muffins. Specifically, the use of buttermilk with its natural acidity makes two contributions. First, it combats dingy grayish discoloring of the batter often caused by chemical reactions with blueberries. Second, the acidity enhances the performance of the baking powder in making the muffins rise to produce a soft cake-like consistency.

The pleasant answer from making a batch of mini-muffins is that Peggy gives the recipe a thumbs-up! Well, they do taste very good, and they are light as opposed to compact in texture, just the way they are supposed to be. We later made a batch in full size muffin tins with extra large paper liners and used the Demerara sugar and WOW! Perfect!

I know you will enjoy these muffins. What a pleasure it is to make excellent food!

It won't take long for you to think about variations for these muffins. In other words, blueberries are great but other fruits and combinations with ingredients like chopped nuts will also be great. For example, today I replaced the blueberries with 1/2 cup of dried sweetened cranberries and 1/2 cup of coarsely chopped pecans and 1/4 tsp. of cinnamon. They are wonderful! My second variation was to use three very ripe bananas, a cup of chopped walnuts and 1/4 tsp. of cinnamon. Superb! The next time I will make lemon muffins using lemon extract (1 tsp.) and lemon zest (1 tbsp.). Any reduction in batter volume due to not using fruit is something I will accommodate by making only ten muffins instead of twelve, thus preserving the nice large muffin size.

Ingredients: (makes 12 large muffins or 48 mini-muffins)

2 cups flour

1 1/4 cups of sugar

2 eggs

2 tsp. baking powder

3 or 4 tbsp. of Demerara sugar (to be sprinkled on the top of the muffins prior to baking)

1/2 tsp. of vanilla extract

1/2 cup softened butter

1/2 cup of buttermilk (buy the real stuff made properly ... don't improvise)

1/4 tsp. salt

1 pint of fresh or frozen wild blueberries

Directions:

Set the oven temperature to 375°F and place the baking rack in the middle of the oven.

Line a regular muffin pan or two mini-muffin pans with paper liners. I like to use the extra large size paper liners in a regular size muffin or cupcake pan as that guarantees that the muffins will have plenty of room to expand while baking, ergo, not attach to each other. Worry not, the extra large size liners have the same base size as regular paper liners so they will fit fine, albeit slightly crowded above the pan, which is not a problem. In fact, it leads to the muffins being nice and tall, and they do fill the extra large size paper liners. That is good! It keeps them fresh for days after baking.

Whisk the flour, baking powder and salt in a medium size bowl.

Put the butter and sugar into a large electric mixer bowl and cream them on medium speed for two minutes or until the mixture has a light texture.

Mix in the eggs one at a time until the batter is smooth.

Add the vanilla and continue mixing for one minute.

Gradually add the flour mixture to the batter alternately with the buttermilk, beginning and ending with the flour mixture.

Mix only until incorporated. Do not over mix the batter or the muffins will come out tough.

Fold in the blueberries with a spatula.

Spoon or scoop the batter into the muffin pan liners, filling the liners to about 3/4 full.

Sprinkle the tops with the Demerara sugar.

Bake regular size muffins for 30 minutes, stopping midway to rotate the muffin pan to assure even baking. If you are making mini-muffins bake them for ten minutes, then check them and rotate the muffin pans, and then bake them for up to five more minutes until they are golden in color and well risen.

Note: For the original size (large) muffins you may (or may not) find that they need to be baked a few minutes longer than the 30 minutes indicated in the recipe. I found that an additional four minutes was plenty of extra time to develop a nice tan color on the top of the muffins, which means the tops will be slightly crunchy as well as sweet with the Demerara sugar. As always, keep an eye on what you are baking as it nears the end of the baking cycle, for overdone is just as bad as underdone.

Remove the muffins from the muffin pans after cooling for few minutes and then store the muffins loosely covered at room temperature.

Enjoy!

Lemon Poppy Seed Muffins - ?

This is a no or low gluten recipe I found on the Internet. I modified the recipe. I suspect I will want to modify it further by adding lemon juice to the batter, as I don't think the lemon zest will provide sufficient lemon flavor freshness. One way to do that is to use two tablespoons of lemon juice with regular milk to create the "buttermilk" which almost no one ever uses. I will report back with results when I try it.

Ingredients: (Makes 12 to 15 muffins)

2 cups of low or no gluten flour

½ tsp. of baking soda

½ tsp. of salt

¼ tsp. of baking powder

4 tsp. of poppy seeds

2 tbsp. of lemon zest

¾ cup of sugar

½ cup of soft butter

2 eggs

1 cup of buttermilk (or 1 cup of regular milk plus 2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice)

1 tsp. of vanilla

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Combine the flour, baking soda, salt, baking powder, poppy seeds and lemon rind in a large bowl and mix by hand.

Use an electric mixer with a large bowl to beat the sugar and butter until the mixture is fluffy.

Beat in the eggs until smooth.

Add the "buttermilk" and the vanilla.

Mix well.

Stir in the flour mixture and mix gently only until the mixture is moistened.

Fill paper cup-lined or greased muffin cups 3/4 full.

Bake 20 minutes, or until golden brown.

Serve warm.

Lemon Squares - ☺♥

Wow! Once again a lot of us have Marie to thank for these Christmas cookies ... they are flat out delicious! Make them.

Ingredients for the Shortbread base:

1 1/2 cups of flour

3/4 cup of butter

1/4 cup of powdered sugar

1/4 cup of granulated sugar

Directions for the shortbread base:

Heat the oven to 350°F.

Mix the flour, butter and sugars using an electric mixer on medium speed. A dough will form and then it is done mixing. Press the mixture into a lightly buttered rectangular glass baking dish, 9x13x2 inches. Bake for 20 minutes. Put the baking dish on a wooden cutting board.

Ingredients for the Lemon topping:

1 1/2 cups of granulated sugar

6 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice (two good size or three regular lemons)

3 teaspoons of grated lemon zest

3/4 teaspoon of baking powder

1/4 teaspoon of salt

3 eggs

Directions for the Lemon topping:

Beat the all of the lemon topping ingredients using an electric mixer on medium and then medium high speed until the mixture is light and fluffy.

Once the lemon topping mixture is made, immediately pour it over the top of the shortbread mixture, spread it evenly with a knife and bake for 25 minutes at 350°F.

Put the baking dish on a wood cutting board.

Allow the lemon squares to cool completely to room temperature. Cut the final product into squares about 1½ inch by 1½ inch. Dust the tops with powdered sugar.

Lemon Sugar Cookies - ☺♥

I wanted a simple recipe for sugar cookies as they can be enjoyed that way or used to make more fancy cookies. I found a recipe on the Internet for lemon sugar cookies that looked pretty good so I made a batch. They were okay but as is typical I am now showing a recipe below that includes improvements I made to the original recipe.

Note that you can use other flavorings instead of lemon to get whatever cookie flavor you want. For example, you could use almond extract instead of any lemon ingredient and add 1/2 cup of almond slices to the recipe. You could also make thumbprint cookies with strawberry jam or other kinds of fruit jams. You could even use a cup or more of small or crushed pieces of Heath® bars or Skor® bars to make a crunchy, chocolate delight.

I included the optional use of Demerara sugar, which has large crystals, and it is a nice addition to a plain sugar cookie. You can find it and buy it easily using the Internet.

This recipe makes about three dozen large cookies.

Ingredients:

3 cups of flour

1 3/4 cups of granulated sugar

2 sticks of butter, softened

2 tsp. of vanilla extract

3 tablespoons (or more) of fresh lemon juice (one large lemon)

1 tbsp. of pure lemon extract

2 teaspoons of grated lemon zest

1/2 teaspoon of baking powder

1 tsp. of baking soda

1/2 teaspoon of salt

2 extra large or jumbo size eggs

Demerara sugar (optional)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Process the lemon to get the juice and the zest.

Whisk together the baking powder, baking soda, salt and flour in a medium sized bowl.

Mix the butter and sugar on medium speed using a large bowl and an electric mixer.

Add the eggs, lemon zest, lemon extract, lemon juice and vanilla and mix until light and fluffy.

Add all of the flour mixture one cup at a time to the mixing bowl, operating the mixer on low speed.

Increase the mixing speed to medium and mix for no more than 30 seconds.

Use two soup spoons to extract dough from the mixing bowl for each cookie. Make a mound of dough that would be about 1 1/4" in diameter in size if it was in the shape of a ball. Space 12 of the mounds evenly on an ungreased cookie sheet.

Flatten the dough mounds to 1/2" thickness with the base of a water glass. First, grease the base of the glass with a film of soft butter, then place the base into some flour, then use the floured glass to flatten a dough mound. Repeat placing the base of the glass into the flour as often as necessary to avoid having cookie dough stick to base.

Sprinkle the tops of the flattened dough pieces with large crystal Demerara sugar if you have it. Otherwise, sprinkle the tops with regular granulated sugar.

Baking time will vary based on what you want, chewy or crisp. Bake for 12 minutes for chewy and up to 14 minutes for crisp. I like to turn the cookie sheet around halfway through baking a batch to assure even baking of all cookies.

Bake the cookies, then remove the cookie sheet from the oven. Let the cookies cool for two minutes, then transfer them to a cooling rack using a spatula.

Repeat the above dough use and baking for the remaining two batches.

Store the cooled cookies in an airtight container, or even in one gallon Ziploc® freezer bags, sealed, to keep them fresh.

Enjoy!

Peanut Butter Cookies - ☺♥

This is a fine and tasty recipe for making chewy peanut butter cookies that started off badly as a lousy Internet recipe. Said recipe used too much flour and a baking time certain to produce bone dry cookies with dark undersides. As is typical, I made important modifications so you don't experience any disappointment like I did.

Let's simply say the recommended baking time of 18 to 22 minutes was absurd. A total baking time of 14 minutes is quite adequate. Ultimately you want a cookie that is chewy, not crumbly, and one with very noticeable peanut taste. Both of those desirable characteristics are lost with too long a baking time.

The good news is you will be quite successful using the recipe below. It differs in ingredients, amounts and baking procedure ... ergo, almost everything. I do have to give the original recipe creator credit for one very nice and uncommon idea ... using parchment paper on the baking sheet, as that makes the baked cookies very easy to remove and it keeps the baking sheet clean.

Note that there is no salt in this recipe for two reasons. The peanut butter has salt in it and the regular salted butter does also.

Have fun! You and your family will love these cookies. And they are very easy to make.

Ingredients: (makes two dozen 2 1/2" diameter cookies)

1 1/2 cups of creamy peanut butter

1 cup of light-brown sugar, packed

1 quarter pound stick of softened butter

1 extra large or jumbo egg

1 1/4 cups of all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon of baking powder

A bowl of thumbprint topping consisting of 2 tbsp. of peanut butter and 2 tbsp. of honey, mixed

Other materials:

A roll of parchment paper

2, 12" x 17" baking sheets

A kitchen scale (optional)

Directions:

Adjust the oven shelves so the baking shelf is in the middle of the oven, top to bottom, and then place an extra baking sheet on a lower shelf. That assures there will be better even heating all over the bottom of the higher baking sheet used for the cookies.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Whisk together the flour and baking powder in a one quart bowl.

Use an electric mixer, mixing bowl and regular beater on low to medium speed and mix the peanut butter, sugar, and butter until smooth.

Add the egg and continue mixing for one minute.

Add the flour mixture gradually (within two minutes, a total of four additions, stopping the mixer for each addition) then mix on low to medium low speed to combine.

Scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl with a soft spatula, then mix again for no more than two minutes.

Divide the completed cookie dough into two equal parts, then make 12 balls of cookie dough from each part.

The smart way to do that is to use a kitchen scale and weigh the dough so you get the amounts exactly right. Then, split each half into two portions, again using the kitchen scale for accuracy.

At that point you can easily divide each of the four sections of dough into six equal size pieces of dough. What I do is roll each section of dough into a 9" long cylinder on a wood cutting board and cut it into six, 1 1/2" long pieces using a pastry knife.

Roll any given piece of dough in your hands to form a ball, then flatten the ball into a dough circle about 2" in diameter.

Place each of the 12 dough circles roughly 2 inches apart from each other and from the sides of a parchment paper lined 12" x 17" baking sheet.

Press your thumb into the center of each dough circle to a depth of about 1/4".

Dispense about 1/2 tsp. of thumbprint topping into each depression.

Bake the cookies, rotating the baking sheet after 7 minutes of baking time.

Continue baking for the second 7 minutes, then remove the baking sheet from the oven.

Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for two minutes.

Transfer the cookies to a cooling rack using a thin bladed hard spatula. They are very easy to remove from the parchment paper with the spatula.

Do the second/final batch of cookies with the second group of 12 pieces of cookie dough.

Let the cookies cool to room temperature, first on the cooling rack and then on a plate.

Store the cooled cookies in either a metal or plastic container with a tight fitting lid.

Enjoy!

Pineapple Upside Down Cake - ☺♥

This is a recipe from the Internet that looked quite good, with changes to the traditional recipe that made a lot of sense, like using only the egg white(s) to create a light crumb to the cake instead of having a heavy cake. I modified the recipe ingredient amounts and directions slightly and tested it. Whoa! Now this is delicious! Great tasting cake portion ... far better crumb than any pineapple upside down cake I ever ate before. Light and just the right flavor and amount of sweetness. Of course, the toppings were typically delicious. How can you go wrong with caramelized sugar, pineapple slices and maraschino cherries? Well, I cut the cherries in half for better fruit composition at eating time.

I am very pleased. This one is serendipity. I hope you make this recipe as you will smile a lot, as will your family, friends and guests ... provided you leave them anything to taste! The only additional change I might make to this recipe (a matter of preference) is to bake the cake longer to guarantee better caramelization of the butter and brown sugar topping, to make it somewhat more crisp/slightly crunchy.

Normally you make this cake in either a round deep dish pie plate or a square or rectangular glass casserole (see shapes in the first picture group). But I used a six position mini-Bundt pan (see the second, multiple position baking dish picture), non-stick ... which, by the way, still needed the inner surface to be made slippery with a light film of butter prior to putting in the other ingredients, esp. the cake batter. Also, if you want to make a larger cake in a 9" x 13" x 2" rectangular glass casserole then increase the ingredient amounts shown below by about one third.

Okay, enough discussion. It is time for you to check out the recipe and decide if you want to make it. (Hint: You do.)

Ingredients:

Topping:

1/4 cup of butter, melted

2/3 cup of packed brown sugar

7 pineapple slices (or more if needed due to the size of your baking dish)

13 to 19 maraschino cherries (or more if needed), whole or cut into halves as appropriate to the baking dish

Cake Batter: (for a 9" diameter deep dish pie plate or a six position mini Bundt pan)

1 2/3 cups of all purpose flour

3/4 teaspoon of baking powder

1/4 teaspoon of baking soda

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1/2 cup of butter, softened

1/4 cup of packed brown sugar

3/4 cup of granulated sugar

1 jumbo or two large egg whites

1/2 cup of sour cream

2 teaspoons of pure vanilla extract

1/3 cup of whole milk

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Prepare the topping first:

Pour the 1/4 cup of melted butter into an ungreased 9" diameter deep dish (2" deep) pie plate.

Sprinkle the brown sugar evenly over the melted butter.

Place the fruit pieces spread out on paper towels. Put more paper towels on top. Blot all surface liquid from the fruit using the paper towels.

Arrange the pineapple slices and all the cherries (whole or cut in half based on your type of baking dish) on top of the brown sugar. If you have extra volume in your baking dish, you can halve 3 additional pineapple rings and arrange the pieces around the sides of the baking dish.

Place the baking dish in the refrigerator for a few minutes as you prepare the cake batter. This is supposed to help solidify or "set" the fruit topping arrangement.

Make the cake batter:

Whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in a 2 quart bowl. Set the mixture aside.

Use a stand mixer and beat the softened butter on medium high speed until smooth and creamy, about 1 minute.

Add the white and brown sugars and beat on medium high speed until creamed together, about 1 minute.

Scrape down the sides and the inner bottom of the mixing bowl with a rubber spatula as needed to assure complete mixing.

Beat in the egg white(s) on medium high speed until combined, then add the sour cream, the milk and the vanilla extract and mix for two minutes.

Dump the flour mixture into the mixing bowl.

Turn the mixer on to low speed and as the mixer runs increase the speed to medium.

Beat just until all of the batter ingredients are combined, about one to two minutes.

Assemble and bake the cake:

Remove the baking dish with the toppings from the refrigerator. Pour and spread the cake batter evenly over the topping.

Bake the cake for 40 to 50 minutes, rotating the baking dish halfway through the baking. If needed, cover the cake with an aluminum foil tent for the last ten minutes of baking time, to avoid having the cake surface become too dark.

The cake is done when a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out mostly clean. I found no problem using my method with the mini Bundt pan and a total baking time of only 35 minutes, rotating the Bundt pan 180 degrees in the oven after the first 20 minutes of baking. This is similar to having reduced baking time when making cupcakes instead of a full size cake. Smaller volumes finish baking in less time.

Remove the cake from the oven and cool it on a wood cutting board for only 20 minutes.

Invert the slightly cooled cake onto a cake stand or a serving plate so the caramelized sugar and the pineapple and cherry pieces are on top.

Cool the cake completely to room temperature before slicing and serving it.

Cover any leftover portion(s) and store it/them for up to 3 days in the refrigerator.

Enjoy ... and I simply know you will.

Sand Tarts - ☺

I fondly remember my grandmother Cora making these cookies with/for me when I was a child. Her sand tarts were thin and crisp/crunchy with an egg wash that held either granulated sugar or sugar and cinnamon. She did not use the baking powder shown in the following recipe. Be sure to look at the maple and peanut butter variation later in this recipe.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of butter, softened

1 cup of granulated sugar

1 egg plus one egg yolk, beaten

1 3/4 cups of sifted flour

2 teaspoons of baking powder – (skip this unless you want puffy sand tarts)

1 egg white, lightly beaten (to coat the cookies before baking)

2 tablespoons of sugar, or, mixed with 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

2 teaspoons of fresh lemon juice

Directions:

Set the oven at 325°F.

Cream the butter and sugar and lemon juice and blend them with the beaten egg in a mixer.

Sift the flour and (baking powder) together and blend it with the creamed mixture to make soft dough.

Wrap the dough in waxed paper and put it in the refrigerator to chill. When cold, place the dough on a floured board and roll it out to about 1/8 inch thick. Dust the dough with flour as needed to make rolling out easier.

Cut the dough into decorative shapes with cookie cutters. Place the cutouts on a lightly buttered cookie sheet. Brush the top of each cookie with the beaten egg white and sprinkle them with the cinnamon sugar mixture or just sugar or other sugar based decorative toppings.

Bake at 325°F about 15 to 20 minutes or until they are lightly browned at the edges.

Makes about 2 dozen cookies.

Variation:

Skip the egg wash, sugar and/or cinnamon topping. Put ½ tsp. maple extract and one tsp. baking powder in the cookie dough while mixing. Make a filling icing of 1 cup confectioners' sugar, 1/3 cup of Jif® creamy peanut butter, 1/8th cup maple syrup and 4 oz. cream cheese. Spread the icing on a cooled cookie about 1/8th inch thick and top with another cookie.

Shortbread Cookies - ☺

This is a standard recipe for making pretty good shortbread cookies. Feel free to vary the ingredient amounts to achieve what you want ... more buttery, more crumbly or more sugary. Alas, Marie laughed herself silly after my first attempt to make shortbread cookies in 1979. I made a major error in the ratio of sugar to flour so my cookies were hard as rocks ... tasty, but hard.

Ingredients:

2 cups of all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon of salt

1 cup (2 sticks) of butter, room temperature

1/2 cup of powdered sugar

1 teaspoon of pure vanilla extract

Directions:

In a separate bowl mix the flour with the salt. Set aside.

In the bowl of your electric mixer, cream the butter until smooth (about 1 minute). Add the sugar and beat until smooth (about 2 minutes). Beat in the vanilla extract.

Gently stir in the flour mixture just until incorporated. Flatten the dough into a disk shape, wrap in plastic wrap, and chill the dough for at least an hour.

Preheat the oven to 350°F with the rack in the middle of the oven. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

On a lightly floured surface roll out the dough to 1/4 inch thick. Cut into whatever shape you prefer using a lightly floured cookie cutter.

Place the cookies on the parchment paper and place them in the refrigerator for about 15 minutes. This will firm up the dough so the cookies will maintain their shape when baked. (You can also skip the use of parchment paper, spray a cookie sheet with Pam®, put the cookies directly on the cookie sheet and put the cookie sheet in the refrigerator for 15 minutes.)

Bake for 8 to 10 minutes, or until the cookies are lightly brown. Cool them on a rack.

Shortbread cookies will keep in an airtight container for about a week or frozen for several months.

Shortbread Thumbprint Cookies - ☺♥♥♥☺

When I mentioned making cookies, Peggy asked me to make her favorite ... thumbprint cookies. But she didn't have a recipe so I went out to the Internet to steal and modify a few or one that looked good. My essential modification to the selected recipe was to beat the dough until it was fluffy, and that resulted in excellent cookie dough texture after baking. I also somewhat changed the ingredients but the basic recipe is unchanged.

Here is "THE" one stunningly good shortbread type cookie recipe that clearly makes it a shoo-in candidate for Food Nirvana. Thanks to AllRecipes.com! Great job, folks!

I made half of the batch using black cherry preserves and the other half using apple butter. Yield: 24 cookies, having used a 2 tbsp. scoop to dispense the dough. Both flavors are superb! The cookie texture is perfect.

Ingredients:

1 cup of butter, softened

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup of white sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of almond extract

2 cups of all-purpose flour

1 cup of seedless jam or preserve of your choice, warmed slightly and mixed with a spoon to be easy to dispense into the cookie thumbprints

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Beat the softened butter and white sugar together in a stand mixer bowl on medium low speed until creamy.

Add the $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of almond extract while mixing. Add the flour gradually and continue mixing on medium speed until the dough is uniform and fluffy.

Form the dough into half-moon shape mounds (use a 2 tbsp. scoop) and place the mounds on a parchment paper covered 11" x 17" baking sheet about 2 inches apart (12 mounds per sheet).

Use your thumb and/or forefinger to press down and make a deep dent in the center of each mound, then use a teaspoon and fill the dent with the warmed/mixed preserve or other filling of your choice.

Bake the cookies in two separate batches in the preheated oven until the edges are lightly browned, about 16 minutes total baking time. Rotate the baking sheet 180 degrees after the first 8 minutes.

Remove the baking sheet from the oven and allow the cookies to cool for a few minutes, then transfer them to a plate with a spatula.

Enjoy! Oh, my, these are really great!

Shortcake - ☺

This is a simple cake recipe that goes well when making strawberry shortcake.

Ingredients: (makes 9, 3"x3" servings)

2 cups of flour

2 1/2 tsp. of baking powder

1/4 tsp. of salt

1/3 cup of vegetable shortening

1 cup of sugar

1 egg

1/2 tsp. of vanilla extract

1 cup of milk

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Grease a 9-inch square cake pan lightly with butter.

Whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt together in a bowl and set it aside.

Beat the shortening and sugar with an electric mixer in a large bowl until light and fluffy.

Beat in the egg and vanilla extract until smooth.

Pour in the flour mixture alternately with the milk, mixing until just incorporated.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan.

Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 25 minutes.

Cool in the pan for 10 minutes before removing to cool completely on a wire rack.

Soft Sugar Cookies - ☺♥

Cookie texture varies a lot depending on your goal and thus the ingredients you use and baking temperature and time. Food Nirvana already has a nice lemon sugar cookie recipe for crispy cookies, so I decided to add a recipe for soft sugar cookies, in this case flavored with almond extract, vanilla and nutmeg. Note that the choice of flavoring extract or extracts is up to you. For example, you might use coconut, maple, cinnamon, lemon, orange, cherry, or a variety of other flavoring extracts to create what you want.

I found this recipe on the Internet and I have modified it a lot. Note the optional use of frosting, food coloring and decorative sprinkles. Those are typical for holiday sugar cookies and certainly appropriate. Also quite attractive. But not required if you are making a simple sugar cookie at some non-holiday time.

Ingredients:

1 cup of butter, softened

3/4 cup of sugar

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon of almond extract

2 extra large eggs

2 1/4 cups of all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon of cream of tartar

1/2 to 1 teaspoon of baking soda

1/4 teaspoon of salt

1/4 teaspoon of ground nutmeg

Food coloring for the cookie dough (optional)

Frosting: (optional)

1/4 cup of butter, softened

3 cups of confectioners' sugar

1 teaspoon of almond extract

2 to 4 tablespoons of hot water

Food coloring (optional)

Decorative sprinkles (optional)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy using the electric mixer on low speed.

Beat in the flavoring extracts and the eggs, one at a time, and the (optional) food coloring, increasing the speed to medium.

In another bowl, whisk together the flour, cream of tartar, baking soda, salt and nutmeg.

Gradually beat those dry ingredients into the creamed mixture on medium low speed only until all the ingredients are well mixed and the cookie dough formed.

Drop the cookie dough by rounded tablespoonfuls (roughly 2 tbsp.) 3 inches apart on parchment paper lined baking sheets.

Flatten each dough ball slightly with the bottom of a lightly bottom buttered glass tumbler dipped in (Demarara or sanding or ordinary) sugar.

Bake the cookies until the edges begin to brown, about 8 to 10 minutes.

Remove the cookies from the baking sheet with a spatula to a wire rack and allow them to cool completely.

For the frosting (if you use it), beat the butter, confectioners' sugar, almond extract and enough water to reach the desired icing consistency for spreading.

Tint the icing with food coloring if you like.

Spread the icing over the cooled cookies. Likewise, use decorative sprinkles on top of the spread icing on the cookies if you like.

Store the iced/decorated cookies in a closed cookie tin with a tight lid, with the layers of cookies separated by either wax paper or parchment paper.

Enjoy!

Spiced Pumpkin Swirl Cheesecake - 😊♥

A well made cheesecake is a very creamy taste of nirvana. It is a rich dessert, the quality of which depends a lot on the ingredients used. Typical recipes for plain cheesecake use conventional methods and ingredients. This recipe is one Peggy obtained from cookingclub.com and it is superb and a bit involved, but definitely worth the effort to create perfection. The directions I provide in this recipe are very detailed and modified to assure success and ease of preparation, and rather more detailed and helpful than what was provided in the cookingclub.com recipe.

As is typical in making topped or swirled cheesecakes, this recipe consists of a three part procedure. The first is making the crust for the bottom of the cheesecake. The second is making the filling for the cheesecake. The third is adding the topping or the swirled ingredients addition at the right time. For example, when making cheesecake with cherry topping the topping isn't applied until after the cake is baked and chilled. Conversely, when making a cheesecake with a swirled flavor addition, that addition is made just before baking the cheesecake.

The cookingclub.com recipe noted that either dark or light brown sugar can be used in the recipe, based on the flavor effect wanted, considering that dark brown sugar has a larger amount of molasses used when it is made. We used a half and half mixture of dark and light brown sugar ... a middle of the road approach.

Note that a 9" diameter spring form pan is required for making a traditional cheesecake. Beyond that, we used a piece of parchment paper cut into a 9" diameter circle inside the spring form pan before making the crust and pressing it into place. The parchment paper makes it easy later to move the completed cheesecake from the bottom of the spring form pan to a serving platter. Other required materials include a shallow baking or roasting pan large enough to hold the spring form pan, and, heavy duty aluminum foil to wrap the outside of the spring form pan to make it waterproof during baking.

Crust Ingredients:

2 cups of raw pecan halves, toasted in a 325 degrees F oven for 12 minutes

2 tablespoons of packed dark or light brown sugar

3 tablespoons of unsalted butter, melted

Cheese Filling Ingredients:

3, 8 ounce packages of cream cheese

3/4 cup of packed dark or light brown sugar

3/4 cup of sour cream

2 teaspoons of vanilla extract

3 large or extra large eggs

Swirl Filling Ingredients:

1 cup of pure canned unseasoned pumpkin filling of the type used to make pumpkin pie

1/4 cup of packed dark or light brown sugar

1 teaspoon of cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon of ground ginger

1/4 teaspoon of ground cloves

1/4 teaspoon of ground nutmeg

Crust Directions:

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F.

Spread the raw pecan halves on a cookie sheet evenly and toast them in the oven for five minutes. Then stir the pecans and spread them evenly and toast them for another five minutes. If they are fairly dry and break easily they are ready to use for the crust. If not, let them toast for an additional 2 minutes or more until they break easily but are not dark or burned.

Put the toasted pecan halves onto a plate and let them cool for five minutes.

Wrap the outside of the spring form pan with heavy duty aluminum foil, such that it will not allow water into the spring form pan from the bottom or the fastening clip area. The aluminum foil should cover the entire bottom and outside area of the spring form pan. That means the best aluminum foil to use is the extra wide (18" wide) heavy duty type.

Cut out a 9" diameter circle of parchment paper from a typical roll/box of parchment paper used for baking. Eliminate the tendency of the circle of

parchment paper to curl by curling it fairly tightly in reverse once or twice. Place the circle of parchment paper into the inside bottom of the spring form pan.

Use a medium to large size food processor on slow to medium speed pulse mode to process the pecan halves and the 2 tablespoons of brown sugar until the pecans are finely ground and mixed with the brown sugar, but be very careful not to over process the mixture or it will become a useless pulp of pecan paste. The caution provided here is to have the cook avoid using a small food processor as the processing time to grind all the pecans in one pass is just what is needed to ruin the pecans, turning them into a useless paste.

Add the melted butter to the pecan and brown sugar mixture and pulse briefly just until the butter is combined evenly with the other ingredients.

Press the crust mixture evenly into the inside bottom of the spring form pan, on top of the parchment paper.

Bake the crust in the 325 degrees F oven for 10 minutes or, if necessary, a few minutes more just until the crust mixture is set and dry. (A crust should be crusty, not pasty or soft and not hard as a brick.)

Remove the spring form pan from the oven and put it on a wire rack to cool.

Cheese Filling Directions:

Beat the cream cheese and the 3/4 cup of brown sugar using a conventional electric mixer on medium speed until the mixture is smooth and blended.

Add the sour cream and the vanilla to the mixture and mix on medium speed for one minute.

Break the eggs into a bowl and then add the eggs a little at a time to the cheese mixture and then beat the mixture on slow speed for one minute and then medium speed for one minute to create a uniform blended mixture. I like to use a spatula to scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl after the first slow speed cycle so all the ingredients get well mixed during the second, medium speed cycle.

Spoon half of the cheese filling mixture into the spring form pan and spread it evenly to cover the surface of the crust.

Set the remainder of the cheese filling mixture aside.

Swirl Filling Directions:

Whisk the pumpkin filling with the 1/4 cup of brown sugar in a one quart bowl.

Add the cinnamon, ginger, cloves and nutmeg and whisk to blend the spices with the pumpkin mixture.

Add 1 1/2 cups of the reserved cheese filling mixture to the pumpkin mixture and whisk until well blended.

Spoon half of the remaining cheese filling mixture into the spring form pan without making any effort to smooth out that addition.

Add half of the pumpkin mixture on top of and around the added cheese mixture filling.

Repeat the additions, using the remaining portions of the cheese mixture filling and the pumpkin mixture.

Make the top surface of the cheesecake flat without mixing the filling. Simply lightly use the underside of a soup spoon to gently make the surface flat, such that the filling contacts the inside wall of the spring form pan evenly.

Use a table knife inserted vertically into the filling to create a swirl effect inside the mixture, to achieve a marbled effect, but do not over mix.

Baking, Chilling and Serving Directions:

Put the spring form pan into the shallow baking/roasting pan.

Fill the baking/roasting pan with hot tap water until the water is deep enough to come halfway up the side of the spring form pan.

Put the baking/roasting pan into the 325 degrees F oven carefully and bake the cheesecake for 60 minutes.

Check the cheesecake for doneness. This is done by pulling out the oven rack that holds the baking/roasting pan and then holding the sides of the spring form pan and gently shaking it side to side for only a moment. If the center of the cheesecake ripples then it is not done. If it simply moves slightly then the cheesecake is done baking.

If additional baking time is necessary then only increase the baking time in five minute intervals, checking after each interval for doneness.

When baking is complete remove the spring form pan from the roasting pan, remove and discard the aluminum foil, and place the spring form pan on a wire rack to cool the cheesecake to room temperature.

Place the spring form pan into the refrigerator and chill the cheesecake overnight, uncovered.

When ready to serve the cheesecake, loosen the side surface of the cheesecake from the inside of the spring form pan with a table knife, remove the cheesecake from the spring form pan and slide the parchment paper and cheesecake onto a chilled serving dish or platter. You may want to use a thin flat spatula to get under the parchment paper for easy removal of the cheesecake from the bottom of the spring form pan.

Typically a cheesecake of 9" diameter size makes 12 servings, each about 475 calories. Zowie!

Enjoy ... Then join Weight Watchers®!

Toffee Coconut Thin And Crisp Cookies - ☺♥♥♥☺

This recipe is a creative variant of the Toffee Milk Chocolate cookies recipe. These cookies are beyond great in taste and texture.

If you have only one oven then do all of the baking in two separate batches, or if you want you can halve this recipe.

Okay ... First make the toffee bits, then use them in making the cookies.

Toffee Bits:

Ingredients: (makes approximately two cups of crushed toffee bits)

6 tbsp. of Butter

2 tbsp. of coconut oil

1/2 cup of Light Brown Sugar

2/3 cup of White Sugar

1/4 tsp. of salt

2 tbsp. of Light Karo® corn syrup

2 tbsp. of Water

Directions:

Put all of the ingredients into a medium size heavy bottom saucepan.

Bring the mixture to a boil over a medium size burner on medium heat, stirring until all the ingredients are combined and melted.

Continue to cook on low heat, with gentle stirring, until a candy thermometer reaches almost 280 degrees F. Note that the rise of temperature is faster the higher it gets so do not let the toffee darken/burn from inattention and overheating in the saucepan, ergo, get the toffee saucepan off the heat at about 275 degrees F. The heat in the bottom of the saucepan will quickly elevate the toffee temperature the rest of the way to 280 degrees F, so you don't need to check the temperature after moving the saucepan from the burner.

Immediately pour the toffee onto a parchment paper lined 11" x 17" baking sheet, as thinly as you can (don't dump it into a pile, empty the saucepan over most of the surface of the parchment paper), and allow it to cool.

Once it has cooled to room temperature, break up the toffee into large pieces by hand or by hitting it lightly many places with a wooden kitchen mallet.

Put the toffee pieces into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, expel the air and seal it and use a wood kitchen mallet to crush/crumble them into toffee bits.

Now let's proceed with making the cookies ...

Toffee Coconut Thin and Crisp Cookies:

Ingredients: (makes approximately 120, 2 1/2" diameter thin cookies)

4 cups of All Purpose Flour (20 oz.)

1/2 tsp. of Baking Soda

1 tsp. of Sea Salt

2 cups of Butter, softened

1 cup of White Sugar

1 cup of Light Brown Sugar

2 Egg Whites

4 tsp. of Pure Vanilla Extract

4 tsp. of Pure Coconut Extract (You can buy this product via the Internet from www.OliveNation.com or other ingredient suppliers)

2 tbsp. of Water

1 1/2 cups of Shredded Sweetened Coconut (packed)

1 1/2 cups of Toffee Bits

Directions:

Preheat the double ovens to 300 degrees F with two shelves in each oven, putting them 1/3 oven height and 2/3 oven height from the bottom of each oven.

Mix the softened butter and the sugars in the electric mixer on medium speed for three minutes.

Add the vanilla extract and the coconut extract and continue mixing.

Add the egg whites and the water and continue mixing on medium speed.

Put the flour, salt and baking soda into a two quart bowl and whisk them together.

Add the flour mixture 1/2 cup at a time to the mixing bowl while mixing on low to medium low speed.

Mix the cookie dough for three minutes on medium speed.

Add the coconut and the toffee bits and mix for two minutes.

Remove the bowl from the mixer and set the bowl of cookie dough aside.

Prepare four parchment paper covered 11"x17" baking sheets.

Dispense the cookie dough onto each baking sheet with a 1 tbsp. scoop, 3 dough mounds by 5 dough mounds on each sheet, evenly separated from each other and the perimeter of the baking sheet. This will make the first 60 cookies of the 120 total cookies.

Put all four baking sheets into the ovens, two per oven.

Bake for nine minutes.

Rotate the baking sheets, then swap the positions of the baking sheets on the shelves.

Bake for an additional nine minutes.

Remove the baking sheets from the ovens to a heat proof counter and allow the cookies to cool for ten minutes.

Use a thin spatula to transfer the cookies to cooling racks.

Now repeat the dough dispensing and baking for the other 60 cookies.

Allow the cookies to cool to room temperature.

Store the cookies in an airtight container.

If you want, you can rinse/wash the sheets of parchment paper with warm water and let them air dry and use them again later.

Enjoy what you made ... these cookies are superb!

Toffee Milk/Dark Chocolate Cookies - ☺♥♥♥☺ T

These cookies are my attempt(s) to recreate/reverse engineer the Pepperidge Farm® cookie of the same name. Or to be precise, their cookie type is prefaced with the words Farmhouse and Thin and Crisp. They are somewhat similar to Alexis Stewart's chocolate chip cookies (see Chocolate Chip Cookies recipe), with the addition of toffee bits, and a slight increase in the ratio of flour to other ingredients. Excess butter is the primary ingredient that causes the cookie dough to be extra soft and spread out to make a thin cookie. A lower than typical baking temperature for a longer time also tends to produce a more crisp yet light colored cookie.

The process of reverse engineering a recipe requires experiments to vary ingredients, ingredient amounts, mixing procedure, baking temperature and baking time. Having tried a variety of those elements myself, I realized that this recipe lends itself to being a teaching recipe. You may decide to try recipe variations of your choice worthy of consideration in arriving at your version of perfection. Some of the obvious variations are noted in the ingredients list and in the later baking directions.

The key objective is to make a buttery and crisp and thin cookie. But not too buttery because you don't want it to be greasy or oily. The ingredient combination I show in the recipe below, without variations, has some chewiness inside a crisp exterior for the larger size cookies, and you can decide how little or how much of that you want by varying the amounts/ratios of flour, butter, egg white, water, amount of dough per cookie and baking temperature/time. Also the amount of toffee bits, which tend to make the cookie chewy.

I found that the best way to dispense the cookie dough on to the baking sheet is by using a scoop of a specific size. This promotes uniformity. Scoops can be purchased online in different sizes, like 1 tbsp., 2 tbsp., and 3 tbsp., in a set, and they have squeeze handles that make the dough release from and fall out of the scoop and on to the baking sheet.

I describe two different baking periods/temperatures for each baking sheet of cookies, but you might decide to use only one baking period, especially if you are making the smallest size cookie. You use the small addition of water to the dough to make it spread out easily, but be careful how much water (or butter) you use or you will have the same type of result as Alexis Stewart ... a pile of ingredients in the center and a very big diameter cookie. But don't be afraid to experiment.

The combination of the rich buttery taste and the toffee bits in a thin crisp cookie is excellent. For the chocolate I use small pieces of the Callebaut® milk chocolate

(type 823NV-132) that I often use in making chocolate candy. You, of course, can easily choose to use a high quality brand of milk chocolate bar, like Lindt®. What a combination! For that matter, you might want to use a high quality semi-sweet or dark chocolate. If you prefer dark chocolate then by all means use that. I also use Callebaut® dark chocolate #811 callets to make a dark chocolate version of this cookie. You can buy the Callebaut® products online at Amazon®.

In my experiments maximum crispness resulted when making the cookies small with the 1 tbsp. dough scoop and 18 minutes of baking time at 300 degrees F. I suggest limiting the amount of toffee bits to 3/4 cup when making the small cookies. Also chop the chocolate pieces/chips so they are no larger than 1/4" squares. You might also try using less butter but use at least 1 3/4 quarter pound sticks of butter. Note finally that these extra instructions apply only when you make the small version of these cookies.

Okay ... First make the toffee bits, then use them in making the cookies.

TOFFEE BITS

Ingredients: (makes approximately one cup of crushed toffee bits)

3 tbsp. of Butter

1 tbsp. of coconut oil

1/4 cup of Light Brown Sugar

1/3 cup of White Sugar

1/8 tsp. of salt

1 tbsp. of Light Karo® corn syrup

1 tbsp. of Water

Directions:

Put all of the ingredients into a small heavy bottom saucepan.

Bring the mixture to a boil over a small burner on medium heat, stirring until all the ingredients are combined and melted.

Continue to cook on low or very low heat, with gentle stirring, until a candy thermometer reaches almost 280 degrees F. Note that the rise of temperature is faster the higher it gets so do not let the toffee darken/burn from inattention and overheating in the saucepan, ergo, get the toffee saucepan off the heat at about 275 degrees F. The heat in the bottom of the saucepan will quickly elevate the

toffee temperature the rest of the way to 280 degrees F, so you don't need to check the temperature after moving the saucepan from the burner.

Immediately pour the toffee onto a parchment paper lined 11" x 17" baking sheet, as thinly as you can (don't dump it into a pile, empty the saucepan over most of the surface of the parchment paper), and allow it to cool.

Once it has cooled to room temperature, break up the toffee into large pieces by hand or by hitting it lightly many places with a wooden kitchen mallet.

Put the toffee pieces into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, expel the air and seal it and use a wood kitchen mallet to crush/crumble them into toffee bits.

Now let's proceed with making the cookies ...

TOFFEE MILK/DARK CHOCOLATE COOKIES

If you decide to proceed to make the cookies, be prepared for a whole lot of verbal abuse by chubby women who were formerly svelte before tasting your cookies, or from the same women whose somewhat paunchy husbands have turned into oinkers! We're talking here about serious loss of control for when to stop eating these cookies.

Ingredients: (makes 24 [3 tbsp. of dough] cookies or 36 [2 tbsp. of dough] cookies or around 60 [1 slightly generous tbsp. of dough] cookies)

2 cups of All Purpose Flour (weigh it on your kitchen scale to be accurate ... 10 ounces)

1/4 tsp. of Baking Soda

1/2 tsp. of Sea Salt

1 cup (2 quarter pound sticks) of Butter, softened (you can reduce the amount but only up to 1/4 stick less)

1/2 cup of White Sugar

1/2 cup of Light Brown Sugar

1 egg white

2 tsp. of Pure Vanilla Extract

1 tbsp. of water (you can vary this from one to three tbsp. to get the dough composition you want)

1 cup of Milk Chocolate or Dark Chocolate Chips (or a 50:50 mixture of both)

3/4 cup of Toffee Bits

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees F.

Whisk together the flour, baking soda and salt in a one quart bowl.

Use a stand mixer and beat together the butter, brown sugar and white sugar on medium speed for about two minutes.

While continuing to mix, add in the egg white, the water, and then the vanilla and continue mixing for three minutes.

Set the mixer to low speed, then add in 1/2 of the flour mixture, mix for one minute, then add in the other half of the flour mixture and mix for one minute.

Add the chocolate pieces and the toffee bits, then mix for one minute. The dough will be very soft. You can use a rubber spatula to scrape it from the inside sides of the mixing bowl to guarantee proper mixing and later ease of use when filling a scoop with dough.

Now you decide which size of scoop to use, and that will determine whether you need only one baking cycle and one temperature, or, two baking cycles at two different temperatures. The point is the larger cookies require more baking time to come out crisp.

For example, use a 2 tbsp. scoop and a table knife (to avoid having excess dough) to dispense the dough in roughly 1 1/2" mounds on three 11"x 17" parchment paper lined baking sheets, cookies spaced evenly (12 cookies/sheet). If you want thicker and larger cookies then use 3 tbsp. of batter (a 3 tbsp. scoop) for each cookie, putting only eight cookies per sheet. The amount of dough you use per cookie determines how large and thick each cookie will be and also how many you can bake at a time on one baking sheet while avoiding having them crowding each other and distorting the shape.

At this point, if you want, you can freeze the unbaked cookies in the deep freeze, then store the frozen unbaked cookies in Ziploc® freezer bags until you are ready to bake some of them. Otherwise proceed with the baking directions below.

Follow the baking procedure described next for each baking sheet of cookies you decide to bake. Bake one or two sheets of cookies at a time. If you are working with unbaked frozen cookies simply place 8 to 15 of them (depending on size) on the parchment paper on a baking sheet.

Bake each baking sheet of the cookies for 18 or 24 minutes (18 for 1 tbsp. scoop cookies, 24 for 2 tbsp. scoop cookies) on a middle oven shelf, turning the baking sheet 180 degrees after the first half of the total baking time and exchanging shelves if you are baking the cookies two sheets at a time.

Remove the baking sheet(s) from the oven and let the cookies cool on the baking sheet. Do the above baking for all the baking sheets of cookies you have prepared.

Check the cooled cookies for crispness. If you like them the way they are then you have completed making the recipe. If you want more crispness then continue with the instructions given next.

Reset the oven temperature to 250 degrees F. Then put each baking sheet of cookies into the oven, one or two sheets per baking cycle, and let them bake for 10 minutes.

Remove each baking sheet from the oven and let the cookies cool to become firm.

Repeat the above baking step for any other baking sheets of cookies that have had the first baking cycle.

Remove the cookies from the baking sheet(s) carefully with a thin spatula, if necessary cutting through any joined areas first with the spatula. Be careful not to break the cookies when removing them from the baking sheet. Put them on a cooling rack.

Allow the cookies to cool completely to room temperature.

You can store these cookies in an air tight plastic or metal container. Or you can simply let them sit out on a plate for up to a day. They will stay crisp best on a plate if the humidity is low ... otherwise they may begin to soften. Note, however, these cookies are at their peak goodness when freshly made and best later if stored in an air tight container.

Enjoy! Oh, what an understatement! Hey, if you really are going to make and eat these cookies you may as well accompany them with a chilled drink of 4 ounces of milk mixed with one ounce of Kahlua® coffee flavored liquor per person. Pure decadence!

Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookies - ☺♥

This recipe is for the traditional chocolate chip cookie recipe found on packages of Nestle's® semisweet chocolate chips. I have some minor variations you might want to try but the basic recipe is great.

What variations? Well, think of some bananas mixed in with the batter, possibly with some added banana flavoring. Or think of some small English toffee pieces with the nuts instead of using chocolate chips. Also, I'm sure raisin lovers might like to add either dark or light colored raisins to the nuts and chocolate chips.

My sweetheart, Peggy, bought a package of 62% high cacao chocolate chips by Nestle® and I will be using them today, along with some regular semisweet chips, mixed separately into different batches.

Enough of my prattle. Let's get on with it.

Ingredients:

2 1/4 cups of flour, sifted

1/2 lb. softened butter

3/4 cup brown sugar

3/4 cup white sugar

1 teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

2 extra large eggs

1 teaspoon of baking soda

2 cups of chocolate chips

1 cup of shelled walnut halves or pecans, chopped

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Mix the eggs using an electric mixer.

Add the sugars and the vanilla and mix thoroughly.

Add the softened butter and again mix thoroughly.

Mix the flour, salt and baking soda separately in a one quart bowl.

Add the mixed flour, salt and baking soda to the egg mixture and mix well.

Add the chocolate chips and mix briefly on a slow to medium speed.

Add the chopped nuts and mix briefly on a slow to medium speed.

Put the dough in rounded tablespoons (I make mine larger) on an ungreased cookie sheet, allowing an inch of spacing on all sides.

Bake the cookies for five minutes, then turn the cookie sheet 180° around to assure even baking and bake the cookies for an additional four to five minutes. Think this way ... the best chocolate chip cookies are slightly chewy, right? So don't over bake them until they are crisp.

Remove the cookies from the oven, let them cool for one minute, and then put them on a wire cooling rack.

When the cookies are completely cooled to room temperature, store them in a sealable container with the layers separated by the sheets of waxed paper.

Enjoy!

DIPS, DRESSINGS & SAUCES:

Arby's BBQ Sauce - ☺♥

The well known barbecue sauce from Arby's® is something nice to have in your home kitchen for hot homemade roast beef sandwiches. It is quite different from typical BBQ sauces used for baby back ribs in that it is much milder. I happened to see a recipe on the Internet so I decided to put it in Food Nirvana. Having tested it there was little resemblance to the real Arby's® BBQ sauce. So it was time for me to make things right.

Here is my version, which varies considerably from the initial recipe provided to me via the Internet. The main idea is that the Arby's® sauce is not very strong/spicy, it is sweet, and it tastes like ketchup is a significant component.

You might start with my recipe and decide if and how much you want to vary it to please yourself. You can easily scale down my recipe to make smaller quantities. The tamarind paste can be purchased via the Internet via sites like Amazon®.

For the beef you will need to make a fine hot sandwich, look at my recipe for Eye Roast of Beef shown at the bottom of this recipe.

Ingredients: (makes roughly one quart of sauce)

1 cup of Cattlemen's Kansas City Classic BBQ sauce

1 tsp. of chili powder

1/2 tsp. of tamarind paste

1 1/2 cups of ketchup

1 cup of water (or more)

1/4 cup of sugar

Directions:

Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan.

Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the sauce boils.

Remove the sauce from the heat, pour it into a one quart canning jar, seal the lid and cool the sauce to room temperature.

Refrigerate the sauce. It will easily keep for a month or more.

Use the sauce generously on hot roast beef sandwiches. Directions for making the roast beef come next.

Here is the recipe for making the roast beef for your similar to Arby's® roast beef sandwich:

I buy roughly 3 lb. eye roasts of beef, and I cut them in half and vacuum seal and freeze the pieces until I am ready to use them, individually.

Later I thaw one piece and I remove any fat that might be present on a surface, and I stand it vertically on an aluminum foil covered baking sheet and bake it for 45 minutes at 350 degrees F. Then I check the internal temperature with an instant read thermometer pushed down into the center of the roast from the top. The goal is 130 degrees F, and further baking will likely need to be done to achieve that temperature.

Wrap the beef in the aluminum foil from the baking sheet to maintain surface moisture, then continue baking. Check the temperature every five minutes so you don't overshoot the mark. Once the temperature reaches 130 degrees F remove the foil wrapped beef from the oven and let it sit, wrapped, on a wood cutting board for about 15 minutes.

I process the hot roast beef with my meat slicer to create very thin or shaved slices. Then I immediately vacuum seal ¼ lb. quantities in small vacuum sealing bags and I simply refrigerate the product. It is medium rare roast beef. It is tender and juicy and delicious. It has a proven shelf life of at least four weeks. And my cost was (in 2023) \$3.99 per pound. In other words, it is idiotic to buy premium roast beef at the delicatessen for \$12 or more per pound or to buy cheaper brands and have them spoil in your refrigerator within a week.

Why the ¼ lb. quantities? Because that is the amount you are likely to use to make one nice hot roast beef sandwich, so I am being economical in opening a package and using all the contents while they are fresh. I do not have to worry about any amount of the product spoiling in the refrigerator following opening the vacuum sealed package.

Enjoy!

Bacon Horseradish Dip - 😊♥

This lively dip for potato chips and a variety of other crunchy products is easy to make and delicious.

Follow the simple directions and you will be pleased with the result.

Ingredients:

6 slices of dry cured hickory smoked bacon (or more water cured bacon)

1/4 cup of prepared horseradish (or more) (do not drain off the juice)

1 cup of sour cream

4 oz. of cream cheese (room temperature)

1/2 tsp. of white pepper

1 tbsp. of Tabasco sauce

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

1 tsp. of fresh lemon juice

Directions:

Fry the bacon in a large skillet. Cook over medium heat until evenly brown.

Remove the bacon and drain the fat from it onto a paper towel.

Crumble the bacon and set it aside.

Put the horseradish, sour cream, mayonnaise, white pepper, Tabasco sauce and lemon juice into a large electric mixer bowl.

Mix first on low speed and then on medium speed for two minutes.

Cut the room temperature cream cheese into 16 small pieces and add them one at a time into the mixing bowl while the contents are being mixed, and continue mixing for three minutes after all of the pieces have been added.

Use a spatula to scrape any cream cheese sticking to the bottom of the bowl into the mixture.

Continue to mix on medium to medium high speed for three additional minutes.

Stir in the crumbled bacon with a large spoon.

Transfer the dip to a storage container, cover it and refrigerate it for at least one hour.

Serve cold. Stir before serving.

Bleu Cheese Dressing - ☺♥

This bulk recipe, my own creation, makes up to two quarts of dressing. You can proportion it to make smaller quantities. If you use less milk you have a lower volume thicker dip for chips, vegetables, etc. If you use more milk you have a salad dressing that is superb on a wedge of iceberg lettuce.

Ingredients:

1½ lbs. high quality Bleu, Roquefort or Gorgonzola cheese

8 oz. cream cheese

1 cup mayonnaise

1 cup heavy cream

Milk (one to three cups depending on your preference/intent)

1 tsp. white pepper

Procedure:

Blend the cream, pepper and mayonnaise with an electric mixer on low speed in a 3 to 4 quart bowl.

Cut up the softened cream cheese and add the pieces gradually while mixing. Increase the speed to medium when necessary.

Cut up one pound of the bleu cheese into small pieces and add them gradually while mixing. Mix on medium to medium high speed to cream the ingredients thoroughly. The mixture will be quite thick.

Add milk gradually, up to one cup total, to obtain the desired consistency for a vegetable or chip dip. Use more for a salad dressing. Mix well after each ¼ cup addition and test the consistency before adding more milk. Some people want a very thick dressing for a dip. Others want thinner dressing for salads. Add the amount of milk in total to meet your goal.

Break up the remaining half pound of bleu cheese into small pieces about the size of a peanut or a chickpea. Mix them all at once into the dressing, briefly, on low speed, so as to retain the small pieces of bleu cheese in the otherwise creamy bleu cheese dressing.

This mixture will easily keep well for up to two weeks if properly refrigerated. I use my vacuum sealer with one pint canning jars to extend the suitable refrigeration storage time to three weeks or more for surplus product.

Bolognese Sauce - 😊 ♥♥♥😊

This recipe originally came from J. Kenji Lopez Alt's great book, The Food Lab©. After making it one time I decided to make a few changes to the ingredients and minor changes to the directions. What I have now, after making it twice, is so good I couldn't believe it! I am talking about complex flavors ... like some of the best French cooking ... where if you take the time to taste what you are eating the taste sensations change within/after each bite, and all are stunningly good. This sauce is far better than I ever could have imagined it to be.

Wow! That is some major meat sauce! My sweetheart says it is perfect. It is.

Make this sauce and you will discover a level of cooking rarely available to the home chef.

Ingredients: (makes 3 to 3 1/2 quarts - 10 servings)

4 oz. of chicken livers

4 anchovy filets

1 tsp. of Marmite

1 tbsp. of soy sauce

2 cups of whole milk

1/2 cup of heavy cream

2 cups of chicken broth or stock

1/2 oz. of unflavored powdered gelatin (2 packets)

1/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil

4 tsp. of minced or finely grated garlic cloves

2 tsp. of dried oregano

A pinch of red pepper flakes

1, 28 oz. can of peeled plum tomatoes in juice, crushed or mashed to 1/2" chunks

4 oz. of pancetta, cut into 1/2" chunks (or two to three thick slices of dry cured hickory smoked bacon)

1 large onion, finely chopped

2 or 3 carrots, peeled and cut into a 1/4" dice (1 to 1 1/2 cups)

3 or 4 stalks of celery, cut into a 1/4" dice (1 to 1 1/2 cups)

4 tbsp. of unsalted butter

1 lb. of ground lamb

1 lb. of ground pork

1 lb. of ground beef (instead of ground veal)

1/4 cup of dried rubbed sage leaves

1, 750 ml. bottle of dry red or dry white wine

2 bay leaves

1/4 cup of dried basil

1/2 cup of fresh, minced parsley

2 oz. (or more) of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese finely grated

1 tsp. of Kosher salt or sea salt

1 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper

1, 24 to 32 ounce bottle of plain Marinara sauce

Directions:

Combine the chicken livers and anchovies with the Marmite and the soy sauce in the bowl of a food processor. Pulse until finely ground, about 10 short pulses. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and set it aside. Note: I used a Magic Bullet® high speed miniature mixer and that was perfect ... Fast, and easy cleanup.

Combine the milk, heavy cream and chicken broth (or stock) in a bowl. Sprinkle that mixture with the gelatin and set it aside.

Heat two tbsp. of the olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium high heat until the oil is shimmering. Add the garlic and oregano and pepper flakes and cook, stirring, for one minute. Add the crushed tomatoes with their juice and bring the mixture to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the sauce has slightly thickened ... about 30 minutes. Then remove the sauce from the heat.

While the tomato sauce is simmering put the remaining two tbsp. of olive oil and the pancetta (or bacon) into a large Dutch oven and cook over medium high heat until the pancetta/bacon is softened and translucent, about six minutes.

Add the onion, carrots and celery and cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are softened but not browned, about 10 minutes. This works best by keeping the lid on the Dutch oven after each time you stir the mixture. When it is done, transfer the mixture to a large bowl.

Return the Dutch oven to medium high heat, add the butter and heat it until the foaming subsides. Add the lamb, the pork, the beef and the sage, mix well and then cook, stirring occasionally, until the meat is no longer pink.

Add the anchovy mixture, stir until homogenous, then cook for five minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the pancetta(or bacon)/vegetable mixture and stir to combine. Then add the wine and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to get only a simmer and cook until the wine is slightly reduced, about 15 minutes.

While the wine mixture simmers, blend the tomato mixture with an immersion blender until it is totally smooth, starting on low speed and increasing to high speed. Note: My sauce was already so smooth I didn't bother with this step.

Add the tomato mixture, the milk/cream mixture, the bay leaves, the basil, the parsley, the salt and the pepper to the Dutch oven and stir to combine. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce to a simmer and cover with a lid slightly ajar.

Cook for three hours, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is thick and rich.

At this point I like to skim the melted fat from the surface of the sauce with a large spoon or a ladle and discard it. I also remove and discard the bacon, which I prefer using rather than pancetta, as the slight addition of the hickory smoked flavor is great. Also, remove and discard the bay leaves.

Add the grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese to the sauce and stir until the cheese is melted and mixed into the sauce.

Remove the sauce from the heat and allow it to cool, covered, for 30 minutes.

You can use the sauce immediately but the flavor improves nicely if you let it rest, covered, overnight.

A sealed container of the sauce will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator. My bet is that it won't last that long because you will have eaten all of it within two to three days!

When you want to use the sauce, heat the amount needed on low heat in a saucepan while you cook the pasta of your choice in boiling water in a pot and then drain off the water in a colander when the pasta is done cooking. Rinse the pasta in the colander very lightly with cool water, very briefly, just enough to barely moisten the pasta so it doesn't stick together when you put it into a serving dish. Avoid making the pasta cold, but if that happens then rewarm it in the microwave oven. Alternatively, you can use a few tablespoons of olive oil after draining the hot pasta and mix it in well in a large bowl to keep the pieces of pasta from sticking to each other.

I like to keep the serving dish of pasta separated from the Bolognese sauce until individual servings are made. That keeps any leftover pasta from absorbing the moisture in the sauce, which is very important to later have high quality leftovers.

Kenji also provided a recipe for Lasagna Bolognese in his book. We made it and we loved it! So I put that recipe (slightly modified) into Food Nirvana.

I suggest having additional grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese served with the meal. Either a nice medium red wine or cold beer will be fine beverages to serve. A small side salad is also nice.

Enjoy!

Cheese Sauce for Broccoli or Cauliflower - ☺♥

This is a simple cheddar cheese sauce with a bit of kick due to the addition of an optional small amount of hot sauce. It is a nice addition to steamed broccoli and/or cauliflower. It is also quite suitable for use with other types of food. You can substitute part or all of the cheese with other types of cheese, like Swiss, Provolone, Mozzarella, American, Pepper Jack, etc. Simply decide what you like best, singly or in combination.

I made the sauce and modified it with the addition of white wine and an extra 1/4 cup of grated cheddar cheese. The sauce is so simple to make and so easy to modify that you can use it as is or make changes. For example, instead of hot sauce you might try Worcestershire sauce or soy sauce. If you happen to have Shaoxing wine you might use a tablespoon or two of that instead of Pinot Grigio, etc. If I were using this sauce with seafood I might use some Old Bay® seasoning.

Ingredients:

2 tbsp. of butter

2 tbsp. of flour

1/2 cup of milk

1/2 cup of heavy cream

1/4 cup of Pinot Grigio or Chardonnay wine

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1/4 tsp. of white pepper

1/2 tsp. of Texas Pete's® (or other) Hot Sauce (optional)

2 (or a bit more) cups of grated extra sharp white cheddar cheese

Directions:

Melt the butter in a one quart saucepan over medium heat.

Whisk the flour into the butter until smooth, then cook while whisking for one minute to create a roux.

Pour the milk and cream into the roux, plus the salt and white pepper, and whisk to combine.

Add the (optional) Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce (or other seasoning[s]).

Cook and stir until the mixture thickens, about 3 minutes, then reduce the heat to low.

Add the wine and stir until well mixed.

Add the cheddar cheese 1/2 cup at a time and stir until the cheese is melted, etc. This will take about 3 minutes.

Pour the sauce generously over steamed broccoli and/or cauliflower (or other food of your choice).

Serve hot.

Cocktail Sauce - ☺♥

Cocktail sauce is great with fried shrimp or shrimp cocktail, as well as with other fried seafood. I provide two recipes below that are somewhat different, the first one from AllRecipes.com® and the second from Food.com®. Both will be very good, but read on ...

If you want a "knock your socks off" superb cocktail sauce then buy a horseradish root at the supermarket and process it per the Food Nirvana recipe for Processed Horseradish. The horseradish that results will be vastly superior to the small bottles of refrigerated stuff found in supermarkets. Use 3/4 cup of ketchup and 1/4 cup of your own prepared horseradish and simply that combination, mixed, yields a fabulous and strong cocktail sauce. Do it.

Recipe#1:

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons of finely grated raw horseradish

1 teaspoon of dark brown sugar

1/8 teaspoon of fresh lemon juice

6 tablespoons of ketchup

Directions:

Simply mix the ingredients in a small bowl, then cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until it is used.

Recipe#2:

Ingredients:

1 cup of catsup

1 to 2 tablespoons of horseradish (to your taste)

1 tablespoon of lemon juice

1/2 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce

1/4 teaspoon of salt

1 dash of pepper

Directions:

Mix the ingredients in a small bowl, cover the mixture with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until it is used.

Creamy French Dressing - ?

This salad dressing can be made easily with simple ingredients most of us keep around the house or in our refrigerators or cupboards. I provide two recipes, the first one from Food.com® and the second one from Tasteofhome.com®, to show the slight variation in recommended ingredients. I am sure either recipe will be very good.

Recipe#1:

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

1/2 cup of ketchup

1/4 cup of apple cider vinegar

1/4 to 1/2 cup of sugar

1 small sweet onion, cut into wedges

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1/4 teaspoon of pepper

1 cup of olive oil

Directions:

Place the mayonnaise, ketchup, vinegar, sugar, onion, salt and pepper in a blender.

Put the lid on and process the mixture until it is smooth.

Gradually add the olive oil in a steady stream while continuing to run the blender.

Let the dressing chill in the refrigerator for about an hour before using it.

Recipe#2:

Ingredients: (makes 2 ½ cups)

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

1/2 cup of ketchup

1/4 cup of white vinegar

1/2 cup of sugar

1 small onion, cut into wedges

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1/4 teaspoon of pepper

1 cup of canola oil

Directions:

Combine the mayonnaise, ketchup, vinegar, sugar, onion, salt and pepper in a blender.

Cover and process the mixture until it is smooth.

Gradually add the oil in a steady stream while continuing to process the mixture.

Dipping Sauce For Pot Stickers - ☺♥

This is a simple, easy to make sauce for pot stickers. You can vary the ingredients to please yourself. For example, you might use light corn syrup instead of the mixture of sugar and water to get a slightly thicker sauce.

Ingredients/Directions:

Dissolve 2 teaspoons of sugar in 2 tablespoons of water with stirring in a microwave safe cup.

Add:

4 tablespoons of soy sauce

2 teaspoons of rice vinegar

2 teaspoons of chili oil

2 teaspoons of minced garlic

2 teaspoons of toasted sesame seeds

1 1/2 teaspoons of toasted sesame oil.

6 green scallion tops diced

Heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven for 45 seconds to one minute.

Stir to mix the ingredients.

Serve this sauce warm with your steamed or fried pot stickers ...

Enjoy!

Dried Beef Dip - ☺

This recipe is compliments of Janet's Aunt Phyllis. It is quite tasty served with crackers or cold vegetables.

Ingredients:

8 oz. Cream cheese, softened

8 oz. Sour Cream

2½ oz. Dried beef, chopped fine (or more depending on your preference)

2 tbsp. Milk

2 tbsp. Minced onion

1 tbsp. Black pepper

2 tbsp. Green pepper, chopped fine

½ cup chopped almonds or peanuts

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

Put all ingredients except the nuts into a 4 quart or larger mixing bowl and blend on low and then medium speed until well blended.

Put the mixture into an ungreased pie plate. Sprinkle with the chopped nuts.

Bake for ten minutes. Remove the pie plate from the oven and let the contents cool to room temperature, then cover the dip with plastic wrap and refrigerate it.

Serve.

Garlic Mayonnaise - 😊♥

This mayonnaise variation is similar to an aioli but more spicy, and it can be used as a topping on seafood or as a dip for a variety of foods.

Ingredients:

1 cup of mayonnaise

1 tsp. of yellow mustard

1/2 tsp. of hot sauce

1 pinch of sea salt

2 tsp. of fresh lemon juice

2 cloves of garlic, minced

Directions:

Put all of the ingredients into a one quart bowl and whisk them until they are well combined.

Refrigerate the garlic mayonnaise before using it, for one to two hours, covered.

Green Goddess Salad Dressing - ☺♥

I've been curious about Green Goddess Salad Dressing for a long time and I finally made it. Wow, it is good stuff! I found the recipe below on the Internet and I slightly modified it. The text describing the dressing in the next paragraph is from that recipe.

Green goddess dressing does double duty as both a dip and a green salad dressing, but it has a number of other uses, too. You can marinate chicken or shrimp in green goddess dressing or use it to dress pasta or potato salad. The finished dressing is quite thick, so toss your greens in the dressing rather than pour the dressing on top of your greens.

You can either make a mayonnaise as an optional part of this recipe or simply use a cup of regular mayonnaise. The ingredient list and directions include what is needed to make the mayonnaise.

I decided to include an optional ingredient, sodium benzoate, at a level of 0.1% (one tenth of one percent) by weight of the salad dressing, as a preservative, to increase the shelf life of this dressing to perhaps six months when it is kept in a tightly sealed bottle or jar in the refrigerator.

Note that sodium benzoate is effective only in an acidic medium with an optimal pH of around 4.5, and the ingredients in this dressing achieve that close enough. I weighed the salad dressing exactly to determine how much concentrated sodium benzoate solution to use. It came in at 13 1/2 ounces by weight and one pint by volume. Thus, I used 1/2 teaspoon of the Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution. Note that we don't have to be exact in that measurement, as commercially, sodium benzoate use varies from 0.05% in some carbonated soft drinks to 0.2% in other foods.

If you do not use any sodium benzoate then keep the dressing refrigerated in a sealed bottle or jar and use it within two weeks. Note also that commercial mayonnaise already has a preservative (EDTA) so what we add in sodium benzoate is incremental but important since we are also using yogurt or sour cream in the mixture, and neither of those products contains any preservative.

Ingredients: (makes one pint)

1 large egg yolk

1 teaspoon of Dijon mustard (optional)

2 tablespoons of freshly squeezed lemon juice (optional)

1 cup of extra virgin olive oil (optional)

1 cup of fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

3 tablespoons of diced fresh chives (or the green tops of four scallions)

2 tablespoons of fresh tarragon leaves

4 anchovies, chopped fine

1 clove of garlic, diced

3/4 cup of plain Greek yogurt or regular sour cream

Kosher salt to taste (optional)

1/2 teaspoon of Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution (optional)

Directions:

Make the mayonnaise or simply put one cup of regular mayonnaise into the blender: If you are using regular mayonnaise you still also add the egg yolk to the mayonnaise.

Otherwise, to make your own mayonnaise, just pulse the egg yolk, Dijon mustard, and lemon juice in a blender with a few quick pulses, and then turn the blender on and drizzle in the oil in a thin, steady stream. Continue to blend until the mixture is light in color and thick.

Optionally add 1/2 teaspoon of the Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution to the mayonnaise.

Blend in the chopped anchovies, the herbs and the diced garlic: Stop the blender and scrape down the sides. Add the parsley, chives, tarragon, anchovies, and garlic. Blend until smooth and vibrant green, about two minutes.

Whisk the dressing gently into the yogurt: Place the Greek yogurt or sour cream into a two quart bowl. Add the herbed/seasoned mayonnaise mixture gradually and whisk gently to combine.

Taste and season: Taste the dressing for seasoning. The anchovies typically make it salty enough, but you can add additional salt if desired.

Zowie! It tastes great! Just imagine the variety of ways you can use the dressing and you will smile.

Guacamole - ?

Guacamole is a wonderful avocado preparation for use with anything from tortilla chips to nachos to salads, etc.

I found the recipe below in an online L.A. Times® group of great Hispanic recipes and it was obvious that this "condiment" or "dip" should be included in Food Nirvana.

Marie used to make fresh Guacamole and we loved it. As I don't have her original recipe I will test the one below and report back to you.

Ingredients:

2 heaping tablespoons of finely chopped white onion

3 Serrano chilies, seeded and finely chopped

4 heaping tablespoons of roughly chopped fresh cilantro plus fresh cilantro leaves with little stems for garnish

3/4 teaspoon of sea salt or to taste

3 large avocados or 4 small avocados

4 ounces of ripe tomatoes, finely chopped (about 2/3 cup)

1 tablespoon of freshly squeezed lime juice

Directions:

Grind together the onions, chilies, chopped cilantro and salt into a paste in a molcajete (Mexican mortar and pestle, or, use a food processor or a blender).

Cut the avocados into halves, remove the pits and spoon the flesh into the molcajete (or into the blender or food processor). Mash the avocado into the onion-chili mixture until it is a uniform texture, but not smooth (it should still have some lumps). You can achieve that effect using a food processor in pulse mode as well, but be careful with using a blender as it will tend to eliminate any lumps, even in pulse mode.

Manually stir in the tomatoes and the lime juice, taste the guacamole and adjust the seasoning if necessary.

Put the guacamole into a serving bowl and top it with the fresh cilantro leaves.

Habanero Hot Sauce - ☺

It has been about five (more) years since I last made habanero hot sauce, and I had to check out various Internet recipes to develop the one I show below. I made it yesterday and it sure is a "kick ass" hot sauce! What a nice way to use my habanero pepper crop.

A few cautions are in order. Working with habanero peppers carries some risk, both in getting the capsicum from the peppers onto and then into your skin or your eyes or other sensitive places. Wear latex or nitrile gloves when working with habanero peppers and discard the gloves if you have to use the bathroom. Then put on a new pair. When you cook habanero peppers be sure to keep the room well ventilated or your breathing will become most difficult.

Alas! My heat freak friends declared the sauce to be too hot. Well, okay, I didn't have filler product like ground carrots in the batch I just made, so it is primarily habanero peppers. I am making a few additions/changes to the recipe right now, and they are reflected below in capital letters.

Ingredients:

30 fresh habanero peppers

5 hot costeno chili peppers, dried (or other variety of dried hot peppers)

10 dried habanero peppers

one small onion, diced

2 teaspoons of minced fresh garlic

6 large carrots finely shredded using a food processor (THE NEW INGREDIENT)

1/4 tsp. each of salt, black pepper, dried oregano and dried thyme

2 cups of water - TWICE THE WATER OF THE ORIGINAL RECIPE TO ACCOMMODATE THE CARROTS DURING SIMMERING

1 cup of apple cider

1 Tablespoon of white distilled vinegar

1 Tablespoon of olive oil

1 tsp. each of cayenne pepper, curry powder and hot chili powder

Juice from one lime, reserved until the sauce is blended

1/2 teaspoon of Koldkiss® sodium benzoate solution, reserved until the sauce is blended

1 Tablespoon of white distilled vinegar, reserved until the sauce is blended

Directions:

Wash and dry the fresh habanero peppers and cut the tops off. Discard the tops.

Cut any stems off the dried costeno peppers, discard the stems, and put the peppers into a plastic Ziploc® freezer bag and crush them with a rolling pin. Do the same for the dried habanero peppers.

Dice the onion and the garlic.

Sauté the onion in the olive oil on low to medium heat until translucent in a two or three quart stainless steel saucepan. Then add the garlic and sauté for one additional minute.

Add the (TWO) cups of water, the cup of apple cider and all the other (YES, INCLUDING THE SHREDDED CARROTS) ingredients except the reserved ingredients and bring the mixture to a boil on high heat.

Turn the heat down to very low and simmer the mixture to soften the ingredients. This takes about 2-3 hours.

Stir occasionally and add water if needed during cooking, keeping the liquid level high enough to barely cover the ingredients.

Cool the mixture to room temperature, covered with a lid.

Add the reserved lime juice, sodium benzoate solution and vinegar and stir until everything is well mixed.

Blend the mixture in a blender, in batches if necessary, until the sauce is the consistency you prefer. Less blending results in a more chunky sauce, while extended blending time purées the mixture.

Bottle the sauce in 4 ounce or 8 ounce canning jars, then vacuum seal the canning jars and keep them refrigerated. Alternatively, you may can the sauce in the sealed jars for ten minutes in boiling water, let them cool and seal, and store them in your pantry.

The sauce will remain fresh for up to a year. You likely will want to give some away as gifts to family and friends.

Hollandaise Sauce - ?

This is a recipe I found on the Internet (TinRoof.com) that looks to be excellent. I need to try it. I modified the content as I found it, to be succinct.

Hollandaise Sauce is one of the great classic sauces of the world that is notoriously hard to make by hand, even for seasoned chefs. This recipe uses an easy blender stick method that takes only 90 seconds, with exactly the same quality as making it by hand.

Use the sauce for Eggs Benedict and steamed asparagus, and it is spectacular with lobster, crab, shrimp and scallops. Ditto steak.

This recipe makes about 1 1/4 cups of Hollandaise Sauce, enough for 8 Eggs Benedict servings. The sauce is rich, so you don't need to use much per serving!

Do follow the recipe directions exactly or you will likely end up with gunk instead of Hollandaise Sauce. Also, take time to read the notes.

Ingredients:

3 egg yolks, from extra large or jumbo eggs

1/4 tsp. of cayenne pepper or white pepper

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

2 tbsp. of lemon juice

1 1/2 tbsp. of warm water

1 1/2 sticks of unsalted butter, cut into 1/2" cubes

Directions:

Separate the eggs and put the egg yolks into a one pint canning jar. Use the whites for some other recipe. (Note 1)

Add the water, lemon juice, cayenne (or white) pepper and salt to the canning jar. Blend those ingredients briefly to combine them.

Melt the butter in a one pint canning jar until it is hot (be careful to avoid splatter if you are using a microwave oven).

Let the hot melted butter stand for a minute or two until the milky white particles and liquid settle at the bottom of the jar. (Note 2)

With the blender stick running on high speed, slowly pour the hot butter in a thin stream into the eggs mixture, taking about 45 seconds. Leave behind the milky white particles and liquid from the melted butter.

Once all the butter has been blended in, the sauce should be thick, creamy, smooth and pale yellow.

Now blend the sauce for another 10 seconds, moving the blender stick up and down.

Thickness: If the sauce is too thick, mix in some warm tap water, 1 teaspoon at a time, but don't overdo it.

Use the Hollandaise Sauce immediately, or keep it warm until it is needed. If it is covered and wrapped in a dish towel, it will stay warm for 15 minutes. Use the sauce while it is warm or at room temperature.

Enjoy!

Notes:

1. Egg yolks – separate the eggs when they are cold from the refrigerator. Use 3 extra large or jumbo eggs. Let the yolks sit in a bowl and come to room temperature before using them to make the sauce, for about 20 minutes.

2. Butter – Leave behind the milky white liquid/particles, but if some gets into the sauce it is not a big problem.

3. Storage – leftovers can be kept in an airtight container for up to 2 days in the refrigerator. To reheat, if you have a super airtight container, then submerge it in a bowl of very warm (but not scalding hot) tap water for 20 minutes. Take the container from the water, open it, stir, put the lid on, change the water, and repeat as necessary until the sauce is back to freshly made perfection. If you are brave, you can also microwave the sauce in 10 second bursts on low power. If your container is not airtight then put the container into a shallow pan of warm tap water and stir, changing the water as needed to provide warmth to the sauce container.

Horseradish Cream Sauce - ☺♥

This sauce is perfect for use with corned beef or roast beef. I like to serve it with the traditional corned beef and cabbage meal as it really sets off the flavor of the corned beef in an otherwise bland meal. For roast beef virtually any form goes well with this sauce ... from medium rare steamship round of beef to cold roast beef sandwiches or hot French dip beef sandwiches. I would not, however, use it on a good grilled steak. Yes, this recipe is mine, but the original came from Marie, so she gets the credit, for she served it to me on hot corned beef when we were in CA in the late 1990's. It was so good I ate like a pig.

Food Nirvana has a recipe for making prepared horseradish from horseradish root. Look under Dips, Dressings and Sauces. That is the epitome of having the finest, hottest horseradish, and if you can then make it before making this horseradish cream sauce. You will be very glad that you did. And depending on your love of hot stuff you may modify the recipe below to contain as much freshly prepared horseradish as you like. Now, that is really going over the top if served with a fine prime rib roast or hot corned beef.

Ingredients: (makes about two cups)

½ cup of Hellman's® mayonnaise

½ cup of heavy cream

4 oz. of Hot creamed or ground horseradish, drained (do not use the liquid)

4 oz. of Cream cheese

½ tsp. of Salt

Variation:

The sauce can also be modified from the ingredients shown above to create a wonderful bacon horseradish dip for potato chips, etc. Simply use one cup of sour cream instead of regular heavy cream, skip the mayonnaise and add ½ cup of small pieces of freshly fried bacon or bacon bits made of real bacon, and skip the salt. You can vary the amount of cream cheese to get the thickness you want, so start with only 2 oz. of cream cheese.

Directions:

Simply put all the ingredients into a blender and blend on low speed until smooth. Pour the contents into a one pint container. Cover it and refrigerate it until used.

You can vary the amounts of each ingredient above to suit yourself to achieve both the consistency and flavor you want. You might also want to add ½ tsp. of white pepper.

Hotel DuPont® Sesame Salad Dressing - ☺♥

From the Hotel DuPont® ... an Internet site had this one and according to the author, the recipe wasn't supposed to be made public. So, what else is new? The recipe as shown on the net wasn't quite the real thing, so someone was blowing hot air or using bad "secret" information. I sensed that and made modifications.

This dressing is one of my fond memories from eating at business meetings in the Hotel DuPont®, Wilmington, DE. It is unique and most tasty on most any type of green salad.

I found the basic recipe on the web site of another food aficionado without much trouble, and I modified it to make what I remember in taste. I also modified the handling of the egg by coddling it and whisking it before adding the rest of the blended ingredients and whisking while slowly adding them to the egg.

I am pleased to report complete success. This salad dressing is unique in that it cannot be found in any store and it is delicious.

Ingredients:

1 Tbsp. of lemon juice

1 large egg (my modification to coddle the egg and whisk it with other blended stuff)

½ cup of ketchup

1/4 cup of sesame oil (my addition)

1/8 cup of honey (my addition)

2 drops of Tabasco sauce

1 rounded tsp. of salt

3/4 tsp. of sugar

1 rounded tsp. of dry mustard

½ tsp. of paprika

½ cup of Miracle Whip®

¼ cup of Hellman's® Mayonnaise (my addition)

3 drops of Worcestershire sauce

7/8 cup of soybean oil (my reduction from 1½ cups in the Internet recipe)

½ cup of toasted sesame seeds (my modification to toast the seeds)

½ cup of Tarragon vinegar (or rice vinegar and 1 tsp. fresh crushed tarragon leaves)

1/2 tsp. of Koldkiss® sodium benzoate solution (optional)

Directions:

Blend all the ingredients except the soybean oil, tarragon vinegar, egg and sesame seeds. Start low and move to high power. Turn back to low and add 7/8 cup soybean oil slowly. Reduce power further and add ½ cup tarragon vinegar. Blend at low speed for a minute then at high speed until the mixture is well blended.

Toast raw sesame seeds in a 300°F oven for two to four minutes on a cookie tray until they turn light tan (or buy McCormick® toasted sesame seeds at Costco® and use them instead). Bump the tray after two minutes to make the seeds turn over for even toasting. Do not allow them to darken beyond a light tan color. Remove and cool the toasted seeds immediately by using a spatula to scrape them onto a plate.

Coddle the egg (add a room temperature extra large egg gently into boiling water from a soup spoon; boil for 45 seconds, remove it and break it into a cool one quart bowl and whisk it). Slowly add the blended salad dressing to the bowl while whisking.

Add the toasted sesame seeds to the dressing and mix manually briefly with a whisk.

This dressing will keep refrigerated for three weeks and longer if kept in a sealed jar. I have yet to vacuum seal it and test for refrigerator shelf life.

Lemon Aioli - 😊♥

This condiment is great used as a dip for foods like fried calamari or as a topping for crab cakes.

Ingredients: (4 servings)

1 cup of mayonnaise

2 garlic cloves, minced

2 tbsp. of finely chopped fresh chives

1/4 cup of fresh lemon juice

1 tsp. of lemon zest

1/4 tsp. of Kosher salt

1/4 tsp. of white pepper

Directions:

Simply whisk all of the ingredients together in a one quart bowl.

Put the aioli into 4 small condiment serving bowls for individual dipping, or keep it in one small serving bowl if you plan to use it for crab cakes or fish.

Refrigerate the aioli for one hour, covered, before using it.

Lemon Vinaigrette Salad Dressing - ☺♥

This is a delightful salad dressing along the lines of oil and vinegar but unique and delicious using lemon juice. It is great on Greek salads and even on simple lettuce salad.

The recipe calls for the optional use of Xanthan gum powder, which is an emulsifying agent that will keep the ingredients well mixed after shaking a jar of the dressing. Xanthan gum has maximum effect the day after the dressing is made. You can buy Xanthan gum powder via the Internet at places like www.bulkfoods.com ... and it is inexpensive and useful in many recipes, including some for ice cream! Discussion of using hydrocolloid thickeners like Xanthan gum is one of the topics in the Food Nirvana Fundamentals Technology section. It is worth your time to take the time to read it.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of extra virgin olive oil
- 2 large cloves of garlic, diced
- 2 tsp. of dried oregano
- 1 tsp. of kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup of freshly squeezed, strained lemon juice
- 1/4 cup of water
- 1/4 tsp. of Xanthan gum powder (optional)

Directions:

Pour the olive oil into the blender. While blending on medium speed, slowly add the (optional) powdered Xanthan gum and mix for two minutes.

Add the diced garlic pieces while mixing.

Add the oregano, the salt and the black pepper to the blender while mixing.

Pour in the strained freshly squeezed/strained lemon juice and the water.

Blend for three minutes, then pour the dressing into a one pint canning jar.

Put a lid on the jar and refrigerate the dressing overnight.

When ready to use the dressing shake it for one minute.

Enjoy!

Pesto Sauce - ☺♥

If you have ever tasted freshly made pesto you know just how fabulous it can be. It is a most versatile flavoring sauce useful for packing some seriously good flavor into lots of different foods. In fact, it is pretty yummy all by itself. Here are some examples for using pesto: Some folks love it on pasta, it is a good additive to minestrone or lentil soup, you can add it to marinara sauce, or put it on a sandwich instead of mayonnaise, combine it with boiled new potatoes, steamed greens of different types or sautéed zucchini, brush it onto chicken breasts before roasting, spoon it onto grilled lamb or pork chops, or coat fish filets and then coat them with bread crumbs and bake or broil the fish.

I thank my dear cousin, Joan Bliss for this recipe, which I confess I modified somewhat based on review of numerous Internet recipes. Well I made the pesto and it is delicious. Now you can make and enjoy it too.

Ingredients: (makes a bit more than one cup)

2 cups of fresh basil leaves, compressed into a 2 cup Pyrex® measuring cup

1/2 cup of pine nuts or chopped walnuts

1/2 cup of finely grated Pecorino Romano cheese

4 cloves of fresh garlic, minced

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

1/4 tsp. of pepper

1/2 cup of extra virgin olive oil

Directions:

Combine the basil, garlic, and pine nuts or walnuts in a food processor and pulse until they are coarsely chopped. Add the oil, salt and pepper and process until the oil is fully incorporated and the nearly completed pesto is smooth. Add the cheese and process briefly just until mixed. Transfer the pesto to a serving bowl and serve it, or you can store it for later use.

Typically pesto is stored in as small a glass jar as it will fit in with a tight fitting lid and then kept in the refrigerator. The idea is that exposure to air will degrade the pesto. Some folks pour a small extra amount of olive oil over the top of the pesto to keep the air away from it. Shelf life per se is not typically a problem as the refrigerated pesto tends to be eaten quickly, but the product should be used within two weeks.

I vacuum sealed and froze a portion of the freshly made pesto. And doing that, and I will do more, helps to use the abundant supply of basil in my herb garden. Of course, if I run out of pesto I can still use my frozen vacuum sealed packets fresh basil to make more pesto during the winter.

Enjoy!

Prepared Horseradish - ☺♥

Making prepared horseradish from horseradish root is far superior to buying/using prepared horseradish from the supermarket. The flavor and heat levels are far better and it is easy to make. Note that the fresher the root the more potent the prepared horseradish.

The one thing you want to be sure to do when preparing the horseradish is to have adequate ventilation so the fumes do not hurt your eyes or keep you from breathing. The chemical in horseradish that causes the irritation is allyl isothiocyanate.

Be certain to let the horseradish rest for ten minutes after it is ground and prior to adding any liquid. That will maximize the heat level, which is exactly what you want to do. Basically, an enzyme present in the horseradish weakens the cell structures allowing the allyl isothiocyanate to be released. Then, Wow!

Some recipes for making prepared horseradish call for the use of a small amount of sugar to "round out" (or make smoother) the flavor. That addition is optional. I suggest trying the sugar addition in half of what you make and then taste test both versions to decide what you prefer.

Try to use the prepared horseradish you make within one month as the product becomes more mild through time. You might also share some of what you make with friends or relatives, and they will be most appreciative.

Ingredients: (makes 3 cups of prepared horseradish)

1 pound of fresh horseradish root

½ cup of white vinegar (5% acidity)

1 cup of cold water, plus a bit more if needed

1 teaspoon of kosher salt, or to taste

1/2 teaspoon of white sugar (optional)

Directions:

Peel the horseradish root and cut out any dark veins. Open any nearby windows to get air flow where you are working so you can breathe normally, and if necessary use safety glasses to protect your eyes from strong fumes.

There are different ways to process peeled horseradish root to arrive at a finely ground but not mushy state. Three different methods are described next.

Using a box grater and doing the work by hand produces a nice grinding result but comparatively with a lot of manual labor and exposure to fumes. If you use that method, let the ground horseradish rest for ten minutes and then mix it in a bowl with the other ingredients.

Another nicer method is to use a powered vegetable shredder, followed by a ten minute resting period, then putting all ingredients into a blender and blending until the desired fineness of the pieces is met.

A third method is to cut the peeled root into 1/2" by 1/2" chunks and use a food processor for the initial grinding, then allow the ten minute rest period, then add the remaining ingredients and process the mixture briefly.

Transfer the prepared horseradish to a quart-size canning jar or into two or three smaller canning jars. But do not heat the prepared horseradish in any way as that will destroy the taste and strength.

Seal the jar(s) and refrigerate the horseradish until you serve it.

The prepared horseradish will last up to 3 months in the refrigerator.

Enjoy! And I know you will!

Queso Dip For Tortilla Chips - ☺♥

Peggy loves the cheese dips used with tortilla chips, called queso. I like them too, along with plenty of red salsa so I can enjoy both dips. So it was time to get a decent recipe and start making the queso dip.

The recipe shown here is one I found on the Internet and I modified a few ingredients to suit me (a bit of heat) after trying that original recipe. The lady who created the original recipe did an excellent job and I tip my hat to her for making a dip with perfect thickness and creaminess.

Ingredients: (makes two pints)

3 cups of Cheddar cheese, freshly shredded

1 tbsp. of cornstarch

1 tbsp. of butter

1 garlic clove, minced

1/2 cup each of diced green and diced red bell peppers

1/4 cup of diced sweet onion

12 oz. can of evaporated milk

1 cup of diced ripe tomato

2 tbsp. of diced jalapeno pepper (seeds removed)

1/4 tsp. of cumin

1/4 tsp. of Sriracha sauce

2 tbsp. of milk

Salt (to taste based on cheese saltiness)

Directions:

Place the shredded cheese and cornstarch in a large bowl, then toss to coat the cheese.

Melt the butter over medium heat in a large saucepan or small pot.

Add the minced garlic, the diced onion and the cumin, then cook slowly for 3 minutes or until the onion is translucent but not browned.

Add the diced tomato, the diced bell peppers and the diced jalapeno pepper and cook for 4 minutes until the tomato and pepper pieces are slightly softened.

Add the evaporated milk and the cheese. Stir, then add the Sriracha sauce.

Stir until the cheese melts and the mixture becomes a silky sauce. This takes about two minutes, with stirring.

Add salt to taste - the amount required depends on the saltiness of the cheddar cheese you used. I used extra sharp cheddar cheese and I didn't use any salt.

Stir in the milk to adjust the thickness - note that the dip thickens when it cools, and milk can be added later if wanted to reduce the thickness.

Remove the queso from the heat. Serve warm or at room temperature - it will be soft and easy to scoop even when it is cold.

Store the queso in sealed jars in the refrigerator. I prefer using pint size wide mouth canning jars to make later dipping/warming easy.

When refrigerated, the queso takes on the thickness of the queso dips sold in jars in supermarkets that are not refrigerated.

The thickness can be reduced by adding a tbsp. of milk, warming the mixture in the microwave oven, and stirring.

Enjoy!

Sweet And Sour Salad Dressing - ☺♥

This recipe is pure serendipity. I tried to recreate it from the memory of taste of what was served to my wife Pat and me in 1968 at the Poor Richard's Inn® restaurant in Wilmington, DE. It's too bad that our children, Ray, Jr. and Patty, ages four and three, were too young to enjoy the salad.

Recently, we tried different recipes from the Internet and we wound up blending two different recipes to hit exactly on the right taste. Who would ever guess that would work? The credit goes to Janet for the recommendation to combine the dressings.

Well, this is one fine salad dressing. Two of my pre-teen grandchildren (Ray's sons Matthew and Andrew) came back for seconds and then third servings so you know it has to be good. No, there is no candy in this recipe! Deep down inside I am very pleased to bring back something great from the past for the enjoyment of those I love.

Ingredients:

1 1/4 cups of soybean oil

1 cup of sugar

3/4 cup of rice vinegar

1/4 cup of maple syrup

1/4 cup of ketchup

1/2 cup of sweet onion, chopped

3 tbsp. of soy sauce

1 tbsp. of Dijon mustard

1 clove of garlic, minced

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/8 tsp. of black pepper

1/8 tsp. of cinnamon

1/8 tsp. of ginger

1/8 tsp. of cayenne pepper

1/8 tsp. of ground cloves

1/4 tsp. of grated orange peel

Directions:

Put all the ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth, about one to two minutes.

I prefer to make my own croutons for the salad, unseasoned, by simply cubing slices of bread and baking the cubes at 350°F on a cookie sheet that has been sprayed with Pam®. Stir every few minutes until golden brown.

This dressing is best served on chopped celery/Chinese cabbage (Napa) and Romaine lettuce with light crisp croutons and a generous amount of grated white cheddar cheese, which is how it was served to me at Poor Richard's Inn®. It is great on other salad greens as well.

Makes about a quart of salad dressing.

Tartar Sauce - ☺♥

This sauce is great with various kinds of seafood, like crab cakes, fish sandwiches and fried seafood like oysters. This recipe comes from AllRecipes.com® and it is quite close to what I have made for many years. It will be very good. You can vary the amount of lemon juice to suit yourself.

Ingredients:

1 cup of mayonnaise

1 tablespoon (or more) of sweet pickle relish

1 tablespoon of minced onion

2 tablespoons of lemon juice (amount optional)

salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Simply mix the ingredients together and then cover the container and refrigerate the sauce for at least one hour before use.

Thousand Island Dressing - ☺

A lot of salad dressings can be made from condiments most of us keep in our refrigerators and spices from our cupboards. I decided to provide two recipes for Thousand Island dressing ... the first one from Food.com® and the second one from AllRecipes.com® as they vary somewhat in ingredients. I'm sure both will be very good.

Recipe#1:

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

2 tablespoons of ketchup

1 tablespoon of white vinegar

2 teaspoons of sugar

2 teaspoons of sweet pickle relish

1 teaspoon of white onion, finely minced

1/8 teaspoon of salt

1 dash of black pepper

Directions:

Combine all of the ingredients in a small bowl. Stir well.

Place dressing in a covered container and refrigerate for several hours, stirring occasionally, so that the sugar dissolves and the flavors blend.

Recipe#2:

Ingredients:

1 cup of mayonnaise

1/2 cup of ketchup

1 cup of sweet pickle relish

1 pinch of salt

1 pinch of ground black pepper

Directions:

Simply put all the ingredients together and mix well to combine.

EGG SECTION/RECIPES:

Egg Preparation, Cooking Techniques and Recipes - ☺♥

The cooking references section of Food Nirvana referred to the Culinary Institutes® book, The Professional Chef©, as a great source of cooking information. One section I particularly enjoyed was about handling, processing and cooking eggs. I learned a few important facts that are worth passing on to others so I decided to include some of their egg information and some of my own, and a few recipes. Eggs are so versatile that we use them in all kinds of ways. Here are a few examples: Eggnog, fried/scrambled eggs and omelets, poached eggs, soft and hard boiled eggs, many baked goods, ice creams, pancakes, French toast, salad dressings, soufflé's, egg foo yung. The list goes on and on, so it makes good sense to understand optimal ways of using eggs.

Let's look first at the egg as purchased. Most of all it must be fresh and without any internal development/red spots. When broken open the egg white should not be runny, nor should the yolk be any color other than light yellow, though some producers use feed supplements that result in a slightly darker colored yolk. Jumbo eggs provide the best value for dollar spent, brown or white.

You can process bulk purchase raw eggs and have them for future use by breaking them into a bowl and whisking them and then vacuum sealing specific portions and then freezing them in a deep freeze. I create flat packets of two eggs as they store easily and thaw very quickly later. The frozen eggs are perfectly fine to use as a backup for those times when you unexpectedly run out of eggs and need some immediately, for they can be thawed quickly and used like fresh eggs, except for making dishes like poached eggs or "eggs over easy." I recommend using frozen, vacuum sealed eggs within one year. Note that the frozen eggs develop a darker color when frozen, but on thawing they become the same color as they were when originally processed, so don't think that your frozen eggs are degraded. Various forms of dried eggs are a poor substitute. Avoid them.

A lot of fear mongering has happened regarding the consumption of raw eggs. We use raw eggs in eggnog and in salad dressings like that for Caesar Salad and for dishes like well seasoned raw ground beef and raw egg (Steak Tartare), which is very popular in Europe. And note that raw eggs are typically used in making the best ice creams, like Ben&Jerry's®. Can one become ill eating raw eggs? Of course, salmonella can be had from eggs from a sick chicken or by unsanitary handling. And one can also be hit by a car if he/she is careless. The idea is that the probability of becoming ill if you buy and consume fresh and clean eggs in

raw form is almost zero. If you get them from the farm directly and are uncertain about surface contamination then wash any eggs you plan to use raw before you break the shells, gently, in warm soapy water.

What about cholesterol? Your annual physical blood tests will let you know if you have a problem that requires medication and/or diet control, but don't blame the egg. Cholesterol comes from many sources, like meats, and your body actually produces additional cholesterol, so singling out a food like eggs for cholesterol avoidance is flat out silly. The nutritional value of eggs in terms of protein is too high to ignore, especially when you consider the ease of making various egg dishes. They are a great tasting and inexpensive meat substitute for a quick meal. Ignore the whining fear mongerers and simply limit your egg consumption to around six each week, raw or cooked.

Okay ... Now we will look at some egg processing and cooking techniques.

Soft-boiled eggs are prepared by putting raw eggs into cold water in a small to medium size saucepan, with the water almost covering them. Do not crowd the eggs as that can cause shells to break during boiling. Add about 1/4 teaspoon of salt to the water. The water is brought to a boil on high heat. The eggs are then cooked on low heat, with the water barely boiling, for anywhere from three minutes to four minutes, based on the size of the eggs, from small to jumbo. Thus, a medium egg will take about three minutes and fifteen seconds, a large egg three minutes and thirty seconds, an extra large egg three minutes and forty-five seconds and a jumbo egg about four minutes. The perfect soft-boiled egg will have barely solidified/cooked white and a completely liquid but warm yolk. Chill each egg briefly in cold water after the boiling period to avoid further cooking and to allow you to handle the eggs without discomfort. Crack the middle of each egg with the edge of a table knife and insert the knife tip into the crack and all the way through the shell on the other side to facilitate breaking the egg in half. The content of each half is removed from the shell carefully with the knife used like a scoop, and the removed content is simply dropped into the serving dish. It is important to avoid getting small bits of eggshell into the dish, so be careful while removing the egg from the shell and also check the serving dish during the process for any bits of shell and remove them. This type of egg is delicious served over hot toast with butter, salt and pepper.

Hard boiled eggs are made in a manner similar to soft boiled eggs except they are boiled for ten minutes and then chilled briefly in cold water. It is best to remove the egg shell while the egg is warm, breaking it gently on any hard surface and peeling/breaking the shell from the egg. Sometimes it is easiest to do that under a faucet with warm water flowing lightly over the egg. The idea is that some eggs are easy to process regarding shell removal, while others fight you every step of

the way. It is a matter of the type and quality of the egg, not how you cooked it. In all instances remove the membrane between the shell and the egg and that will facilitate shell removal. Hard boiled eggs are used as quick and easy snacks, and as sliced cold for salads or halved for making deviled eggs. They are also used whole when making foods like pickled red beets.

We now move on to the world of fried eggs in various forms. The first consideration is the skillet. The Professional Chef© says to have the skillet hot before introducing the raw eggs so that they cook quickly (and retain moisture). I add that the skillet should be thick bottomed and non-stick. I will typically use butter for taste when frying eggs but that is not essential to the cooking process if you use a hard anodized aluminum skillet.

If you are making scrambled eggs always break the raw eggs into a bowl and whisk them thoroughly, then add a small amount of milk and any other ingredients you want, including salt and pepper, and whisk until the mixture is uniform. Then pour the mixture into the hot skillet and use a hard polymer spatula to turn the eggs over a few times to avoid overcooking the surface exposed to the skillet. Continue just until the eggs are barely cooked, then quickly remove them to a warmed bowl or a plate. Do not overcook the eggs if you want them to be light and fluffy.

If you are making "eggs over easy" then break the raw eggs into a bowl first, gently, then decant them into the hot skillet gently and evenly and the yolks will not break. Note that the number of eggs to be fried at one time depends on the size of the skillet, such that only half of the area of the skillet is used, allowing for space between each egg. That will facilitate separating and turning the eggs over without risking breaking of the yolks. Separate the eggs from each other after a minute of frying with the spatula and wait for about one minute longer and then use the spatula to flip them over gently. Remove the eggs to a plate after about 30 seconds of frying on the second side.

If you are making omelets the frying process is somewhat different. First, start with the same mixture that you would use making scrambled eggs, except hold back on introducing ingredients other than salt and pepper, and possibly use a tiny bit more milk to create a lighter egg/milk mixture that will flow easily within the skillet. Also, use a skillet appropriate to the size of one omelet. Pour the amount of whisked raw egg and milk mixture into the hot skillet, distributing the raw egg mixture evenly on the entire bottom of the skillet. While the bottom surface of the eggs cooks to a light tan or golden brown introduce the other ingredients into the center one-third of the egg mixture, going from one side of the skillet to the other, leaving small areas on both edges of the filled area without extra ingredients, and leave two-thirds of the egg area without any extra

ingredients (One third of the area on each side of the center third). After two minutes of frying the underside of the omelet should be turning a light tan or golden brown color, but not necessarily evenly. Put a spatula under one side gently and lift the edge and fold it over to make it partially cover the ingredients in the middle section. Then put the spatula under the other side and make it complete the covering of the middle section, with maximum overlap of the first side. Gently flip the omelet over using a spatula wide enough to keep the omelet from breaking apart. Fry the omelet for one additional minute and then remove it to a warmed plate.

I do not provide other egg recipes in this section. Individual recipes elsewhere in Food Nirvana cover essential details using eggs. In any event, if you follow the procedures recommended in this section you will likely have great egg dishes every time. Enjoy!

Lazy Mans Fried Egg Sandwich - 😊♥

I was hungry and I decided I wanted to have a fried egg and cheese sandwich on a toasted, buttered English muffin.

Then I realized I didn't want to do any cleanup afterwards. I didn't even want to work to fry the egg! And I wanted it fast!

So I thought about how to change the rules ... Hmm ... round muffin ... round egg and cheese? Eureka!

First, cut the English muffin and put the halves into the toaster, as usual. And go on to the next steps while it is toasting.

Put a teaspoon of butter into a small microwave safe paper or fiber bowl and melt it in about 10 seconds in the microwave oven.

Tilt the bowl to get the melted butter to coat the bottom surface and slightly up the sides of the bowl.

Break a raw egg into the bowl and stab the yolk with a fork to break it.

Add some salt and pepper.

Microwave the egg for 30 seconds on high. No cover needed.

Lay a slice of cheese on top of the egg.

Microwave the egg and cheese for 30 seconds on high.

Put the toasted English muffin halves on a piece of paper towel and butter them while you are waiting for the egg and cheese.

Use the fork to slide the fried egg and melted cheese onto one side of the English muffin.

Wow! A perfect fit! A perfectly round fried egg with cheese!

Cover it with the other side of the English muffin.

Heat the completed sandwich (on the piece of paper towel) in the microwave oven for 10 seconds.

Enjoy ... Mmm ... hot and tasty! You even had the piece of paper towel to use as a napkin.

And now for the cleanup ...

Trash the bowl and the piece of paper towel.

Total mess? Only one knife and one fork. No skillet, no spatula and no serving dish.

Of course, if you used a plastic knife and a plastic fork, well ... Poof! Literally nothing to clean!

You had a cooked meal ... and a tasty one at that! How long did it take to prepare it? Maybe three minutes?

And ... You didn't have to drive anywhere, wait anywhere, or even ask anyone at home to do it for you ... and your cost is only about 50 cents for the ingredients.

Do you know of any place other than your kitchen where it is easier and quicker to get that kind of hot sandwich, and also so inexpensive?

Oh, yes ... my sweetheart Peggy improved my recipe by adding real bacon bits to one she made. Smart!

Compare the price of that one to an Egg McMuffin® with cheese and bacon at McDonald's®! The cost for her sandwich was only about 60 cents!

Poached Eggs - ☺♥T

I needed to find a good recipe to make poached eggs. Why? Because you need a well made poached egg to make Eggs Benedict. You may also simply like to have poached eggs with other breakfast foods. You can think of a poached egg as a perfectly make, unbroken soft boiled egg without any shell, and that is very convenient. With poached eggs you don't have to hold and scoop hot egg from hot egg shell halves, always breaking the yolk.

I was lucky to find a nearly perfect recipe from the Internet. I was able to make a perfect poached egg easily the first time around. I am pleased. So I've provided additional detailed instructions in this Food Nirvana recipe to make the process pretty much foolproof.

There are numerous ways to make a poached egg, most methods using some device or small container to hold a raw egg while it is cooking. What sets this recipe apart from the others is the absence of any container and a cooked egg that is completely uniform in degree of doneness, for the raw egg without any shell is immersed in lightly boiling water. That means it is heated evenly everywhere as it floats under the water.

It is necessary to use a fine mesh sieve to allow any runny egg white to flow through it and be discarded before poaching the egg. Otherwise the runny part will separate from the rest of the egg during cooking and form useless wads/strings of cooked egg white in the boiling water, yet typically stay partially connected to the main body of the egg.

Here are the caveats: 1) The fine mesh sieve, if it is too fine, will not let runny egg white through it, so that defeats the purpose of using that particular fine mesh sieve. Find one with slightly larger grid openings. Gently shake the sieve over a sink or a small bowl to help the runny egg white to drip out. This should take about one minute. 2) A jumbo egg and an extra large egg will require more cooking time than a large egg, so allow 3 minutes for a large egg, 3 1/4 minutes for an extra large egg, and 3 1/2 minutes for a jumbo egg.

If you are making only one egg then use the stirring step described below to create a vortex in the water before adding the egg. If you are making multiple eggs at the same time do not create the vortex. Also, initially process each egg in the sieve individually and then put each egg into a separate ramekin or small bowl.

Ingredients:

One fresh large, extra large or jumbo egg (or more than one egg [maximum of four at a time], but all of the same size)

1 tbsp. of white or cider vinegar

A large (7" or more in diameter) saucepan with boiling water 4" deep

Other kitchen stuff:

A small ramekin or a small bowl large enough to hold a raw egg.

A fine (but not too fine) mesh sieve with a handle.

A large serving spoon for stirring the lightly boiling water in the saucepan into a vortex.

A large slotted spoon for removing a poached egg from lightly boiling water. Also for removing any unwanted stringy cooked runny egg white.

A kitchen timer

Directions:

Crack the egg into a fine mesh sieve (over a sink or a small bowl), shake the sieve gently, and discard the runny egg white that drips from the sieve.

Carefully transfer/pour the egg into a small ramekin or small bowl. You don't want the yolk to break.

Bring a large saucepan with water 4" deep to a boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to low. You do not want the water to be boiling vigorously when the egg is cooking. If necessary, move the saucepan of boiling water to a small burner turned on to low heat.

Add one tablespoon of either white or cider vinegar to the boiling water in the saucepan and stir the water with the serving spoon to create a vortex. Then remove the spoon from the water.

Pour the egg from the ramekin carefully into the middle of the vortex and set a timer for 3 minutes for a large egg, 3 1/4 minutes for an extra large egg, or 3 1/2 minutes for a jumbo egg.

After the first minute or two, use the large slotted spoon to remove and discard any cooked egg white that is not part of the main body of the egg. It is the stuff

that is floating above the egg. It is easy to pull it away from the main body of the egg with the slotted spoon.

Once the egg is done cooking, use the slotted spoon to remove the poached egg from the water, let water drain from the egg for a few seconds, then put it into a small bowl.

Dab any water from the inside of the bowl and from the surface of the egg with a folded paper towel, then use/serve the egg.

Enjoy!

FOWL:

Beer Batter Fried Chicken - ☺♥

This recipe is a variation of a fried shrimp recipe from the Culinary Institute's book, *The Professional Chef*©. I've further modified it by using techniques and ingredients recommended by J. Kenji Lopez-Alt. I tried it and it is really good, and I edited it for Food Nirvana to include missing instructions to help less experienced cooks. A similar shrimp recipe is also in Food Nirvana under Seafood.

The batter in this recipe puffs out somewhat around the chicken during frying due to the presence of eggs in the batter. I have avoided the use of baking powder used with the shrimp recipe to limit the amount of puffing during frying, as that elimination creates a better batter for frying chicken.

The best parts of this recipe are that the batter is crisp and it tastes really good and the fried chicken is not in any way oily or greasy. The batter seals instantly on immersion into hot cooking oil and that keeps out the cooking oil. Beyond that, any leftovers can later be put into hot cooking oil or simply a 300 degrees F oven to reheat them and they come out just fine, not oily.

Kenji recommends frying the chicken using a wok instead of a pot or deep skillet. He is absolutely right. A wok is perfect to make easy access to pieces while they are frying and also to avoid almost all spattering of oil outside the frying vessel. Use a wok.

The batter quantity produced from the recipe below is sufficient for three to four pounds of chicken so you may want to halve the batter ingredients. Or you may use the excess batter to make fried onion rings to accompany the fried chicken.

Note that I have included two optional ingredients, crushed cornflakes and chipotle powder. The chipotle powder gives a bit of "zing" to the batter. The cornflakes will provide a somewhat crunchy version of the fried chicken. Note also that I have not yet tried using the crushed cornflakes so you might want to experiment by frying only half of the chicken using crushed cornflakes and the other half without them. You can then decide which version you prefer. In addition, I have provided some seasoning variations at the end of this recipe that are excellent.

Ingredients:

1 or 2 lbs. of Chicken drumsticks or thighs or wings, or breast meat deboned and cut into 3/4" thick pieces

2 extra large eggs

8 oz. of ice cold beer (start with 8 ounces and if necessary add a bit more)

2 ounces of ice cold vodka

1 cup of all purpose flour (or 1/2 cup all purpose flour and 1/2 cup of white rice flour)

3/4 tsp. salt

3/4 tsp. black pepper

1/2 tsp. allspice

1 tsp. grated fresh ginger root (Or pre-minced ginger in a jar, available at Asian markets.)

1 cup (or more) of Cornstarch for dredging

3/4 tsp. of chipotle powder (optional)

2 cups of crushed cornflakes (optional)

2 quarts of soybean or canola oil for frying

A frying or candy thermometer

Directions:

Wash and partially pat dry the chicken pieces with paper towels. If you are using chicken breast meat then cut the breast halves into pieces about 3/4" thick and as long or wide as you want. That will allow for rapid frying with no concern about adequate cooking or darkened batter from extended frying time. Put the raw chicken pieces on a plate that has a paper towel on it. The chicken pieces should not be laying in water as they should be moist before dredging but not wet.

Pre-warm your oven to 200° F. Put a paper towel covered china plate or wide shallow bowl/serving dish into the oven to later hold the fried chicken and to help keep the pieces warm after they are served.

Put the soybean oil into a wok or into a two gallon pot and heat it to 360° F on medium heat while you are preparing the batter. Check the temperature

frequently during heating with an instant read thermometer. If necessary you can adjust the heat to high to get to the right temperature when you are ready to start frying, but keep an eye on the temperature so that it does not exceed 360° F. (Note that the oil can be reused multiple times in the future, until it starts to darken. It should be poured into a separate sealable container through a sieve after it has cooled. Discard everything except the clear oil, and that includes the last part of the oil from the bottom of the pot that has accumulated various kinds of gunk in it from the frying process.)

Whisk the eggs well in a two quart bowl. Chill the eggs in the bowl in the refrigerator for 15 or more minutes. Put the flour and other dry seasoning ingredients in a separate small bowl and put that into the refrigerator for 15 minutes. The idea is to have all batter ingredients really cold prior to combining them into making the batter.

Add the ginger and then the beer and the vodka slowly while whisking gently. It will foam a lot.

Add the chilled dry ingredients mixture together with the egg and beer mixture all at once and mix gently. It is not necessary or desirable to mix until the batter is smooth. Do not mix/whisk for more than about 30 seconds. Moisture variations in different flours may create the need to adjust consistency. The batter should not be thick and it should not be runny. You will know you have the right consistency when a piece of dredged chicken coated with the batter holds a coating thickness of no more than 1/16th of an inch. Less is better as the batter will puff up slightly during frying. You can adjust the consistency if required with beer if it is too thick or with flour if it is too thin. But minimize the amount of mixing time. The basic idea is that you want the batter to be entirely crisp at the end of the frying and if it is too thick from gluten formation the outside will be crisp but the inside of the batter will be doughy.

If you decide to use the crushed cornflakes then put the cornflakes into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag and crush them gently using a rolling pin. Then pour the crushed cornflakes into a wide shallow bowl.

Dredge each piece of chicken in a bowl of cornstarch, shake off the excess, and dip the chicken piece into the batter using tongs, making sure to coat it completely. Extract the coated piece with the tongs, let the excess batter drip off for a few seconds and then roll it lightly on the crushed cornflakes (if you used them) and then immerse the coated chicken piece directly into the heated oil that is at a temperature of 360° F. In other words, you do each piece one at a time adding each piece to the oil until you have four to six pieces in the oil. For example, do four drumsticks or four thighs but do six cut up pieces of breast.

You will need to clean the tongs after immersing the last piece in a given batch to remove excess batter. Adjust the heat to maintain an oil temperature around 350° F.

Fry each piece for eight to twelve minutes, using the longer frying time for the drumsticks and thighs, turning each piece over a few times, until any given piece is medium gold in color. Then extract that piece with tongs and let the hot oil drain from it for a few seconds and then place it on a paper towel. Salt the piece immediately while it still has some oil on the surface to hold the salt. Place each completed batch into a 200° F warming oven on a plate or in a bowl to maintain a desirable eating temperature while other batches are being fried. Note also that time spent in the warm holding oven will assist in being sure the larger pieces of chicken are cooked all the way through. Be sure the oil temperature is monitored and adjusted as necessary so that it is at 360° F when each batch is fried.

Serve the chicken immediately. It is delicious!

If you want to eat the fried chicken pieces using a dipping sauce then you might make the dipping sauce from the sauce recipe provided at the end of the beer batter fried shrimp recipe. You might also look for Chinese and other dipping sauce recipes on the Internet. Duck sauce available by the quart in supermarkets is a very nice dipping sauce. I have even used Jamaican Green Sauce and it is delicious on the fried chicken.

Recipe Variations: Use 3/4 tsp of garlic powder and 3/4 tsp of dried oregano instead of the ginger. Use Panko bread crumbs instead of corn flakes. Yummy!

Beer Can Chicken - ☺♥

This is a great way to cook a whole chicken. My great friends, Linda and Joe Lange, made this tasty treat for dinner and it was fantastic. They got the recipe from CookSmart® and now I'm passing it on to you. The chicken is perfectly seasoned and it stays moist and tender due to the beer evaporating from the beer can during cooking.

There is one important safety message that I did not see in the provided recipe. During cooking the fat rendered from the chicken will ignite, burn and ruin the chicken if you fail to follow the directions exactly. Specifically, do not under any circumstances cook the chicken directly over a gas grill flame or directly over hot charcoal briquettes. The area directly under and a few inches around the chicken must not be heated directly.

Ingredients: (three to four servings)

1 whole small 3½ to 4 lb. chicken

1 Tbsp. of kosher salt

2 tsp. of ground black pepper

2 tsp. of Italian Seasoning (see Food Nirvana recipe)

2 tsp. of paprika

2 tsp. of lemon zest from one large fresh lemon

1 tsp. of garlic powder

1 can of dark beer like stout or ale

Directions:

Rinse the chicken and pat it dry with paper towels. Reserve any giblets for a different use.

Use a "zester" to get the lemon zest from one large fresh lemon.

Mix the salt, pepper, Italian seasoning, paprika, lemon zest and garlic powder in a small bowl.

Pat the cavity and the exterior of the chicken evenly with the mixture, using all of it.

Let the chicken stand on a wire rack for one to two hours.

Preheat a gas grill to 400°F, using all burners on high heat for at least ten minutes.

Open the can of beer and pour 1/3 of it into a glass. Drink that beer.

Turn off one of the gas grill burners but keep the grill cover closed.

Set the chicken's leg cavity on the open beer can and place that on a wire rack to make later handling of the chicken easier after cooking.

Open the grill cover, and place the rack with the chicken and beer can on the gas grill over the extinguished burner area and close the lid.

Cook for 50 minutes to one hour and five minutes based on the size of the chicken.

You can check for doneness (170°F) with a meat thermometer inserted into the leg/thigh area.

Turn off the gas grill and remove the chicken, beer can and rack.

Let the chicken rest for ten minutes.

Carve the chicken and serve it.

Braised Chicken - ☺

This recipe is for something simple and very satisfying. I consider it to be an old time comfort food that is great for colder weather or for a Saturday night supper.

I never made this dish until about mid-2010, yet I had memories of the fragrant scent of chicken braising in the homes of my great-uncles and great-aunts back in the 1950's.

Mostly they farmed and their meals were traditional for farming folks. My mother did not make braised chicken, and why I know not. I guess we were too "modern." More likely it was because my dad was not all that fond of chicken.

Well, memories lead to action when they are really good memories. And to be blunt, I didn't even consider looking up a recipe on the Internet or in a cookbook. I simply made what I sensed would be delicious. So it was. So it has been ever since the first time. In fact, Janet and I just finished a most satisfying meal of braised chicken and gravy with rice for me and noodles for her and steamed carrots and individual romaine salads with homemade bleu cheese and sweet and sour salad dressings. This is something we enjoy thoroughly about once every two or three months.

Ingredients:

5 chicken drumsticks

2 chicken breast halves (or combinations of thighs and breast halves)

½ stick of butter

1½ cups water

1 tsp. Sea salt

1 tsp. Black pepper

1 tbsp. fresh tarragon (Giada DeLaurentis of the Food Network® is responsible for me adding this herb, which enhances the overall taste nicely) or 1/2 tsp. of dried tarragon

1 tsp. dried rosemary

1 tsp. dried thyme

2 strips of raw bacon

1 quart of chicken broth

3 tbsp. of cornstarch

Directions:

Put the bacon into a large skillet with a glass cover. Remove the cover. Heat on medium heat. Fry the bacon on medium heat only until it is barely crisp.

Put all the remaining ingredients except the chicken broth and the cornstarch into the large skillet with the glass cover. Heat on medium heat, covered. When the contents are boiling reduce the heat to low, and simmer.

About every ten minutes turn the pieces of chicken over and recover the skillet and continue the cooking.

After about 30 minutes most of the water is evaporated and the chicken has started to brown nicely on both sides in the hot butter.

Continue to cook in the butter on low heat, turning the chicken every five minutes for a total time of fifteen minutes.

Remove the chicken to a platter or other serving dish and put it into a warm 200°F oven.

Add one quart of chicken broth and three tbsp. of cornstarch to the skillet contents with no heat. Use a plastic spatula to free the browned chicken particles from the skillet bottom and when you have it all in the water then turn on the heat to medium.

Stir continuously while the "soon to be gravy" mixture comes to a boil. When it starts to boil it will thicken and it is then done cooking. Turn the heat off and pour the gravy through a sieve and a large funnel into a gravy boat. Put the gravy boat into the warming oven, along with your dinner plates.

I hope that you considered and prepared other meal items like rice or noodles and some steamed vegetables and a salad before making the gravy. If not, do those items now.

Serve the meal and you will get very satisfied moans and groans as your family and/or friends dispense all of the food rather quickly.

All of you will walk or waddle away from the table quite satisfied. There will be peace on earth that evening, at least in your home.

Chicken A La King - ☺♥

This dish is a relatively common one but one worthy of making. I think of it as warm comfort food, ideal to serve during cold weather months, but tasty at any time of year. It qualifies as a one dish meal, though you might choose to serve small tossed salads (with non-creamy dressings) on the side. Chilled Pinot Grigio wine is a fine beverage to serve for this meal.

I cherry picked three Internet recipes for ingredients and procedural steps and decided what and how much to use/do for this recipe. After making this dish I found it to be bland so I added garlic to the recipe to ramp up the taste. You may like the dish without any additional seasonings or other flavoring ingredients, or you might try the additions listed next.

You might decide to use garlic or any fresh vegetable like a cleaned and sliced jalapeno pepper, or fresh or dried herbs, like thyme or basil, or any dry or liquid seasoning, like curry powder or Thai chili pepper sauce, that appeals to you that will intensify the flavor, but don't use anything sweet.

Remember to use fairly small quantities of any added seasoning ingredients until you know by experience the preferred amounts. You can experiment easily by putting very tiny amounts of your chosen seasoning(s) or flavor additives into very small portions of the cooked dish and sampling the effect before committing the whole dish to a given seasoning or other additive.

I tried both toast points and white rice as a base for making individual servings of the Chicken A La King and I prefer the rice. You do whatever appeals to you.

Ingredients: (makes six servings)

1/2 cup of heavy cream

1 tsp. of salt

1/2 tsp. of pepper

2 lb. of boneless skinless chicken breasts, poached, rinsed/wiped of albumin, and diced into 1/2" cubes

3 tbsp. of olive oil

1 cup of milk

1/4 cup of butter

2 tbsp. of Better than Bullion® Chicken flavor

1 small onion finely chopped
4 ounces of drained sliced canned mushrooms
1 carrot peeled and finely chopped
1 celery rib finely chopped
2 sprigs of fresh rosemary
1/4 cup of all-purpose flour
2 large cloves of fresh garlic, minced
1/2 cup of Pinot Grigio wine
1 1/2 cups of chicken broth
1 cleaned and diced red bell pepper
1 cleaned and diced green bell pepper
6 sprigs of fresh parsley
Toast points or white rice, for serving

Directions:

Prewarm the individual serving dishes you plan to use for your guests in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Cook the chicken breasts (poach them in boiling water for about 20 or a few additional minutes to make certain they are cooked through).

Rinse and wipe the poached chicken breasts in cold water to remove any albumin. Then dice the chicken breasts and set the pieces aside.

Make the toast points or white rice you intend to use at serving time and set those items aside, covered if you made rice.

Clean and dice or chop the various vegetables.

Heat the oil and the butter in a 2 gallon heavy bottom stainless steel pot until the butter stops foaming.

Add the salt, pepper, mushrooms, onion, carrot, celery, garlic, rosemary sprigs and diced bell peppers, then stir well to coat the vegetables with the oil/butter

mixture, and cook on medium heat with occasional stirring until the vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes.

Stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute.

Add the wine, the Better than Bullion®, the milk, the chicken broth and the cream and cook on medium heat to a low boil, with stirring, until somewhat thickened, about 5 minutes.

Stir in the diced chicken breasts. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook for five minutes with gentle stirring.

Remove and discard the rosemary sprigs.

Remove the Chicken A La King from the heat, then season it to taste with additional salt and/or pepper or other seasoning.

Serve it on the toast points or on the white rice in the individual serving dishes you warmed earlier.

Garnish each serving with a parsley sprig.

Enjoy!

Chicken and Dumplings - ☺♥T

Who wouldn't love this wonderful comfort food since it is much like that served at Cracker Barrel®? I found this recipe on the Internet and modified it and I was practically drooling after looking at the recipe pictures. Well, I made it and my sweetheart Peggy and I really enjoyed it, though the home cook who provided the recipe didn't know much at all about cooking, ingredients or proportions, so I had to fix the errors and omissions during the preparation. Having good knowledge of cooking helps a lot in detecting Internet recipe mistakes. In any event, as much as we enjoyed what I made, I made some changes to the recipe afterwards to further enhance the seasoning and improve the texture of the dumplings.

Beyond the basics, you will see that I have two alternative versions of dumpling ingredients. The basic one, which is found in almost all recipes is similar to a pie dough recipe except for the rising agent, baking powder. The other version includes two eggs and less milk to create a more noodle-like dumpling, ergo with a more smooth and slippery texture, which is one of the things I love about the dumplings at Cracker Barrel®. I suggest you try both versions, which can be done in one recipe preparation, if you want, by dividing the dry dumpling ingredients in half and processing each half separately, with appropriate changes to the shortening and other ingredients, using only one whisked egg in one batch and no egg in the other. You can cook the dumplings together after they have been cut and dried and that will demonstrate, easily, the differences in each type. Thereafter you will make the version that pleases you best.

Note that most chicken and dumpling recipes on the Internet are not at all useful as they create weird soups or puffy or almost dry dumpling mixtures and not the creamy thickened gravy type of broth that is characteristic of the best recipes, like this one ... And like the dish at Cracker Barrel®, which is very tasty. It turns out that you have to refer to these superior flat dumplings as "rolled" dumplings if you want to check out various appropriate Internet dumpling recipes.

Your ratio of chicken meat to dumplings and gravy in this recipe will be far superior to what is served at Cracker Barrel®. Of course, they serve theirs with only pieces of chicken breast, while I use all types of the chicken meat except the giblets from stewing a whole chicken. If the chicken is small I add a chicken breast to get the meat to gravy and dumplings ratio I want. If I changed anything further in this recipe it would be to make more dumplings because I really love them in the gravy.

A word or two about stewing chickens is in order. First, for this dish the best choice is a very large oven stuffer roasting chicken, because they are typically a

full 5 pounds or more after the giblets are removed. Supermarkets frequently pack very small stewing chickens with lots of extra giblets inside just to get the weight at or above 5 pounds. That is a dirty trick. Thus, you can supplement the amount of chicken, if needed, by including a chicken breast or two small breast halves.

Finally, I used a beef base product when I made my original recipe of beef and dumplings that I had never tried before. It was the beef type of the product Better Than Bullion® and I was impressed by the ingredients and how it amped up the flavor. That means this recipe for chicken and dumplings can use the chicken base version of Better Than Bullion® if the chicken flavor from the chicken you simmer typically isn't as strong as you like. Thus, the use of Better Than Bullion® is optional, but it is very nice knowing there is a product like it to add needed flavor intensity to a mildly flavored dish.

You may want to make and chill a Waldorf Salad in advance to serve as an accompaniment to the chicken and dumplings, to give variety in colors, textures and tastes. There is a fine Waldorf Salad recipe in Food Nirvana. Also, you might chill a nice bottle of Pinot Grigio wine to serve with this meal.

Have fun making and eating this dish. You will be most popular with your guests. You will not likely need to serve a dessert if you make the Waldorf Salad, for this meal is very filling and the salad is sweet. It is particularly nice to make and enjoy hot chicken and dumplings during cool or cold weather.

Ingredients: (makes six generous adult servings)

Chicken and Broth/Gravy Mixture:

1 large fryer or stewing chicken or roaster (more than 5 lbs.), at refrigerator temperature, after neck and giblets have been removed

1 large chicken breast or two small breast halves (only if needed)

2 quarts of chicken broth

1 quart of water

2 tsp. of Better Than Bullion® Chicken Base (optional)

1 large onion, peeled and cut into thick slices

3 carrots cut into slices

3 stalks of celery, cut into pieces about one inch long

2 tsp. of Kosher or sea salt

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

1/2 tsp. of Bells® poultry seasoning

1/8 tsp. of turmeric

4 tbsp. of cornstarch mixed in 1/2 cup of water (hold until the last step for thickening the gravy)

Dumplings:

3 cups of flour

1 tsp. of baking powder

3/4 tsp. of salt

3/8 cup of Crisco® shortening, chilled

3/8 cup of butter, chilled

2 extra large or jumbo eggs and 1/4 cup of cold milk, or, 3/4 to 1 cup of cold milk and no eggs

Optional: (to use at serving time, either on top of or mixed in with the chicken and dumplings)

1/2 cup of freshly chopped parsley

Directions:

Place the chicken and any additional chicken pieces, the onions, carrots, celery, poultry seasoning, turmeric, salt, pepper and the optional Better Than Bullion® if you are using it (but not the cornstarch) in a 1 1/2 to 2 gallon pot and cover (or nearly cover) the mixture with the chicken broth and water. Bring to a boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, with the pot covered. Cook the chicken for 1 hour at a simmer or very low boil until it is cooked through (about 165 degrees F). If the chicken isn't completely covered by the liquid you can turn it over two or three times during cooking to assure even cooking. Note that you needn't worry if the chicken isn't quite done as the shredded pieces of it you will make next will be simmered later when thickening the broth to make the gravy.

Once the chicken is done, turn off the heat, remove the chicken from the broth, letting any broth in the chicken drain back into the pot, then cut the chicken

apart into pieces and let them cool on a wood cutting board for about 15 to 20 minutes. Then remove the cooled chicken meat from each piece and cut/tear/shred it into medium to small size pieces. The idea is you want to avoid large chunks of chicken, so some squeezing of the cut pieces will partially shred them. Put those pieces into a large bowl. Discard the bones, fat, gristle, dark flesh, veins and skin.

Pour the broth from the pot into a large bowl through a fine sieve to capture the vegetable pieces and all unwanted small pieces of fat, skin, etc., from the chicken. Discard the vegetable pieces, or use them for some other purpose.

You might or might not decide to partially defat the chicken broth with a ladle or with a pourer designed to defat broths, and then return the broth to the pot. The idea is that you want some chicken fat in the final dish for flavor, but not necessarily all of it. This is a matter of personal preference, as well as that of actual rendered fat content of the chicken you use. I typically do not defat the broth, for besides giving good flavor the fat combines with the flour from the dumplings and the cornstarch later when making the gravy, so there is no obvious fat anywhere once the dish is made.

Put the flour, baking powder and salt together in an electric mixer bowl. Run the mixer on medium low speed. Cut the chilled Crisco® and butter into the flour mixture gradually in roughly one teaspoon amounts and continue mixing on medium speed until the contents resemble small peas. This may take a few minutes of mixing after all the shortening has been added. Actually, it may not happen at all, so just mix for three or four minutes on medium speed after all of the shortening has been added and proceed to the next step.

If you are not using the optional egg method, add the milk, only 1/4 cup at a time while mixing for a minute or two between milk additions, for you may not need a full cup. If you decide to use the optional eggs and milk version then whisk the eggs and add the 1/4 cup of milk to it and whisk well, and add it all at once into the flour mixture. If you didn't use the egg option, repeat the milk additions and continue mixing only until a ball of dough begins to form. Whichever method you use the formation of the mixture into dough will be obvious so it is easy to know when to stop mixing.

Divide the dough in half and knead each piece by hand or by using a dough hook with the electric mixer for a minute or two, then form a rectangle of dough about 1" thick and put it onto some plastic wrap. Wrap the dough with the plastic wrap and refrigerate it for 30 to 60 minutes. The chilling and resting period will help gluten formation, which is highly desirable in keeping the dough together later while the dumplings are cooking in the broth.

Roll out the dough onto a floured surface. I like to put plastic wrap on a granite countertop and dust it with flour. Then I partially knead and flatten the dough to a 1" or less thickness by hand to make rolling it out easier. Then I dust the dough with flour, center it on the plastic wrap and put a second piece of plastic wrap on top. Then I roll the dough with an ordinary rolling pin to about 1/8th of an inch thick. This method works perfectly for rolling dough without having it stick to any surface, and the rolling pin stays clean.

Remove the top piece of plastic wrap, then use a pizza cutter or a sharp knife and cut the dough, roughly into rectangles about 1 inch wide by 2 inches long. Allow the dough strips to harden/dry for at least 30 minutes or up to an hour, then remove the pieces to a plate, being careful not to include any plastic wrap. I like to turn the pieces of dough over when putting them onto plates and loosely stack them, such that the damp surfaces that were underneath on the plastic wrap can dry like the top and sides ... and I let the dumplings dry for an additional 30 minutes.

Bring the broth to a simmer on high heat and drop in the dough strips a few at a time so they don't clump together. When they are all in the pot, reduce the heat to low, cover the pot and allow them to cook for 10 minutes at a simmer or very low boil. Do not stir them while they are cooking. You now have dumplings similar to the style served at Cracker Barrel®, especially if you used the eggs and milk option.

Add the shredded chicken pieces to the pot. Mix briefly and gently with a large wooden spoon and allow the mixture to cook, covered, at a simmer to partially thicken it, about 20 minutes.

Mix the cornstarch with the 1/2 cup of water and pour it into the simmering chicken and dumplings mixture slowly, while mixing gently. Then increase the heat to medium and let the mixture come to a low boil while mixing gently and it will be thickened in a minute or two at a low boil. Note that the gravy will thicken more overnight with any leftovers you may have (due in part to moisture absorption by the dumplings) so don't overdo the use of cornstarch initially even if the gravy thickness isn't quite what you want immediately at the end of the cooking.

Serve the chicken and dumplings hot in wide shallow bowls that have been pre-warmed in a 180 degrees F oven.

If you want you can sprinkle some freshly chopped parsley on top of each serving to add color and good complementary taste. Alternatively, you can mix the chopped parsley into the chicken and dumplings in the pot before serving it.

Let each guest season their serving with salt and pepper, to taste.

Did you remember to make/serve the Waldorf Salad and the chilled Pinot Grigio wine?

Enjoy!

Chicken and Gnocchi - ☺♥

This recipe is a variation of the Food Nirvana Chicken and Dumplings recipe. It saves all the labor of making dumplings from scratch. And there are a few other ingredient variations as well.

When first made the gravy may appear to be too thin, but it will thicken upon cooling and remain thick when reheated. If necessary, you can increase the flour to 3 tbsp., but no more.

You want to make this recipe. It is easy and very tasty. Serve it along with a chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio wine and a small salad and it is fine dining!

Ingredients: (makes eight adult servings)

5 large chicken thighs, skin on (or 8 large drumsticks, skin on)

2 boneless skinless chicken breast halves precooked in two quarts of water, then rinsed and rubbed to remove any pieces of white albumin gunk

2 quarts of chicken broth

1 tbsp. of Better Than Bullion® Chicken Base

1 medium onion, peeled and cut into thick slices

2 carrots cut into slices

2 stalks of celery, cut into pieces about one inch long

2 cloves of garlic, minced

2 tsp. of Kosher or sea salt

1/2 tsp. of ground black pepper

1/4 tsp. of Bells® poultry seasoning

1/8 tsp. of ground turmeric

2 tbsp. of cornstarch and 2 tbsp. of flour, mixed in 3/4 cup of water

2, 1 lb. packages of premade gnocchi

1/2 cup of freshly chopped parsley (optional)

Directions:

Place the chicken thighs, the onions, carrots, celery, garlic, poultry seasoning, turmeric, salt and pepper into a 2 gallon pot and cover the mixture with the chicken broth.

Bring the mixture to a boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, with the pot covered. Cook the mixture for 1/2 hour at a simmer or very low boil until it is cooked through.

Remove the chicken thighs from the broth, letting any broth in the pieces of chicken drain back into the pot, then cut the thighs in half and let them cool on a wood cutting board for about 10 minutes.

Remove the cooled chicken meat from each piece and cut/tear/shred it into medium to small size pieces. Discard the skin, bones, gristle and any dark vein areas.

Slice the precooked chicken breast crosswise into pieces 1/4" thick and add them to the bowl of chicken thigh pieces.

Pour the broth from the pot into a 3 quart bowl through a fine sieve to capture the vegetable pieces and all unwanted small pieces of fat, skin, etc., from the chicken thighs.

Discard the vegetable pieces, or use them for some other purpose. Return the broth to the pot.

Cut the pieces of gnocchi in half lengthwise and cook the gnocchi pieces at a low boil for five minutes in the chicken broth.

Add the Better Than Bullion® chicken base to the broth.

Mix briefly and allow the mixture to simmer, covered, for five minutes.

Mix the cornstarch and flour with the 3/4 cup of water and pour it slowly into the simmering broth and gnocchi mixture while stirring. Let the mixture thicken while stirring.

Add the shredded and sliced chicken pieces and the chopped parsley, then heat and cook the chicken and gnocchi at a simmer for five minutes.

Serve the chicken and gnocchi in wide, shallow bowls that have been prewarmed in a 180 degrees F oven.

Let each guest season their chicken and gnocchi serving with salt and pepper, to taste.

Did you remember to serve the chilled wine and the salad?

Enjoy!

Chicken Broccoli Alfredo - 😊♥♥♥😊

Chicken Broccoli Alfredo is a delightful, rich and tasty dish ... one you certainly want to make to please your family and your best friends. It is especially good in cooler/colder weather, for it leaves you feeling pleasantly filled. The one thing you must remember is not to mix the sauce with the pasta until immediately before the meal, else the pasta will absorb the sauce and leave you with something gunky, ergo not very nice. I actually recommend, in this recipe, keeping the primary components separated from each other until serving time, at which time you build individual servings in each individual serving dish ... or, you can let each guest do that to their own preference of amounts of each component, then mix well the combination with two dinner forks or a fork and a soup spoon.

A fine creamy cheesy sauce dinner entree like this one deserves a fine bottle of Pinot Grigio wine, chilled, and a nice Caesar side salad (see the Food Nirvana recipe for Caesar salad) if you have time to make one. Glasses of ice water will be appreciated also.

Ingredients: (makes four generous adult servings)

For the Pasta:

1 pound box of dry fettuccine pasta

For the Chicken:

1 1/2 pounds of boneless, skinless chicken breasts

1 teaspoon of dry Italian seasoning (or use 1/2 tsp. each of dried oregano and dried basil)

3/4 teaspoon of sea salt

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper

2 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons of butter

For the Broccoli:

1 large fresh broccoli crown (or two smaller crowns), cut into small florets, stem discarded

For the Alfredo Sauce:

1, 8 tbsp. stick of butter, cut into 12 slices

2 1/2 cups of heavy cream

2 large cloves of garlic, minced

3/4 teaspoon of garlic powder

1 teaspoon of dry Italian Seasoning (or a mixture of dried oregano and basil)

1/2 teaspoon of sea salt

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper

2 cups of freshly grated Parmegiano Reggiano or Extra Sharp Aged Provolone (my favorite for this sauce) or Pecorino Romano cheese

1/2 cup of chopped fresh parsley (used at serving time mixed into the sauce as a garnish)

Directions:

Set the oven at 180 degrees F and put in the wide bowls you will use later for individual servings and also one large (3 qt.) serving bowl and three medium (2 qt.) serving bowls.

Make the Chicken:

Season the chicken breasts with the Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper, rubbing the seasoning over the surface of each chicken breast.

Warm the olive oil over medium-high heat in a large nonstick skillet. Once it is shimmering, swirl the pan to evenly distribute the oil.

Set the heat to medium and add the chicken breasts and leave them undisturbed for 5 to 7 minutes, until the bottom is golden-brown.

Flip the chicken breasts over and add in the slices of butter between them, picking up the pan to give it a gentle swirl to distribute the melted butter. Briefly lift each piece of chicken for the melted butter to flow underneath.

Continue cooking the chicken breasts for another 5-7 minutes (or until the internal chicken temperature reaches 165 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer.) Note that I microwaved the cooked chicken breasts for three minutes on full power without checking the internal temperature, as I could see the interior of the breasts was still partially raw after the skillet cooking. That worked perfectly.

Transfer the chicken breasts to a wood cutting board and let them rest for 3 minutes. Cut them with a large, sharp knife, crosswise, on a diagonal into 1/4" thick slices.

Put the slices into one of the medium size serving bowls , cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven while you prepare the broccoli and the Alfredo sauce.

Make the Broccoli

Cut the broccoli crown with a paring knife to create many small florets, each about an inch long and 3/4" wide. Discard the large pieces of broccoli crown stem left over after making the florets.

Put the florets and one cup of water into a steaming pot and bring the water to a boil on medium heat.

Let the florets steam, covered, for seven minutes and then put them into one of the medium size serving bowls. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven.

Make the Alfredo sauce:

In the same Skillet used for the chicken, add the butter and the cream, and cook over medium-low heat, whisking lightly until the butter has melted.

Add the minced garlic, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper and whisk until all the ingredients are combined and smooth.

Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer on medium heat (to about 180 to 190 degrees F ... Do not let the sauce boil) and cook the sauce for 3 to 4 minutes on very low heat, whisking constantly.

Stir in the grated cheese, just until it is melted and the sauce is smooth. Turn off the heat.

Stir in the chopped fresh parsley.

Pour the sauce into one of the medium size serving bowls, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven.

Make the Pasta:

Bring a one gallon pot of lightly salted water to a boil.

Add the fettuccine and cook it at a medium boil, with initial stirring to assure the pieces separate from each other, until it is al dente according to package directions, usually 12 to 13 minutes.

Drain the fettuccine in a colander.

Give it a hot water rinse while it is in the colander, then set it aside, wet, in the 180 degrees F warming oven, in the large serving bowl, covered with plastic wrap.

Assemble the Broccoli Chicken Alfredo at serving time:

Divide the pasta among the four individual serving bowls and let each guest add pieces of broccoli and chicken and then ladle Alfredo sauce over the combination. They then toss/mix the components together using a two dinner forks or a fork and a soup spoon.

Let each guest season their own serving of Broccoli Chicken Alfredo with additional salt or pepper, to taste.

A nice chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio wine goes very well with this meal, plus some glasses of ice water, and a side Caesar salad makes the meal perfect!

Enjoy!

Chicken Croquettes - 😊♥♥♥😊 T

I really enjoy well made chicken croquettes. They are especially good with a warm/hot, seasoned sauce poured over them at serving time.

I have a related funny story to share. My wife Janet and I were sitting in a country style restaurant named Circle (as it was next to a traffic circle). I saw some people sitting part way across the room and one had a plate with two chicken croquettes. I hadn't eaten those in years, and I was hungry, so when the waitress took our order I put in a double order for me.

What a surprise I had when she served me eight chicken croquettes! It never occurred to me to ask her initially how many were provided in a single order, for I only saw two croquettes on the other diners plate, so I figured that was one order. My mistake! I chowed down and finished six of them, and they were delicious, but I had to take the remaining two home.

Think of chicken or turkey croquettes as comfort food, for they certainly qualify. They are simple to make and very tasty, and they can be served as a standalone light meal or snack due to the bread crumbs content, or they can be served with side dishes like French fries and steamed broccoli to make a full meal. Another nice consideration is that you know how much chicken you are getting when you make the croquettes, compared to what you might get in a restaurant.

Chicken croquettes are typically thought of as a tasty way to use leftover roast chicken. I believe the taste can be made so good that they deserve first place in the use of the raw chicken. In this instance I am referring to chicken thighs, not to a whole roast chicken. These chicken croquettes are excellent served with the warm/hot seasoned sauce. The taste and the texture are perfect.

Ingredients: (makes 12 croquettes/ 4 servings)

3 cups of finely chopped/diced, cooked chicken meat (from six roasted large chicken thighs)

2, 10.5 ounce cans of Campbell's® condensed cream of chicken soup, divided

1/2 cup of Italian-style dry bread crumbs (for inside the croquettes)

6 tablespoons of minced celery

4 tablespoons of minced onion

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1 teaspoon of Bells® poultry seasoning (for inside the croquettes)

1 extra large or jumbo egg (for making an egg wash for dipping before coating the croquettes with bread crumbs)

1 cup of Italian-style dry bread crumbs (for rolling/coating the croquettes)

1 cup of milk (for the seasoned sauce)

2 teaspoons of Bell's® poultry seasoning (for the seasoned sauce)

Directions:

Put six raw large chicken thighs on an aluminum foil covered baking sheet.

Bake the chicken thighs for 1 hour and 15 minutes in a 350 degrees F conventional oven, or, use 325 degrees F if you use a convection oven.

Remove the baking sheet from the oven and put the chicken thighs on a wood cutting board to cool for a few minutes.

Set aside 1/3 cup of rendered, liquid chicken fat from the baking sheet in a small bowl. Discard the rest of the liquid fat or use it some other way.

Process the chicken thighs ... peel off the crisp skins and save them for a later snack in a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, then refrigerate them.

Cut the thigh meat for all six thighs away from the bone and from any other fat or gristle or veins or very dark meat, then cut it into 1/2" x 1/2" pieces and put them into a bowl. Discard the bones and other waste.

Measure out 3 (or a bit more) cups of the chicken pieces and put them into a two quart bowl. Use any remaining chicken pieces later for making foods like chicken salad. Put the extra chicken pieces into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, seal it and refrigerate them.

Combine the chopped chicken pieces with 2/3 of a can of the condensed cream of chicken soup, 1/3 cup of liquid chicken fat, 1/2 cup of Italian-style bread crumbs, the celery, onion, sea salt and 1 teaspoon of Bells® poultry seasoning in the two quart bowl and mix well.

Shape the mixture into 12 croquettes by hand and put them on a dinner plate, separated from each other. Each croquette will be roughly 1/3 cup in volume, so you might use a 1/3 cup measuring cup to fill and then dispense the mixture in making each croquette, which will make them nicely even in size. Chill the croquettes in the refrigerator for one to two hours. Chilling will make the

croquettes more firm so they don't come apart later during egg wash dipping and coating with bread crumbs.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F with a rack/shelf in the middle. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and lightly spray it with Pam® (canola oil).

Make the egg wash by whisking the egg with 1 tablespoon of water in a small bowl. Put the one cup of Italian-style bread crumbs into a wide, shallow bowl or a pie plate.

Make an assembly line, left to right, starting with the plate of cold formed croquettes, the egg wash and then the bread crumbs, with the parchment paper covered baking sheet at the end.

Gently dip and roll each cold croquette in the egg wash, coating all surfaces, then put it into the bowl of bread crumbs and roll it around or temporarily cover it with bread crumbs, to coat it evenly.

Place the bread crumb coated croquette on the parchment paper covered baking sheet and repeat the egg wash dipping and crumb coating for the rest of the croquettes.

Generously spray (Pam®) on the croquettes. Do not soak them but you should be able to see the oil glisten on the surface of the bread crumbs.

Bake the croquettes for 15 to 20 minutes, until they are golden in color. Rotate the baking sheet 180 degrees after the first 10 minutes of baking.

Optional step: Set the oven to broil on high heat and broil the baked croquettes for 4 minutes if you want to make the surfaces nice and crunchy. I recommend doing this step for the texture results are very nice at eating time. Do be careful not to burn the tops of the croquettes, ergo keep an eye on them during broiling and if necessary stop the broiling (remove the baking sheet from the oven) before the tops turn dark in color.

Remove the croquettes from the oven and put them on a serving plate.

Use the 1 1/3 remaining cans of cream of chicken soup mixed/whisked in a one quart microwave safe bowl with one cup of milk and 2 teaspoons of Bells® poultry seasoning. Heat the sauce mixture in the microwave oven for three to four minutes, or until it is hot, then stir it well and serve it to your guests along with the croquettes, plus any other food items you have prepared, and a nice cold beverage like soda or iced tea.

Enjoy!

Chicken Fried Pork Chops - 😊♥

We are usually familiar with the type of fried beef steak or fried chicken filet known as chicken fried steak or chicken fried chicken. Put simply the flesh item is batter coated and deep fried to produce a relatively flat, thin, crispy coated and tasty entree.

Typically the flesh portion of each chop is about six to eight ounces in weight, such that the final fried entree looks and is large, roughly the equivalent of a circle five to six inches in diameter. The amount of fried batter on the surface of the pork chop is sufficient to be considered the carbohydrate part of a meal.

At various times past I have purchased a very economical variety of pork titled sirloin end chops. They are not considered to be the prime meat areas so the price is about \$1.80 per pound in the year 2024. They are about 1/2" thick and of the right size to be used in making Chicken Fried Pork Chops. Given rampant inflation in the USA at this time in history, I smile knowing I can make a nice entree to serve three adults for about \$10 total cost for all ingredients! Plus about \$5 total cost to make three very nice side salads. And about \$4 for three bottles of good beer, like Corona®. You might compare that sum to about \$48 to feed three people the same food type at a meal in an average restaurant. Of course, they will also provide French fries ... just what you need, right? Beverage, tip and tax extra! Each bottle of beer will cost about \$7. Think ... about \$88 total compared to \$19 when you make the meal at home.

It is important to process these chops as purchased by washing them and then using paper towels to mostly dry the surfaces. Then all external fat areas are cut away and discarded. After that it is up to the cook to decide whether or not to cut out the areas of bone. Leaving them in place will produce a large final fried piece of meat, whereas cutting out the bone areas will most likely increase the number of pieces of meat but they will be proportionally smaller.

Pork chops containing bone(s) will distort in shape during frying due to the pieces of meat not being uniform. Instead, each raw pork chop is multiple areas of meat and bone loosely held together by thin fatty membrane. The distortion during frying does not hurt the final result at all. It simply looks different from flat servings of chicken fried chicken or chicken fried steak.

Note that this recipe calls for a second but short frying step. That is a very nice way to assure the fried batter is completely crisp on the surface of the pork at serving time, while the meat inside remains moist and tender. Do you have leftover batter? Why not make fried onion rings? Easy and yummy!

This item is not health food, but it sure is tasty. If you decide to make it then serve some type of healthy salad or vegetable medley as a side dish.

Here is one final point ... the use of multiple flours to control gluten formation, toasted sesame oil to impart a subtle extra flavor, and double frying to guarantee having crisp fried batter, are all techniques used in making fried Oriental foods. You will be pleased with the results.

Okay, let's get to it ...

Ingredients: (2 to 3 servings)

6 pork sirloin end chops (about 2.5 to 3.0 pounds)

1/2 cup of all purpose flour

1/3 cup of rice flour

1/3 cup of finely ground corn meal or corn flour

1/4 cup of corn starch (for the batter)

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of black pepper

1 teaspoon of garlic powder

2 jumbo or 3 extra large eggs

1 1/4 cups of water, divided

1/4 cup of toasted sesame oil

1 cup (or more) of corn starch for dredging the chops

1 gallon plastic bag to hold the corn starch for dredging the chops

2 to 3 quarts of either canola oil or peanut oil for frying

Directions:

Wash the chops in cold water and then lay them individually on sections of paper towel. Then press paper towel sections on top of the chops to partially dry them.

Cut away all areas that are completely fat. Optionally, cut away the bones.

Make the batter as follows:

Whisk the eggs in a two quart bowl. Then add one cup of the water and again whisk.

Add the toasted sesame oil and whisk briefly.

Put all of the dry ingredients in a one quart bowl and whisk them gently to mix the ingredients evenly.

Gradually add the dry ingredients mixture to the egg mixture while whisking.

When the batter is well mixed, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Pre-warm a large serving bowl lined with paper towels in a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Start heating the oil slowly in a 6 quart (or larger) pot on low heat. The goal is to have the oil be 350 degrees F when all other preparations are done and it is time to start frying the pork pieces. Use an instant read thermometer. If the oil temperature is at 350 degrees F before you are ready to fry the pork then temporarily turn off the heat.

Now dredge the pork chops/pieces in corn starch in the one gallon plastic bag, one large chop/piece at a time. Remember to close the top of the bag before shaking it. Use tongs to extract the dredged pork from the bag. Put all pieces of dredged pork on a plate, on top of each other.

If you use all the corn starch and still have more pork to dredge then put another 1/2 cup of corn starch into the one gallon plastic bag and continue the dredging.

Take the batter from the refrigerator and whisk it. It will likely be thicker than what is needed, for the batter should be thin for frying the chops, so add 1/4 cup of water and whisk until the batter is uniform.

Check the oil temperature and if necessary increase the heat to high to get it up to 350 degrees F. Then turn the heat to very low.

The battering step uses tongs to introduce each dredged pork chop (or piece of pork chop) into the batter. Be sure both sides of the chop are completely coated with batter. Then use the tongs to hold the chop above the batter for about ten seconds to let excess batter run/drip back into the bowl of batter.

Fry the dredged/battered pork chops one at a time (or multiple pieces at a time for a given chop if you cut away the bones earlier) for five minutes.

Use a spider or equivalent tool like a slotted spoon to remove and discard small pieces of batter that float to the top of the hot oil.

Maintain the oil temperature at 350 degrees F by varying the heat as needed.

Put each piece of fried pork on a cooling rack above a baking sheet.

When all the pork has been fried and allowed to cool somewhat, then do a second frying at 350 degrees F for three minutes. The pork pieces can be added, three chops (or the equivalent) at a time, into the hot oil for the second frying.

Put the completed second frying pieces of chicken fried pork chops on the cooling rack to drain excess oil, and then into the pre-warmed serving bowl.

Serve the pork chops hot, along with other meal items, like a salad. Cold beer is a nice beverage to serve with this meal.

Have additional salt and pepper available for those guests who want more seasoning.

Enjoy!

Chicken Fried Steak - ☺

I've eaten both Chicken Fried Chicken and Chicken Fried Steak numerous times in restaurants like Cracker Barrel®. It is not cuisine but it is tasty comfort food if made well. There is no reason why any of us can't make it at home. It is quick and easy.

Though this recipe is for steak, you can simply substitute boneless skinless chicken breast to make the Chicken Fried Chicken.

Various recipes I've read call for making a creamy milk gravy after the meat/fowl has been fried, using the crud left in the oily skillet after frying. I think it is much easier and more tasty to use either a 14 ounce can of beef broth or chicken broth, heat it on very low heat in a small saucepan until the volume is reduced to about 7 ounces, then mix two teaspoons of cornstarch in 1/4 cup of milk or water, then add it to the broth while stirring. Increase the temperature to medium and keep stirring until a gravy is formed.

Have fun ... And consider serving this meal with coleslaw and either buttered noodles or French fries, along with some applesauce. Note that the hot cooking oil used for the meat/fowl can be used once the meat/fowl is fried to make the French fries. This can be done rather quickly, especially if you have sometime earlier used the Food Nirvana recipe to make the fries and then stored some of them frozen after the initial frying. A tossed salad is a nice substitute for the coleslaw.

Ingredients:

1 pound piece of 1/2" thick (or thicker) lean sirloin or round steak

1 egg

1/8 cup of water

1 cup of flour for dredging

1/2 cup of cornstarch for dredging

2 cups (or slightly more) of corn, soybean or canola cooking oil

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1 teaspoon of ground black pepper

Directions:

Cut the meat into four roughly equal pieces. If the meat as purchased is too thick, like 3/4" to 1" thick, then cut each piece in half carefully to produce two thinner pieces.

Cut away and discard any fat on the meat, then pound each piece on both sides using a kitchen mallet and a cutting board to a final thickness of 1/4 inch.

Beat the egg with a whisk in a shallow bowl, add the water and whisk until well blended and set the mixture aside.

Mix together the salt and black pepper and sprinkle it on both sides of beef pieces. Rub it in.

Put the flour in a pie pan or wide shallow bowl pan.

Put the cornstarch in a pie pan or wide shallow bowl.

Dredge each piece of beef in the cornstarch, gently shaking off any excess cornstarch.

Dip each cornstarch coated piece of beef into the egg/water mixture, and then dredge it in the flour, gently shaking off any excess flour.

Set the dredged pieces of meat aside on a large plate, not touching each other.

Heat the cooking oil in a large cast-iron or other heavy bottom skillet over medium-high heat for a few minutes.

The oil should be a little less than 1/2 inch deep in the skillet. Adjust the amount of oil if necessary.

Check the oil temperature once a minute with an instant read thermometer. The oil is ready to use when the temperature is 325 degrees F.

Carefully place each piece of meat into the hot oil using tongs or a large meat fork. Protect yourself (and your kitchen) from the popping grease that may result by using a screen cover on the skillet.

Increase the heat to high.

Fry the meat pieces on each side for three to four minutes, turning once. They should be light golden brown in color.

If necessary, fry them for an additional minute on both sides.

Drain the fried meat pieces on a paper towel.

Serve hot.

Chicken Saltimbocca - ☺♥

This recipe is originally from Giada DeLaurentis via Food Network®. I've made my typical editing changes to make it fit the standard Food Nirvana recipe format and I provide some recommended changes to the recipe. I made this dish and I've now made a number of improvements and recommendations, mostly in the directions. Note, for instance, that Giada uses salt and pepper multiple times in this recipe, and I recommend going very lightly on both each time. Your guests can season the chicken saltimbocca to please themselves at serving time.

You want to consider what side dishes to serve with this meal. The chicken saltimbocca is distinct in numerous flavors, and bright or slightly tart with the lemon juice in the reduction sauce, so a mild dish of cooked pasta combined with sautéed garlic slices in olive oil will go well. A tossed salad with a creamy Caesar dressing is also a good item to serve, as the salad contrasts with the other foods in colors, textures and taste. You might also serve some warmed Italian bread with butter. A nice white wine like Pinot Grigio, chilled, is perfect with this meal. Dessert? Hmm ... How about a small fresh fruit salad with a shot of Amaretto in each serving?

Ingredients: (Makes two to three servings)

6, 3 ounce chicken cutlets, pounded (maybe!) to flatten them evenly to a thickness of 1/4" or less

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

6 thin slices of prosciutto ham

1, 10 ounce box of frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

3 tablespoons (or slightly more) of olive oil

1/4 cup (or more) of grated Parmesan cheese

1, 14 ounce can of chicken broth

2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice

Directions:

Set the oven temperature to 180 degrees F and put a serving platter and two or three dinner plates into the oven to pre-warm them.

Process a fresh lemon to make the lemon juice, then set it aside.

Now, about pounding the chicken cutlets. A cutlet is a long, relatively wide sliced piece of chicken breast. Thus, if/when you cut a boneless, skinless chicken breast half to make the cutlets, remember to cut along the flesh evenly and along the length, not perpendicular to it, or pounding it to make it thin will result in you making mashed chicken instead of flattened cutlets. Hint: Don't use the knurled end of the kitchen mallet to do the pounding.

An alternative to pounding is to create slices of raw chicken breast that are 1/4 inch or less thick, eliminating any need for pounding completely. You can do that easily with a meat slicer if the half breast is partially frozen. In fact, in the future that is exactly what I will do, as chicken flesh is far more fragile than beef or pork. Think about it ... one pounds lean tough beef to tenderize it as well as to make it thinner ... and that is totally unnecessary for chicken breast if you start with thinly sliced chicken breast.

Squeeze the thawed frozen spinach about a quarter cup at a time by hand to remove the excess water, then put it into a small bowl. Season the spinach lightly with salt and pepper. Toss the spinach with 1 tablespoon of olive oil to coat it.

Place a thin chicken cutlet flat on a cutting board. Sprinkle the chicken lightly with salt and pepper. Lay one slice of prosciutto ham on top of the chicken cutlet.

Arrange an even, thin layer of spinach on top of the prosciutto ham slice. Actually, you can't do that. Simply dispense small "finger pinch" amounts of spinach evenly over the surface of the ham and spread it lightly with the back of a teaspoon.

Sprinkle the Parmesan cheese evenly over the spinach. Note: Each piece receives roughly one heaping teaspoon of Parmesan cheese, so the 1/4 cup of grated Parmesan cheese indicated in the recipe ingredients may not be exactly accurate.

Beginning at the short tapered end, roll up the chicken cutlet like a jellyroll. Secure the rolled up chicken to itself with a toothpick (or two) so it cannot unroll during cooking. Put the rolled up chicken on a plate.

Repeat the above procedure for the remaining five chicken cutlets.

Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil (or a bit more) in a heavy bottom large skillet over high heat.

Add the rolled up chicken pieces and cook them just until golden brown, about 2 minutes (or more) per side. When it is time to turn the pieces over to brown the second side, use a strong spatula with a sharp front end to free each piece from

the skillet bottom, such that the golden crust remains on the surface of the chicken.

Use the spatula to release the second side of the browned chicken rolls from the bottom of the skillet.

Add the chicken broth and the lemon juice (I like to mix them together first in a one pint measuring cup), and scrape the browned bits of chicken from the bottom of the skillet with a wooden spoon. Note, there may or may not be any browned bits of chicken to scrape! It all depends on how hard/long you fry the rolled up chicken in the olive oil, and on the quality of the spatula you use to release and then turn the chicken pieces over to brown the second side.

Bring the liquid to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium. Cover the skillet and simmer the chicken until it is just cooked through, about 8 to 10 minutes. Just don't serve chicken to your guests that is raw in the middle.

Transfer the chicken saltimbocca to the pre-warmed serving platter and put it back into the oven.

Simmer the cooking liquid over medium high heat, uncovered, until it is reduced to about 2/3 cup, about 5 minutes.

Season the reduced cooking liquid with salt and pepper, to taste. Note, this was not necessary.

Note: Having made the reduced liquid and having used it on the chicken for one meal I decided that in the future I will reserve a few ounces after it is reduced, let the reserved amount cool slightly, mix in a teaspoon of cornstarch, and then pour that into the skillet, stirring, with heat, to thicken the reduction.

Remove the serving platter from the oven and remove the toothpicks from the chicken saltimbocca pieces.

Drizzle the reduced (thickened!) cooking liquid over the chicken saltimbocca.

Serve it immediately on the pre-warmed dinner plates, along with whatever other items you have prepared for the meal.

Enjoy!

Chicken Schnitzel - ☺♥

I always loved the wiener schnitzel served in good German restaurants. The buttery taste of the thin, pounded breaded veal is delightful, as is the hot German potato salad, or spatzle (German noodles), and the sweet and tart braised red cabbage, and sometimes cinnamon seasoned warm applesauce.

Marie used to make stacked platters of wiener schnitzel for our kids, along with lots of buttered noodles and homemade applesauce. They absolutely loved it and devoured it in quantity. In fact, Marie and I enjoyed lots of it at a great German restaurant named Max's®, in Pittsburgh PA, very close to the Allegheny General Hospital where my mother was undergoing a triple bypass operation for clogged arteries. Go figure.

Various folks I know will not eat veal for personal reasons, and yet others will not eat breaded or coated meats fried in butter for health reasons. Ah well, to each his own ... but keep reading.

Veal is fairly expensive when purchased as scaloppini slices, raw, which is the best form of veal to use for making wiener schnitzel. Back in 2010 the price, even at Costco®, was around \$10 per pound. But I don't even bother looking a veal prices anymore.

I decided recently to make wiener schnitzel with slices of chicken breast. Let me tell you the taste and texture, inside and out, are so good using lean chicken that I have trouble telling the difference. In fact, lean pounded chicken is easily as tender and moist as the veal. Best of all, it only costs about \$3 per pound, purchased as a boneless skinless chicken breast.

I must note that this recipe is essentially identical to the Food Nirvana recipe for pork schnitzel, in fact I used that recipe exchanging chicken for pork and I was highly pleased with the results.

Ingredients:

2 lbs. of boneless skinless chicken breast

1/3 to 1 lb. of butter (or more based on how many skillet full of crumb coated chicken you fry)

2 cups (or a bit more) of Kellogg's® Club Cracker (tm) crumbs

1 1/2 cups of Panko bread crumbs

1/3 cup of flour

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

1 tsp. of Sea salt (fine)

1 extra large or jumbo egg

1 to 2 oz. of water

Directions:

Make whatever side dishes you plan to make for this meal before cooking the chicken. Buttered noodles or hot German potato salad are naturals, as are hot applesauce and/or sweet and tart braised red cabbage. There is a recipe for the braised cabbage in Food Nirvana and also for the hot German potato salad. Keep the hot side dishes covered in plastic wrap in a warm oven. See below.

Turn on your oven to 200°F and put a large dinner plate or small meat platter into it that will be used to hold the cooked chicken. Put your prepared side dishes, covered, into the oven.

Remove any areas of fat on the chicken breast and discard them. Slice the chicken breast crossways into slices roughly 1/2" thick.

Use a kitchen mallet with a metal knurled or indented wood surface used to pound meat. Pound each slice of chicken on both sides on a wood cutting board until it is about 1/4" thick. Pound gently from one side to the other and over the entire first surface to do about half of the reduction in thickness. Then turn the slice over and repeat the process on the second side until the right thickness is obtained.

Repeat the above pounding process for all the chicken slices, placing and then stacking the individual thinned, pounded pieces of chicken onto a large dinner plate.

Use a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag to hold enough Kellogg's® Club Crackers (tm) and other dry ingredients to make three to four cups (or more) of finely ground crumbs. Close the bag leaving as little air inside as possible. Crush the contents using the kitchen mallet and then open the bag and eliminate as much air as you can and then reseal the bag.

Use your rolling pin or the kitchen mallet to finish the process of crushing the crackers into very fine cracker crumbs. Add the salt and the pepper to the bag and mix well by shaking it.

Make an egg wash. Break the raw egg into a wide shallow bowl and whisk it for about 30 seconds. Add the water and again whisk for 30 seconds.

Pour the cracker crumb mixture onto a large shallow bowl and spread it evenly.

Dip a slice of pounded chicken into the egg wash, coating both sides. Let the excess egg wash run off back into the egg wash bowl.

Lay the chicken slice on top of the cracker crumb mixture, then press down with your fingers over the whole surface to cause the cracker crumb mixture to adhere to the underside of the chicken slice. Flip the chicken over on to the second side and again press down all over the surface of the chicken. If necessary you can spoon some extra crumb coating on top of the slice and press it into the meat to get total even coverage of the crumb mixture.

Remove the chicken slice, holding it above the bowl and shaking it gently to get excess crumbs to fall back into the bowl.

Put the crumb coated chicken slice onto a separate large plate.

Spread the cracker crumb mixture out evenly in the bowl and repeat the above process starting with dipping a chicken slice into the egg wash, until all the chicken slices have been coated and placed on top of each other on a plate.

Use a large (12" to 14" diameter) non-stick thick bottom skillet and heat it on medium heat with 1/3 stick of butter. Spread the melted butter around the inside of the skillet with a spatula.

When the butter is starting to bubble, place as many pieces of the coated chicken into the skillet as you can, but only one layer deep, and do not let the slices touch each other. After two minutes turn the slices over with a wide spatula and again cook for two minutes. Repeat if necessary until the schnitzel has a nice golden coating on both sides.

Remove the warming plate/platter from the oven. Move the finished chicken schnitzel pieces to the warmed plate or small meat platter, and then return the plate/platter to the warming oven.

Clean the skillet quickly with hot water and a dish cloth to remove buttery crumb residue, and wipe it dry with a paper towel. Return it to the stove. Add 1/3 stick of butter and repeat the above cooking process until all of the slices of raw crumb coated chicken have been cooked and placed on the warming plate/platter.

Discard any unused egg wash or crumb coating mixture. Do not reuse them.

Serve the hot chicken schnitzel and the side dishes you prepared earlier.

Cold beer is a nice beverage to serve with this meal. Cold sodas are fine also. Some folks love a chilled somewhat sweet wine like Riesling.

Your guests will be very happy. You will be too.

Chinese Fried Chicken Nuggets - ☺♥

Having made Chinese fried chicken wings and extending the use of that recipe to drumsticks and thighs, I wondered if I could also use boneless, skinless chicken breasts and create very flavorful fried chicken nuggets. The answer is absolutely yes, but you start with boneless, skinless chicken breasts and process them crosswise into strips, then marinate them, then dredge them in cornstarch, then batter dip them and fry them. The batter is essential to keep the flesh from drying out during frying, yet it must be kept thin to produce a crisp surface that isn't doughy inside. The crispness aspect is enhanced by doing two or three short, low temperature frying at 325 degrees F, separated by a cooling period(s) on a rack over a baking sheet. The frying periods will be five minutes each if you fry twice, or four minutes each if you fry three times.

I noticed the drying effect on the bare flesh when frying using chicken thighs (the skin did not adhere to the flesh) and it became obvious that battering them first would be required, whereas both wings and drumsticks fried perfectly without batter. In considering chicken breast meat I wanted to have excellent seasoning of the meat before battering so the result would be crispy fried chicken nuggets that were both well flavored and moist inside. I was very pleased with the results. Now you can be too. I was surprised to find these nuggets are delicious either hot, or later cold, for the flavors are excellent.

Note that commercial chicken nuggets often appear to be made from some mixture of formed, ground/processed chicken, and they are relatively tasteless, which is why they are commonly sold with accompanying dipping sauces. The chicken strips in this recipe vary a lot in size and shape, but they are very high quality chicken and the different shapes/sizes do not affect the results.

That is enough explanatory descriptions ... Let's get busy!

Ingredients: (four to five generous servings)

2 1/2 pounds of boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cut approximately into 3/4" wide x 1" thick, 2" to 3" long strips, crosswise

2 to 3 quarts of peanut oil (for frying)

Any dipping sauce or sauces of your choice (or eat the fried chicken nuggets without using a dipping sauce)

Marinade: (Thanks to the folks at Woks Of Life® website for this great marinade recipe!)

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper
1/2 teaspoon of white pepper
1/2 teaspoon of garlic powder
1 tablespoon of sea salt
1 teaspoon of sugar
2 tablespoons of soy sauce
2 tablespoons of Shaoxing wine
2 teaspoons of toasted sesame oil
2 extra large eggs
2 tablespoons of cornstarch
2 tablespoons of all purpose flour

Batter:

1/2 cup of rice flour
1/2 cup of all purpose flour
1/4 cup of cornstarch
1 teaspoon of sea salt
1/2 teaspoon of garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon of white pepper
2 extra large eggs
1 cup or more of water to produce a thin batter
1 cup (or more) of cornstarch for dredging the marinated chicken strips before battering them

Directions:

Wash the chicken breast halves and pat them dry with paper towels. Note that when you cut them into strips there will be numerous smaller pieces and that is fine.

First make the marinade and then marinate the cut chicken strips for two hours at room temperature or for four hours refrigerated, as follows:

Whisk the eggs in a large mixing bowl, then add the black pepper, white pepper, garlic powder, sea salt, sugar, soy sauce, Shaoxing wine and sesame oil.

Whisk the contents of the mixing bowl, then add the chicken strips to the bowl, coating each piece completely with the marinade mixture.

Mix everything until all of the wings are well-coated, then sprinkle the 2 tablespoons of cornstarch and the 2 tablespoons of all purpose flour evenly over the tops of the strips, then mix again by hand until the cornstarch and flour are incorporated and the strips are evenly coated.

Put the coated chicken strips into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag and expel the air, seal the bag, and flatten the contents so the strips are not on top of each other. Alternatively, you can vacuum seal the coated strips in a large 10" x 12" vacuum seal bag and then flatten the contents.

Let the strips marinate for 2 hours at room temperature, turning the bag over every 30 minutes, or put them into the refrigerator for four hours, turning the bag over hourly. (If you refrigerate the strips, be sure to let them come to room temperature later before frying them).

Make the batter, then dredge the marinated chicken strips, then batter dip them and fry them, as follows:

Whisk the eggs in a small bowl, then add the rest of the batter ingredients (except the cup of cornstarch to be used for dredging) and whisk until everything is well combined. Refrigerate the batter, covered, for 30 minutes.

At this point you should prepare other foods you plan to serve with the fried chicken Nuggets, for you want the fried chicken Nuggets to be crisp and hot when you serve them.

Dredge each piece of the marinated chicken strips in the bowl of cornstarch, individually, and put them onto a sheet of wax paper or onto a sheet of parchment paper, in one layer, not touching each other. Put additional cornstarch into the bowl if needed during dredging.

Fill a one gallon pot about 1/2 to 2/3 of the way up with the peanut oil, and heat it to 325 degrees F. Vary the heat during frying to maintain the oil temperature close to but not above 325 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer and check the temperature often and adjust the heat as necessary.

Whisk the chilled batter, then check it for thickness. If needed, add a small additional amount of water and whisk again. The point is you want the batter on a piece of marinated, dredged chicken strip to be only about 1/16" thick before frying, so batter thickness can be adjusted as necessary.

Put the dredged chicken strips into the batter, one at a time, then use tongs to hold each above the batter for about ten seconds to let excess batter run back into the bowl. Then add that battered strip to the hot oil.

Fry the strips in multiple batches of four or five strips each, for 5 or 4 minutes (depending on whether you are doing double or triple frying), then remove the strips with tongs individually, let excess oil fall off, and put them on a cooling rack over a baking sheet. I recommend using a kitchen timer to keep the frying times accurate, but you don't need to adjust the frying time for the first few strips of a given batch.

After all strips are fried and cooled for the first time, return them in batches of four or five strips to the hot oil and fry them again for 5 or 4 minutes.

If you are triple frying the strips then repeat the cooling and frying steps one more time.

You now have Chinese Fried Chicken Nuggets ... very delicious fried chicken nuggets, crisp outside and moist and tender inside.

Drain the chicken nuggets on the cooling rack for a minute or two after the final frying. If you aren't serving them immediately then put them into a bowl and keep them briefly in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Serve the Chinese Fried Chicken Nuggets hot, along with whatever other foods you prepared for the meal, including one or more dipping sauces if you decided to use them. We found the taste to be so good due to the marinating step that no dipping sauce was needed.

Cold beer is a fine beverage to serve with hot fried chicken nuggets, or serve other carbonated beverages to young guests.

Enjoy!

Chinese Fried Chicken Wings - ☺♥♥♥☺ T

Yes! Well made fried whole chicken wings come from good Chinese restaurants. They are crispy outside and moist and tender inside, ergo perfect. In this instance the original recipe came from The Woks Of Life® web site. That is regularly pretty much a guarantee of fine results, regardless of which Chinese food you are making.

I made some minor changes to their recipe, reducing the time of the second frying to four minutes, and changing some of the wording and methods of marinating the wings.

The results were nothing less than superb! My sweetheart Peggy and I both declared them to be the best fried chicken wings we ever had, and that is no small claim as we've enjoyed and often made many types over many years.

Overall the procedure and the ingredients of the Chinese recipe vary a lot from common USA recipes for fried chicken wings. And clearly the Chinese method works exceptionally well. You definitely want to make fried chicken wings using this recipe.

I've used this recipe for frying drumsticks and thighs as well as wings. Drumsticks come out perfect (and they are a lot cheaper to buy than wings). Think \$3.99/lb. for whole wings and \$1.29/lb. for drumsticks. I simply increase the frying times to six minutes and then five minutes for the second frying for drumsticks.

Thighs do not fry as nicely as wings or drumsticks (with thighs, the skin doesn't adhere well to the flesh) so I use two toothpicks per thigh and fasten the skin to the flesh ... then they fry as nicely as wings and drumsticks. I can also batter dip the marinated thighs and then they fry nicely (without using toothpicks) and the flavor from the marinade comes through fine. Note that the batter approach also allows you to create marinated chicken tenders cut from chicken breasts, and that also is nice. See the Food Nirvana recipe for Fried Chicken Nuggets. I also put a light batter recipe at the end of this recipe.

Note that you can increase the amount of marinade you make, easily, if you want more intense flavor for a given quantity of wings or drumsticks.

Ingredients: (Serves two to three people)

10 whole chicken wings

1/8 teaspoon of black pepper

1/4 teaspoon of white pepper

1/4 teaspoon of garlic powder

1 1/2 teaspoons of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of sugar

1 tablespoon of soy sauce

1 tablespoon of Shaoxing wine (You can use dry sherry but the Shaoxing wine is best. Buy it.)

1 teaspoon of toasted sesame oil

1 extra large egg

1 tablespoon of cornstarch

2 tablespoons of all purpose flour

2 to 3 quarts of peanut oil (for frying)

Directions:

Wash the chicken wings and pat them dry with paper towels.

Whisk the egg in a large mixing bowl, then add the black pepper, white pepper, garlic powder, sea salt, sugar, soy sauce, Shaoxing wine and sesame oil.

Whisk the contents of the mixing bowl, then add the chicken wings to the bowl one at a time, coating each wing completely with the sauce mixture.

Mix everything until all of the wings are well-coated, then sprinkle the cornstarch and the all purpose flour evenly over the tops of the wings, then mix again until the cornstarch and flour are incorporated and the wings are evenly coated.

Put the coated wings into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag and expel the air, seal the bag, and flatten the contents so the wings are not on top of each other.

Alternatively, you can vacuum seal the coated wings in a large vacuum seal bag and then flatten the contents.

Let the wings marinate for 2 hours or more at room temperature, turning the bag over every 30 minutes, or put them into the refrigerator overnight for the best results. (If you refrigerate the wings, be sure to let them come to room temperature the next day before frying them).

Fill a one gallon pot about 1/2 to 2/3 of the way up with the peanut oil, and heat it to 325 degrees F. Vary the heat during frying to maintain the oil temperature close to but not above 325 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer and check the temperature often and adjust the heat as necessary.

Fry the wings in two batches of five wings each, for 5 minutes, then remove the wings with tongs and put them on a cooling rack over a baking sheet.

After all of the wings are fried and cooled, return them in batches of 5 wings to the hot oil and fry them again for 4 minutes.

Drain the wings on the cooling rack for a minute or two after frying. If you aren't serving them immediately then put them into a bowl and keep them in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Serve the wings hot, with or without hot sauce, along with whatever other foods you prepared for the meal. Cold beer is a fine beverage to serve with hot chicken wings.

====>> Optional rice flour based batter for chicken thighs or strips of chicken breast:

1 egg, 1/4 cup of water, 1/2 cup of rice flour, 1/4 cup of cornstarch, 1/4 tsp. of sea salt, 1/2 tsp. of garlic powder and 1/4 tsp. of white pepper.

Whisk the egg in a small bowl, then add the rest of the ingredients and whisk until well combined. Refrigerate the batter, covered, for 30 minutes.

Whisk the chilled batter, then use it to coat the pieces of chicken thigh or strips of chicken breast immediately before frying, one at a time, making a batch of two thighs or four strips of chicken breast for each frying.

Add the batter coated pieces of chicken to the 325 degrees F hot peanut oil and fry for four minutes, then remove them to a rack over a baking sheet to cool.

When all chicken pieces have been fried and cooled then put half of them back into the 325 degrees F oil and fry them for 5 minutes, then put them on the rack to drain off excess oil.

When all the thighs or breast strips have been fried a second time the serve the hot fried chicken or keep it in a 180 degrees F warming oven until you are ready to serve it.

Enjoy!

Fried Chicken Sous Vide - ☺♥

The Food Nirvana recipe for Beer Battered Fried Chicken is very good and appropriate for most any kitchen. But what about considering the use of preliminary Sous Vide cooking of the chicken pieces prior to frying? My food science guru, J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, discussed cooking chicken Sous Vide in his book, *The Food Lab*©, though not for frying recipes. That caused me to think about what goes wrong when people fry chicken breast halves from a raw state, namely, by the time the fried chicken breast is cooked through adequately, due to flesh thickness, the meat is dry and the crust overdone. Yet, in the distant past, Harlan Sanders developed a technique for pressure frying chicken that resulted in great fried chicken, pretty much regardless of whether it was a thigh or half a breast. Back then the fast food company, Gino's®, had exclusive use of Sander's process, and the chicken quality was superb. Later, Gino's went bankrupt, for reasons other than chicken, and we saw the startup of Kentucky Fried Chicken® business locations. Alas, I know not what happened but the quality of the fried chicken went downhill and stayed bad. I won't patronize any of those places as their chicken is dry and tough from being overcooked.

Okay, that was then and this is now. Sous Vide cooking wasn't even discovered yet. My point is that one need not use pressure frying to get succulent moist tender full size fried chicken breasts with crust done to perfection. Well, I had to prove that, so I did. Put simply, I followed Kenji's recommendations for cooking chicken pieces Sous Vide at the low temperature of 148 degrees F, but for at least one hour, to guarantee all bacteria is killed and the thick chicken breast halves are fully cooked all the way through. The special advantage, per Kenji, is that keeping the cooking temperature well below the FDA recommended 160 degrees F keeps the protein in the chicken from tightening and squeezing out a lot of water. Also, by using the Sous Vide process it is impossible to overcook the chicken.

What all of this means is that the frying time for chicken pieces cooked Sous Vide is simply that needed to create a nice crust on the outside with the beer batter. That time is roughly six minutes at 360 degrees F. You might experiment with higher oil temperatures to shorten the frying time even more, but do not exceed 375 degrees F. Some moisture is lost from the Sous Vide cooked chicken during frying, but very little, and remember none was lost during the preliminary Sous Vide cooking. The net result is that all the fried chicken pieces, regardless of size, come out perfectly crisp and very tender and moist inside. That is a win-win in every respect. Thus, I simply had to put this recipe into Food Nirvana for those advanced cooks who will use Sous Vide cooking ... even if all they use is the simple food cooler approach described by Kenji, which I describe below. In

short, anybody can do this without buying any special equipment. It all comes down to whether or not the cook cares about perfection.

This recipe is simply the combination of simple Sous Vide cooking of chicken pieces followed by the recipe for beer batter fried chicken. There is nothing complicated to it. It is simple and the results are memorable. The fried chicken is absolutely perfect so I hope you try this recipe.

Here is a short version of making the chicken pieces Sous Vide. Start with fresh or thawed chicken pieces and either vacuum seal them in vacuum sealing bags, without any crowding, or use Ziploc® freezer bags and eliminate virtually all the air by sealing them with the top of each bag very close to the surface of the hot water in the Sous Vide bath. The pressure of the water on the outside of the bag, under water, pushes out the air, except for the very tiny amount that will remain when you seal the top of the bag. But note that you are not to get any water at all into the bag.

Note that as a recipe variation you might have some seasoning(s) of your choice or a light marinade in with the chicken as it is cooking via the Sous Vide process. If you want to do that simply rub the seasoning onto the raw chicken or pour the light marinade into the bag before sealing it.

Use your nice 2 to 3 gallon hard sided food cooler that you take to the beach. Fill it about 3/4 full with hot tap water. Boil about a gallon of water in a pot on your stove. Using a food thermometer, mix enough of the boiling water into the water in the cooler to achieve a temperature of 148 degrees F. Put the bagged chicken into the water and put the lid on the cooler. Check the water temperature every ten minutes and add boiling water as needed to maintain a temperature of 148 degrees F. Cook the chicken for a minimum of one hour. Actually, since it is impossible to overcook it by this process, I recommend one and one half hours if you use the cooler method, just to be certain the chicken is cooked through, in particular thick, large breast halves.

While the chicken is cooking you can make the beer batter as described below in this recipe. You can also get the frying oil hot so there is little delay from the end of the Sous Vide cooking to the starting of the frying. This means you want the oil hot and the Sous Vide chicken ready to dip into the batter you have just made. To do that, dry the outside of the Sous Vide chicken pieces as they will be very wet. That is necessary so that the dredging step in corn starch works properly. You don't want the corn starch to become goeey. You want it to be dry when you dip each chicken piece into the beer batter and then into the hot oil.

Okay, that is the full procedural introduction for making Fried Chicken Sous Vide. Try it ... believe me, you and your loved ones will be delighted with the results.

Everything from this point on in this recipe is essentially identical to the Beer Batter Fried Chicken recipe, with a few appropriate references to handling the Sous Vide cooked chicken pieces.

Ingredients:

2 lbs. of Chicken drumsticks or thighs or wings or split breasts or any combination of those chicken parts

2 extra large eggs

8 oz. of ice cold beer (start with 8 ounces and if necessary add a bit more)

2 ounces of ice cold vodka

1 cup of flour

3/4 tsp. salt

3/4 tsp. black pepper

1/2 tsp. allspice

1 tsp. grated fresh ginger root (Or pre-minced ginger in a jar, available at Asian markets.)

1 cup (or more) of Cornstarch for dredging

2 quarts of soybean or canola oil for frying

A frying or candy thermometer

Equipment of some sort to do the Sous Vide cooking

Directions:

Do the Sous Vide preparation of the raw chicken pieces first per the instructions earlier in this recipe. Do not crowd a lot of raw pieces into one or a few bags. It is smart to use more bags to assure all pieces of chicken get fully cooked.

Pre-warm your oven to 200° F. Put a paper towel covered china plate or wide shallow bowl/serving dish into the oven to later hold the fried chicken and to help keep the pieces warm after they are served.

Put the soybean oil into a wok or into a two gallon pot and heat it to 360° F on medium heat while you are preparing the batter. Check the temperature frequently during heating with an instant read thermometer. If necessary you can adjust the heat to high to get to the right temperature when you are ready to start frying, but keep an eye on the temperature so that it does not exceed 360° F. (Note that the oil can be reused multiple times in the future, until it starts to darken. It should be poured into a separate sealable container through a sieve after it has cooled. Discard everything except the clear oil, and that includes the last part of the oil from the bottom of the pot that has accumulated various kinds of gunk in it from the frying process.)

Whisk the eggs well in a two quart bowl. Chill the eggs in the bowl in the refrigerator for 15 or more minutes. Put the flour and other dry seasoning ingredients in a separate small bowl and put that into the refrigerator for 15 minutes. The idea is to have all batter ingredients really cold prior to combining them into making the batter.

Add the ginger and then the beer and the vodka slowly while whisking gently. It will foam a lot.

Add the chilled dry ingredients mixture together with the egg and beer mixture all at once and mix gently. It is not necessary or desirable to mix until the batter is smooth. Do not mix/whisk for more than about 30 seconds. Moisture variations in different flours may create the need to adjust consistency. The batter should not be thick and it should not be runny. You will know you have the right consistency when a piece of dredged chicken coated with the batter holds a coating thickness of no more than 1/16th of an inch. Less is better as the batter will puff up slightly during frying. You can adjust the consistency if required with beer if it is too thick or with flour if it is too thin. But minimize the amount of mixing time. The basic idea is that you want the batter to be entirely crisp at the end of the frying and if it is too thick from gluten formation the outside will be crisp but the inside of the batter will be doughy.

Dredge each piece of "surface dried Sous Vide cooked chicken" in a bowl of cornstarch, shake off the excess, and dip the chicken piece into the batter using tongs, making sure to coat it completely. Extract the coated piece with the tongs, let the excess batter drip off for a few seconds and then immerse the coated chicken piece directly into the heated oil that is at a temperature of 360° F. In other words, you do each piece one at a time adding each piece to the oil until you have four to six pieces in the oil. Note that the size of the pieces does not matter as you will be frying them all for exactly the same amount of time, six minutes. You will need to clean the tongs after immersing the last piece in a given batch to

remove excess batter. Adjust the heat to maintain an oil temperature around 350° F.

Fry each piece for about six minutes, even large half breast pieces, just long enough for the batter to develop a nice golden color. You don't have to fry with the intent of heating the interior of the pieces of chicken ... for you already cooked it using the Sous Vide approach, so now all you are doing is frying the batter on the surface. Then extract that piece with tongs and let the hot oil drain from it for a few seconds and then place it on a paper towel. Salt the piece immediately while it still has some oil on the surface to hold the salt. Place each completed batch into a 200° F warming oven on a plate or in a bowl to maintain a desirable eating temperature while other batches are being fried. Be sure the oil temperature is monitored and adjusted as necessary so that it is at 360° F when each batch is fried.

Serve the chicken immediately. It is delicious! It is crisp on the outside and moist and tender on the inside. In other words, perfect!

If you want to eat the fried chicken pieces using a dipping sauce then you might make the dipping sauce from the sauce recipe provided at the end of the beer batter fried shrimp recipe. You might also look for Chinese and other dipping sauce recipes on the Internet. Duck sauce available by the quart in supermarkets is a very nice dipping sauce. I have even used Jamaican Green Sauce and it is delicious on the fried chicken.

Recipe Variations: Use 3/4 tsp of garlic powder and 3/4 tsp of dried oregano instead of the ginger. Use Panko bread crumbs instead of corn flakes. Yummy!

Fried Dry Rub Chicken Wings - ☺♥

I wanted to fry chicken wings and then apply a dry rub to them, yet almost all Internet recipes I found replaced frying with baking or air frying, which often are not worth a damn in taste or texture compared to frying the wings in hot oil. But there are some good baking recipes for chicken wings.

Conversely, at times standard ways of making foods are subject to great improvements, like smoking chicken wings on a charcoal grill. Alas, it is now winter where I live, so I will not be using my charcoal grill until the spring, so this recipe lacks the smoking approach and attempts to replace it using hickory flavored salt and powder.

The essence of the one useful recipe I found is to fry the chicken wings twice at different temperatures and then use a dry rub to season them, while they still have a light residue of oil on the surface of the fried wings to hold the dry rub. The method made sense so I decided to try it. It worked.

I did make some good ingredient and amount changes to the Internet recipe. That recipe called for four times as much dry rub as needed! It also used dry mustard instead of hickory flavoring. Okay, ingredient choices are personal, but amount errors reflect carelessness or lack of knowledge, so beware Internet recipes. Compare different ones as a means to identify mistakes and other types of errors.

The result from this modified recipe was delicious! You want to make these fried chicken wings.

You will also want to serve some crisp and cold celery sticks and carrot sticks along with bleu cheese dressing on the side.

Be sure to have ice cold beer as the beverage, and consider frying some potatoes, like Tater Tots® or French fries, to make this sinful meal complete.

Ingredients: (2 adult servings. This recipe makes about 8 pieces of fried wings per serving.)

2 pounds of chicken wings

1 tablespoon of ground smoked paprika

1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper

1 teaspoon of chili powder

2 teaspoons of hickory flavored salt (or sea salt)

1 tablespoon of hickory flavored powder (optional)

1/4 teaspoon of cayenne pepper

1 teaspoon of onion powder

1 teaspoon of garlic powder

1/4 teaspoon of ground white pepper

1/4 teaspoon of ground cumin

6 cups of peanut oil (for frying)

Directions:

Cut the chicken wings in half into drumsticks and ends. Dry the chicken wing pieces with paper towels.

Make the dry rub:

Combine the paprika, black pepper, chili powder, hickory flavored salt, hickory flavored powder (optional), cayenne pepper, onion powder, garlic powder, white pepper and ground cumin in a bowl. Whisk until the dry rub is well mixed.

Fry the chicken wings:

Heat the peanut oil at a depth of two inches in a deep pot over high heat to 300 degrees F.

Fry the chicken wings in two separate batches in the hot peanut oil for 5 minutes per batch. Use tongs to put the partially fried wings from each batch on a dinner plate.

Increase the oil temperature to 350 degrees F.

Fry the hot, partially fried chicken wings in the 350 degrees F oil in two separate batches until the skin is crispy and golden brown, about 5 minutes per batch.

Use tongs to transfer the first completed batch of the fried chicken wings to a large bowl.

Start frying the second batch of wings.

Sprinkle half of the dry rub mixture over the chicken wings from the first batch and toss them with two large forks to coat them evenly.

Complete the frying of the second batch.

Use tongs to put the second batch of the fried chicken wings into the bowl, then sprinkle the other half of the dry rub mixture over them, then use the large forks and toss them to coat them evenly.

Toss all of the chicken wings together in the bowl to distribute the dry rub evenly.

Serve the wings hot, along with the cold beer and some celery sticks and carrot sticks and bleu cheese dressing on the side.

Did you remember to make some fried potatoes on the side, like Tater Tots®: or French fries, to make this sinfully delightful meal complete?

Enjoy!

Gluten Free Fried Chicken Sous Vide - ☺♥

This recipe is one I created so that my grandson, Michael, could eat my fried chicken. He has a gluten allergy so I had to develop a crust recipe that would be delicious, create a great crust, not be oily and not contain any gluten.

As I thought about it I decided to combine the Sous Vide approach to cooking as that keeps the chicken very moist and tender and shortens the amount of time the battered chicken has to fry in hot oil ... thus promoting a crisp but lightly colored crust on the fried chicken after only six minutes or less of frying time.

I succeeded far better than I expected, and at that, the very first time I tried, though I did have to add a whisked egg to my original ingredients to have a batter that coated the chicken well and fried perfectly. I thought my way through combining flours that lacked gluten to achieve good taste and also a good combination for frying. Like me, you can buy the rice and sorghum flours listed below via www.bulkfoods.com and buy the stone ground cornmeal at your local supermarket. Note that the cornmeal is ground so fine it can be considered to be in flour form.

The best part of all is that the fried batter tastes delicious, so those who do not have a gluten allergy won't mind at all. In fact, it will be a real awakening to just how good non-gluten flour mixtures can be in terms of taste.

Here is a short version of making the chicken pieces Sous Vide that you can do at home without any special equipment. Start with fresh or thawed chicken pieces and either vacuum seal them in vacuum sealing bags, one or only a few pieces per bag depending on the size of the piece(s), without any crowding and single thickness, or use Ziploc® freezer bags and eliminate virtually all the air by sealing them with the top very close to the surface of a pot of cold water, into which you have dipped the bag containing one or more chicken pieces, to eliminate the air in the bag.

The pressure of the water on the outside of the bag, under water, pushes out the air, except for the very tiny amount that will remain when you seal the top of the bag. But note that you are not to get any water at all into the bag.

Note that as a recipe variation you might have some seasoning(s) of your choice or a light marinade in with the chicken as it is cooking via the Sous Vide process. If you want to do that simply rub the seasoning onto the raw chicken or pour the light marinade into the bag before sealing it. Also, if you do that you may want to skip the some of the seasoning ingredients shown in the batter recipe below. Your choice.

Boil about a gallon of water in a pot on your stove.

Use your nice 2 to 3 gallon hard sided food cooler that you take to the beach. Fill it about 3/4 full with hot tap water.

Mix enough of the boiling water into the water in the cooler to achieve a temperature of 148 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer to measure the temperature accurately.

Put the bagged/sealed chicken pieces into the water and put the lid on the cooler. Check the water temperature every ten minutes and add boiling water as needed to maintain a temperature of 148 degrees F. Note that the bags of chicken pieces should not float on the surface of the hot water if you have properly eliminated the air in each bag.

Cook the chicken pieces in the cooler for a minimum of one hour, moving the bags around periodically with a long wooden spoon to assure even cooking/exposure to the hot water. Actually, since it is impossible to overcook the chicken by this process, I recommend one and one half hours if you use the cooler method, just to be certain the chicken is cooked through, in particular the thick, large breast halves.

When the Sous Vide cooking is done the chicken will be very moist/wet and sometimes slightly pink in color but it will be fully cooked and completely safe to eat.

Remove the bags from the Sous Vide bath and the chicken pieces from the bags and put them on a few paper towels.

Make the batter and the dredging mixture and then fry the chicken pieces per the directions below, put them on paper towels, salt them and put them into a 150 degrees F warming oven in a paper towel lined large bowl. Why not a higher temperature for the warming oven? Well, you made a point of cooking the chicken below 150 degrees F to keep it moist and tender, so why ruin it, even partially, after frying? Now you know. If your minimum oven temperature is 180 degrees F then follow the special instructions given below in the cooking directions.

The batter in this recipe is great for making fried onion rings to accompany the fried chicken, and there is enough excess batter left over from the chicken battering to coat onion rings. After the chicken is fried and resting in the warming oven, peel and then cut a very large onion into 5/8" thick slices, then separate the slices into rings.

Coat the rings with batter and fry them for two minutes per side or until golden in color. Fry only six rings at a time, ergo, do not crowd the onion rings during frying. Monitor the oil temperature closely so it does not exceed 365 degrees F. Adjust the heat as needed.

Remove the fried onion rings to a paper towel and salt them, and then put them into a separate paper towel lined bowl in the warming oven.

Note: Be sure to have the other dishes you plan to serve at this meal, like coleslaw and fruit salad, prepared and chilled before you fry the chicken.

Ingredients:

3 to 4 lbs. of roasting or frying chicken pieces: (breast halves, drumsticks, thighs, wings)

1 very large yellow or Vidalia onion (optional ... needed only if you plan to make onion rings)

2 to 3 quarts of peanut, canola or corn oil (2 quarts if you fry using a wok, 3 quarts if you fry using a Dutch oven)

For the batter:

1 cup of gluten free flour (1/2 cup rice flour, 1/4 cup sorghum flour, 1/4 cup stone ground cornmeal)

3 tbsp. of cornstarch

2 tsp. of baking powder

1 jumbo egg, whisked in a 2 quart bowl that will be used to hold the batter

2 tsp. of sea salt

1 can (12 ounces) of ice cold beer

1 ounce of ice cold vodka

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 tsp. of paprika

1 tsp. of Sriracha sauce

For the dredging mixture:

1/2 cup of gluten free flour (1/4 cup of rice flour, 1/4 cup of sorghum flour)

2 tbsp. of cornstarch

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 150 degrees F (or to 180 degrees F if that is the minimum temperature for your oven).

Use the oven to pre-warm the serving bowl for the fried chicken, the one for the fried onion rings if you are making them, and also to pre-warm the dinner plates you will use for each guest.

Preheat two to three quarts of peanut or canola or corn oil to 365 degrees F, two quarts if in a wok or three quarts if in a Dutch oven.

Wipe the Sous Vide cooked chicken pieces with a paper towel, lightly, to reduce wetness if needed.

Combine the dredging ingredients in a wide shallow bowl.

Combine and gently whisk together all the dry batter ingredients in a one quart bowl.

Add the beer, the vodka and the Sriracha sauce to the whisked egg in the two quart bowl and whisk gently.

Gradually add the dry ingredients to the egg, beer and vodka mixture while whisking, and whisk until everything is well mixed into a homogenous batter. Note that you should let the mixed batter rest for five minutes and then whisk it again briefly just prior to using it.

Dredge and then batter each piece of chicken and put it into the hot frying oil. I use tongs to move battered pieces from the batter into the hot oil, allowing a few moments for excess batter to drip into the batter bowl before putting the piece into the hot oil.

For larger pieces like breast halves I also use a slotted spoon or a spatula underneath the piece to help support the weight. Otherwise a heavy battered piece might slip out from the tongs and splash into the hot oil, causing a fire hazard at the stove and a burn hazard for the cook ... also a needless mess.

Fry only two pieces at a time if they are chicken breast halves, or four at a time for thighs or drumsticks, or up to six at a time for wings.

Increase the heat as necessary to maintain an oil temperature of at least 350 degrees F, but no more than 365 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer

frequently to check the oil temperature during frying and between batches. Adjust the heat as necessary.

Fry the chicken pieces, regardless of size, for six minutes (+ or -) or until light to medium golden in color, turning the pieces over with tongs every two minutes. Wings will typically take less than six minutes of frying time, but use your own judgment about when any piece of chicken is sufficiently fried, noting that all you have to care about is the doneness of the batter, for the chicken meat was already fully cooked Sous Vide prior to frying.

Use the tongs, and for large breast pieces a spatula or slotted spoon also, to help support the weight, to remove the fried chicken pieces from the hot oil, allowing a few seconds for oil to drip from a piece of chicken back into the hot oil. Place the fried chicken pieces on paper towels to drain residual oil and immediately salt them.

Put the chicken pieces into the 150 degrees F warming oven. If your oven has a minimum temperature setting of 180 degrees F then keep the door partially/halfway open to retard the heating/keep the temperature well below 180 degrees F. Place the bowl(s) on a middle shelf.

Repeat the battering and frying steps for the rest of the chicken pieces, remembering to whisk the batter lightly before using it for each batch.

Serve, hopefully along with the delicious fried onion rings and whatever lighter vegetable and/or fruit dishes you made for dinner. You will be very popular. You will receive many compliments.

Be sure to have ice cold beer or ice cold sodas as the beverage for this meal.

Hot Wings - ☺♥

I figure most of us have tried hot wings at some time. They come in so many names and varieties due to restaurants and frozen food companies trying to outdo each other that the result is mostly confusion. Even within a restaurant you may find half a dozen different degrees of heat or other flavors. Seldom have I tasted any wings in restaurants or prepared commercially that were worth talking about. In short, the very best wings are those made at home by true aficionados who have been fortunate enough to find or create a great recipe. Always make them fresh.

My recipe is a great and simple one I developed after thinking about what a hot wing should be like. First, the cooked wing must be crisp on the outside and very moist and tender on the inside, which means it will be deep fried, usually from fresh raw chicken, though vacuum sealed frozen and thawed raw chicken wings are okay too. That eliminates all commercially available coated processed wings from consideration. They will never be crisp unless you bake the *!#\$ out of them and in so doing make the interior dry and tough instead of moist and tender. Second, the sauce used to flavor the wing should be light in terms of thickness or viscosity else you will taste only the sauce. This means the fried chicken wing itself has a lot of flavor that should not be lost to have the best experience, so the sauce has to be one that complements the taste of the wing.

How do I know my recipe is among the very best? (Whoops! Read on ...). I get rave reviews and a lot of my hot wings disappear in a hurry. My sauce is designed to accommodate every preference from mild to very hot. I do not make a sweet sauce so if that is what you want then look elsewhere.

But ... Alas! Today I made hot wings using Kenji Lopez-Alt's favorite recipe. His double frying technique is far better than my single frying. He does a first frying at 225 to 250 degrees F, for about 20 minutes, then he cools the wings to room temperature, then he fries them a second time at 400 degrees F for five to ten minutes. Outstandingly crisp outside and tender and moist inside! Kenji even uses the same sauce that I have been using for many years. I'm happy. My sweetheart Peggy and I just demolished a large serving bowl of wings made Kenji's way!

The instructions in this recipe are very thorough so that you will have excellent and uniform results in a safe environment. Follow the procedural instructions carefully.

The raw chicken wings should be purchased at a good supermarket where they have not been commercially processed into a tightly packed water logged clear plastic heat sealed pack. The wings should be loose in traditional foam and plastic wrap packaging so you can see what you are buying. Buy very large wings if you can. I refuse to buy the tightly packed type of wings, available at places like Costco®, because they have been water processed. You get ripped off on weight and the product is inferior for deep frying.

Oh, before I forget, I have a few other things to say about specific ingredients. I much prefer Texas Pete's Hot Sauce® compared to McIlhenny's Tabasco Sauce®, for I want hot pepper flavor without too much vinegar overtone. And I also much prefer peanut oil for frying the wings. It doesn't break down at the recommended frying temperature and it imparts a nice flavor to the wings and it can be reused. Note that you can cover and cool the oil after use and then strain it into a sealable container and reuse it up to three times before discarding it. Thus, the cost of the oil does not have to break your budget. Of course, the better way to buy peanut oil at the best price is at Costco® in a bulk container, or from Amazon®.

Well, that's enough of my "thou shalt" instructions. Try my (Nah, use Kenji's method!) recipe and let me know what you think. But note that I prefer peanut oil for taste, not canola oil.

Ingredients: (Makes about 8 large chicken wings [16 pieces] or more if the wings are not large)

4 lbs. of large, fresh chicken wings (cut into flats and drumettes)

½ stick of butter

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

2 to 3 tbsp. of rice vinegar (based on how much hot sauce you decide to use below)

1/2 to one cup of Texas Pete's Hot Sauce® (mild or medium or hot, your preference)

½ to 1 gallon of peanut oil (depends on the size of the deep fryer or pot)

Directions:

Cut each whole chicken wing in half at the primary joint with a large butcher knife on a wooden cutting board. Dry the wing pieces with paper towels.

I'm leaving my old recipe directions in place for now, for old time's sake, as it was very good ... but not as good as Kenji's. So, you can read below but the right way is to pre-fry the cut wing pieces for 20 minutes in two or more batches at 225 to 250 degrees F, let them cool to room temperature (I cheat and chill them quickly in my enclosed porch in the winter) and then bring the oil temperature up to 400 degrees F and fry the wing pieces in two or more batches for 5 to 10 minutes. Then drain hot oil off as you remove them from the oil.

Put each completed batch of fried wing pieces into a large bowl that has a paper towel under each batch to capture/eliminate excess frying oil. Keep the bowl in a 200°F oven, initially before the first batch is fried and then after each batch is placed on a fresh paper towel in the bowl. This will keep the fried wing pieces hot and crisp.

Use whatever sauce you choose at the table. Serve celery sticks and blue cheese dressing. Have lots of cold beer. Done.

You can read the rest of this recipe for good general procedural information if you want, but if you follow the instructions in the last four paragraphs you are done.

General Procedural Information: (for review only)

Heat the peanut oil in your deep fryer or in a six quart or larger pot to 365°F. The top of the oil in the pot should be at least four inches below the top of the pot. Deep fryers typically have minimum and maximum oil levels shown on the stainless steel frying container. Always use high heat when you are frying in a pot unless the oil temperature temporarily exceeds 365°F, which it should not do if you are paying attention. If it does, turn off the heat and wait until the temperature returns to 365°F. Do not under any circumstances attempt to move the hot oil to chill it, for that is a disaster waiting to happen.

You must use a frying or candy thermometer for careful temperature control. Do not try to guess. Uniform results and safety considerations demand using a thermometer. Typically there will be a wait time after frying each batch of wings of one to three minutes while the oil is reheating to 365° F. You can speed up this process by mostly covering the pot (except for the thermometer area) with a lid or anti-splatter screen.

Cut each whole chicken wing in half at the primary joint with a large butcher knife on a wooden cutting board. Dry the wing pieces with paper towels.

Prepare the sauce per the instructions below and keep it in a 200°F oven. Do this after frying the wings so that you are not distracted from the sauce preparation,

which can lead to ruining the sauce, i.e., burned butter. Just recently I tried mixing the cold ingredients with the melted butter and leaving the sauce cold even for use on the hot wings. It worked very well, and any leftover sauce can be refrigerated without separating ... nice.

Fry the wings in batches of eight to ten pieces if you are using a gallon of oil; otherwise adjust the number of wings based on the amount of oil you use. The idea is that once the room temperature wings are in the hot oil you don't want them to cool the oil below 340°F.

I introduce all the pieces of wings for each batch into the oil at once. I use a five inch diameter long handled nearly flat circular ladle to hold them and dispense them so that the initial "boiling" up of the oil doesn't splatter me with hot oil. This is far superior to trying to put pieces of chicken into the hot oil a few at a time. Note that the four inch space above the unheated oil is what keeps the hot bubbling oil from overflowing the pot at the beginning of each batch of frying. I also use a screen cover when I fry food in a pot to keep the oil from splattering out onto me or onto the stove. Deep fryers have covers or lids to accomplish that purpose. Oddly, I used to use my deep fryer, but I stopped because the whole process is easier using a large pot, and the cleanup afterwards is so much easier if a pot is used.

Fry the wings for the amount of time based on their size. Small wings only need about eight to ten minutes frying time. Large wings need about 11 to 12 minutes. You will know what is right because if you fry them too long they will look and taste too dry. If you don't fry them long enough they will not be crisp. Experiment to get the best results and before long you will automatically know what to do in your frying environment to get the best results. But always, and I do mean always, use a kitchen timer to alert you when each batch is done. Don't "wing it."

Remove the fried wings from the hot oil with metal tongs, one at a time. Let each piece drain oil off back into the pot for a few seconds. If you are using a deep fryer, then lift the basket from the hot oil and hang it in a dripping position for half a minute.

Put each batch of fried wing pieces into a large bowl that has a paper towel under each batch to capture/eliminate excess frying oil. Keep the bowl in a 200°F oven, initially before the first batch is fried and then after each batch is placed on a fresh paper towel in the bowl. This will keep the fried wing pieces hot and crisp.

After all batches are fried, remember to turn off the heat under the oil. Now is the best time to make the sauce per the instructions below. Then remove the paper towels from the hot bowl and serve the wings as they are along with small cups of the sauce. Your guests can pour the amount of sauce they want over each portion of the fried wings. There is no advantage in mixing all the wings with the sauce prior to serving them. Alternatively, you can keep the sauce in one container and have each guest dip each wing into the sauce as they fill their plate. Some folks will want additional salt so have a shaker of sea salt available.

Making the sauce:

Melt the butter in a small saucepan on medium heat. Add the hot sauce and stir until well blended. Add the vinegar and the salt and continue to stir on low heat until the sauce is completely uniform. When it begins to bubble as it approaches boiling temperature it is done. Keep the sauce in the pan and place the pan in the 200°F oven to keep it hot, or, use it immediately if all the wings have been fried. The sauce will be mildly to medium hot in terms of seasoning the wings based on how much hot sauce you used.

What about milder or hotter sauces? For a hotter sauce add one half to one tbsp. habanero sauce to your sauce while you are cooking it. For a milder sauce increase the amount of butter from ½ stick to ¾ stick or 1 stick. It really is that simple. Kids can enjoy the mild stuff.

What about leftovers? Why do you have leftovers? My advice is to throw them into the trash can. The sauce will not stay uniform if it is cooked and then refrigerated and then reheated as it will not form a proper emulsion upon reheating, but if it is kept cold originally it is fine as a leftover. The fried wings themselves taste lousy upon reheating, especially if a microwave oven is used. Heating them in a regular oven is somewhat better but I think they come out really bad compared to how they tasted when freshly prepared. Why eat bad wings? Or, you can refry the wings and they will be just fine ... but that is a lot of work for a few leftovers.

Enjoy!

Light Batter Fried Chicken Drumsticks - ☺♥

Gluten formation in wheat flour based batters can result in fried chicken with a coating of fried batter that is too thick and likely not crispy all the way through. One way to combat gluten formation in batters is to reduce the amount of all purpose wheat flour and use some rice flour or potato flour or corn flour, plus cornstarch. That will create a lighter, less viscous batter, with a limited amount of gluten. But that suggests doing lower temperature frying at 325 degrees F as the optimal temperature, combined with double frying in 7 minute periods, and limiting the number of drumsticks put into the hot oil to four per batch. Why? Less moisture is lost from the chicken during low temperature frying so it comes out juicy and tender beneath the crispy fried batter, which is assured by doing a double frying.

The drumsticks are given the initial frying and placed on a cooling rack over a baking sheet to cool to about 120 degrees F. This means all of the drumsticks get the initial frying and cooling, and while the second batch is cooling the first batch is given a second 7 minutes of frying, etc.

The net result of the lower temperature double frying method is to have a very crisp piece of fried chicken of light to medium gold color instead of a darker color that could result from single frying at a higher temperature like 360 degrees F or even higher. The result from low temperature frying is also chicken meat under the crispy fried batter that is very tender and juicy, not tough and dry. You want to make fried chicken using this method.

Here is a nice little extra benefit ... Why not use your leftover batter to make fried onion rings? You will need about a pint of batter to coat the rings from one large onion. Simply peel and cut a large sweet onion into 1/2" to 3/4" thick rings, separated, and dredge the onion rings in leftover cornstarch, in a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, closing it and shaking it, then put the dredged onion rings on a plate. Add 1/4 cup of cornmeal to the leftover batter and whisk it. If it is too thick then add some cold water and whisk the batter. Repeat that step if necessary. Maintain the temperature of the peanut oil at 325 degrees F on low heat, while coating about six onion rings individually with the batter. Put each one into the hot oil individually with tongs after allowing excess batter to drip back into the bowl of batter. Plan on frying the onion rings in one continuous batch, starting with six or more battered onion rings and adding additional battered onion rings to the hot oil when you have removed ones that are done frying. Adjust the heat as necessary to maintain the oil temperature at 325 degrees F. Check the doneness of the rings after three to four minutes of frying, turning them over a few times with tongs, and remove them individually when

they are a medium gold in color. Put the fried onion rings on a paper towel lined plate, salting each layer. Put the completed fried onion rings into the 200 degrees F warming oven used for the drumsticks, and serve the onion rings when you serve the fried drumsticks.

If you decide you want to make the fried onion rings then I suggest increasing the batter ingredients shown below by about 50 percent.

Ingredients: (makes 3 to 4 medium size servings of two drumsticks each)

2 to 3 lbs. of Chicken drumsticks (six to eight drumsticks), washed and dried lightly with paper towels

1 extra large or jumbo egg

6 oz. of cold beer (start with 6 ounces and as necessary add more)

1/4 cup of cornstarch for the batter

1/2 cup of all purpose wheat flour

1/2 cup of white rice flour or potato flour or corn flour

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 tsp. of smoked paprika

1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

1 tsp. of toasted sesame oil

1 cup (or more) of cornstarch for dredging the raw drumsticks

2 to 3 quarts of peanut oil for frying (you can reuse peanut oil multiple times if you filter out fried material after the oil has cooled, before storing it)

An instant read frying thermometer

1 large sweet onion, peeled and cut into thick slices of rings, then separate the individual rings from each other (optional)

Directions:

Prepare any food items you plan to serve with the fried drumsticks, except for onion rings if you decide to make them.

Set the oven temperature at 200 degrees F.

Wash the drumsticks briefly in warm water and then dry them lightly using paper towels. Set them aside, separated from each other.

Whisk the egg in a 2 quart bowl, then add the beer and whisk again.

Add the flours and the 1/4 cup of cornstarch and whisk.

Add the dry seasonings and the sesame oil and whisk until everything is well combined.

Refrigerate the bowl of batter for 30 minutes.

Put the one cup or more of cornstarch for dredging the drumsticks into a wide, shallow bowl.

Dredge the drumsticks individually in the cornstarch and put them on a plate.

Heat the peanut oil in a 2 gallon pot on high heat to 325 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer.

Once the oil is at 320 degrees, reduce the heat to low.

Check the batter and if it is too thick (it likely will be too thick) add an ounce or two of beer and whisk the batter.

If necessary, repeat the beer addition and whisking until you have a light viscosity batter that when used on a piece of dredged raw drumstick will have/keep a thickness of about 1/16" before frying.

Doing one drumstick at a time, use tongs to put a dredged drumstick into the batter, making sure it is completely coated, then use the tongs to hold the small end of the drumstick and let excess batter return to the batter bowl, for about ten seconds.

Add the drumstick to the hot peanut oil.

Repeat the above step for batter coating three more drumsticks and adding them to the hot oil.

Adjust the heat as necessary to maintain a temperature close to but not above 325 degrees F.

After two to three minutes of frying, check the drumsticks with tongs to make sure they are not stuck together. If any are stuck together, then force them to separate using the tongs and the interior surface of the 2 gallon pot.

After seven minutes of frying the first batch of drumsticks, use tongs to remove them from the hot oil and put them on a cooling rack above a paper towel lined baking sheet.

Start the second batch of drumsticks with batter coating and then frying, and then put them on the cooling rack.

Take the drumsticks from the first batch and put all of them into the hot oil and fry them for seven minutes.

Remove the drumsticks from the oil to the cooling rack and salt them generously.

Repeat the second frying step for the second batch of drumsticks and put them on the cooling rack and salt them generously.

Put all of the drumsticks into a paper towel lined serving bowl and keep them in the 200 degrees F oven for 20 minutes.

Are you making the optional fried onion rings? If so, maintain the temperature of the peanut oil at 325 degrees F, then follow the directions given earlier in this recipe.

Remember to turn off the heat under the peanut oil when you are done frying. You can filter and save the oil an hour or more later after it has cooled, after you have enjoyed your fried drumsticks.

Serve the drumsticks along with whatever other food items you have prepared.

Serve ice cold beer to your adult guests, and cold carbonated soft drinks to young guests.

Enjoy!

Mild Chicken Curry with Basmati Rice - ☺♥

One of the Eastern dishes I always enjoyed was a creamy mild yellow chicken curry served over basmati rice. Today Peggy and I were discussing what to make for dinner, I suggested that dish, only to discover I had never put a recipe for it into Food Nirvana. That oversight is being corrected now, due to a nice Food Network® recipe that I've modified to suit our tastes. Basically I have reduced the amount of cayenne pepper by half and doubled the amount of heavy cream, and at Peggy's request I have made the chicken a mixture of thighs and breast halves with the skin on all pieces, which increased a few ingredient amounts slightly. I also provide directions for making the basmati rice.

You might note that the addition of all the vegetables makes this truly a one dish meal that is nutritionally complete. You might want to serve a light chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio. If you want to add texture, color and taste variety to the meal you can make the recipe for Oriental Salad found in Food Nirvana ... and it is also delicious.

This recipe produces a delicious and well spiced curry but it is not as yellow in color as what I was served years ago and, thankfully, it is not hot in terms of seasoning. I suspect the reason for the color is the darkening effect of browning the chicken pieces (instead of using pre-cooked chicken pieces), plus the use of ground cinnamon instead of temporarily using a cinnamon stick. I suggest that you experiment some time after making this recipe, as given, to create what pleases you best. Have fun. Be creative.

Ingredients: (makes three to four servings)

2 tablespoons of vegetable oil

2 tablespoons of butter

4 chicken thighs with the skin on

2 halves of chicken breast with the skin on, deboned

1 tsp. of Sea Salt

1 tsp. of white pepper

1 cup of chopped sweet onion

3 cloves of garlic, diced

1 tbsp. of mild yellow curry powder

1/4 teaspoon of cayenne pepper

1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon

1 teaspoon of ground cumin

2 carrots, peeled and sliced 1/8th inch thick on the diagonal

1 1/2 cups of chicken broth

1 cup of fresh broccoli florets

1/2 cup of heavy cream

3/4 cup of frozen peas (let the peas thaw while you are making this recipe)

2 cups of uncooked basmati rice

1 quart of chicken broth (for cooking the rice)

Directions:

Heat the oven to a temperature of 180 degrees F to keep different food components and dishes warm until the meal is served. This practice enhances the quality of the eating experience by keeping warm food warm for the duration of the meal.

Note that you do the opposite for foods like salads by keeping the salads and dishes to be used with the salad in the refrigerator until serving time.

Prepare the rice first and when it is completed keep it covered in the 180 degrees F warming oven.

To make the rice, bring the quart of chicken broth to a boil in a two quart saucepan with a lid on high heat.

Stir in the uncooked basmati rice, cover the saucepan and move it to the lowest output burner on your stove.

Cook the rice on very low heat for fifteen to twenty minutes, checking it for doneness at fifteen minutes, which means all of the liquid has been absorbed by the rice without causing the rice to stick to the bottom of the saucepan.

If all the liquid has been absorbed the rice is done. If not, continue cooking the rice, covered, for no more than five additional minutes.

Note that actual cooking time needed depends on whether the rice you use was parboiled before you purchased it. Parboiling creates a rice that will cook in a

shorter period of time than rice that has not been parboiled, by at least a difference of five minutes. Typical types of rice that have not been parboiled can require a cooking time from 22 minutes for some types of white rice to up to 45 minutes for raw brown rice.

Remove the covered saucepan from the heat. Put the rice into a 1 1/2 quart bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and put it into the warming oven.

Place china dinner plates or wide shallow bowls into the warming oven based on the number of people who will be eating the meal.

Now proceed to make the mild chicken curry.

First, if you are using chicken breast halves that have bone included then debone them now by simply cutting the bone away from the flesh. Discard the bones.

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet on medium heat and stir in the butter to make it melt and combine with the oil.

Season the chicken pieces with the salt and pepper.

Cook the chicken pieces in the oil/butter mixture on low to medium heat, skin side down, with the skillet covered with a lid, until they are golden brown.

Turn the chicken pieces over and continue to cook them, covered, until they are golden brown on the second side.

Reduce the heat to low and continue cooking the chicken with the skillet covered for 20 minutes, turning the pieces over every four minutes. Then, turn off the heat.

Put the chicken pieces on a large wooden cutting board and cut them into bite sized pieces, removing all bone, gristle and any excess fat but not the browned skin. Do not be concerned if you notice some undercooked areas of flesh as the coming cooking steps will eliminate that problem.

Next, put the bite size chicken pieces into a three or four quart bowl and place it into the warming oven.

Stir the onion pieces into the skillet and cook them on low heat until they are translucent. Add the diced garlic, stir, and cook for one minute. Stir in the curry, cayenne pepper, cinnamon and cumin and cook on very low heat until the aromas of the spices are released.

Stir in the carrot pieces and toss them in the oil/butter/onion/seasonings mixture to coat them.

Add the 1 1/2 cups of chicken broth and bring the skillet contents to a simmer on high heat.

Put the bite size chicken pieces back into the skillet and stir in the broccoli florets. Cover the skillet and simmer the contents for 15 minutes on low to medium heat.

Stir in the cream and the thawed peas. Cover the skillet and heat the curry to a simmer and let the ingredients cook at a simmer for about three minutes. It is not necessary or desirable to bring the curry to a boil.

Put the completed chicken curry back into the large bowl used for the chicken pieces.

Serve the curry with the warm basmati rice on the pre-warmed dinner plates or bowls.

Let each person season their portion of curry to taste with sea salt and white pepper.

Remember the chilled wine! And be extra pleased if you made the Oriental Salad.

Enjoy!

Ray's Chicken Stew - ☺♥

This recipe is a great variation of the Food Nirvana Braised Chicken recipe, designed to create a savory tomato and tarragon based stew with tender, moist, fall off the bone delicious chicken.

The stew is very savory due to the use of the tomatoes, fresh tarragon, thyme, rosemary and freshly sliced leek. It is best served with a carbohydrate side dish like rice or noodles. The bacon gives the stew just the right amount of smoky undertone to set it off.

You might want to serve warm crusty rolls or crusty bread and butter. Most any beverage will be okay but a chilled Pinot Grigio wine is very nice with this meal.

I know you will really enjoy this dish. Peggy and I both loved it.

Ingredients:

4 chicken drumsticks

2 chicken thighs

2 chicken breast halves, each cut into four pieces

½ stick of butter

1, 28 oz. can of peeled plum tomatoes and juice, chopped

4 cups of chicken broth, divided

1 large leek cut into slices 1/4" thick

2 cups of chopped kale or fresh spinach

2 cloves of garlic, minced

2 tsp. Sea salt

1 tsp. Black pepper

4 tbsp. of fresh tarragon

1 tsp. of dried rosemary

6 fresh sprigs of thyme

2 strips of dry cured hickory smoked bacon

1/4 cup of all purpose flour

Directions:

Put all the ingredients except the flour and one cup of the chicken broth into a large, high sided skillet with a glass cover. Heat on medium heat. When the contents are boiling reduce the heat to low, and simmer.

Continue to cook at a low simmer, covered, for one hour.

Remove and discard the thyme sprigs.

Mix the flour with the one cup of the reserved chicken broth, then add that mixture to the stew with stirring.

Bring the stew to a boil on medium heat and then simmer the stew for fifteen minutes on low heat.

Pour the completed stew into a large serving dish and keep it warm in a 180°F oven.

Make the side dishes for your meal.

Enjoy! And I know you will!

Roast Turkey - ☺♥

This is a standard set of instructions for times and temperature for different turkey weights. What makes it good is the information I provide about the combination of the brining process and the roasting with the breast side down ... and no internal stuffing. Of course, I also provide the recipe for great turkey gravy.

Brine a thawed turkey, below 40°F, in a solution of one cup of kosher salt per gallon of water. Keep the turkey submerged. A five gallon plastic pail is a good choice of container for a bird 12 lbs. or less. For larger birds I use a cooler, lots of brine and non-reactive weights to hold the turkey under the brine. Brine for one to two days based on the size of the turkey (12 to 24 lbs.), with the giblets removed first. Oh, do not brine for longer than two days, else the saltiness will ruin the taste of the bird.

Roast the turkey at 325°F breast side down on a roasting rack in a large roaster to assure getting moist tender breast meat. Invert the turkey for the last thirty minutes of roasting time to get a golden surface on the breast skin. Follow the chart below for roasting times.

Whole Turkey Cooked at 325° F

Weight	8 to 12 pounds	12 to 14 pounds	14 to 18 pounds	18 to 20 pounds	20 to 24 pounds	24 to 30 pounds
Unstuffed	2¾ to 3 hours	3 to 3¾ hours	3¾ to 4¼ hours	4¼ to 4½ hours	4½ to 5 hours	5 to 5¼ hours
Stuffed	3 to 3½ hours	3½ to 4 hours	4 to 4¼ hours	4¼ to 4¾ hours	4¾ to 5¼ hours	5¼ to 6¼ hours

The giblets can be simmered for one hour in water and the water used later when making the gravy. We chop the cooked giblets and feed the pieces to our cats, who love them.

To make the gravy, first remove the fat from the roasting pan using a baster or by pouring off the liquid into a large bowl and using a ladle to skim the fat off the top. We lucky folks use a clear plastic separator container with a spout that comes from the bottom of the container, which makes fat removal very simple, as you can pour out the juice yet leave the fat in the separator. Return the defatted juice to the roaster.

The next step calls for the addition of chicken broth. As roast turkey is typically served with mashed potatoes the best way to get the chicken broth is to cook the raw potato pieces in chicken broth and then use that broth when making the gravy. That accomplishes capture of some vitamin C from the potatoes and also potato starch and flavor. In short, this method of cooking the potatoes leads to superior tasting mashed potatoes and superior gravy in taste and consistency.

Add one to two 14 oz. cans of chicken broth and heat to simmering temperature while using a wooden spoon or spatula to deglaze the pan and capture the drippings to help flavor the gravy. Adjust the volume with water or chicken broth based on the size of the turkey and the amount of drippings. Reserve one cup of water or chicken broth and mix in it a combination of flour and corn starch, perhaps two tablespoons of each for gravy for a 12 lb. turkey and proportionately more if the liquid volume for the gravy is higher.

Mix the flour and corn starch and water completely and then add it all at once to the gravy that has been somewhat cooled by the addition of the water/chicken broth. Bring the temperature to a boil on high heat while constantly stirring the gravy with a wooden spoon. Turn off the heat and adjust the seasoning as shown below.

If you brined the turkey do not under any circumstances use salt in the gravy. Use only pepper. If you did not brine the turkey use one teaspoon of salt along with ½ teaspoon of pepper and taste the gravy. Adjust as necessary based on the quantity of gravy prepared.

The time you spent making the gravy is the amount of time the roasted turkey needed to rest prior to carving. Keep the gravy in one or more gravy boats in a warm oven while carving the turkey. Serve and enjoy.

Smokey Dry Rub Chicken Wings - ☺♥

I decided to try baking chicken wings instead of frying them, while using a dry rub instead of later using only a dip, a rub, or a sauce. I saw a nice recipe on the Internet, modified it a fair amount, and had at it. What a good decision!

My sweetheart Peggy and I are highly pleased with the results, so it is obvious this recipe belongs in Food Nirvana. I hope you make these wings for they are excellent and bound to please your family and guests.

Ingredients:

1 pound of chicken wings separated into drumsticks and flats

2 tablespoons of brown sugar

1 ½ teaspoons of sweet smoked paprika

1 ½ teaspoons of smokehouse flavored salt

1 teaspoon of smoke flavor seasoning powder

¾ teaspoon of garlic powder

¾ teaspoon of chili powder

½ teaspoon of dry mustard powder

¼ teaspoon of onion powder

1/8 teaspoon of cayenne pepper

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (or to 375 degrees F if you are using a convection oven, which is the best way to make wings in an oven)

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and place a wire baking rack on top.

Place the wing pieces on paper towels and cover them with paper towels and press together to thoroughly remove surface moisture from the wings. Repeat if necessary.

Mix the dry ingredients together in a gallon Ziploc® freezer bag. Shake to mix.

Put all of the wing pieces into the freezer bag, seal the bag and toss the pieces to coat them.

Evenly place the dry rub coated wing pieces on the baking rack.

Bake the wings for 30 minutes.

Turn the wings over and bake at 350 degrees F until they are crisp and golden brown, about 15 minutes.

Serve and enjoy, along with a cold beverage like beer.

You will be very pleased.

Turkey Gravy - ☺♥

Here is a wonderful and slightly different recipe for great turkey gravy ... enjoy! I described the use of chicken or turkey broth in cooking potatoes in the recipe for roasting a turkey. If you are making mashed potatoes to accompany the roast turkey then use chicken or turkey broth as the cooking liquid for the raw pieces of potato. Then use that broth as the ingredient shown in this recipe for chicken or turkey broth. It is a great way to enhance gravy flavor and consistency. All it takes is a minor amount of pre-planning.

Ingredients:

Pan Juices from the turkey and roasting pan

1/2 cup of dry white wine

1/2 cup of flour

2 tbsp. cornstarch

5 cups of turkey or chicken broth

1 tsp. of kosher salt

1/4 tsp. of black pepper

Directions:

Strain the pan juices into a fat separator or bowl, let stand for 10 minutes.

Skim and discard the fat from the surface, set the juices aside.

Place the empty roasting pan over 2 burners over medium high heat.

Add the wine, salt and pepper and stir and scrape to dissolve any pan drippings stuck to the pan for about 2 minutes.

Mix the flour and cornstarch with one cup of the cold chicken or turkey broth in a separate bowl.

Add the other four cups of the broth to the skillet, then all of the reserved juices. Mix well.

Stir and then add the flour and cornstarch mixture to the skillet and mix well. I like to use both flour and cornstarch because the result is guaranteed to be perfect.

Bring to a boil, stirring constantly, then reduce the heat and simmer gently for one minute while stirring.

Strain just before serving into a serving bowl or into two large gravy boats.

Stir Fried Chicken and Bok Choy - ☺♥

I was looking for a recipe using bok choy in a stir fry and one from the Internet looked pretty good. But before I was through making changes a whole lot of ingredients and procedures were modified to better reflect good Chinese cooking. It was time to make the dish and enjoy it.

Done! And I am quite pleased. Now Food Nirvana has a chicken stir fry ... a very nice chicken stir fry. In fact, the chicken comes out extra tender due to marinating it in baking soda and water.

I have one item to point out ... do not overcook the vegetables when you first stir fry them. If they become limp they are overcooked in this recipe.

Ingredients: (makes 4 generous servings)

For the Rice:

1 1/2 cups of uncooked basmati or jasmine rice

3 cups of chicken broth

For the Marinade:

1/2 teaspoon of baking soda

1/3 cup of water

For the Sauce:

2 tablespoons of honey

1/2 teaspoon of freshly grated ginger

1 large clove of garlic, minced

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of white pepper

1 tablespoon of toasted sesame oil

1 tablespoon of oyster sauce

2 tablespoons of dark soy sauce

1 tablespoon of light soy sauce

1 tablespoon of rice wine vinegar

1 tablespoon of Shaoxing cooking wine

1 teaspoon of cornstarch

For the Stir Fry:

3 tablespoons of canola oil, divided

2 tablespoons of Shaoxing cooking wine

2 pounds of boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut cross grain into 1/4" thick slices, then cut the slices into strips 1/4" wide

1 pound head of bok choy, washed and cut into 1 inch strips (including the green parts)

2 large carrots peeled in strips, then cut the strips in half

6 scallions (both white and green parts), diced

2 tablespoons (or more) of toasted sesame seeds

1/4 cup of chopped fresh cilantro (optional)

Directions:

Pre-heat the serving dish you plan to use for the stir fry in a 180 degrees F warming oven. Similarly, pre-heat wide, shallow individual serving dishes you will provide for your guests.

Make the marinade of baking soda and water in a two quart bowl. Cut the chicken breasts cross wise into 1/4" x 1/4" thick strips, removing/discarding any fat or other waste. Mix the strips of chicken with the baking soda marinade and let the mixture sit in the bowl for 30 minutes, stirring briefly every ten minutes.

Prepare the rice by first bringing the chicken broth to a boil in a two quart saucepan. Add the rice and stir it, then cover the saucepan with a tight fitting lid. Move the saucepan to the smallest burner on the stove and set it to the lowest heat. Let the rice steam for 15 minutes, then remove it from the heat and keep it covered for five minutes. Put the rice into a serving dish, cover the dish with plastic wrap, and put it into the warming oven.

In a one quart mixing bowl, whisk the honey, ginger, garlic, sea salt, white pepper, oyster sauce, sesame oil, vinegar, one tablespoon of Shaoxing wine, the

cornstarch and dark and light soy sauces together until well combined. Set the mixture aside to add to the stir-fry later.

Heat the wok over high heat until it begins to smoke.

Heat two tablespoons of canola oil in the wok. Add the marinated chicken strips and stir fry them for 3 to 4 minutes, or until they are cooked through. Lower the heat to medium and then set the chicken strips aside in a bowl.

Add one tablespoon of canola oil to the wok. Let the wok heat for two minutes.

Add the bok choy, carrots, and scallions. Add the two tablespoons of Shaoxing wine to the wok around the perimeter of the vegetables. Stir fry continuously for 3 to 4 minutes to cook the vegetables until they are crisp-tender, but do not overcook them.

Put the stir fried chicken strips into the wok and mix everything together.

Stir the sauce briefly to mix in the cornstarch a second time.

Set the heat to medium high.

Add the sauce to the wok mixture and stir fry for 2 minutes to coat the chicken and vegetables with the sauce and to slightly thicken it.

Serve the stir fry in the pre-warmed serving bowl, then in the pre-warmed individual serving dishes over rice, with a sprinkling of (optional) cilantro and toasted sesame seeds.

Provide a small bowl of dark soy sauce for guests who may want additional seasoning.

A nice chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio is a fine beverage to accompany this meal. Also, serve glasses of ice water.

Enjoy!

Stuffing for Roast Turkey - ☺♥

I became convinced a long time ago that stuffing a turkey was foolish because it increased the required roasting time and simply dried out the turkey flesh. Thus, I always recommend baking the stuffing separately in an ovenproof glass casserole. There is no lost flavor. Just do it.

Ingredients: (Eight to ten servings)

One and one half regular size [22 to 24 oz.] loaves of bread cut into cubes (about 25 cubes per slice)

½ cup of Butter

1 1/2 cups of diced Onion

1 1/2 cups of diced Celery

1 teaspoon of Salt

1/2 teaspoon of Pepper

2 teaspoons of a mixture of equal parts of dried Sage, Savory, Thyme and Marjoram, or, 1/2 tsp. of each

14 oz. can of Chicken Broth, with the broth heated to simmering temperature in a saucepan

Directions:

Fresh bread should be used for a soft and moist stuffing while dried bread is best for a lighter stuffing. Bread cubes can be dried either on a cookie sheet in a 180°F oven for fifteen to thirty minutes or on a plate in a microwave oven.

Melt the butter in a skillet.

Sauté the onion and celery in the butter until they are softened.

Add the seasonings and mix well

Add the skillet contents to the bread cubes in a large mixing bowl and mix well by hand.

For moist stuffing, add a small amount of hot chicken broth (you decide how much) and mix well. Do not make soggy stuffing by adding too much chicken broth.

Put the stuffing into a 13" by 9" by 2" ovenproof glass casserole.

Bake the stuffing for 30 minutes at 325°F and check for doneness. If it is the way you like it then it is done. Otherwise bake it for 15 minutes longer and check it again, but do not exceed one hour total baking time or you will have very dry stuffing.

Turkey Pot Pie - ☺♥

The world of pot pies is something that seems to have gone away for most home chefs, and that is a real shame. Supermarkets always have a few brands and varieties of frozen pot pies of the single serving variety, and now and then you might find large pot pies refrigerated but not frozen in chains like Market Basket®. As you might guess the small frozen pot pies tend to be all gravy, typically mostly artificial, with very little meat or fowl and only a few vegetables. They are pathetic, and an expected result of commercial producers trying to maximize profit by cheating the consumer. The larger pies are typically made by small local producers, like pork pies in New England, and they are of better quality but also rather expensive relative to the cost of ingredients.

I cannot recall exactly when as a child I ate a seriously great turkey pot pie that was homemade, but I did, and thus I remembered that a pot pie made well is an unforgettable delight and comfort food, especially during the winter. Thus, as one can't find a great pot pie commercially without paying an arm and a leg I decided to provide my fabulous recipe in Food Nirvana. As you might expect the arrival at perfection was the product of some experimenting and making essential changes.

What I have done here is to provide two separate recipes representing a starting point with Marie and then my quest for perfection a few years after she died. Read the first recipe in terms of what you might choose to do with leftovers from Thanksgiving dinner. Read the second recipe in terms of what is the best way to create an inventory of the finest homemade frozen turkey pot pies. Let's proceed.

Marie made a great Turkey Pot Pie from the leftovers of a roasted turkey.

We started with about 4 lbs. of breast and darker meat, all skin and fat and gristle and other extraneous matter removed, and then the meat was chopped. We also had about a pint of leftover turkey gravy with mushrooms. Marie added two cans of chicken broth and about one cup each of chopped carrots, celery, frozen peas and ½ tsp. each of onion powder, salt, and pepper. She simmered the mixture for 15 minutes on medium heat. I added a mixture of 1/2 cup of flour mixed in about one cup of water, to thicken the contents prior to making the pie.

Marie rolled out a traditional Crisco® pie dough ... a double batch ... 4 cups flour, 1 1/3 cups Crisco®, 1/2 cup water and one teaspoon salt. She sprayed Pam® lightly into a 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish, lined the dish with a thin layer of the dough and then I poured the simmered turkey mixture into it. Marie then covered the top of the baking dish with a somewhat thicker layer of dough and

baked it at 400°F for 75 minutes. Note that the baking time seems a bit long ... so if you make this pot pie keep an eye on it during baking so the crust doesn't get too dark. Also, the longer the baking cycle the more moisture that will be lost from inside the pot pie. Adjust the time to suit yourself.

What a fine and tasty meal! It was very satisfying on a cold winter day. Now we will move on to the second recipe.

Ray's turkey pot pie recipe:

I decided one day to make a lot of single and double servings of turkey pot pie that could be taken from the freezer and put on the table ready to eat in about 45 minutes. I also decided to make everything from scratch, entirely moving away from the idea of using leftovers. My pot pies taste so good that they almost make me shout with pleasure eating them. I promise you will love these pies if you follow my directions. Note: The recipe for roasting the turkey is elsewhere in this section of Food Nirvana, so refer to that recipe to get started.

The amount of pot pie filling produced following this recipe, two gallons, is a whole lot of product. Thus, the number of ceramic or other oven proof containers required to use all of it depends on the volume of the containers. I recommend that you plan in advance to have enough oven proof containers, considering the volume of all of them, and the fact that some of that volume will be used by pie dough. Also, the task of making all the dough for the containers is considerable, particularly when you consider having to roll out the equivalent of eight or more very large dough areas of about 14" in diameter. In short, there is a lot of time involved overall in making the full recipe of the turkey pot pies as described. Figure on six to eight hours of work overall. The yield is considerable and note that I freeze the pies, then vacuum seal them, then return them to the deep freeze, where they store very well and provide lots of joy for six to twelve months!

Finally, note that the amounts of salt and pepper used are intentionally low for the volume of product made. The idea is that each person can season their pie as desired when it is served.

Ingredients: (Makes approximately 2 gallons of pot pie filling)

One fourteen to sixteen pound turkey, just roasted

Gravy made with the pan drippings, skin, bones, etc. in the roasting pan (see the directions below)

3 cups of diced carrots, blanched separately from all other ingredients for two minutes in boiling water

3 cups of frozen peas, thawed

3, 8 oz. drained net weight cans of sliced mushrooms (use the liquid when making the gravy)

3 cups of fresh, frozen or canned corn, drained

3 cloves of fresh garlic, diced

1 tbsp. of sea salt

1/2 tbsp. of ground black pepper

3, 14 oz. cans of chicken broth plus up to two more cans to adjust gravy volume to 3 quarts

3, 14 oz. cans of water

6 tbsp. of corn starch

4 (or more) double recipes of two layer deep dish Crisco® pie dough (found in Food Nirvana under Pies and Piecrusts)

A variable number of single or double serving sizes of porcelain oven proof dishes, at least seven or eight of each type

Directions:

Remove the roasted turkey from the oven and allow it to cool for two hours in the roasting pan, uncovered. Then put the turkey on a wooden cutting board.

Defat the contents of the roasting pan to the extent necessary to please you and using the method of your choice.

Completely remove/cut all the meat from the turkey, putting all scraps back into the roasting pan, including the skin and the bones.

Chop and shred all the turkey meat into pieces no larger in volume than a 3/4" by 3/4" cube. Having smaller pieces is fine. Discard any gristle found. Set the processed turkey meat aside.

Put the three cans of chicken broth and three cans of water into the roasting pan and mix and heat the contents to boiling over high heat.

Reduce the heat to medium and boil the contents for 15 minutes, stirring regularly to assure the bones are submerged in the liquid.

Turn the heat off and pour the roasting pan contents through a large strainer into a large bowl. Discard all the scraps, skin and bones.

Measure the volume of turkey gravy broth and add extra chicken broth as necessary to bring the final volume up to three quarts.

Pour the broth back into the roasting pan. Add the six tbsp. of corn starch gradually while whisking to assure complete mixing.

Add the salt and the pepper and the diced garlic to the broth and heat it on high heat stirring slowly continuously until the mixture comes to a full boil and the gravy thickens.

Reduce the heat to low and add the carrots, peas, corn and mushrooms and mix well. Then add the turkey meat and again mix well. Turn the heat off.

Make the recipes of pie dough and roll out enough to cover the inside surfaces of the porcelain baking dishes, and put the rolled dough into the dishes all the way over the top edge of each dish, as if you were making a pie. Cut off any excess dough with a table knife, cutting vertically along the outside perimeter of the baking dish.

Gently mix the turkey and gravy mixture with a large wooden spoon and use a soup ladle to extract enough of the mixture to dispense into each of the dough lined porcelain dishes. Fill each dish to slightly below the top edge.

Roll out the remaining dough and cover each dish with a dough layer, cutting away excess dough from the edges and pinching the dough layers together to form a fluted design of sealed dough.

Use a table knife to cut four air vents in the top dough surface of each pie.

Freeze the pies in the deep freeze for a minimum of four hours, until they are totally frozen.

Remove the pies from the freezer and put each one into a separate vacuum sealing bag and vacuum seal the pies.

Return the pies to the freezer until you are ready to eat one or more of them.

Directions for preparing the frozen pies for a meal:

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Put the frozen pie(s) onto a cookie sheet that has low sides around the perimeter. This is to avoid possible dripping into your oven during baking.

Bake the pie(s) for 45 minutes and test for doneness by sticking a fork into the top center of a pie and checking the temperature of the extracted fork using the palm of your hand to gauge whether or not the center of the pie reached the necessary hotness to complete the baking. The crust should be a light to golden brown, not darker. If necessary (This should not be necessary, unless the porcelain dish depth exceeds 1 1/2 inches) the final heating of the interior of the pies can be done individually in a microwave oven, about one minute each on high heat. The idea is to avoid over-browning the crust while assuring the entire pie interior is very hot.

Serve the pie(s) along with salt and pepper shakers to allow each person to season the pie to her/his own liking. For double serving pies, provide each person a wide, shallow soup bowl and then dispense equal portions from the porcelain dish into each soup bowl.

Enjoy!

Special note:

I have found that making some supplemental gravy immediately before serving the pies is a good idea to assure enough gravy to completely moisten the baked pie dough. Simply boil two cans of chicken broth on medium heat to reduce the volume to one half of the starting volume, and then add two tbsp. of corn starch that has first been mixed into 1/4 cup of water, stirring continuously for a minute during the final boiling to complete the gravy.

Serve the gravy in a gravy boat with a gravy ladle so that each person can use it as they choose.

The flavors are so rich and good that your family and/or guests will moan with delight as they eat the pies. No one will walk away hungry.

FROZEN DESSERTS:

How To Make Creamy Ice Cream

Adding Xanthan gum powder to the primary ingredients when making ice cream produces a smooth texture ice cream, in part by preventing the formation of large ice crystals when the ice cream is being hard frozen. The reality is that ice crystal formation is limited also during the initial making of the ice cream. The smooth texture also results from increasing the final volume of ice cream produced from a given volume of ingredients by the inclusion of a limited amount of air in the mixture. Also, the temperature of the ice cream when dispensed normally determines how hard it will be to dispense. More about that is discussed later, but realize the cheap stuff (quality, not price) you buy at the supermarket is easy to dispense only because it has too much air worked into it when it is made, and/or chemical additives that keep it from being hard when well frozen or from melting when it is at melting temperature. One example ... carboxy methyl cellulose, or CMC.

Xanthan gum powder is one of a few different thickeners/stabilizers used to enhance ice cream physical properties commercially. Thickeners/stabilizers are unfortunately often used to cheat you, for the apparent volume of one and one half quarts of ice cream in a box, if allowed to totally melt, will be far less than one and one half quarts. Beyond that, if the thickeners/stabilizers were not used the difference would be even greater. Read below to learn how to test ice creams to measure the severity of the cheating problem for any given brand.

Food Nirvana recipes for frozen desserts do not usually include any specific reference to using Xanthan gum powder. What you are to do is remember the directions shown below in this primer and apply them to each Food Nirvana frozen dessert recipe as you find appropriate. In general that means you may want to try making the ice cream without Xanthan gum powder first, then decide if you need to eliminate large ice crystals that form during hard freezing. If so, by all means use the directions shown below.

Now, here is a special point to having creamy ice cream that is easy to dispense from the freezer container to your bowl ... First, think about the temperature in the really good ice cream vendors freezers when they are serving the public. The freezers are open at the top, yet the ice cream does not melt until after it is served to you. But it also isn't hard when it is served, else the vendor couldn't scoop the ice cream from the two to five gallon containers in their large, open top freezer. This means the temperature of the ice cream in their freezers is very close to the

freezing point of the ice cream, not to the truly cold freezer temperatures that you will use when storing ice cream. The point is that your ice cream, when first removed from your freezer, will be too hard to dispense easily. What you do is put the container (around one quart in size) of ice cream into the microwave oven and run it on full power for about 15 to 30 seconds, depending on the size of your ice cream container and the amount of ice cream in the container. That will increase the temperature of the ice cream to close to its melting point, making it easy to dispense. As the overall quantity of ice cream in your storage container lessens, remember to lower the amount of time you keep it in the microwave oven for partial thawing, else you will wind up with melted ice cream instead of still frozen but pleasantly soft ice cream.

What I have done later in this primer is provide one vanilla ice cream recipe that combines the best of the best and creates totally excellent ice cream. I'm calling it, "All Out Vanilla Ice Cream." You definitely want to get all of the ingredients and make it as it will make you look like a professional! A dish of it with my homegrown fresh sliced strawberries on top got rave reviews. What a fine combination ...

I've had variable ice crystal formation results making many different ice creams, and in my search to find best solutions to address ice crystal formation I came across an Internet discussion about using Xanthan gum powder to make ice cream "creamy." Unfortunately, I became irritated with the presentation that basically said cream really isn't necessary to have great ice cream. Hogwash! The result is my caustic comments in this advisory on how to make creamy ice cream, so I ask for your forbearance in advance. I simply got angry reading distorted, incomplete "information."

Smooth texture ice cream made by the addition of Xanthan gum powder tastes high in fat, but does not "require" heavy cream to produce a creaminess effect, so you can easily understand what commercial producers of ice cream typically do to save money (Dairies? Let's get real!). What the producers do is cheat you of heavy cream with a cheap substitute. You are misled into believing you are eating a quality product, simply because it appears to be creamy. That misconception is easily identified if you sample some truly high quality ice cream at the same time you sample the cheap stuff (cheap in ingredients, not price!). The difference(s) will be quite obvious.

My favorite example of absurd change is related to Breyer's® frozen product that is sold like ice cream in the same freezer sections in supermarkets, but nowhere on the box is it called ice cream. Why? Well, simply because it isn't ice cream! It is a concoction of various ingredients to make it seem like ice cream ... and the price? Oh, yes ... also absurd given the cheap cost of the ingredients. It is

kind of like seeing a girl you used to love when you were young, who was so perfect ... but who then fell in with the wrong crowd and became something else. She kind of looks the same, but inside you know she is different, and clearly not the dream of your youth. How sad.

Okay. Some limited use of Xanthan gum powder does make a lot of sense to avoid ice crystal formation, which can/will often happen during the hard freezing period after the ice cream has been made, regardless of the quality of the ingredients you use. So, what is this stuff?

Xanthan gum is made from the fermentation of sugars found in corn starch, making it ideal for people allergic to gluten. Look for Xanthan gum powder on the Internet. Buy it by the pound from bulk suppliers, like www.bulkfoods.com. Do not waste your money on small amounts from numerous rip-off sellers found on Amazon® and other places, like health food stores.

You can add Xanthan gum powder to the ice cream base when you are making your favorite ice cream, sherbet or sorbet recipe to create a creamy frozen dessert, even with low fat ingredients. This, of course, is cheating, unless you are on a strict diet.

The elimination of ice crystals is sufficient reason to use a small amount of Xanthan gum powder. Reduction or elimination of heavy cream is, in contrast, idiotic. Ergo, do you want to eat artificial goo or do you want a genuinely fine ice cream with no ice crystals?

There is one special point to make that is very important. Xanthan gum powder will tend to clump together in any stationary liquid medium, making it hard, or nearly impossible, to mix in evenly into the ice cream base. You avoid that potential problem by sprinkling the powder into an agitating mixture of ingredients. Ergo, use an electric mixer for introducing the powder when you are making frozen desserts or use a blender when you are making food products like salad dressings.

Directions:

At the time of creating this primer on using Xanthan gum powder for ice cream I did not actually know the best amount to use. After making a batch of mint chocolate chip I concluded the recipe amount recommended from the Internet recipe is pretty good. That means the texture and creaminess right out of the gelato maker are fine. I tested the ice crystal formation by hard freezing the ice cream and waiting an additional 24 hours to check the final texture ... and the answer is the Xanthan gum really works well to make the ice cream easy to dispense and with no detectable large ice crystal formation. But read on ...

Normally an ice cream maker or gelato maker will cause freezing and expansion of the volume of liquid put into the machine. As Ben & Jerry note, a good ice cream should be expanded about 20% from the original liquid volume due to the introduction of air during the freezing process. Were it not for the introduced air then the ice cream would be hard like a block of ice.

This means that one of the dirty tricks used in making ice cream commercially is to introduce around 30% or more air from extended mixing and by using products like Xanthan gum powder to thicken and thus stabilize the ice cream later when it is starting to melt. Were it not for thickeners acting as stabilizers the cheap ice creams would melt into little puddles and provoke your anger at seeing how badly you are being cheated.

If you are curious you can do a very simple test of any ice cream to detect excessive use of thickeners/stabilizers. The basic idea is to compare the weights of a given volume of product, across multiple products. Weigh one pint of a 2 to 1 mixture of heavy cream and milk and multiply the answer by 3. Then weigh a one and one half quart package of typical commercial vanilla ice cream, subtracting about 3% for the weight of the box. Then weigh a pint of high quality vanilla ice cream removed from its container and multiply that weight by 3. The cream/milk mixture weight corresponds to no expansion of liquid ice cream ingredients. The ordinary commercial ice cream weight corresponds to the amount of expansion due to introduction of air in the presence of thickener/stabilizer. The multiplied weight of the high quality ice cream corresponds to what the ice cream should weigh with the proper amount of air expansion. I guarantee that you will be shocked to learn how badly you are cheated when buying ordinary commercial ice creams.

I've noted that the use of Xanthan gum powder increases the final volume of the ice cream, and you can do what commercial producers do by doing extended mixing time to increase volume by introducing more air, the point being that thickeners like Xanthan gum powder keep the ice cream from freezing hard in the ice cream or gelato machine. In effect, the ice cream you take out is like soft serve ice cream even with extended mixing/freezing time. The effect is pretty obvious, in that liquid ingredients of a volume of seven cups can easily produce ten cups of ice cream if you do extended mixing, like 40 minutes instead of 25 or 30 minutes (the normal freezing time). Going from seven to ten cups is actually a 43% expansion! A proper 20% expansion of seven cups of liquid would produce only about eight and one half cups of ice cream.

The soft serve effect is, of course, temporarily gone when you hard freeze the ice cream. But note that the extra expansion and elimination of large ice crystal formation makes the ice cream easy to dispense. That is an obvious advantage. It

is up to you to decide the proper balance point in mixing time to control ice cream density.

I've provided the general directions from the Internet recipe I found for using Xanthan gum powder, rather modified, in the instructions below.

Combine the ice cream base ingredients in an electric mixer mixing bowl as directed by your recipe.

Determine the amount of Xanthan gum powder to use by multiplying the number of quarts of liquid in the recipe by $\frac{1}{4}$ to calculate the number of teaspoons of Xanthan gum powder needed. For example, a recipe with 2 quarts of liquid would need: $2 \times \frac{1}{4} = \frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of Xanthan gum powder.

Measure the correct amount of Xanthan gum powder and use anything you have that will allow you to sprinkle the powder into the ice cream base gradually/lightly while it is being mixed. What I chose to do was sprinkle the powder onto a paper towel and then tap it gently over the mixing bowl to introduce small amounts of the powder into the ice cream base being actively mixed via my Kitchen-Aid® electric mixer. That method worked just fine and it was easy to do.

Run the mixer on medium speed for about four minutes to give the Xanthan gum powder time to incorporate and thicken the ice cream base. That sure did happen for me.

Pour the right amount of ice cream base into an ice cream maker or gelato maker (this depends on the volume capacity of your machine, allowing for expansion) and freeze it according to the manufacturer's directions. Then package it and hard freeze it for a few hours in a deep freeze.

Note that the custard base ice cream recipes in Food Nirvana do not require mixing with an electric mixer, but to use Xanthan gum powder in a custard base ice cream the initially hot base should be chilled in an electric mixer bowl. Then add the Xanthan gum powder, introducing it slowly (from a paper towel) while the custard ice cream base is being mixed with the electric mixer on medium speed. Mixing time should be about four minutes. That process is described next in detail with the All Out Vanilla Ice Cream recipe. You can easily adapt other ice cream recipes to use the steps indicated below.

Now we proceed to the recipe for the "All Out Vanilla Ice Cream." It may appear daunting but it is actually very simple to make. It has only one additional step more than the regular Food Nirvana custard base ice cream recipes.

Ingredients: (makes about 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 quarts of ice cream from about 1 3/4 quarts of ingredients)

3 cups of heavy cream

12 ounce can of evaporated milk

1 1/2 cups of regular milk

8 jumbo egg yolks, whisked

3 tbsp. of pure vanilla extract

2 vanilla bean pods (buy them via www.MySpiceSage.com for a reasonable price)

3/4 cup of sugar

1/3 cup of malted milk powder (buy it via www.bulkfoods.com for a reasonable price)

1/2 tsp. of Xanthan gum powder (buy it via www.bulkfoods.com for a reasonable price)

1/8 tsp. of salt

Directions:

Prepare the custard ice cream base in the regular way, which means starting by putting the cream, milk, evaporated milk, sugar, malted milk powder and salt into a thick bottomed two quart or larger saucepan. Note that the malted milk powder is not easy to mix in with the other ingredients until the mixture is heated.

Whisk the eight egg yolks in a one quart bowl.

Stir the saucepan contents while heating to 140 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer and keep a close eye on the temperature, then remove the saucepan from the heat when the contents are at 140 degrees F.

Gradually dispense one cup of the hot mixture into the egg yolk bowl with continuous whisking.

Pour the egg yolk mixture into the saucepan.

Heat the saucepan contents on medium heat to 175 degrees F with constant stirring. Keep a very close eye on the temperature and do not let it exceed 175 degrees F.

Pour the cooked custard base into/through a fine mesh sieve that is over a one gallon or larger electric mixer bowl.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the custard base until it is thoroughly chilled, about two to three hours.

While the custard base is chilling you can dispense the vanilla extract into a small cup. Then process the two vanilla bean pods on a wood cutting board to scrape out the contents. Add those contents to the vanilla extract and discard the pods. Set the cup of vanilla flavorings aside.

Dispense the 1/2 tsp. of Xanthan gum powder onto a paper towel lightly, covering a few square inches of area. Set it aside.

When the custard ice cream base is chilled, put the mixing bowl in place on the electric mixer.

Run the mixer on medium speed with the regular beater.

Add the processed vanilla bean pod contents and pure vanilla extract to the custard base and run the mixer for three minutes.

Very gradually dispense the Xanthan gum powder from the paper towel into the custard base while the mixer is running. This should take about two minutes. You want to avoid adding a lot at the same time or it will clump together and be useless.

Mix on medium speed for four minutes.

Transfer half of the contents into your gelato maker and run it until the ice cream is soft frozen, usually about 30 minutes.

Dispense the soft frozen ice cream into a chilled three quart plastic container and place it, covered, into the freezer.

Process the other half of the ice cream base in the gelato maker, and when it is soft frozen dispense the ice cream into the same plastic container used for the first batch of ice cream.

Hard freeze the ice cream for a minimum of four hours. Freezing it overnight is best.

Enjoy a simple but truly perfect dish of vanilla ice cream, or get fancy and make some type of sundae.

You will be highly pleased with this "perfect" ice cream ... it is very creamy and very tasty.

It will tend to disappear quickly so be prepared to make additional batches upon request

Banana Peanut Butter Ice Cream - 😊♥/😊

I decided to make banana peanut butter ice cream and my search for recipes yielded two very different ones. The first one, shown next, is a custard based ice cream and is certain to be delicious. The second recipe is not custard based but uses more peanut butter and it is quite tasty too. But a bit of experience making the second recipe made me realize that what some people are calling ice cream is really something mid way between a pudding and an ice cream. In short, the attempt to combine what could be two fine desserts to create a third type, well, it falls short of the goal and becomes something that isn't either.

Let's cut to the chase ... I made the Recipe #2 ice cream and it is tasty. What surprised me was there are no eggs in that recipe. The result, primarily from the relatively large amount of peanut butter, is nice taste but the end product was too slippery due to high fat content. Also, the complete blending of bananas and peanut butter lost the uniqueness in the flavor of each item. A partial fix for the slippery texture problem is provided in the modified ingredient amounts shown below.

I have yet to try Recipe #1 but I pretty much know it will be a fine banana custard ice cream with small pockets of peanut butter throughout, ergo more banana flavor, but still also some separate peanut butter overtones. I know that because of my own experience making custard based ice creams and ice creams with multiple additions in a good base flavored ice cream, like vanilla or chocolate, plus additions in ice creams like Rocky Road.

Recipe #1:

This recipe is one to be totally enjoyed. You want to make it. Make it now. It uses a custard base and what could be better?

Ingredients: (makes one and one half quarts of ice cream)

2 cups of heavy cream

5 large egg yolks

1 cup of 4% butterfat milk

2/3 cup of sugar

Dash of kosher salt

3 large very ripe bananas

1 tablespoon of pure vanilla extract

1 tablespoon of dark rum or maple syrup (optional)

4 tablespoons of creamy peanut butter, divided

Directions:

Heat the cream, milk, sugar and salt in a heavy bottom saucepan, on medium-low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon to dissolve the sugar completely, while raising the temperature to 140 degrees F (use an instant read thermometer). That will take about 4 to 5 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Whisk the egg yolks in a separate bowl.

Whisking constantly, slowly pour about one cup of the hot cream mixture into the yolks bowl. Then, gradually whisk that yolk and cream mixture back into the saucepan with the rest of the cream mixture.

Return the saucepan to medium-low heat and cook while stirring until the mixture is 175 degrees F. Immediately remove the saucepan from the heat.

Pour the custard base into a bowl and cover it with plastic wrap.

Chill the covered custard base in the refrigerator for four or more hours.

Place half of the custard base into a blender with the bananas. Puree the mixture until it is smooth.

Add the other half of the custard base (if your blender is large enough, otherwise pour blender contents and the other half of the custard base into a large bowl and stir the mixture) and blend the mixture for one minute.

Add the vanilla extract and the (optional) rum (or maple syrup) and continue blending/mixing for one minute.

Freeze the ice cream mixture in the gelato maker in one or two batches based on the capacity of the gelato maker, adding the peanut butter by the teaspoon to a total of twelve teaspoons during the last 5 minutes of freezing.

Store the ice cream in a 1 1/2 quart plastic container, then hard freeze it in the deep freeze for four hours.

Enjoy!

Recipe #2:

This second recipe appears to be more robust in terms of flavor intensity, compared to recipe one, as the amount of peanut butter is proportionately greater. As this is not a custard based ice cream, or even a conventional ice cream, it does not have eggs or egg yolks in the list of ingredients. I figured the bananas and high fat content of the peanut butter would provide the necessary creaminess, and they did, but with too much slipperiness from the fat in the peanut butter.

My initial reaction to the homogenized taste of bananas and peanut butter was good. Then I realized the blending lost the unique flavor of each main ingredient. Still, this is a tasty product, and one where you can limit the amount of peanut butter to reduce the fat caused slipperiness. Think of a pudding with ice cream characteristics due to freezing the mixture.

I modified the recipe to increase the amounts of cream and milk and bananas to reduce the slippery effect of the peanut butter. That will make a product more like ice cream and less like pudding. Those changes are reflected in the ingredients list below.

Ingredients: (makes about 1 1/2 quarts of ice cream)

2 1/2 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of whole milk

2/3 cup of peanut butter

1/3 cup of maple syrup (or sugar)

4 ripe bananas, mashed

pinch of kosher salt

2 teaspoons of pure vanilla extract

Directions:

Put the bananas into the electric mixer bowl and mix for one minute on medium speed. Then add the milk and mix for two minutes. Then add the cream, the salt, maple syrup (or sugar) and the vanilla and mix for two minutes.

If needed, use a spatula to scrape down the inside of the mixer bowl after initial mixing to make sure no ingredient sticks to the surface of the bowl.

Add the peanut butter one tablespoon at a time while mixing, and then mix until the contents are completely blended.

Freeze the ice cream in your gelato maker, then put it into a 1 1/2 quart plastic container with a lid and put that into the deep freeze for a two hours.

Enjoy!

Black Raspberry Ice Cream - ☺♥T

This ice cream is an all time favorite of many folks. It was my choice as a child and my wife Janet's also. My parents would take my brother Rick and me to Alwine's Dairy® outside of Johnstown PA during the 1950's and for a dime we would get a large yummy cone of that delight that was made of the best ingredients right at the dairy. The ice cream was very creamy and the color was deep and the taste was intense. Times have surely changed as that dime wouldn't even buy a tablespoon of that high quality ice cream anywhere today, thanks to the Federal Reserve! Alas, Alwine's Dairy® closed many years ago. Maybe I gobbled up their profits!

I decided to try making this ice cream, knowing that it would be rather more difficult than the other ice creams described in this section. With raspberries you get seeds and seeds are not found in the best commercial ice creams, so the trick is to make the ice cream without seeds. The taste intensity is a second consideration, so enough ripe berries must be used to get the right taste. That is the rub. When was the last time you even saw ripe black raspberries for sale? Worry not.

As you will read below, the first times I made this ice cream I used a black raspberry concentrate syrup to get the flavor I wanted, and juice from blueberries to get the desired color. Here I am years later with lots of black raspberry bushes and now I use juice and pulp from my black raspberries for color and flavor. Wow! If you happen to have access to black raspberries then use a pint of them and heat them in the microwave oven, then use an electric mixer to help separate pulp and juice from the seeds. Then process that mixture to separate out the seeds from the pulp and juice. I use an accessory for my Kitchen-Aid mixer designed to do just that, and it works well. But if you don't have that accessory you can use a fine sieve and a wooden spoon and press the juice and pulp through the sieve. You can then proceed with the recipe below, using only 1/3 the amount of blackberry concentrate syrup and no blueberries. I also added about 1/4 teaspoon of Xanthan gum to the ice cream, gradually, while it was in final mixing, and that added to the creaminess of the final ice cream. I noticed that the intensity of the fruit flavor and the ice cream composition reminded me of a product somewhere between a gelato and an ice cream. What a delicious result! Now we will get back to my original recipe.

I enjoy a challenge. What I did first was verify that the Ben and Jerry's® Homemade Ice Cream and Dessert Book© had a recipe I could use. They had a recipe but it was clearly screwed up. That is the second time I've found a bad

recipe in that book and now I'm starting to doubt their sincerity (or at least their ability to pay attention to detail) in helping ordinary people make top quality ice cream at home. Well, I do give them credit for a great cream base recipe and some good background information on making ice cream. But why, pray tell, would they ever recommend making raspberry ice cream with the seeds in it?! There were other mistakes as well but I will forego mentioning them now and concentrate on making great ice cream.

Speaking of concentrating, that was my solution to the missing supply of black raspberries. I bought natural black raspberry concentrate via the Internet from a company named Natures Flavors® in Orange CA. The web address is www.naturesflavors.com. Different sizes of various real fruit concentrates are available and as you might guess the smaller quantities are quite expensive compared to larger quantities. Knowing my propensity to plow ahead you know that I bought a gallon of highly concentrated black raspberry juice. I could have paid \$10 for four ounces but instead I spent \$85 for a gallon, plus shipping. Why do anything half way? Dive in with all four feet! Little did I know that one drop of the product is recommended as a single serving! Well, they understate how much is needed but the product is excellent, thus, who needs fresh black raspberries? Not me, at least for this frozen dessert.

I attempted my first batch of black raspberry ice cream by doing what I thought would work. I was mistaken. Between my errors and those of Ben and Jerry the ice cream was too flat in taste and too light in color, and I was even forced to use food coloring in excessive amounts to get close to the right color. But now I have an improved recipe after thinking about needed changes, and you get the benefit of my experience. And voila! The modified recipe, shown below, is perfect.

First, when making ice cream from a flavored concentrate that can't provide color you can use a secondary fruit that will not interfere with the flavor but which will provide natural color (like blueberries) ... not the artificial stuff. Second, Ben and Jerry's recipe had an internal conflict, saying that the fruit was very tart, yet calling for the addition of lemon juice. What to do? The answer is that when you use the concentrate you must add lemon juice to achieve the tartness necessary to avoid a bland ice cream. Sugar provides sweetness and the fruit concentrate provides the special flavor, but the lemon juice is critical to achieving a balance between creaminess, fruitiness and tartness. Enough said.

Let's get on with the improved recipe and enjoy perfection.

Ingredients: (Makes 1½ to 2 quarts of ice cream)

2 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of half and half

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

1¼ cups of sugar

Juice extract from one cup of blueberries

Black raspberry concentrate ... 1 to 1¼ tbsp. to make 1½ quarts of ice cream

3 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice (juice from one typical large fresh lemon)

1 tsp. of natural vanilla extract

Directions:

Put the blueberries into a one quart saucepan with ½ cup of water. Bring them to a simmer on medium heat, crush the berries with a fork and simmer the mixture on very low heat while stirring for five minutes. Process the juice and the crushed berries through a sieve or a colander to extract the colored liquid. Set the extract aside and allow it to cool to room temperature, or briefly put it into the freezer.

Break the eggs into a five or six quart electric mixer bowl and mix them on medium speed until they are frothy. Add the sugar and mix until well blended, around five minutes. Add the vanilla and the lemon juice and continue to mix for one minute.

Add the extracted berry juice to the mixer bowl and mix well. Add the cream, half and half, and the black raspberry concentrate and mix thoroughly for two to three minutes on medium speed.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and proceed to make the ice cream. When it is fairly stiff (about twenty-five minutes), transfer the ice cream to a two quart plastic container with a tight fitting lid. Put the container into the deep freeze for four hours or more to finish hardening the ice cream. Serve the ice cream and be delighted.

Other considerations:

The addition of any liquid product other than cream or half and half when making ice cream may cause the ice cream to be less creamy. In this recipe I added extracted berry juice in a small amount of water to obtain good color so that is one example of necessary use of a non-cream based liquid addition. One way to accommodate the potential loss of creaminess is to increase the overall amount of cream, or, as I have done in this recipe, replace the normal amount of

milk in Ben and Jerry's cream base recipe with half and half. You will learn as you experiment what works best for you and that is what really matters. Note that as you change overall volume by adding cream or half and half you also need to consider changing amounts of flavorings, etc., to keep the right ratio.

Butter Brickle Ice Cream - ☺♥

I usually follow the Ben and Jerry's® ice cream book directions for making an ice cream base. Their recipe uses whole eggs. Well, there is one exception in this recipe ... the use of light brown sugar instead of white sugar, due to the desire to have that taste in the ice cream itself. In addition, the ice cream is very creamy if you use the optional Xanthan Gum powder. And I add a tiny bit of salt as well. Actually there are more than three exceptions ... one very nice exception ... in the next paragraph. Try it if you want exceptional creaminess without using Xanthan Gum powder.

You can use the Food Nirvana recipe for Custard Ice Cream Base, using light brown sugar instead of white sugar, plus two teaspoons of vanilla, and add the butter brickle pieces for the last few minutes of freezing the ice cream in the gelato maker. You will be thrilled with the creaminess and richness of the result. Do adjust either the amount of butter brickle to accommodate the Custard Ice Cream Base recipe, or, adjust the Custard Ice Cream Base recipe amount to match the butter brickle amount in this recipe.

My favorite is the Custard Ice Cream Base, but the result using the Ben and Jerry's® base with added Xanthan Gum powder is excellent too. What I love to do with this ice cream is serve it in a dark brown sugar ice cream cone. Yummy! I also make three to four times the amount of butter brickle as needed and then I save the extra for later batches of the ice cream. That is a fine labor saver. Just keep the extra butter brickle in a sealed Ziploc® freezer bag, and store it in the freezer until you are ready to use it.

Butter Brickle

Ingredients:

1/2 stick of butter

1/3 cup of light brown sugar

1/4 cup of white sugar

1 tbsp. of dark Karo®

1 tbsp. of water

Directions:

Add the brown sugar, white sugar, Karo®, water and butter to a small heavy bottom saucepan.

Bring to a boil over medium heat.

Continue to cook on low heat, stirring regularly, until a candy thermometer reaches 290 degrees F.

Pour the mixture onto a piece of parchment paper in a cookie baking sheet, as thin as you can (don't dump it into a pile!), and allow it to cool.

Once it has cooled, break up the butter brickle into pieces.

Put the butter brickle pieces into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, seal it and use a wood kitchen mallet to crumble them. Then set the bag with the crumbled butter brickle aside in the freezer.

Now proceed to make the ice cream and when it is frozen to a fairly firm texture add the crumbled pieces of butter brickle. You can use the very nice Ben & Jerry's® type of recipe below, or, use the Food Nirvana recipe for a custard ice cream base, flavored with vanilla, but also using brown instead of white sugar.

Ingredients: (makes about 5 cups)

1 cup of whole (4% butterfat) milk

2 cups of heavy cream

2/3 cup of light brown sugar

2 teaspoons of vanilla extract

3 extra large or 2 jumbo eggs

A dash of salt

1/2 teaspoon of Xanthan Gum powder

Directions:

Turn on the gelato machine to pre-chill it.

Use an electric mixer to mix the eggs for one minute on medium speed.

Add the vanilla, the salt and the brown sugar and continue mixing for two minutes.

Add the heavy cream and the milk and continue mixing for two minutes.

Gradually add the (optional) Xanthan Gum powder while mixing and then continue mixing for three minutes.

Transfer the mixture to the gelato machine.

Run the machine until the ice cream is fairly firm.

Add the butter brickle pieces and continue to run the gelato machine for two to three minutes to let the pieces blend into the ice cream.

Package the butter brickle ice cream in a six cup chilled plastic storage container with a tight fitting lid.

Hard freeze the ice cream in the deep freeze for four or more hours.

Serve. You will love this stuff!

Butter Pecan Ice Cream - ☺♥

This is one of the best traditional ice creams. My recipe is based on that found in Ben and Jerry's® "Homemade Ice Cream & Dessert Book.©" I modified their recipe to get what I want, but more to the point, they miss telling the home chef a few important procedural considerations, which is not typical of them. Thus, it took me a time or so to get it right. Now it is perfect and you get the benefit of my experience.

The missing information concerned how to best introduce the butter to the ice cream base and how to avoid capturing unwanted particles in the melted butter that result when sautéing the pecans. Simply adding the melted butter from the skillet to the sweet cream base as they state results in chunks of butter in the final ice cream and unwanted small gritty pecan particles from the sauté process, and both of those are bad. Worry not. The problem is solved. See below.

Ingredients: (makes about 1½ quarts of ice cream)

Sweet Cream Base: (But see alternative Custard Ice Cream Base recipe in Notes at the end of this recipe)

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

2 cups heavy cream

¾ cup sugar

½ cup half and half (I prefer this rather than using only milk)

½ cup whole milk

Other ingredients:

1 stick of butter

1½ cups pecan halves (I use 50% more than Ben and Jerry)

½ tsp. salt

Directions:

Melt the butter on low heat in a skillet. Add the salt and the pecan halves and stir to mix. Sauté the pecan halves until they are crisp but not burnt, on low heat. Turn off the heat. Remove the pecan halves to a dish for about two minutes to drain off the excess butter, then put the pecan halves on a dinner plate,

arranging them to keep them from touching each other. Drain the butter from the first pecan dish back into the skillet. Clean the dish and then pour the melted butter from the skillet into the dish, avoiding the last part of the butter that contains unwanted sautéed pecan particles. Set the dish aside. Put the plate of sautéed pecan halves into the freezer.

Make the sweet cream base. Use your electric mixer to beat the eggs on medium speed, then pause to add the sugar and resume mixing. Mix thoroughly. Slowly add the cream and the half and half while continuing to mix. Put the milk into the bowl with the melted butter and heat it in the microwave oven for about 30 seconds to 1 minute on full power. Blend the warm milk and melted butter completely with a whisk then slowly add that mixture to the sweet cream base while mixing on medium speed.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and turn it on. After about 25 minutes check the ice cream to see if it is relatively but not completely stiff. When it is fairly stiff add the pecan halves slowly and mix for two minutes.

Transfer the ice cream from the gelato maker into a good quality 1½ quart plastic container that has a tight fitting lid. Put the lid on the ice cream and put the container into a deep freeze for four to six hours.

The ice cream is then ready to serve. It is delicious!

Notes:

The temperature of a deep freeze is typically much lower than that of the freezer of your refrigerator, and that means the deep freeze is far superior to your refrigerator freezer in the last step of final freezing of the ice cream. Use your deep freeze and the ice cream will be ready within a few hours. Conversely, the freezer of your refrigerator may not properly freeze the ice cream at all, and even if it does you may have to wait until the next day to eat the ice cream properly frozen.

The Food Nirvana recipe for Custard Ice Cream Base can be used instead of the sweet cream base recipe shown earlier in this recipe. Be sure to try the Custard version as it is very creamy and rich in taste. Do note that you will have to modify the Custard recipe to accommodate the melted butter addition in the recipe shown above.

Coconut Almond Chocolate Chip Ice Cream - ☺♥

This ice cream is a new entry for Food Nirvana. Think of it as a special frozen dessert that captures the taste of coconut and toasted almonds with a chocolate chip background in a very nice vanilla ice cream base. Of late I've been experimenting with variations of chocolate chip ice cream and this was an obvious one to try. So I did and I'm very pleased with the results. You will be too. I suggested to Peggy that we are making an ice cream version of the Peter Paul's Almond Joy® candy bar.

There is a new procedure listed, along with some new ingredients, for making the chocolate chips. I found that I needed to make a "freezer" type of chocolate to have it yield the best flavor and texture when used in ice cream. I intend to include the ingredients and procedure in all the Food Nirvana ice cream recipes that use chocolate chips. Note that I list a Ghirardelli® 100% cacao bar as the source of the chocolate. I did that because most home chefs will easily find that ingredient at the supermarket. What I use is my 11 pound block of Callebaut® dark block chocolate for baking, which is 70.4% cacao.

Note also that I list food grade liquid soy lecithin as an ingredient for making the chocolate chips. Soy lecithin is an emulsifying agent that will cause the other ingredients to combine well. It is typically used at the rate of one half of one percent of the total weight of the chocolate chips. This means you need to use a precision kitchen scale that can measure accurately to the tenth of a gram. My scale is a reloader scale from Cabela's®. It cost \$70 and I use it often for measuring a variety of chemical additives for food, especially preservatives like sodium benzoate. Buy one. You need it.

My source for food grade liquid soy lecithin is www.modernistpantry.com and a 175ml bottle, with shipping, costs under \$20. That amount of product will last for a very long time for the home chef.

I decided to try making this ice cream because I find I am experimenting a lot like Ben and Jerry did in the early days of developing their ice cream business. Certain flavors and textures complement each other and this ice cream is a perfect example of the marriage of flavors and textures that go very well together. It is all good. I hope you make this great ice cream.

Ingredients: (Makes 1½ quarts of ice cream)

2 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of milk

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

3/4 cup of sugar plus 1 tbsp. of sugar for the chocolate chip mixture

1/2 cup of chopped sweetened shredded coconut

1/2 cup of chopped blanched toasted almonds

1 tsp. of natural vanilla extract

2 tsp. of coconut extract

3/4 tsp. of almond extract

2 oz. of chopped/cut pieces of a 100% cacao chocolate bar (I suggest using a 4 oz. Ghirardelli® bar)

1.6 oz. of coconut oil

1 oz. of light corn syrup

1 tsp. of water

0.4 grams of food grade liquid soy lecithin

Directions:

Chop the shredded sweetened coconut on a wooden cutting board to lengths roughly 1/4" long.

Blanch the almonds as described in the Food Nirvana recipe for making almond paste. Then chop them and roast them on a cookie sheet in a 350 degrees F oven for five minutes. Turn the cookie sheet around, stir the almond pieces, and roast for five more minutes. Dump the roasted almond pieces onto a plate to cool. Then put the plate into the freezer.

Weighing out and using the tiny amount of thick, sticky soy lecithin is a challenge. Use the precision kitchen scale. Put the one tsp. of water into the weighing pan and put the weighing pan on the scale. Now turn on the power to the scale. It will read zero as the weight. Add the soy lecithin by dipping a paring knife about one inch into the jar of soy lecithin vertically and then lifting the knife out and letting most of the soy lecithin drip/run off the tip of the knife back into the jar. Then hold the knife vertically over the weighing pan and let just enough soy lecithin drip from the knife into the water, until you have a weight of 0.4 grams showing on the scale display. Remove the weighing pan and gently mix the soy lecithin with the water. You are now ready for the next step.

Put the corn syrup, one tbsp. of sugar, and the water and soy lecithin mixture into a small bowl. Heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven for 5 to 10 seconds and mix/stir until the sugar has dissolved and the water and lecithin mixture has mixed completely with the other ingredients. If necessary repeat the heating and stirring until the sugar has dissolved.

Use a wooden cutting board to cut half of the 4 oz. 100% cacao chocolate bar into pieces roughly 1/2" square. Save the other half for a later batch of ice cream. Barely melt the chocolate pieces in a small bowl with the coconut oil in the microwave oven with a 20 second heating cycle on high heat. Stir the mixture to help melt the chocolate, then, if necessary, repeat the heating cycle but only for 10 seconds. Stir until the mixture is well combined, then mix/stir/whisk it together with the corn syrup mixture until well combined. If necessary heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven and stir until well combined. Pour the mixture onto a dinner plate and put the plate into the freezer. After the mixture is frozen cut it into irregularly shaped pieces roughly 3/8" square with a large sharp knife and return those pieces to the freezer.

Break the eggs into a five or six quart electric mixer bowl and mix them on medium speed for one minute. Add the 3/4 cup of sugar and mix until well blended, around three minutes. Add the vanilla, the coconut extract, the almond extract and the chopped shredded coconut and continue to mix for one minute.

Add the cream and the milk and mix for two to three minutes on medium speed.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and proceed to make the ice cream. When it is fairly stiff (about twenty-five minutes), add the chopped toasted chilled almond pieces and the chopped/cut frozen chocolate pieces and run the gelato maker for an additional three minutes. Transfer the completed ice cream to a two quart storage container. Put the container into the deep freeze for four hours or more to finish hardening the ice cream.

Serve the ice cream and be delighted.

Cherry Chocolate Chip Ice Cream - ☺♥

This ice cream is a new entry for Food Nirvana. Think of it as a frozen dessert that captures the taste of chocolate covered cherries in a very nice ice cream. Of late I've been experimenting with variations of chocolate chip ice cream and this was an obvious one to try. So I did and I'm very pleased with the results. You will be too.

I decided to try making this ice cream because I buy very large jars of maraschino cherries in a lot of sweetened syrup for use in other recipes. Thus, I already have the cherry taste in both the cherries and the sweet syrup, along with the nice red coloring that becomes a nice pink with this ice cream. That means making a basic vanilla ice cream and adding the cherries and syrup leaves only one item to consider ... the chocolate.

Fortunately, we have many choices for high cacao content chocolate in better supermarkets. What goes well with this ice cream is a 100% cacao chocolate bar processed as described below to create what is called "freezer" chocolate for making professional level chocolate chips for ice cream that melt in your mouth. My, how nice ... rich and tasty. In short, do not use conventional chocolate of any form directly in the ice cream, including the chocolate chips you use when making cookies, or you will wind up with chocolate pieces having the consistency of crayons!

Ingredients: (Makes 1½ to 2 quarts of ice cream)

2 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of milk

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

¾ of a cup of sugar plus one tbsp. of sugar for the chocolate chip mixture

½ cup of maraschino cherry syrup

½ cup of quartered maraschino cherries

1 tsp. of natural vanilla extract

2 oz. of cut pieces of a 100% cacao chocolate bar (I suggest buying a 4 oz. Ghirardelli® bar)

2 tbsp. of coconut oil

1 tbsp. of honey

0.4 grams of food grade liquid soy lecithin

Directions:

Buy the soy lecithin from www.modernistpantry.com for \$20 for a 175ml bottle, including shipping. Use it as an emulsifying agent to enhance the consistency of the chocolate chips. Be sure you have a precision kitchen scale that will measure accurately down to the tenth of a gram. I bought a reloader scale from Cabela's® for that purpose for \$70. You need one for multiple uses with food chemicals, like the preservative sodium benzoate. Buy one.

Use a wooden cutting board to cut half of the 4 oz. 100% cacao chocolate bar into pieces roughly 1/2" square. Save the other half for a later batch of ice cream. Barely melt the chocolate pieces in a small bowl with the coconut oil, honey, soy lecithin and the one tbsp. of sugar in the microwave oven with a 30 second heating cycle on high heat. Whisk the mixture to help melt the chocolate, then repeat the heating cycle but only for 20 seconds. Whisk until the mixture is well combined, then pour it onto a dinner plate and put the plate into the freezer. Put the knife and the cutting board into the freezer also.

After the mixture is frozen hard cut it into pieces about 3/8" square using a large knife and cutting board that have been chilled in the freezer, and return the cut chocolate pieces to the freezer on the cold plate. The idea is you do not want the chips to melt while you are processing the frozen chocolate mixture.

Cut the maraschino cherries into four pieces each until you have 1/2 cup of the pieces. Put the pieces into a shallow bowl and put the bowl into the freezer.

Break the eggs into a five or six quart electric mixer bowl and mix them on medium speed for two minutes. Add the sugar and mix until well blended, around three minutes. Add the vanilla and the cherry juice and continue to mix for one minute.

Add the cream and the milk and mix for two to three minutes on medium speed.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and proceed to make the ice cream. When it is fairly stiff (about twenty-five minutes), add the chopped cherry pieces and the chocolate chips and run the gelato maker for an additional three minutes. Transfer the completed ice cream to a two quart storage container. Put the container into the deep freeze for four hours or more to finish hardening the ice cream.

Serve the ice cream and be delighted.

Cherry French Vanilla Ice Cream - 😊♥

This is an exceptional ice cream and I show two different ways to make it, each unique. The first recipe shown below is my basic French Vanilla ice cream recipe, modified in amounts of some ingredients, plus the addition of maraschino cherries and cherry juice. I became curious about how the combination of the ingredients would taste. What resulted was not only a taste sensation but a fabulously creamy consistency. This one you really want to make. But also read on to consider the second recipe ... that of using a custard ice cream base.

The total volume of this ice cream exceeded the stated capacity of my gelato maker by one cup. That turned out to be okay as the freezing mixture expands and uses the small extra capacity available immediately under the lid. Thus, instead of the typical yield of 1 1/2 quarts I got 1 3/4 quarts. Check the true capacity of your gelato maker to assure that the ice cream mixture will not overflow from the bowl into the freezing coils, initially or during freezing. Adjust ingredient amounts if necessary.

Ingredients: (makes about 1 3/4 quarts of ice cream)

2 extra large or jumbo eggs plus two egg yolks

2 cups of heavy cream

3/4 cup of sugar

1 cup of milk

1 cup of maraschino cherry juice

3 tablespoons of vanilla extract

1 cup of maraschino cherries cut into quarters

Directions:

Cut the cherries into quarters and set them aside in a bowl in the freezer.

Use your electric mixer to beat the eggs and the egg yolks on medium speed for two minutes, then pause to add the sugar, then resume mixing for two minutes. Then add the vanilla extract and the maraschino cherry juice and resume mixing for one additional minute. Slowly add the cream and the milk while continuing to mix for one minute.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and turn it on. Add half of the cut maraschino cherries. After about 30 minutes check the ice cream to see if it is fairly stiff. If necessary continue to run the gelato maker for an additional ten minutes.

Add the other half of the cut maraschino cherries gradually so they do not bunch together.

Run the gelato maker for three to five minutes.

Transfer the ice cream from the gelato maker into a good quality 2 quart plastic container that has a tight fitting lid. Put the lid on the ice cream and put the container into a deep freeze for four to six hours.

The ice cream is then ready to serve. It is more than delicious ... it is superb!

So, what is better than superb? Read about the alternate recipe below. Definitely try it. I like it best.

Alternate Recipe using evaporated milk as an ingredient of the custard base ice cream:

Ingredients:

2 cups of heavy cream

1, 12 ounce can of evaporated milk

2/3 cup of sugar

1/8 teaspoon of fine sea salt

4 jumbo or 5 extra large or 6 large egg yolks

1/2 cup of maraschino cherry juice

1 1/2 tablespoons of vanilla extract

1 cup of maraschino cherries cut into quarters

Directions:

Cut the cherries into quarters and set them aside in a bowl in the freezer.

Heat the cream, evaporated milk, maraschino cherry juice, sugar and salt in a heavy bottom saucepan, on medium-low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon to

dissolve the sugar completely, while raising the temperature to 140 degrees F (use an instant read thermometer). That will take about 4 to 5 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Whisk the yolks in a separate bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly pour about one cup of the hot cream mixture into the yolks. Then, gradually whisk that yolk and cream mixture back into the saucepan with the rest of the cream mixture.

Return the saucepan to medium-low heat and cook while stirring until the mixture is 175 degrees on an instant-read thermometer. Then immediately remove the saucepan from the heat.

Strain the custard base through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl. Add the vanilla and mix. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and allow the custard base to cool in the refrigerator.

Chill the covered custard base in the refrigerator for about 4 hours. Note that you can keep the custard base refrigerated before use for up to three to four days if it is well covered.

Churn and chill the flavored custard base in a gelato or ice cream machine according to the manufacturer's instructions.

When the ice cream is becoming stiff then gradually add the maraschino cherry pieces and then run the ice cream machine until the contents are stiff enough to be ready for packaging.

Transfer the ice cream to a sealable plastic or paper box container(s) and hard freeze the ice cream for four or more hours in the deep freeze.

Serve the ice cream. Moan with pleasure!

Notes:

The temperature of a deep freeze is typically lower than that of the freezer of your refrigerator, and that means the deep freeze is superior to your refrigerator freezer in the last step of final freezing of the ice cream. Use your deep freeze and the ice cream will be ready within a few hours. Conversely, the freezer of your refrigerator may not properly freeze the ice cream at all (it depends in part on how you set your freezer settings), and even if it does you may have to wait until the next day to eat the ice cream properly frozen.

Note also that you may enjoy this dessert as a soft ice cream, which I love. To do that divide the ice cream from the gelato maker into two, one quart containers. Put both containers into your refrigerator freezer for one hour. The ice cream is

then ready to eat as a soft ice cream. Try it. If you continue freezing the remaining ice cream it will have the traditional ice cream consistency. Or you might serve all of the soft ice cream immediately to family or friends in ice cream dishes that have been chilled in the freezer.

Chocolate Chip Ice Cream - ☺♥

This ice cream is a new entry for Food Nirvana but a well known nice ice cream that has been around for over fifty years. I've experimented a fair amount making the chocolate chips, as discussed below.

I found that I needed to make a "freezer" type of chocolate to have it yield the best flavor and texture when used in chocolate chip ice cream. I also have discovered that Peggy and I prefer to have some of the sugar in the chocolate chips remain in crystal form as it makes the chips very slightly crunchy. That is a personal preference that is not part of traditional chocolate chip ice cream.

Note that I list a Ghirardelli® 100% cacao bar as the source of the chocolate. I did that because most home chefs will easily find that ingredient at the supermarket. What I use is my 11 pound block of Callebaut® dark block chocolate for baking, which is 70.4% cacao.

Note also that I list food grade liquid soy lecithin as an ingredient for making the chocolate chips. Soy lecithin is an emulsifying agent that will cause the other ingredients to combine well. It is typically used at the rate of one half of one percent of the total weight of the chocolate chips. This means you need to use a precision kitchen scale that can measure accurately to the tenth of a gram. My scale is a reloader scale from Cabela's®. It cost \$70 and I use it often for measuring a variety of chemical additives for food, especially preservatives like sodium benzoate. Buy one. You need it.

My source for food grade liquid soy lecithin is www.modernistpantry.com and a 175ml bottle, with shipping, costs under \$20. That amount of product will last for a very long time for the home chef.

Have fun making this ice cream and know that it is delicious.

Ingredients: (Makes about 1½ quarts of ice cream)

2 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of milk

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

¾ cup of sugar plus 1 tbsp. of sugar for the chocolate chip mixture

1 tbsp. of natural vanilla extract

2 oz. of chopped/cut pieces of an 80% to 100% cacao chocolate bar (I suggest using a 4 oz. Ghirardelli® bar)

1.6 oz. of coconut oil

1 oz. of light corn syrup

1 tsp. of water (optional)

0.4 grams of food grade liquid soy lecithin plus one tsp. of light corn syrup

Directions:

Let's talk first about the optional teaspoon of water for the chocolate chips. If you use it and heat the chip mixture to force the sugar to dissolve then the chocolate chips will not have any crystalline sugar evident when you eat the ice cream. If you skip the teaspoon of water or avoid heating the chip mixture to the point of dissolving the sugar completely you will get a bit of sugar crunchiness in the chocolate chips. The decision is yours to make.

Weighing out and using the tiny amount of thick, sticky soy lecithin is a challenge. Use the precision kitchen scale. Put the one tsp. of corn syrup into the weighing pan and put the weighing pan on the scale. Now turn on the power to the scale. It will read zero as the weight. Add the soy lecithin by dipping a paring knife about one inch into the jar of soy lecithin vertically and then lifting the knife out and letting most of the soy lecithin drip/run off the tip of the knife back into the jar. Then hold the knife vertically over the weighing pan and let just enough soy lecithin drip from the knife into the corn syrup, until you have a weight of 0.4 grams showing on the scale display. Remove the weighing pan and gently mix the soy lecithin with the corn syrup. You are now ready for the next step.

Put one tbsp. of sugar, the corn syrup, the water and the corn syrup and soy lecithin mixture into a small bowl. Heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven for 5 to 10 seconds and optionally mix/stir long enough until the sugar has dissolved and the water and lecithin mixture has mixed completely with the other ingredients. But do stir enough to combine the lecithin.

Use a wooden cutting board to cut half of the 4 oz. high cacao chocolate bar into pieces roughly 1/2" square. Save the other half for a later batch of ice cream. Barely melt the chocolate pieces in a small bowl with the coconut oil in the microwave oven with a 20 second heating cycle on high heat. Stir the mixture to help melt the chocolate, then, if necessary, repeat the heating cycle but only for 10 seconds. Stir until the mixture is well combined, then mix/stir/whisk it

together with the corn syrup mixture until well combined. Pour the mixture onto a dinner plate making sure it is evenly distributed and put the plate into the freezer. After the mixture is frozen cut it into irregularly shaped pieces roughly 3/8" square with a large sharp knife and return those pieces to the freezer.

Break the eggs into a five or six quart electric mixer bowl and mix them on medium speed for one minute. Add the 3/4 cup of sugar and the vanilla and mix until well blended, around three minutes.

Add the cream and the milk and mix for two to three minutes on medium speed.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and proceed to make the ice cream. When it is fairly stiff (about twenty-five minutes), add the chopped/cut frozen chocolate pieces and run the gelato maker for an additional three minutes. Transfer the completed ice cream to a one and one half quart storage container. Put the container into the deep freeze for four hours or more to finish hardening the ice cream.

Serve the ice cream and be delighted.

Chocolate Chip Coconut Marshmallow Crème Ice Cream - ☺♥T

I decided to use my fine homemade coconut flavored marshmallow crème with chocolate ice cream to create a yummy variation of chocolate marshmallow ice cream.

Then I thought about adding dark chocolate chips (freezer chocolate that easily melts in your mouth) to the chocolate ice cream.

This recipe is the result of that process, and it is yummy! No ... It is far better than yummy!

Note that you do need to have or make the coconut flavored marshmallow crème. If you don't have it then use the Food Nirvana recipe for marshmallow crème and use coconut flavoring instead of vanilla and make only 1/3 of a batch. You can buy the coconut flavoring from OliveNation.com online.

You also make the freezer chocolate, and that recipe is included below.

The specific ice cream base ingredients and procedure shown below are for the Ben & Jerry's® type of ice cream ... easy to make and tasty. Know that you can also decide to use the Food Nirvana custard based vanilla ice cream recipe modified to make chocolate ice cream. Your choice. Both types of ice cream are fine. It is a matter of personal preference.

The Ice Cream:

Ingredients: (makes a bit more than 2 quarts of ice cream after adding in the chocolate chips and the marshmallow crème)

1, 12 ounce can of evaporated milk

2/3 cup of sugar

1 cup of milk

2 1/2 cups of heavy cream

2/3 cup of Hersheys® powdered unsweetened cocoa

1/3 cup of Hersheys® chocolate syrup

Pinch of salt

1 tsp. of pure vanilla extract

2 jumbo eggs

1/2 tsp. of Xanthan gum powder (optional)

2 cups of coconut flavored marshmallow crème

1 cup of freezer chocolate chips as described in the recipe below

Directions:

Mix the eggs with the sugar using an electric mixer on medium speed, then add the salt and the vanilla extract and continue mixing.

Add the evaporated milk and the regular milk. Then add the cream and mix for two minutes.

Reduce the mixer speed to very low and gradually add the unsweetened cocoa and then the chocolate syrup.

Gradually increase the mixer speed to medium and mix for three minutes to blend all ingredients. If necessary, stop the mixer and use a spatula to scrape any chocolate material from the inside of the mixer bowl into the rest of the mixture. Then resume mixing for two minutes.

Introduce the (optional) Xanthan gum to the mixer bowl very gradually, as in sprinkling it in, while the mixer is running on medium speed. Then continue to mix on medium speed for four minutes.

Chill the chocolate ice cream base in the refrigerator, covered, keeping it cold while you prepare the freezer chocolate.

The Freezer Chocolate:

Ingredients: (Makes about one cup of Freezer chocolate chunks)

2 to 3 ounces of dark high cacao content chocolate (like a Callebaut® Baking Chocolate Bar)

1.5 ounces of coconut oil

1 ounce of light corn syrup

1 tsp. of sugar

1 gram of soy lecithin (buy it online from OliveNation.com)

2 tsp. of water

Directions:

Weighing out and using the tiny amount of thick, sticky soy lecithin is a challenge. Use a precision kitchen scale accurate to the tenth of a gram. Put the two tsp. of water into the weighing pan and put the weighing pan on the scale. Now turn on the power to the scale. It will read zero as the weight. Add the soy lecithin by dipping a paring knife about one inch into the jar of soy lecithin vertically and then lifting the knife out and letting most of the soy lecithin drip/run off the tip of the knife back into the jar. Then hold the knife vertically over the weighing pan and let just enough soy lecithin drip from the knife into the water, until you have a weight of 1 gram showing on the scale display. Remove the weighing pan and use the contents in the next step.

Put the corn syrup, sugar, and the water and soy lecithin mixture into a small bowl. Stir well to get the soy lecithin to mix with the corn syrup. Heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven for 15 seconds and mix/stir until the sugar has dissolved. If necessary repeat the heating and stirring until the sugar has dissolved.

Use a wooden cutting board and a large, sharp butcher knife to shave the 2 oz. high cacao chocolate bar into thin sections, then chop across the sections to make the chocolate pieces thin and small. Barely melt the chocolate pieces in a small bowl with the coconut oil in the microwave oven with a 30 second heating cycle on high heat. Stir the mixture to help melt the chocolate, then, if necessary, repeat the heating cycle but only for 15 seconds. Stir until the mixture is well combined.

Mix/stir/whisk the chocolate coconut oil mixture together with the corn syrup mixture until well combined. If necessary heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven and stir until well combined.

Pour the completed freezer chocolate onto a sheet of parchment paper on a baking sheet and spread it out thin, about 1/16" thick, then put it in the deep freeze to harden for about one hour.

After it has hardened cut it up into small pieces with a butcher knife, about 1/2" on a side and return them to the deep freeze. Then proceed to make the final ice cream, as described next.

Making The Final Ice Cream:

Now use the gelato maker and freeze the chocolate ice cream base.

When it is almost done add the freezer chocolate pieces gradually and let them mix into the ice cream for two minutes. If you don't have enough room in the gelato maker then dispense the ice cream into a 2 quart chilled bowl and mix the chocolate pieces into the ice cream with a large spoon.

Dispense a 3/4" thick layer of the completed chocolate chip ice cream into a chilled 2 to 3 quart plastic storage container. Then use two spoons to put about 1/4 to 1/3 cup of spread out globs of the marshmallow crème on top of the layer of ice cream. Don't worry about precise measurements for either the ice cream or the marshmallow crème.

Repeat the layering of the ice cream and the marshmallow crème, finishing with a layer of ice cream.

Hard freeze the ice cream in the deep freeze for four or more hours.

Enjoy!

Chocolate Coated Butter Brickle Ice Cream Bars - 😊♥

Butter brickle ice cream is delicious. I figure that a great way to use it is in a chocolate coated ice cream bar, similar to a Magnum® bar. Thus, I pulled together the recipe information to make each component and put them all together in sequence in this recipe. I also provide detailed instructions to assure success.

I bought silicone molds for making ice cream bars through Amazon®. The brand is Silikomart® Easy Cream Ice Cream Molds. They are made in Italy and they cost about \$25 for enough molds to make four ice cream bars. I doubled the purchase so I could make eight ice cream bars at a time. Each mold will hold three volume ounces of ice cream. Thus, about three cups of ice cream are needed to make eight ice cream bars. The molds come with a package of 100 popsicle type sticks and you can buy the packages of sticks separately and inexpensively. One of the more interesting features of the molds is that you can use them for baking treats as well as frozen treats. They are very flexible, such that a frozen ice cream bar with the stick in it can be removed from the mold easily by manually flexing the mold after running warm faucet water over the back of the mold for five to ten seconds.

Thus, you make ice cream in a gelato maker and while it is still "relatively" soft you fill the molds, insert the popsicle sticks, and then hard freeze the bars. Once they are hard frozen you can remove the bars one at a time and coat them with a chocolate coating that will quickly set on the surface of the cold ice cream.

I made a simple, 12" long 2x4 wood board device (a holding rack) with 1" deep openings cut out to hold the base of each of eight popsicle sticks, well spaced from each other, so when the ice cream bar has been coated with the chocolate you hold it upside down until the chocolate coating hardens, then you turn it upright and put the base of the stick into an opening on the wood board where it will be held stationary. The idea is that you put the completed bars and the wood board into the freezer to complete the hardening process. Later you can remove and cover the ice cream bars with the product of your choice ... either something like a popsicle bag or, in my case, I will use small vacuum seal bags and slightly vacuum seal each bar for freezer storage, knowing that each bar will be very fresh later when the bag is opened.

Okay, the first product you want to make is the butter brickle, and the ingredients and directions are shown immediately below, followed by the recipe for the ice cream, and finally the recipe for the chocolate coating.

The Butter Brickle

Ingredients:

1/3 cup of light brown sugar

6 tablespoons of unsalted butter

Directions:

Add the brown sugar and butter to a small heavy bottom saucepan.

Bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low.

Use an instant read candy thermometer to monitor the temperature.

Continue to cook until the candy thermometer reaches 290 degrees F.

Pour the butter brickle onto a silicone baking sheet, spread it out thinly and then allow it to cool.

Once cooled, break up the butter brickle into pieces sized about 1" square.

Put the butter brickle pieces into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, seal it and use a wood kitchen mallet to crumble them. Then set the bag with the crumbled butter brickle aside in the freezer.

Now proceed to make the ice cream.

The Ice Cream

Ingredients: (makes about 6 cups, allowing extra for eating some of the ice cream later from a dish)

1 1/2 cups of milk

3 cups of heavy whipping cream

1 cup of light brown sugar

2 teaspoons of vanilla extract

3 extra large or jumbo eggs

Directions:

Turn on the gelato machine to pre-chill it.

Use an electric mixer to mix the eggs for one minute on medium speed.

Add the vanilla and the brown sugar and continue mixing for two minutes.

Add the heavy cream and the milk and continue mixing for two minutes.

Transfer the mixture to the gelato machine.

Run the machine until the ice cream is fairly firm.

Add the butter brickle pieces and continue to run the gelato machine for two to three minutes to let the pieces blend into the ice cream.

You are now ready to put the finished butter brickle ice cream into the silicone molds.

Use the ice cream paddle that comes with the gelato maker to remove ice cream and fill each mold.

Smooth out the top surface of the ice cream in each mold opening. Then insert the popsicle sticks into the mold openings, being sure to keep about three inches of each stick outside of the ice cream.

Hard freeze the ice cream bars in the deep freeze for four or more hours.

Put any extra ice cream into a plastic container with a tight fitting lid and put the container into the deep freeze.

Now, while the ice cream bars are hardening in the deep freeze you can make the chocolate coating.

The Chocolate Coating

Ingredients: (Makes about one cup of chocolate coating)

4 ounces of dark high cacao content chocolate (like a Ghirardelli® 100% cacao baking bar)

3.2 ounces of coconut oil

2 ounces of light corn syrup

1 tbsp. of sugar

1.4 grams of soy lecithin

2 tsp. of water

Directions:

Weighing out and using the tiny amount of thick, sticky soy lecithin is a challenge. Use a precision kitchen scale accurate to the tenth of a gram. Put the one tsp. of corn syrup into the weighing pan and put the weighing pan on the scale. Now turn on the power to the scale. It will read zero as the weight. Add the soy lecithin by dipping a kitchen table knife about one inch into the jar of soy lecithin vertically and then lifting the knife out and letting most of the soy lecithin drip/run off the tip of the knife back into the jar. Then hold the knife vertically over the weighing pan and let just enough soy lecithin drip from the knife into the corn syrup, until you have a weight of 1.4 grams showing on the scale display. Stir to combine the corn syrup and the soy lecithin. Remove the weighing pan and use the contents in the next step.

Put the 2 ounces of corn syrup, one tbsp. of sugar, the water and the corn syrup/soy lecithin mixture into a small bowl. Stir well to get the soy lecithin to mix with the corn syrup. Heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven for 20 seconds and mix/stir until the sugar has dissolved. If necessary repeat the heating and stirring until the sugar has dissolved.

Use a wooden cutting board to cut the chocolate into pieces roughly 1/2" square. Barely melt the chocolate pieces in a small bowl with the coconut oil in the microwave oven with a 30 second heating cycle on high heat. Stir the mixture to help melt the chocolate, then, if necessary, repeat the heating cycle but only for 20 seconds. Stir until the mixture is well combined, then mix/stir/whisk it together with the corn syrup mixture until well combined. If necessary heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven and stir until well combined.

Chill the chocolate coating in the refrigerator briefly to cool it but do not try to use it if it has hardened. If it hardens before you need to use it then lightly microwave it immediately before use and stir it just enough to return it to a thick liquid consistency.

Once the ice cream bars are hard frozen you are ready to use the chocolate coating. The procedure described next explains how to coat them and then store them for a final freezing prior to packaging.

Chocolate Coating Procedure:

Gently remove an ice cream bar from the silicone mold after running warm faucet water over the back of the mold for no more than five to ten seconds.

Hold the bar upside down over the bowl of chocolate coating. Use a small scoop or large spoon to extract chocolate coating from the bowl and drizzle it over the ice cream portion of the ice cream bar evenly, letting the excess coating drip back into the bowl.

Repeat this process to make sure the bar is completely covered with chocolate, then once the chocolate sets (hardens), which happens quickly, invert the ice cream bar and insert the base of the stick into the wood holding rack.

It is best to keep the wood holding rack in a regular refrigerator freezer while you are coating the ice cream bars so that the ones done earliest stay frozen.

Repeat the above coating steps for the other ice cream bars.

At this point you can package the ice cream bars and then keep them in a deep freeze.

Enjoy this delight ... you earned it!

Chocolate Covered Cherries Ice Cream - ☺♥

This ice cream is a new entry for Food Nirvana, a kind of serendipity following a simple idea. If we can have chocolate covered cherries then why not chocolate covered cherries ice cream? All it takes is some high quality cocoa (Hershey's® Special Dark Cocoa [100% cocoa]) and some nice maraschino cherries and juice, plus the regular ingredients for a nice vanilla ice cream. Well, Food Nirvana has a fine recipe for vanilla ice cream so I just had to make this new ice cream ... so I did, and it is delicious. Now you can make it too!

Ingredients: (Makes about 1½ quarts of ice cream)

2 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of milk

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

2/3 cup of sugar

A dash of salt

1 tbsp. of natural vanilla extract

1/2 cup of maraschino cherry juice

1/3 cup (or maybe a bit more) of Hershey's® Special Dark Cocoa powder

1/2 tsp. of Xanthan gum powder

1/2 cup of coarsely chopped maraschino cherries

Directions:

Prepare 1/2 cup of coarsely chopped maraschino cherries, then put them in a small bowl in the freezer until they are needed.

Mix the eggs with the sugar and the salt in the electric mixer on low to medium speed. Add the vanilla and the maraschino cherry juice and continue mixing on low to medium speed.

Add the cocoa powder slowly. When it is mixed in then slowly add the cream and the milk and mix until all the ingredients are well combined.

Add the Xanthan gum powder in small amounts by tapping on the spoon holding it so that it almost dusts its way into the rest of the ice cream ingredients while

the mixer is running. That method is necessary to keep it from clumping together while being added to the ice cream mixture.

Turn on the gelato machine to pre-chill it.

Mix the ice cream ingredients on medium speed for five minutes to hydrate the Xanthan gum powder.

Add half of the ice cream mixture to the gelato machine and freeze the ice cream, putting half of the chopped maraschino cherries into the ice cream a few minutes before it is done freezing (the gelato machine mixing will slow down and that is when you add the chopped cherries and continue the freezing until the hardening ice cream nearly stops the gelato machine blades from turning).

Turn off the gelato machine.

Put the ice cream into a 3 to 4 cup plastic container with a lid and put it into the freezer.

Repeat the above freezing steps for the other half of the ice cream mixture and the chopped maraschino cherries.

Serve the ice cream after it has hard frozen (a few hours later) and be delighted.

Enjoy!

Chocolate Malted Milk Ice Cream - ☺♥

Malted milk powder has a huge, positive effect in the taste of milk shakes and other dessert dairy products. In this recipe malted milk powder is used directly in flavoring chocolate custard base ice cream and I expected the results to be excellent.

And so they were! I used basically what looked like a pretty good custard ice cream base recipe from the Internet ... and I quantified it regarding temperatures and modified it a bit with the addition of the milk to make the custard process more reliable by being less prone to being ruined by unintentional overheating. Actually I've changed ingredient amounts also to what I know makes a superior custard base ice cream, like limiting the sugar to 2/3 of a cup and using enough vanilla extract to be noticeable.

Since this is a custard base ice cream it is very important not to exceed the indicated temperatures, so use an instant read thermometer and be vigilant while heating the ingredient mixtures. Stir with scraping using a wooden spoon while heating to keep any forming custard from overheating on the inside surface of the saucepan. Also, use a heavy bottom saucepan and nothing higher than medium heat to assure even, controlled heating.

Note that malted milk powder can easily be used in different ice cream recipes to enhance taste (examples: vanilla or strawberry), with the exception of certain types of ice creams noted for already having a unique desirable taste, and/or texture, like Rocky Road. For example, some fruit ice creams and especially fruity gelatos will lose their unique, bright taste if malted milk powder is added to the recipe.

Ingredients: (makes about 1 1/2 quarts of ice cream)

1, 12 oz. can of evaporated milk

2/3 cup of sugar

1/2 cup of milk

2 cups of heavy cream

2/3 cup of malted milk powder

2/3 cup of Hersheys® powdered unsweetened cocoa

Pinch of salt

1 tsp. of pure vanilla extract

5 jumbo or six extra large egg yolks

Directions:

Put the first seven ingredients into a heavy base two quart saucepan, whisking the mixture with each addition to blend the ingredients.

In a separate one quart stainless steel bowl, whisk together the egg yolks.

In a separate two or three quart stainless steel bowl put in the vanilla extract and place a fine sieve or strainer over the top of the bowl.

Warm the mixture in the saucepan to 140 degrees F while slowly whisking, making sure to get all of the solids dissolved and well mixed with the liquid ingredients.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Slowly pour a cup of the warmed mixture into the whisked egg yolks, while whisking constantly, then pour the contents back into the saucepan and whisk briefly.

Return the saucepan to the heat.

Stir the chocolate custard mixture constantly over medium heat with a wooden spoon, scraping the bottom as you stir, until the mixture reaches 175 degrees F.

Immediately pour the chocolate custard through the sieve/strainer, remove the sieve/strainer, and whisk the chocolate custard with the vanilla extract.

Discard the sieve/strainer contents and set the sieve/strainer aside to be cleaned.

Scoop out any custard left in the saucepan with a spoon and add it to the bowl of chocolate custard and whisk to mix it in.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the chocolate custard for two to three hours or until it is totally chilled to the refrigerator temperature.

Freeze the mixture in your ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Use a two quart covered plastic container or a paper carton of the closable type used for takeout foods to hold the ice cream.

Hard freeze the ice cream for three to four hours in the deep freeze or in the refrigerator freezer section.

Enjoy!

Coffee Ice Cream - ☺♥

My daughter Patty and son-in-law Mike and I planned to make a variety of ice creams using my new Lussino model 4080 Lello Dessert Maker, by Musso Srl., an Italian company. That unit received very high ratings and I found it on Amazon® for \$549 with free shipping. It was a very wise purchase. Patty said she would like us to make coffee ice cream. That was one variety I did not have in Food Nirvana. Said problem is now fixed with the recipe below which is delicious. Oh, I refer to the dessert maker in this recipe as a gelato machine as it was designed to be that.

We used the fine Food Nirvana recipe for Custard Ice Cream Base, 1/4 cup of Nestle® instant coffee granules and 1/2 cup of SweetGourmet® chocolate espresso beans blend of white, milk and dark chocolate, individual pieces chopped in half, and some vanilla. The addition of the chopped chocolate espresso beans really amped up the flavor and texture of what would have been a very good but not outstanding ice cream flavor.

So now the ice cream is outstanding. You can buy a one pound bag of the SweetGourmet® chocolate espresso beans on Amazon® for \$12.95. As of now, buy two bags and the shipping is free.

Ingredients: (makes about 6 cups)

1 1/2 cups of milk

3 cups of heavy cream

3/4 cup of sugar

1 tbsp. of pure vanilla extract

5 jumbo egg yolks

1/8 teaspoon of salt

1/4 cup of Nestle® instant coffee granules

1/2 cup of halved pieces of SweetGourmet® Chocolate Espresso Beans Blend - White, Milk & Dark Chocolate

Directions:

Heat the cream, milk, sugar and salt in a heavy bottom saucepan, on medium-low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon to dissolve the sugar completely, while

raising the temperature to 140 degrees F (use an instant read thermometer). That will take about 4 to 5 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Whisk the yolks in a separate bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly pour about one cup of the hot cream mixture into the yolks. Then, gradually whisk that yolk and cream mixture back into the saucepan with the rest of the cream mixture.

Return the saucepan to medium-low heat and cook while stirring until the mixture is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon (175 degrees F on an instant-read thermometer). Then immediately remove the saucepan from the heat.

Strain the custard base through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and allow the custard base to cool to room temperature.

Chill the covered custard base in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours. Note that you can keep the custard base refrigerated before use for up to three to four days if it is well covered.

Chop the chocolate espresso bean candy pieces in half with a heavy knife on a wooden cutting board.

Add the instant coffee granules and the vanilla to the custard base, stir briefly, and then transfer the mixture to the gelato machine and turn it on. The churning of the gelato machine will dissolve the coffee granules into the custard base.

Run the gelato machine until the ice cream is fairly firm, about 30 minutes.

Add the chopped chocolate espresso bean candy pieces and continue to run the gelato machine for two to three minutes to let the pieces blend into the ice cream.

Package the ice cream in a two quart plastic or paper storage container with a tight fitting lid.

Hard freeze the ice cream in the deep freeze for two to four hours.

Serve. You will love this stuff!

Creamy Vanilla Brown Sugar Ice Cream - ☺♥

This is a very rich and delicious ice cream, and I just lucked my way into discovering it. Basically it is a nice vanilla ice cream in which half of the sugar used is dark brown sugar, and a slightly larger amount than typical of xanthan gum powder is used. To cut to the chase I was experimenting and this one turned out to be great.

I hope you make it. You will be quite pleased. Also, if you do not have xanthan gum powder then buy it via the Internet. It is an important ice cream ingredient since commercial dairies cut the amount of butterfat in heavy cream to 36%.

Ingredients: (makes about 1½ quarts of ice cream)

2 jumbo eggs

2 cups of heavy cream

1/3 cup of white sugar

1/3 cup of dark brown sugar

1/4 cup of malted milk powder

1 1/2 cups of 4% butterfat milk (regular whole milk)

1 Madagascar (or other) vanilla bean pod

1 tablespoon of pure vanilla extract

1/3 tsp. of xanthan gum powder

Directions:

Cut the vanilla pod in half lengthwise and scrape all of the dark vanilla particles from the inside of each pod half, then set those particles aside in a small dish. Save the pod pieces for other uses, like putting them into a bowl of sugar to make vanilla sugar.

Use your electric mixer to beat the eggs on medium speed, then pause to add the sugars, the malted milk powder, the vanilla extract and the reserved vanilla particles and resume mixing. Mix thoroughly.

Slowly add the cream and then the milk while continuing to mix for one minute.

Sprinkle the xanthan gum powder lightly into the ice cream mixture while the mixer is running, then mix for an additional four minutes on medium speed.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and turn it on. After about 25 minutes check the ice cream to see if it is fairly stiff. If necessary continue to run the gelato maker for an additional ten minutes.

Transfer the ice cream from the gelato maker into a good quality 1½ quart plastic container that has a tight fitting lid. Put the lid on the ice cream and put the container into a deep freeze for four to six hours.

The ice cream is then ready to serve. It is delicious!

Note that one easy way to soften hard frozen ice cream to make scooping easy is to put the ice cream container into the microwave oven and run it on high power for 15 seconds.

Enjoy!

Custard Ice Cream Base - ☺♥T

Food Nirvana Ice Cream recipes generally have not used a Custard Base, for in the past I have preferred Ben and Jerry's® simple ice cream base, both for simplicity and flavor. But times have changed and the heavy cream we can buy in super markets now stinks ... it was changed from 40 percent butterfat with no other added ingredients to 36 percent butterfat with thickening agents like carrageenan. That really ticked me off because it impacts how well the cream works when making homemade ice cream. Specifically, some amounts of too thickened crap can form during the churning and freezing of the ice cream. That is disgusting and entirely a matter of supplier greed.

You can still get good heavy cream directly at some dairy farms, but that limitation is ridiculous. Also terribly expensive.

My response was to make a very good custard base, which involves some filtering through a fine sieve to eliminate any congealed material, which also happened to eliminate the artificial thickener problem. I found a number of good custard base recipes and the one below looked to be the best ... modified, of course, by me to include certain important specifics, like cooking temperature, that were missing or somewhat off in the Internet recipes I found. The recommended number of egg yolks to be used was anywhere from two to eight. As I use jumbo eggs the recipe below indicates that four egg yolks should be used. You can vary the number based on the type of eggs you use and your preferences for smoothness/richness of the ice cream. I am highly pleased with the amount of egg yolks I used.

I declare complete and perfect success with this recipe. It is fabulous. What I did was cross reference it in all of the appropriate Food Nirvana ice cream recipes so readers have the choice of using the Ben and Jerry's simple ice cream base, or, this new custard ice cream base. I think you know which one I will be using.

Ingredients:

2 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of whole milk

2/3 cup of sugar

1/8 teaspoon of fine sea salt

4 jumbo or 5 extra large or 6 large egg yolks

Your choice of flavoring, like 2 tablespoons of pure vanilla extract

Directions:

Heat the cream, milk, sugar and salt in a heavy bottom saucepan, on medium-low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon to dissolve the sugar completely, while raising the temperature to 140 degrees F (use an instant read thermometer). That will take about 4 to 5 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Whisk the yolks in a separate bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly pour about one cup of the hot cream mixture into the yolks. Then, gradually whisk that yolk and cream mixture back into the saucepan with the rest of the cream mixture.

Return the saucepan to medium-low heat and cook while stirring until the mixture is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon (175 degrees on an instant-read thermometer). Then immediately remove the saucepan from the heat.

Strain the custard base through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and allow the custard base to cool to room temperature.

Chill the covered custard base in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours or even overnight. Note that you can keep the custard base refrigerated before use for up to three to four days if it is well covered.

Add your choice of flavoring ingredient(s) to the custard base, per whatever ice cream recipe you are making. Stir as necessary to mix. Note that some ingredients aren't added, depending on the recipe, until the ice cream is pretty well frozen in the next step, like butter brickle chips or Oreo cookie pieces, etc.

Churn and chill the flavored custard base in an ice cream machine according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Serve the ice cream directly from the ice cream machine for soft serve, or store it in the freezer in a sealed paper or plastic container until needed, to have a very rich tasting and smooth texture ice cream.

Dipping Chocolate - ☺♥

My purpose for having this recipe is to be able to make ice cream bars rivaling those made by Dove® and Magnum®. This recipe in original form comes from the Serious Eats© website and the author's last name is Falkowitz. I made some modifications but the basic recipe works very well.

Dove® and Magnum® ice cream bars have thick coatings of delicious Belgian chocolate. I am using the Callebaut® 11 pound Belgian Dark Block Chocolate bar typically used for baking applications, ergo, high in cacao (70%) and low on flow rate. This choice works well with the dipping recipe.

I plan to try coating ice cream bars with ice cold crystals of Heath Bar® toffee prior to doing the dipping. That will produce a common and delicious variation to the plain dark chocolate ice cream bar.

You can also dip ice cream cones or pour a coating of the dip onto a dish of very cold ice cream.

Ingredients:

4 ounces of dark chocolate bar of 70% or more cacao

3.2 ounces of coconut oil (use the high heat stabilized version)

2 ounces of light corn syrup

1 tbsp. of sugar

2 tsp. of water

1.4 grams of liquid food grade soy lecithin

Directions:

Shave or cut thin layers of chocolate from the bar, weigh the chocolate, and put it into a microwave safe bowl.

Weigh and then add the coconut oil.

Microwave the mixture in 30 second intervals, stirring after each interval until the mixture is just melted. It is not necessary or desirable to heat the mixture beyond what is needed to barely melt the chocolate/combine it with the coconut oil. Stirring after each heating period is essential and you will find that partially melted chocolate will melt well with stirring after the first or second heating period.

Next, use a precision scale to hold the water in the weighing pan as a tare weight and then dispense 1.4 grams of soy lecithin into the water. Combine the corn syrup and the sugar in a small bowl, then add the contents of the weighing pan being sure to get all of the soy lecithin.

Stir the mixture to combine the ingredients and then microwave for 15 seconds and stir again. Repeat the heating and stirring until the sugar is dissolved.

Add the corn syrup mixture to the chocolate and coconut oil mixture and mix well. Microwave for 30 seconds and stir well to complete the mixing. You can then chill the dip briefly in the refrigerator to cool it to room temperature, and then use it to coat ice cream bars.

The dip can be stored in a sealed container at room temperature for up to two months. If you use it after a long storage period remember to stir the mixture before use to accommodate any ingredient separation that might occur during storage.

The dip will set within 30 seconds on the surface of the ice cream bar after hard frozen ice cream from the deep freeze is coated with it.

Enjoy!

Evaporated Milk Custard Ice Cream Base - ☺♥

The recipe below has identical text to the standard one in Food Nirvana for a custard ice cream base. What I have done here is provide you a modification to that recipe that I tried with stellar results ... the use of half heavy cream and half evaporated milk (1 1/2 cups of each) to create a very rich and creamy vanilla ice cream. I think you can use this change for other ice creams that have rich flavors, like chocolate, but I suggest you avoid using this change if you are making a light tasting fruit ice cream or any gelato, for there is a taste overtone resulting from using evaporated milk that is wonderful for some ice creams and not for others.

Food Nirvana Ice Cream recipes generally have not used a Custard Base, for in the past I have preferred Ben and Jerry's simple ice cream base, both for simplicity and flavor. But times have changed and the heavy cream we can buy in super markets now stinks ... it was changed from 40 percent butterfat with no other added ingredients to 36 percent butterfat with thickening agents like carrageenan. That really ticked me off because it impacts how well the cream works when making homemade ice cream. Specifically, some amounts of too thickened crap can form during the churning and freezing of the ice cream. That is disgusting and entirely a matter of supplier greed.

You can still get good heavy cream directly at some dairy farms, but that limitation is ridiculous. In general, so is the cost.

My response was to make a very good custard base, which involves some filtering through a fine sieve to eliminate any congealed material, which also happened to eliminate the artificial thickener problem. I found a number of good custard base recipes and the one below looked to be the best ... modified, of course, by me to include certain important specifics, like cooking temperature, that were missing or somewhat off in the Internet recipes I found. The recommended number of egg yolks to be used was anywhere from two to eight. As I use jumbo eggs the recipe below indicates that four egg yolks should be used. You can vary the number based on the type of eggs you use and your preferences for smoothness/richness of the ice cream. I am highly pleased with the amount of egg yolks I used.

I declare complete and perfect success with this recipe. It is fabulous. What I did was cross reference it in all of the appropriate Food Nirvana ice cream recipes so readers have the choice of using the Ben and Jerry's simple ice cream base, or, this new custard ice cream base. I think you know which one I will be using.

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups of heavy cream

1, 12 ounce can of evaporated milk

2/3 cup of sugar

1/8 teaspoon of fine sea salt

4 jumbo or 5 extra large or 6 large egg yolks

Your choice of flavoring, like 2 tablespoons of pure vanilla extract

Directions:

Heat the cream, evaporated milk, sugar and salt in a heavy bottom saucepan, on medium-low heat, stirring with a wooden spoon to dissolve the sugar completely, while raising the temperature to 140 degrees F (use an instant read thermometer). That will take about 4 to 5 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Whisk the yolks in a separate bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly pour about one cup of the hot cream mixture into the yolks. Then, gradually whisk that yolk and cream mixture back into the saucepan with the rest of the cream mixture.

Return the saucepan to medium-low heat and cook while stirring until the mixture is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon (175 degrees on an instant-read thermometer). Then immediately remove the saucepan from the heat.

Strain the custard base through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and allow the custard base to cool to room temperature.

Chill the covered custard base in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours or even overnight. Note that you can keep the custard base refrigerated before use for up to three to four days if it is well covered.

Add your choice of flavoring ingredient(s) to the custard base, per whatever ice cream recipe you are making. Stir as necessary to mix. Note that some ingredients aren't added, depending on the recipe, until the ice cream is pretty well frozen in the next step, like butter brickle chips or Oreo cookie pieces, etc.

Churn and chill the flavored custard base in an ice cream machine according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Serve the ice cream directly from the ice cream machine for soft serve, or store it in the freezer in a sealed paper or plastic container until needed, to have a very rich tasting and smooth texture ice cream.

Freezer Chocolate - ☺♥

If you think about the tasty chocolate coating on Dove® or Haagen Daz® ice cream bars you will realize you are eating freezer chocolate. Said chocolate is a mixture of ingredients that will be solid when very cold but melt quickly once inside your mouth. If you coat an ice cream bar with chocolate from a typical candy bar it will have the consistency of crayons when you try to eat it. Yuck!

This means we also need to make and use freezer chocolate any time we want to make any ice cream containing chocolate chips. For example, mint chocolate chip ice cream, which is delicious when well made.

The recipe below is simple except for getting and using food grade soy lecithin, which is an emulsifying agent and essential to making good freezer chocolate. You can buy the soy lecithin via the Internet from places like www.modernistpantry.com ... and you only need a small container, like 175 ml, and that will last you for years.

Getting the soy lecithin to combine with the other freezer chocolate ingredients is pretty easy but only if you combine it and mix it well first only in the corn syrup. Otherwise it is terrible to try to combine it with the other ingredients.

Ingredients:

5 ounces of dark high cacao content chocolate (Like a Lindt® dark chocolate bar, or my favorite, Callebaut® Dark Chocolate callets)

3 ounces of coconut oil (I like the type that has coconut flavor, which adds a subtle and delightful taste to the later ice cream products where it is used)

2 ounces of light corn syrup

1 tbsp. of sugar

1.5 grams of food grade soy lecithin in 1 tsp. of light corn syrup

2 tsp. of water

Directions:

Weighing out and using the tiny amount of thick, sticky soy lecithin is a challenge. Use a precision kitchen scale accurate to the tenth of a gram. I use a "reloader" scale that I purchased from Cabela's® ... one that is typically used to reload firearm cartridges.

Put the one tsp. of corn syrup into the weighing pan and put the weighing pan on the scale. Now turn on the power to the scale. It will read zero as the weight.

Add the soy lecithin by dipping a kitchen table knife about one inch into the jar of soy lecithin vertically and then lifting the knife out and letting most of the soy lecithin drip/run off the tip of the knife back into the jar. Then hold the knife vertically over the weighing pan and let just enough soy lecithin drip from the knife into the corn syrup, until you have a weight of 1.5 grams showing on the scale display.

Clean the knife by wiping it firmly on both sides on the rim of the open soy lecithin bottle, then wipe the knife with a paper towel and return the lid to the soy lecithin bottle.

Remove the weighing pan from the scale. Stir the contents to combine the corn syrup and the soy lecithin and use them in the next step.

Mix the two ounces of corn syrup and the soy lecithin/corn syrup mixture in a small bowl or cup, then add the one tbsp. of sugar and the water and mix well. Heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven for 15 seconds and mix/stir until the sugar has dissolved. If necessary repeat the heating and stirring until the sugar has dissolved.

Use a wooden cutting board to cut the chocolate bar into pieces roughly 1/2" square. Barely melt the chocolate pieces in a cereal bowl with the coconut oil in the microwave oven with a 30 second heating cycle on high heat. Then stir the mixture to help melt the chocolate. If necessary, repeat the heating cycle but only for 10 seconds. Stir until the mixture is well combined, then add in and mix/stir/whisk it with the corn syrup mixture until well combined. If necessary, heat the mixture again briefly in the microwave oven and stir until well combined.

Pour the chocolate mixture thinly on to a sheet of parchment paper on a 12"x17" baking sheet. Chill the chocolate in the freezer or deep freeze until it is set, then cut it into small squares about 1/2" on a side using a large butcher knife (which makes the process quick and easy and avoids having the freezer chocolate melt).

Put the cut/broken pieces into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag and put that into the freezer until you are later ready to add the freezer chocolate to soft frozen ice cream ... or to barely melt it before coating a hard frozen ice cream bar.

Enjoy!

French Vanilla Ice Cream - ☺♥

This is a very rich and delicious ice cream, and I describe two unique ways of making it. My first recipe is based on that found in Ben and Jerry's® "Homemade Ice Cream & Dessert Book.©" but I have modified their recipe a bit to get what I want. Thus, it took me a few times to get it right. Now it is perfect and you get the benefit of my experience.

The key to making great French Vanilla ice cream is to include extra egg yolks, a Madagascar vanilla bean pod and a nice heavy cream content. The egg yolks add body, color and texture. The vanilla pod amps up the vanilla flavor considerably and puts those tiny specks of vanilla in the ice cream that you will see when buying a very high quality vanilla ice cream. The use of more cream and less milk makes a creamier ice cream. The recipe below has my changes. Do note that vanilla bean pod is expensive so you may opt to simply increase the amount of vanilla extract to three or four tablespoons, or buy vanilla beans online at a great price at www.myspicesage.com.

I have learned that Ben and Jerry are right about limiting the total amount of cream. Some milk causes the ice cream to take on the right amount of air during the freezing process to produce a consistency that is perfect.

Do check out the recipe variation described at the end of this recipe. It uses the Food Nirvana Custard Ice Cream Base recipe plus the two jumbo eggs referenced below instead of the first four ingredients shown. It is amazing!

Ingredients: (makes about 1½ quarts of ice cream)

2 jumbo eggs plus two egg yolks

2 cups of heavy cream

¾ cup of sugar

1 cup of milk

1 Madagascar vanilla bean pod

1 tablespoon of vanilla extract

Directions:

Cut the vanilla pod in half lengthwise and scrape all of the dark vanilla particles from the inside of each pod half, then set those particles aside in a small dish. Save the pod pieces for other uses, like putting them into a bowl of sugar to make vanilla sugar.

Use your electric mixer to beat the eggs and the egg yolks on medium speed, then pause to add the sugar, the vanilla extract and the reserved vanilla particles and resume mixing. Mix thoroughly. Slowly add the cream and the milk while continuing to mix.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and turn it on. After about 25 minutes check the ice cream to see if it is fairly stiff. If necessary continue to run the gelato maker for an additional ten minutes.

Transfer the ice cream from the gelato maker into a good quality 1½ to 2 quart plastic container that has a tight fitting lid. Put the lid on the ice cream and put the container into a deep freeze for four to six hours.

The ice cream is then ready to serve. It is delicious!

Notes:

The temperature of a deep freeze is typically lower than that of the freezer of your refrigerator, and that means the deep freeze is superior to your refrigerator freezer in the last step of final freezing of the ice cream. Use your deep freeze and the ice cream will be ready within a few hours. Conversely, the freezer of your refrigerator may not properly freeze the ice cream at all (it depends in part on how you set your freezer settings), and even if it does you may have to wait until the next day to eat the ice cream properly frozen.

The earlier references to the Custard Ice Cream Base recipe result from my experimenting with making custard base ice creams. The Custard based recipe is exceptionally creamy and rich and thus is perfect for making French Vanilla Ice Cream. Do try it. It is a bit more work cooking the custard base and chilling it but believe me it is well worth the extra effort.

Malted Milk Ice Cream - ☺♥

Malted milk powder has a huge, positive effect in the taste of milk shakes and other dessert dairy products. In this recipe malted milk powder is used directly in flavoring custard base ice cream and I expected the results to be excellent.

And so they were! I used basically what looked like a pretty good custard ice cream base recipe from the Internet ... and I quantified it regarding temperatures and modified it a bit with the addition of the milk to make the custard process more reliable by being less prone to being ruined by unintentional overheating. Actually I changed ingredient amounts also to what I know makes a superior custard base ice cream, like limiting the sugar to 2/3 of a cup and using enough vanilla extract to be noticeable.

Since this is a custard base ice cream it is very important not to exceed the indicated temperatures, so use an instant read thermometer and be vigilant while heating the ingredient mixtures. Stir with scraping using a wooden spoon while heating to keep any forming custard from overheating on the inside surface of the saucepan. Also, use a heavy bottom saucepan and nothing higher than medium heat to assure even, controlled heating.

Note that malted milk powder can easily be used in different ice cream recipes to enhance taste (examples: chocolate, vanilla or strawberry), with the exception of certain types of ice creams noted for already having a unique desirable taste, and/or texture, like Rocky Road. For example, some fruit ice creams and especially fruity gelatos will lose their unique, bright taste if malted milk powder is added to the recipe.

Ingredients: (makes about 1 1/2 quarts of ice cream)

1, 12 oz. can of evaporated milk

2/3 cup of sugar

1/2 cup of milk

2 cups of heavy cream

2/3 cup of malted milk powder

Pinch of salt

1 tbsp. of pure vanilla extract

5 jumbo or six extra large egg yolks

Directions:

Put the first six ingredients into a heavy base two quart saucepan, whisking the mixture with each addition to blend the ingredients.

In a separate one quart stainless steel bowl, whisk together the egg yolks.

In a separate two or three quart stainless steel bowl put in the vanilla extract and place a fine sieve or strainer over the top of the bowl.

Warm the mixture in the saucepan to 140 degrees F while slowly whisking, making sure to get all of the solids dissolved and well mixed with the liquid ingredients.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Slowly pour a cup of the warmed mixture into the whisked egg yolks, while whisking constantly, then pour the contents back into the saucepan and whisk briefly.

Return the saucepan to the heat.

Stir the custard mixture constantly over medium heat with a wooden spoon, scraping the bottom as you stir, until the mixture reaches 175 degrees F.

Immediately pour the custard through the sieve/strainer, remove the sieve/strainer, and whisk the custard with the vanilla extract.

Discard the sieve/strainer contents and set the sieve/strainer aside to be cleaned.

Scoop out any custard left in the saucepan with a spoon and add it to the bowl of custard and whisk to mix it in.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the custard for two to three hours or until it is totally chilled to the refrigerator temperature.

Freeze the mixture in your ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Use a two quart covered plastic container or a paper carton of the closable type used for takeout foods to hold the ice cream.

Hard freeze the ice cream for three to four hours in the deep freeze or in the refrigerator freezer section.

Enjoy!

Maple Walnut Ice Cream - ☺♥

This flavor of ice cream is pretty popular with some folks and is completely ignored by others. It was my mother's favorite, it is Janet's mother's favorite and also the favorite of Janet's best friend, Dottie. It turns out that this ice cream flavor is also my grandson Arthur's favorite as well. I just had to make some to keep everyone happy.

The ice cream recipe is another one from Ben and Jerry. I modified their recipe a bit but it is close to what they recommend. I changed the type and increased the amount of maple syrup and chopped walnuts. Ben and Jerry recommend grade C dark maple syrup, which is generally used as a food additive, not a syrup, because it is very strong in taste. Trust me, they are right. The Grade A syrups are far too diluted to be any good in making this ice cream. The Grade B syrup is better but you have to use more of it than the grade C syrup and even then the maple flavor is too weak.

Based on my experiments trying Grade A Dark Amber and Grade B Dark Amber neither syrup is sufficient to impart enough maple flavor to the ice cream. Grade C syrup is flat out not available. This means use grade B and supplement it with Crescent Mapleine® imitation maple flavor, which is what I have done with total success. Most recently I learned that what we used to call Grade B is now called Dark Amber Grade A. What silly game playing! No matter how any of it is named you still must use the Crescent Mapleine® to get a sufficiently strong maple taste.

I have also learned that using pecans instead of walnuts is great! You definitely want to try pecans in this recipe instead of walnuts. Both are delicious but clearly different from each other. Have fun!

Ingredients: (makes almost 1/2 gallon)

2 cups of heavy cream

1/2 cup of half and half

1/2 cup of whole (4% butterfat) milk

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

3/4 cup of sugar

1/2 cup of Grade B (or now Grade A) Dark Amber maple syrup

1 teaspoon of Mapleine® imitation maple flavoring

1 cup of chopped walnuts or pecans

Directions:

Mix the eggs at medium speed in an electric mixer in a 4 or 6 quart mixing bowl.

When they are well mixed add the sugar and continue mixing for two minutes.

Add the heavy cream, half and half, and milk while continuing to mix for two minutes.

Add the maple syrup and the Mapleine® and mix for one minute.

Pour the ice cream mixture into a gelato maker and process it for about 25 minutes.

When it is fairly stiff add the chopped walnuts or pecans and continue processing for two to three minutes.

Transfer the ice cream to a two quart plastic container with a tight fitting lid.

Put the ice cream into the deep freeze and let it harden for four or more hours.

Serve and enjoy!

Mint Chocolate Chip Ice Cream - ☺♥

This is a very rich and delicious ice cream. My recipe is based on looking at various Internet recipes and then deciding what combination of ingredients and procedures would work best. The bottom line? This recipe is perfect. Make this ice cream and you will be highly pleased. The mint flavor in the ice cream is evident but not overwhelmingly strong. Oh, yes, for a mind blowing variant of this recipe make the Food Nirvana Custard Ice Cream Base and chill it, then proceed with the recipe below, skipping the first four ingredients shown and starting with the directions for adding the remaining ingredients.

The key to making great mint chocolate chip ice cream is to start with a really good recipe for vanilla ice cream and then simply add pure peppermint extract and, get this, Andes® Crème De Menthe Baking Chips. The idea is that the chocolate in those baking chips is perfect for this specific ice cream, and the mint filling adds even more to the experience. You can, of course, spend more money and get a somewhat better product by buying a 4.7 ounce box of Andes® mints and cutting each mint into 4 or more pieces.

Ingredients: (makes about 1½ quarts of ice cream)

2 jumbo eggs or three large eggs

2 cups of heavy cream

¾ cup of granulated sugar

1 1/2 cups of milk (regular, Lactaid® or Simply Smart®)

1 tbsp. of McCormick® pure vanilla extract

1 to 2 tsp. of McCormick® culinary pure peppermint extract

5 ounces of Andes® Crème De Menthe baking chips or Ande's® mints eat cut into 4 or more pieces

4 to 5 drops of green food coloring

Directions:

Put the baking chips or the cut mints into a bowl and put it into the freezer.

Use your electric mixer to beat the eggs on medium low to medium speed, then pause to add the sugar, the vanilla extract, the peppermint extract and the green food coloring and resume mixing. Mix thoroughly. Slowly add the cream and the milk while continuing to mix.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker and turn it on. After about 25 minutes check the ice cream to see if it is fairly stiff. If necessary continue to run the gelato maker for an additional ten minutes.

Add the Andes® Crème De Menthe baking chips (or the Ande's® mint pieces) to the ice cream a little at a time and continue running the gelato maker for two to three minutes to allow time for the chips to mix properly with the ice cream.

Transfer the ice cream from the gelato maker into a good quality 1½ quart plastic or other food storage container that has a tight fitting lid. Put the lid on the ice cream and put the container into a deep freeze for four to six hours.

The ice cream is then ready to serve. It is delicious! You may want to serve it with a few small lemon sugar cookies on the side and a nice hot cup of freshly made coffee.

Peanut Butter and Chocolate Fudge Swirl Ice Cream - ☺♥

Wow! Now we are talking about some seriously good ice cream! This recipe is a composite of different Internet recipes that I tried and modified to get exactly what I want. The Internet recipes were too light on both peanut butter and chocolate. They must have been created by dairies that sell ice cream, to make you think you can't achieve perfection like them! Guess again, dairies ...

One improvement I would like to suggest for this recipe is to use cake decorating icing tubes to dispense the peanut butter sauce and the chocolate fudge sauce in the final steps to create relatively even and thin layers of both over a number of thinner layers of ice cream. Then the swirling part with the spatula will not be needed.

Note that the chocolate I recommend below can be purchased via Amazon® in a button form known as callets, which are very easy to process.

Ingredients:

Ice Cream:

3 cups of heavy cream

1 cup of milk

3/4 cup of sugar

3 jumbo eggs or 4 extra large eggs

1 tbsp. of vanilla

Peanut Butter Sauce:

1 1/3 cups of peanut butter

2/3 cup of heavy cream

2 tbsp. of light corn syrup

2 tbsp. of light brown sugar

Chocolate Fudge Sauce:

5 ounces of very high quality dark chocolate (like Callebaut® #811 Dark Chocolate Callets)

1/3 cup of heavy cream

2 tbsp. of sugar

Directions:

Make the ice cream:

Mix the eggs until they are fluffy in an electric mixer on medium speed.

Add the sugar and continue mixing until the eggs and sugar are well blended, about two minutes.

Add the heavy cream, the milk and the vanilla and continue to mix for two minutes.

Put the mixture into a gelato maker and run it for about 25 minutes, until the ice cream is fairly stiff.

While the ice cream is freezing, make the peanut butter sauce:

Combine the peanut butter, heavy cream, corn syrup and brown sugar in a saucepan.

Heat the mixture over low heat, stirring, until it is smooth and the sugar is dissolved.

Transfer the peanut butter sauce to a small bowl and refrigerate it until it is used.

While the ice cream is freezing, make the chocolate fudge sauce:

Break or cut the chocolate into small pieces about 1/2" by 1/2" in size, or use the suggested callets that are already perfectly sized buttons of chocolate.

Bring the heavy cream and the sugar to a simmer on very low heat in a small saucepan, stirring, until the sugar dissolves.

Add the chocolate pieces, stirring, maintaining very low heat close to a simmer until the sauce is smooth. Do not boil the sauce.

Transfer the chocolate fudge sauce to a small bowl and refrigerate it until it is used.

When the ice cream is soft frozen:

Spread one fourth of the ice cream on the bottom of a chilled 2-quart plastic container and top it with one third of the peanut butter sauce and then one third of the chocolate fudge sauce.

Swirl the sauces and ice cream together briefly with a spatula.

Layer the remaining ice cream and the sauces in the same manner, swirling at each layer briefly with a spatula.

Freeze the completed ice cream, covered tightly, until it is hard.

Serve and enjoy!

Pistachio Ice Cream - ☺♥

This is a very rich and delicious ice cream. My recipe is based on that found in Ben and Jerry's® "Homemade Ice Cream & Dessert Book.©" for their French Vanilla ice cream but I have modified their recipe to get what I want in a Pistachio ice cream. Thus, it took me a time or so to get it right. Now it is perfect and you get the benefit of my experience. Actually, as you will read below, I have two great recipes for making this ice cream.

The key to making great Pistachio Ice Cream is to: 1) Ignore whatever you find on the Internet or in books that virtually always call for making a custard base (but see below) and that never include the use of a concentrated flavor pistachio nut extract, and 2) Get acquainted with Internet sites that sell special flavor concentrates that are, let's be honest, part of a much larger industry of manufactured flavors for all kinds of foods from hamburgers to soft drinks. Recently, I have been buying concentrates for numerous flavors from Olivenation.com.

Think about it. Ben and Jerry do not provide a recipe for pistachio ice cream, yet you know they make it. The point is they know that the typical person making ice cream at home will not have flavor concentrates. It is time to upgrade your food pantry to include those products for many different dishes, so as to compete successfully with great restaurants and even premium frozen entree's in the supermarket, not to mention makers of premium ice creams.

Well, the obvious point is that you want to make fine ice cream regardless of the flavor. Use this recipe and you and your family and guests will be quite pleased with your product.

Ah, to be candid, now that Food Nirvana has a great recipe for Custard Ice Cream Base, I have to eat some of my words above regarding the use of a custard base. In short, you can make the Food Nirvana recipe for Custard Ice Cream Base, chill it, and skip the ingredients and directions related to the first four ingredients shown below. Proceed with the addition of the other ingredients, etc. You will be amazed with the extra creamy and rich tasting result.

Ingredients: (makes about 1½ quarts of ice cream)

2 jumbo eggs plus two egg yolks

2 cups of heavy cream

¾ cup of sugar

1 cup of milk

3/4 tsp. of Olive Nation's® Super Flavor Pistachio Extract

1 tsp. of vanilla extract

1/2 tsp. of almond extract

1 cup of chopped, shelled roasted pistachio nuts (salted or unsalted ... your choice)

A few drops of green food coloring

Directions:

Turn on the gelato maker to prechill it.

Chop the pistachio nuts and put them into a bowl, then put the bowl into the freezer.

Use your electric mixer to beat the eggs and the egg yolks on medium speed, then pause to add the sugar, the vanilla extract, the almond extract, the green food coloring and the Super Flavor Pistachio Extract and resume mixing. Mix for three minutes.

Slowly add the cream and the milk while continuing to mix. Mix for one to two minutes.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato maker (which you started about ten minutes earlier) and, if you didn't think to prechill it, turn it on. After about 25 minutes check the ice cream to see if it is fairly stiff. If necessary continue to run the gelato maker for an additional ten minutes.

Add the chopped pistachio nuts and run the gelato maker for three minutes.

Transfer the ice cream from the gelato maker into a good quality 1½ to 2 quart plastic container that has a tight fitting lid. Put the lid on the ice cream and put the container into a deep freeze for four to six hours.

The ice cream is then ready to serve. It is delicious!

Yes, you can bow as your audience applauds!

Later, you can wonder why so many essential facts about making excellent food products are kept out of the public domain. I think you really do know the answer, right?

Notes:

The temperature of a deep freeze is typically lower than that of the freezer of your refrigerator, and that means the deep freeze is superior to your refrigerator freezer in the last step of final freezing of the ice cream. Use your deep freeze and the ice cream will be ready within a few hours. Conversely, the freezer of your refrigerator may not properly freeze the ice cream at all (it depends in part on how you set your freezer settings), and even if it does you may have to wait until the next day to eat the ice cream properly frozen.

Red Raspberry Gelato - ☺♥

This gelato is a new entry for Food Nirvana. Think of it as a frozen dessert that captures the intense taste of fresh red raspberries in a very nice gelato. Why gelato instead of ice cream? Well, Food Nirvana has lots of nice ice cream recipes and gelato preparations are "bright" in fruit taste, thus interestingly different. And, the simple fact is you can make Red Raspberry ice cream using the recipe below, simply by switching the ratio of cream to milk and skipping the lemon juice. We've done it both ways and the results are terrific.

I decided to try making this gelato because I now grow my own red raspberries. Another very good reason is that my sweetheart, Peggy, loves raspberries. Smart move, right? Yes, and I was completely successful. I am most pleased with this recipe.

I noted while researching gelato recipes that virtually all of them create a cooked custard with egg yolks. While there is nothing specifically wrong with that method I learned a long time ago that the simple ice cream base used by Ben and Jerry in their homemade ice cream book creates an ice cream that is equal to any ice cream I have ever tasted made with a custard base. Thus, I decided to vary completely from the standard gelato recipes and use a modified base, simply using a lot more milk and less cream than what is used when making ice cream.

A lot of gelato and ice cream recipes that use red raspberries fail to eliminate the seeds. I find that less than acceptable ... a weak response that produces an inferior product. Even Ben and Jerry drop the ball on this one!

Thus, I use a Food Mill attachment with my Kitchen-Aid mixer that partially separates juice and pulp from the seeds. I then use the seeds and remaining pulp attached to the seeds in a second procedure that is trivially simple and very effective. Specifically, I mix the pulp and seed mixture with about a cup of milk and process the mixture using the regular beater of the electric mixer and a regular mixing bowl. You can run the mixer for five minutes on medium speed. That will produce significant separation of the pulp from the seeds without breaking the seeds. At that point you simply pour the mixture into a fine sieve and collect the liquid, pressing lightly with a wooden spoon to get the last of the pulp. The seeds are then discarded.

If you don't have a mixer attachment (Food Mill) as described above you can simply microwave a plastic wrap covered dish of the raspberries just until they come to a boil. That will break the bonds to the seeds and make juice extraction very easy with just a fine sieve and a wooden spoon. You will, however, still need to use the wooden spoon to press the bulk of the pulp through the sieve. But note

that the flavor is in the juice, so if you are making gelato you don't even have to use the pulp.

Okay, enough preliminaries. Let's get on with it ...

Ingredients: (Makes about 1½ quarts of gelato)

1 cup of heavy cream

2 cups of milk

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

1 1/4 cups of sugar

6 cups of fresh red raspberries

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1 tsp. of natural vanilla extract

Directions:

Process the red raspberries as described above in the introduction to create a juice and pulp mixture with no seeds.

Use the electric mixer to beat the eggs on medium speed for about one minute, then add the sugar and beat for two minutes on medium speed.

Add all the remaining ingredients and the raspberry juice and pulp mixture and mix for three minutes.

Transfer the mixture to a gelato (or ice cream) maker and proceed to make the gelato. Once it is stiff, transfer the completed gelato to a two quart storage container. Put the container into the deep freeze for two to four hours to finish hardening it.

When serving the gelato you may want to let it partially thaw for perhaps five to ten minutes, but be observant and then scoop it from the storage container and serve it fairly quickly as it can melt faster than ice cream.

Enjoy!

Red Raspberry Syrup - ☺♥

This recipe provides a fine method for making seedless Red Raspberry Syrup. As I grow red raspberries it is obvious that I should have the ability to make a high quality syrup to be used in multiple ways. The typical use for syrups of this type is to pour them on pancakes or waffles or even ice cream. My sweetheart Peggy likes to flavor beer with fresh fruits and syrups. In the past she used only blueberries and blueberry syrup ... and that as an experiment after finding that she loved blueberry beer, which is quite expensive. I have now provided her the means to do what she likes with fresh/frozen red raspberries and raspberry syrup.

I searched the Internet for candidate recipes for red raspberry syrup and I found only one recipe that made any sense to me. I made the syrup using my kitchen equipment to separate the juice and pulp from the seeds, and otherwise followed the Internet recipe as a first attempt at making a great seedless red raspberry syrup. I concluded that the recipe was pretty good though rather in error about the degree of thickening provided by the given procedure.

I've decided to provide the simple recipe I found and also discuss ways to improve it. Specifically, I am embarking on the use of thickeners that are used commercially, especially in high end restaurants, to create syrups, sauces and pastes of varying thickness. I have created a Food Nirvana entry for using thickeners and located it in the Technology section following the Dabbling in Science topic. You can refer to the thickeners entry for more information.

Now let's proceed with this very simple recipe. Simple? Well, at least there aren't many ingredients. Processing, however, is easy or hard depending on whether or not you have a Kitchen-Aid® stand mixer with a Food Mill attachment. If you don't, then you have to process the raw or frozen fruit with the alternative methods I describe.

Okay, let's proceed ...

Ingredients: (makes three or four cups of syrup)

6 cups of fresh or frozen red raspberries

2 cups of water

1 cup of sugar

Optional Ingredients: (Use your high sensitivity electronic kitchen scale)

4.0 grams of Agar Agar

2.4 grams of Kold-Kiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution

Fruit Processing Directions:

If you have fresh berries then freeze them first and then thaw them. Freezing helps to break up the cell structure to make the later extraction of the pulp and juice relatively easy. They can best be thawed in the microwave oven to a slightly warm temperature. Note also that if the dish is covered with plastic wrap the fruit can be brought to a boiling temperature in the microwave oven, and that really makes later separation of the juice from the seeds easy, with or without the Food Mill attachment described next.

If you have the Food Mill attachment described earlier, use it to separate the pulp and juice from the seeds, and then discard the seeds.

If you do not have the Food Mill attachment described earlier, you can process the berries on slow to medium speed in a bowl using a stand electric mixer for about three minutes. That helps to separate the seeds from the pulp and juice. Then put all of that mixture into a large fine mesh sieve over a large bowl and stir until nothing is left in the sieve except seeds and pulp. Then press on the pulp and seeds with a small spatula or the back of a spoon to get the pulp to go through the sieve, rubbing across the pulp and seeds fairly firmly, multiple times, until only the seeds and a tiny bit of pulp remain in the sieve. Discard the seeds and residual pulp.

Now follow the directions below for making the syrup.

Syrup Directions "without" the optional thickener:

Put two cups of water, the sugar and the processed fruit juice and pulp into a two quart saucepan.

If you are using sodium benzoate then measure out the correct amount and add it to the saucepan and stir to mix the ingredients.

Heat the mixture on high until it boils, then reduce to heat to low to result in a very low boil.

Boil the mixture for up to 30 minutes to reduce the liquid volume to three cups and in the process somewhat thicken the syrup.

Pour the syrup into three, eight ounce canning jars and seal them with the canning jar inserts and rings tightly. I use a wide mouth funnel inserted sequentially into each jar to assure the top of the jar does not get messy with the syrup during the pouring process.

You now have a light to medium thickness syrup that is fine for later use on pancakes, waffles or ice cream.

At this point you want to process the canning jars in a boiling water bath for five to ten minutes, then remove the jars and retighten the lids. You can store the jars in your food pantry, but once opened refrigerate any unused syrup.

Alternatively, you can tighten the lids on the jars and let the contents cool to room temperature. Typically the jars will develop a vacuum and seal during cooling. If not, then use your commercial vacuum sealer by slightly loosening the jar rings, vacuum sealing the product at a vacuum level of 25 inches of mercury, and then retightening the rings.

Note that vacuum sealing the syrup when it is very hot is a bad idea as it will boil out of the jars and make a mess. Note also that refrigerator storage is recommended rather than pantry storage, though with the sodium benzoate preservative in the syrup pantry storage of the vacuum sealed product should be okay.

Syrup Directions "with" using the optional thickener:

Follow the syrup ingredients and directions shown above with two major exceptions. Reserve one half cup of the water to use with the thickening agent. Bring the syrup to a low boil and immediately process and use the thickening agent.

Mix the thickening agent with the reserved one half cup of water in a one cup glass Pyrex® measuring cup, stir well and let it hydrate for five minutes, stirring twice during that period.

Heat the mixture in the measuring cup in the microwave oven for approximately one minute to barely bring it to a boil. Stir the mixture to get the thickening agent to disperse evenly. Then add the mixture immediately to the boiling syrup while stirring. Mix thoroughly.

Proceed with the above syrup directions for pouring the syrup into canning jars. You will have four, eight ounce canning jars of nicely thickened syrup instead of three.

Enjoy!

Rocky Road Ice Cream - ☺♥

(Makes about one and one half quarts) (Ray, Sr.'s own recipe!)

This recipe may appear to be complicated but it is not. It is definitely worth the time spent in producing a top quality homemade ice cream. Do understand that if you are serious about making excellent ice cream you will buy a gelato maker with a built-in freezer unit. The old-fashioned rock salt and ice bucket types just don't cut it in making the more demanding varieties of ice cream. They do not provide a uniform degree of freezing from the center of the stirrer out to the can, i.e., the ice cream freezes to the limit of reasonable stiffness on the outside while still too soft in the center. A uniform density/freezing level is essential to making this ice cream so that the additions at the end don't sink to the bottom of the plastic container before the ice cream is frozen sufficiently everywhere to keep that from happening.

You can use an old-fashioned rock salt and ice bucket type of ice cream maker by making an allowance for its limitations. Mix well and then freeze the ice cream in the deep freeze without the additions at the end but only until it is fairly stiff but still workable. Then the additions can be folded in and the final ice cream hard frozen for four or more hours.

Ingredients:

2½ cups of heavy cream

Half and half (up to one cup or more as needed)

½ cup of sugar

2 tsp. of vanilla

¼ tsp. of salt

1 jumbo egg or two large eggs

½ cup of blanched, chopped, roasted almonds (or more to suit your preference)

1 cup or more of marshmallow crème (Use Ray's marshmallow crème recipe)

8, ¾"x1½"x ½" blocks of Scharffenberger's® 82% cacao dark chocolate, the type used in candy making. You might substitute using baking chocolate but a top quality dark candy making chocolate is best. You might also use premium dark chocolate high cacao (85%) bars found in the candy section of better

supermarkets (Lindt®). In any event the weight of the Scharffenberger's® chocolate I use is 2 ounces total, so an equivalent weight from a high cacao Lindt® bar should work just fine.

¼ cup of Hershey's® chocolate syrup (contains sugar)

1/3 cup of Ghirardelli® cocoa mix (contains sugar, so don't substitute with an equivalent amount of Hershey's® dry cocoa). If you have to substitute, use a combination of 1/8th cup Hershey's® dry cocoa and ¼ cup sugar.

6, bite size pieces of Milky Way® or Snickers® candy or one standard size bar

Directions:

Blanch the almonds by simmering them in boiling water for one minute (I do this in a Pyrex® cup in the microwave oven) and then rinse them in cold water, then remove the skins by pinching the skin from the nutmeat. Discard the skins. Dry the blanched almonds with a paper towel and chop them each into two to four pieces. Place almond pieces on a cookie tray and lightly roast them in a 350°F oven for about 10 minutes, stirring pieces around every three minutes to assure even roasting. They will be light tan in color when done. Cool the almond pieces and place them in a freezer on a saucer.

Cut the Milky Way® or Snickers® candy pieces into four pieces each or cut the bar into 24 pieces and freeze them on a saucer with all pieces separated from each other.

Cut the dark chocolate blocks into small pieces. Melt the chocolate pieces, chocolate syrup and cocoa mix in a small saucepan. Mix and melt, then slowly add one cup of the heavy cream, ¼ tsp. salt and 2 tsp. of vanilla while continuing to mix. When thoroughly blended, chill the mixture in the freezer, in the pan, for about 20 minutes.

Whisk the egg(s) until fluffy in an electric mixer bowl. Gradually add the ½ cup of sugar while mixing and continue to mix until well mixed. Add 1 ½ cups heavy cream and mix well. Chill the mixture in a refrigerator for 15 minutes.

Pour the egg, sugar and cream base into a one quart measuring cup. Add the chilled chocolate and cream mixture stirring gently to mix well. Adjust the volume to one quart using Half and Half. Note: I use some of the half and half to get all the chocolate mix out of the saucepan. Transfer the entire contents into the gelato maker and process to make the ice cream.

When the ice cream is fairly stiff add the almond pieces and continue mixing for two minutes. Stop mixing, remove the ice cream into a 2 quart plastic container

and put it into ice cubes in a larger bowl (or better yet, put the ice cream into a deep freeze for one hour as that will ensure ingredients added later will not go to the bottom of the container). Add the frozen Milky Way® or Snickers® pieces and fold them into the ice cream with a wooden spoon. This typically means mix gently for about 30 seconds.

Add the marshmallow crème in units of one rounded tsp., four teaspoons per addition, onto the top of the ice cream and then fold them into the ice cream keeping them separated from each other until covered with ice cream. Hint: I use two teaspoons with each other to make the marshmallow crème additions easy. I use one of the teaspoons to get the marshmallow crème from the jar and the other to help remove the marshmallow crème from the first spoon, causing the marshmallow crème to drop onto the surface of the ice cream. Mix the marshmallow crème into the ice cream gently after each addition of four spoons of marshmallow crème. Repeat that process until the marshmallow crème is consumed.

Freeze the finished ice cream for three or more hours in a 0°F deep freeze until it is solid. It is then ready to serve at your leisure.

Sherbet Recipes - ?

Sometimes we need something cold but lighter than ice cream. I remember restaurants serving a small paper cup of sherbet as an appetizer, free, to kick off a meal when I was a child ... as appetite stimulators. It was a great idea. I wonder why we don't see that practice now?

Orange Sherbet (makes 1 ³/₄ quarts)

1 1/2 tbsp. of grated orange rind (zest)
1 1/2 Cups of sugar
1/4 Cup of fresh-squeezed lemon juice
1 1/2 Cups of fresh-squeezed orange juice
1 tsp. of vanilla
2 Cups of very cold milk
2 Cups of heavy cream
Orange food coloring

Stir together the grated orange rind and sugar. Stir in the lemon juice, orange juice and vanilla and continue stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Add the milk and the cream and about one tsp. orange food coloring.

Put the mixture in an ice cream maker and freeze according to the manufacturer's directions.

Lemon Cream Sherbet

1/8 tsp. of salt
1 1/2 Cups of milk
1/2 Cup of cream
2 tsp. of gelatin
1/4 Cup of cold water
1 Cup of sugar
1/3 Cup of light corn syrup
1/3 Cup of lemon juice
1 tsp. of grated lemon rind (zest)

Soak the gelatin in the cold water and dissolve over hot water. Mix together the remaining ingredients and add them gradually to the gelatin mixture. Freeze the mixture in an ice cream maker.

Makes 1 quart.

Pineapple Sherbet

3/4 Cup of sugar
1 1/2 Cups of water

1/4 Cup of cold water
juice of ½ orange
2 egg whites
juice of 1 lemon
1 Tbsp. of unflavored gelatin
1/2 Cup of pineapple juice
1/8 tsp. of salt
1/2 Cup of whipping cream
1 Cup of crushed pineapple, drained

Bring the sugar and the 1½ cups of water to a boil. Add the gelatin, which has been soaked in the ¼ cup of cold water for 5 minutes, and mix until the gelatin is dissolved. Remove the pan from the heat and allow it to cool. When cool add the fruit juice and pineapple. Partially freeze the mixture in an ice cream maker.

Add the salt to the egg whites and beat until stiff using an electric mixer. Set the mixture aside.

Whip the cream until thick but not stiff and combine it with the partially-frozen fruit mixture and then fold in the egg whites. Continue freezing the completed mixture in an ice cream maker.

Makes 2 quarts.

Raspberry Sherbet

½ Cup of water
¾ Cup of sugar
½ Cup of whipping cream
1 egg white
2 Tbsp. of lemon juice
1 pint of red raspberries

Put the fresh berries in a saucepan with the water and sugar and cook for 5 minutes. Press through a sieve to remove the seeds and then add the lemon juice.

If you use canned berries, omit the water. Simply heat them in their own juice and press through a sieve.

Cool the mixture.

Beat the berry mixture until it is light. Beat the egg white until it is stiff. Fold in the beaten egg white and beat the mixture again. Whip the cream until it is thick and then fold it into the other mixture and stir well. Freeze in an ice cream maker.

Makes 1½ quarts.

Strawberry Marshmallow Ice Cream - ☺♥

This recipe was born of the simple idea that these two food items could go well together. We've had Chocolate Marshmallow ice cream around for sixty years. Why not Strawberry Marshmallow?

I succeeded far beyond my expectations as measured by the response of friends and loved ones. But before we get to the actual recipe I want to digress into the world of ice cream and why you should make it at home or buy it at locations of small producers and refuse to patronize your supermarket's ice cream section.

My experiments in making various ice creams improved markedly when Marie bought a gelato maker with its own freezing unit and also Ben and Jerry's® "Homemade Ice Cream & Dessert Book©." These two things spelled the difference between making okay homemade ice cream and excellent ice cream. Even better, Ben and Jerry explained in detail the world of ice cream and how it is made commercially. All I can say is that after great success I scoff at the low quality rip off price ice creams in our supermarkets. They are expensive garbage, or, if high quality, then they are absurdly expensive.

Most of the supermarket ice creams are 50% air. A well made ice cream should never be more than 20% to 25% air. Some air content is necessary, however, else the ice cream would be a hard frozen block of liquid.

Those of us fortunate enough to discover small businesses that make their own ice cream very well certainly recognize the huge quality difference. The price is typically high for single servings and there is not the convenience of having the ice cream at home without a special trip to buy hand packed and expensive high quality ice cream. But the small, high quality commercial producers sometimes have excellent bulk ice cream at great prices.

Hayward's® in Milford NH makes excellent ice cream. It is expensive by the cone or in a sundae, or by the quart, but if you buy the three gallon bulk container it only costs \$17. At least it did for me back in 2006. Think about that for a minute. That is less than \$6 per gallon, less than \$1.50 per quart, for excellent ice cream. Compare those prices to what you find in your supermarket today that is half air. Yes, you should be livid.

So who needs three gallons of one kind of ice cream? Do you have any friends or family nearby? Do you want to be very popular? Be generous, or at least share the product and the cost so people you care about can win too.

Ben and Jerry provide three recipes for a Sweet Cream Base for all the different ice creams. I use a variation of their recipes by using a combination of ingredients from their first two recipes. My chosen combination is shown below. In general, the higher the heavy cream content the richer the ice cream, but the shorter the shelf life. If you make this ice cream you sure won't have to worry about shelf life!

Oh, note that you can make the Food Nirvana Custard Ice Cream Base as an alternative to making the sweet cream base described below. My, what a fine alternative! Try both methods ... as shown and by using the Custard Ice Cream Base.

Ingredients: (makes a generous 1½ quarts of ice cream)

Sweet Cream Base:

2 Extra large or Jumbo eggs

¾ cup of sugar

2 cups of heavy cream

½ cup of half and half

½ cup of whole milk

Other ingredients:

1½ cups of fresh very ripe strawberries

1/3 cup of Hersheys® Strawberry syrup (used to make strawberry flavored milk)

1½ cups of Marshmallow Crème (see Ray's recipe in this book)

1/4 cup of sugar

Directions:

You should use a gelato maker to get the best results from this recipe. If you use the old rock salt and ice type of ice cream machine be certain the ice cream is very stiff before the last step of adding the marshmallow crème.

Make the sweet cream base first using your electric mixer. Mix the eggs well and then add the sugar and mix well. Then add the milk and half and half and heavy cream slowly while mixing thoroughly. Cover the mixing bowl and put it into the refrigerator to chill.

Clean and hull the strawberries and cut them into fourths, or more pieces if they are very large strawberries. Mix the sugar with them, cover them with plastic wrap and leave them rest for about one hour in your refrigerator.

Remove half of the strawberry pieces to a bowl and crush them thoroughly with a fork. Partially crush the other strawberries in the original bowl. Recombine all the strawberry sugar mixture and add the Hershey's® strawberry syrup and mix well with a spoon.

Put all the strawberry mixture into the sweet cream base bowl and mix well by hand. Then put all of that mixture into the gelato maker and turn it on.

A typical gelato maker is advertised as a unit that makes only one quart of ice cream at a time. In reality the available volume of the freezing unit is one and one half quarts. This allows for the expansion of the ice cream as it freezes and takes on air.

Since our goal is to limit the air percentage of the ice cream to about 20 percent, the extra volume we added with the strawberry mixture will be accommodated by the gelato maker.

After about 25 minutes the gelato maker will have soft frozen the strawberry ice cream, almost sufficient to proceed to the next step. Let the gelato maker run for an additional five to ten minutes. Once it is completely filled you may as well use the contents as there is no volume available to introduce more air. You simply wanted to give the fairly large volume of ice cream a chance to become relatively stiff.

Have a two quart good quality freezer container that has a tight fitting lid sitting in ice cubes in a four quart bowl. Scoop the contents from the gelato maker into the freezer container.

Using two teaspoons to aid you in handling the marshmallow crème, dispense the marshmallow crème in rounded teaspoon quantities, four at a time into the ice cream but not touching each other. Gently fold the clumps of marshmallow crème into the ice cream with a wooden spoon until they are covered with ice cream. Repeat this process until the entire one and one half cups of marshmallow crème have been incorporated into the strawberry ice cream evenly.

Cover the freezer container with a tight fitting lid and put it into a deep freeze for four or more hours to complete the freezing process. The ice cream is then ready to serve.

Expect applause. You will get it.

➔ You can always put the ice cream into the deep freeze for an hour or so before adding the marshmallow crème as that will guarantee that the folded in marshmallow crème will not sink to the bottom of the ice cream container. It all depends on how firmly the ice cream is frozen by the gelato maker.

Strawberry Sorbet - ☺♥

This sorbet is a new entry for Food Nirvana. Think of it as a frozen dessert that captures the delicious taste of fresh (hopefully home grown) strawberries in a very nice sorbet. Why sorbet instead of gelato or ice cream? Well, Food Nirvana has lots of nice ice cream recipes and some fine gelato preparations, and even some nice sherbet recipes, and as we move away from the use of cream or milk the frozen delights become more "bright" in fruit taste, thus interestingly different. Sorbets do not typically contain dairy products.

I decided to try making this sorbet with my son-in-law, Mike, using his recipe, because I grow my own delicious strawberries. Another very good reason is that my sweetheart, Peggy, loves strawberries. Smart move, right? Yes, and Mike and I were completely successful. I am most pleased with Mike's recipe, and have very much thanked him, and I've added the recipe to Food Nirvana for you to enjoy.

It is best to make sorbet using a gelato maker that comes with its own freezing unit. If you buy one you can make great sorbets, gelatos and ice creams. Just don't try to use an ice cream maker to make gelatos or sorbets. Inherent design and capability differences indicate you want to buy a gelato maker for versatility. The price range for good gelato makers will range from a few hundred dollars up to about eight hundred dollars for top of the line equipment. That may sound expensive, but think how much you spend for store bought or roadside stand ice cream. I'm betting you can easily save so much money that the unit will pay for itself within two or three years ... and you truly control the quality of what you will eat in frozen desserts.

Note that fruit seed removal in some sorbet or gelato or ice cream recipes won't work with strawberries because the seeds are simply too small to capture and remove with any conventional kitchen equipment. Thus, if you have digestion or processing problems with small seeds you do not want to eat this strawberry sorbet.

Oh, yes ... one final thought ... the ingredient amounts shown in all the ice cream, gelato, sherbet and sorbet recipes found in Food Nirvana can be modified to please you best. After you have used the basic recipes, experiment with different amounts of sugar or lemon juice, etc. until you achieve what to you is perfection. You are not limited to what is sold commercially in super markets or other places ... You are the boss.

Okay, enough preliminaries. Let's get on with it ...

Ingredients: (Makes about 2 quarts of sorbet)

1 cup of sugar

8 cups of fresh strawberries

2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

Dash of salt (optional)

Directions:

Process all the ingredients in a blender on medium speed until the mixture is totally smooth.

Transfer half of the mixture to a gelato maker and proceed to make the sorbet. Once it is stiff, transfer the completed batch of sorbet to a one quart storage container. Put the container into the deep freeze for two to four hours to finish hardening it. Repeat the freezing and storage steps for the second half of the sorbet mixture.

When serving the sorbet you may want to let it partially thaw for perhaps five to ten minutes, but be observant and then scoop it from the storage container and serve it fairly quickly as it can melt faster than gelato or ice cream.

Enjoy!

PASTAS / OTHER ETHNIC FOODS:

Bolognese Sauce - ☺♥

This recipe comes from J. Kenji Lopez Alt's great book, The Food Lab©. This was my first attempt to make Bolognese Sauce so I couldn't comment other than to note that I was using ground beef instead of ground veal. In other respects I adhered to Kenji's recipe.

Wow! That is some major meat sauce! My sweetheart says it is perfect just the way it is. I enjoyed the taste but to me it seemed to lack desirable tomato sauce influence. Well, to each his own.

From studying some other recipes for this sauce I found the ones that are most authentic do limit the influence of tomato sauce. Okay, for Food Nirvana purposes I will use the official recipe as shown below, and it is very good ... just not quite what I expected based on my having more tomato based sauces in Italian restaurants. Likely they catered to Americans simple taste in pasta sauces.

Ultimately, if I were to change this sauce to suit me, I would add likely a quart of a plain marinara sauce. You, of course, can do as you like.

Ingredients: (makes about 2 1/2 quarts - 8 to 10 servings)

4 oz. of chicken livers

4 anchovy filets

1 tsp. of Marmite

1 tbsp. of soy sauce

2 cups of whole milk

1/2 cup of heavy cream

2 cups of chicken broth or stock

1/2 oz. of unflavored powdered gelatin (2 packets)

1/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil

4 tsp. of minced or finely grated garlic cloves

2 tsp. of dried oregano

A pinch of red pepper flakes

1, 28 oz. can of peeled plum tomatoes in juice, crushed or mashed to 1/2" chunks

4 oz. of pancetta, cut into 1/2" chunks

1 large onion, finely chopped
2 carrots, peeled and cut into a 1/4" dice (about one cup)
3 stalks of celery, cut into a 1/4" dice (about one cup)
4 tbsp. of unsalted butter
1 lb. of ground lamb
1 lb. of ground pork
1 lb. of ground beef (instead of ground veal)
1/2 cup of fresh sage leaves, finely chopped
1, 750 ml. bottle of dry red or dry white wine
2 bay leaves
1/2 cup of fresh minced basil
1/2 cup of fresh minced parsley
1 tbsp. of Asian fish sauce
2 oz. of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese finely grated (about one cup)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Combine the chicken livers and anchovies with the Marmite and the soy sauce in the bowl of a food processor. Pulse until finely ground, about 10 short pulses. Transfer the mixture to a bowl and set it aside. Note: I used a Magic Bullet® high speed miniature mixer and that was perfect ... Fast, and easy cleanup.

Combine the milk, heavy cream and chicken broth(stock) in a bowl. Sprinkle that mixture with the gelatin and set it aside.

Heat two tbsp. of the olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium high heat until the oil is shimmering. Add the garlic and oregano and pepper flakes and cook, stirring, for one minute. Add the crushed tomatoes with their juice and bring the mixture to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the sauce has thickened ... about 30 minutes. Then remove the sauce from the heat.

While the tomato sauce is simmering add the remaining two tbsp. of olive oil and the pancetta to a large Dutch oven and cook over medium high heat until the pancetta is softened and translucent, about six minutes.

Add the onion, carrots and celery and cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are softened but not browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl.

Return the Dutch oven to medium high heat, add the butter and heat until the foaming subsides. Add the lamb, the pork, the beef and the sage, mix well and then cook, stirring occasionally, until the meat is no longer pink.

Add the anchovy mixture, stir until homogenous, then cook for five minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add the pancetta/vegetable mixture and stir to combine. Then add the wine and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to get only a simmer and cook until the wine is reduced, about 15 minutes.

While the wine mixture simmers, blend the tomato mixture with an immersion blender until it is totally smooth, starting on low speed and increasing to high speed. Note: My sauce was already so smooth I didn't bother with this step.

Add the tomato sauce mixture, the milk/cream mixture, the bay leaves, half of the basil and half of the parsley to the Dutch oven and stir to combine. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce to a simmer and cover with a lid slightly ajar.

Cook for two hours, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is thick and rich.

Add the fish sauce and the Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese to the sauce and stir vigorously until the cheese is emulsified in the sauce. Season the sauce to taste with salt and pepper.

Remove the sauce from the heat and allow it to cool, covered, for 30 minutes.

Stir in the remaining basil and parsley.

You can use the sauce immediately but the flavor improves a lot if you let it rest, covered, overnight.

A sealed container of the sauce will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator.

When you want to use the sauce, heat the amount needed on low heat in a saucepan while you cook the pasta of your choice in boiling water in a pot and then drain off the water in a colander when the pasta is done cooking. Rinse the pasta in the colander very lightly with cool water, very briefly, just enough to barely moisten the pasta so it doesn't stick together when you put it into a serving dish. Avoid making the pasta cold, but if that happens then rewarm it in the microwave oven.

I like to keep the serving dish of pasta separated from the Bolognese sauce until individual servings are made. That keeps any leftover pasta from absorbing the moisture in the sauce, which is very important to later have high quality leftovers.

I suggest having additional grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese served with the meal. And either a nice medium red wine or cold beer will be fine beverages to serve with the meal.

Enjoy!

Chicken Broccoli Alfredo - 😊♥♥♥😊

Chicken Broccoli Alfredo is a delightful, rich and tasty dish ... one you certainly want to make to please your family and your best friends. It is especially good in cooler/colder weather, for it leaves you feeling pleasantly filled. The one thing you must remember is not to mix the sauce with the pasta until immediately before the meal, else the pasta will absorb the sauce and leave you with something gunky, ergo not very nice. I actually recommend, in this recipe, keeping the primary components separated from each other until serving time, at which time you build individual servings in each individual serving dish ... or, you can let each guest do that to their own preference of amounts of each component, then mix well the combination with two dinner forks or a fork and a soup spoon.

A fine creamy cheesy sauce dinner entree like this one deserves a fine bottle of Pinot Grigio wine, chilled, and a nice Caesar side salad (see the Food Nirvana recipe for Caesar salad) if you have time to make one. Glasses of ice water will be appreciated also.

Ingredients: (makes four generous adult servings)

For the Pasta:

1 pound box of dry fettuccine pasta

For the Chicken:

1 1/2 pounds of boneless, skinless chicken breasts

1 teaspoon of dry Italian seasoning (or use 1/2 tsp. each of dried oregano and dried basil)

3/4 teaspoon of sea salt

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper

2 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons of butter

For the Broccoli:

1 large fresh broccoli crown (or two smaller crowns), cut into small florets, stem discarded

For the Alfredo Sauce:

1, 8 tbsp. stick of butter, cut into 12 slices

2 1/2 cups of heavy cream

2 large cloves of garlic, minced

3/4 teaspoon of garlic powder

1 teaspoon of dry Italian Seasoning (or a mixture of dried oregano and basil)

1/2 teaspoon of sea salt

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper

2 cups of freshly grated Parmegiano Reggiano or Extra Sharp Aged Provolone (my favorite for this sauce) or Pecorino Romano cheese

1/2 cup of chopped fresh parsley (used at serving time mixed into the sauce as a garnish)

Directions:

Set the oven at 180 °F and put in the wide bowls you will use later for individual servings and also one large (3 qt.) serving bowl and three medium (2 qt.) serving bowls.

Make the Chicken:

Season the chicken breasts with the Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper, rubbing the seasoning over the surface of each chicken breast.

Warm the olive oil over medium-high heat in a large nonstick skillet. Once it is shimmering, swirl the pan to evenly distribute the oil.

Set the heat to medium and add the chicken breasts and leave them undisturbed for 5 to 7 minutes, until the bottom is golden-brown.

Flip the chicken breasts over and add in the slices of butter between them, picking up the pan to give it a gentle swirl to distribute the melted butter. Briefly lift each piece of chicken for the melted butter to flow underneath.

Continue cooking the chicken breasts for another 5-7 minutes (or until the internal chicken temperature reaches 165 °F. Use an instant read thermometer.) Note that I microwave the cooked chicken breasts for three minutes on full power without checking the internal temperature, as I could see the interior of the breasts was still partially raw after the skillet cooking. That worked perfectly.

Transfer the chicken breasts to a wood cutting board and let them rest for 3 minutes. Cut them with a large, sharp knife, crosswise, on a diagonal into 1/4" thick slices.

Put the slices into one of the medium size serving bowls, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven while you prepare the broccoli and the Alfredo sauce.

Make the Broccoli

Cut the broccoli crown with a paring knife to create many small florets, each about an inch long and 3/4" wide. Discard the large pieces of broccoli crown stem left over after making the florets.

Put the florets and one cup of water into a steaming pot and bring the water to a boil on medium heat.

Let the florets steam, covered, for seven minutes and then put them into one of the medium size serving bowls. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven.

Make the Alfredo sauce:

In the same Skillet used for the chicken, add the butter and the cream, and cook over medium-low heat, whisking lightly until the butter has melted.

Add the minced garlic, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, salt, and pepper and whisk until all the ingredients are combined and smooth.

Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer on medium heat (to about 180 to 190 °F ... Do not let the sauce boil) and cook the sauce for 3 to 4 minutes on very low heat, whisking constantly.

Stir in the grated cheese, just until it is melted and the sauce is smooth. Turn off the heat.

Stir in the chopped fresh parsley.

Pour the sauce into one of the medium size serving bowls, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven.

Make the Pasta:

Bring a one gallon pot of lightly salted water to a boil.

Add the fettuccine and cook it at a medium boil, with initial stirring to assure the pieces separate from each other, until it is al dente according to package directions, usually 12 to 13 minutes.

Drain the fettuccine in a colander.

Give it a hot water rinse while it is in the colander, then set it aside, wet, in the 180 °F warming oven, in the large serving bowl, covered with plastic wrap.

Assemble the Broccoli Chicken Alfredo at serving time:

Divide the pasta among the four individual serving bowls and let each guest add pieces of broccoli and chicken and then ladle Alfredo sauce over the combination. They then toss/mix the components together using a two dinner forks or a fork and a soup spoon.

Let each guest season their own serving of Broccoli Chicken Alfredo with additional salt or pepper, to taste.

A nice chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio wine goes very well with this meal, plus some glasses of ice water, and a side Caesar salad makes the meal perfect!

Enjoy!

Ricotta Cheese - 😊♥

I found a recipe for making ricotta cheese on the Internet and it is simple and excellent. Use freshly squeezed lemon juice when you want to make a sweet recipe that uses ricotta cheese, like Cannoli, or vinegar when you are planning to make a savory recipe, like ravioli.

Ricotta cheese is very easy to make and what you make at home tastes great so I hope you make it.

Ingredients: (makes one pint of ricotta cheese)

2 quarts of whole milk (4% butterfat)

1 teaspoon of salt

3 tablespoons of freshly squeezed lemon juice or white vinegar

Directions:

I learned quickly that all the discussion about using cheesecloth in this recipe is silly if you have a medium to large size sieve with very fine holes. Use that and you can skip all the directions in this recipe for using cheesecloth. If you don't have that type of sieve then get one. Look online at sites like Amazon® to see the different types of sieves.

Optionally ... Line a colander with a large piece of lightly dampened cheesecloth that has been folded over itself at least 3-4 times. Place the colander over a bowl. Make sure to use non-reactive materials. (Alternatively, you can use a recycled ricotta basket placed on a bowl).

Heat the milk in a large heavy base saucepan over medium heat.

Add the salt and stir slowly with a wooden spoon. Make sure the milk does not scorch on the directly heated surface.

Heat the milk to 185 °F. Use an instant read thermometer to check the temperature.

Lower the heat to low.

Add the freshly squeezed lemon juice (or the vinegar).

Slowly stir the mixture for 2 minutes. You will notice the curds (the ricotta cheese) separating from the whey (yellowish liquid). Note that the whey can be used later in various recipes if kept refrigerated, but use it within a week or two as it will spoil like milk.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Cover the saucepan and let it stand for about 20 minutes.

Carefully “ladle” your ricotta into the sieve or use the cheesecloth lined colander or your basket. The consistency of the final product will depend on the amount of time you leave

the ricotta to drain. For a creamy ricotta, let it sit for 3-5 minutes; for a dryer ricotta, it can sit up to 20 minutes.

You can use the ricotta cheese immediately. Do refrigerate any leftover ricotta cheese, storing it in a sealable plastic bag with excess air expelled just prior to sealing the bag. It will last about a week in the refrigerator.

You may also decide to lightly vacuum seal leftover ricotta cheese and then freeze it. It won't be good for recipes that actually need fresh ricotta cheese but here is a list of foods below that you can make after thawing frozen ricotta cheese.

Uses for (thawed) Frozen Ricotta Cheese

Pancakes

Cookies

Cakes and Pound Cakes

Cannoli

Pizza and Calzones

Lasagna

Casseroles

Stuffed Pastas

Eggplant Parmesan - ☺♥

I have a very pleasant memory of eating this dish for lunch at Leoune's Town Talk® restaurant in Wilmington DE on February 17, 1978. I had just asked Marie to have lunch with me the day before and this was our very first time together as just the two of us. The rest, as they say, was history as we married later that year.

The eggplant parmesan served at Leoune's Town Talk® restaurant was excellent. It was inevitable that Marie and I would make it at home as we both loved it. So we did and the recipe below is guaranteed to please as it was our own and I perfected it. Enjoy!

This recipe varies considerably from ones I've seen in cook books as the writers seem to be hung up on drying the eggplant with water extraction via salt before sautéing. It is all bull, unless you are preparing fried eggplant. Do it my way and the total preparation time is about 15 minutes.

Ingredients:

1 eggplant, 3" in diameter and about 8" long

1 cup fine breadcrumbs

Pam® (as needed)

Olive oil to lightly coat a 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish

4 to 6 oz. whole milk Mozzarella cheese

1, 32 oz. jar of Classico® Marinara sauce

1 to 2 tbsp. dried basil

1/3 cup Parmesan cheese

6, 5" diameter slices of soft Provolone cheese

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Cut the eggplant into ½" thick slices. The eggplant should be about 3+ inches in diameter at the thickest point and about 8+ inches long. We typically grew our own in CA and the plants were robust and productive. One eggplant of the

recommended size should be just right to cover the bottom of the glass baking dish.

Dust the eggplant slices in fine breadcrumbs. Lightly sauté them on medium heat in a skillet sprayed lightly with Pam®. Also, remember to spray the surfaces of the eggplant slices with Pam® before sautéing. The eggplant does not have to cook through, for it will later be baked. Anyway, turn once so both sides are lightly browned.

Coat a 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish lightly with olive oil and place the sautéed eggplant slices into it one layer deep. Cut a chunk of Mozzarella cheese about 1"x2"x2" into pieces about 1"x1"x1/4", and place the pieces vertically between and around the eggplant slices. Use more Mozzarella if you like a lot of cheese.

Open the bottle of Marinara sauce and pour in enough to cover the eggplant.

Sprinkle the top with the basil. Use more or less basil to suit your taste.

Put six slices of provolone cheese (5" diameter sandwich type sold in bulk packs at Costco®) on top of the marinara sauce and sprinkle the top of the provolone cheese with about ½ cup of Parmesan cheese.

Bake in the 350° F oven for 45 minutes. Serve and go wild with delight! I had the pleasure of watching a certain significant other wolf down about ½ of the dish in one sitting the first time I made it.

You can vary the preparation by making two layers of eggplant, cheeses and marinara sauce if you have a family to feed. If you do, increase the baking time to one hour, but keep an eye on the top layer of cheeses so that they brown lightly but don't burn. The Parmesan cheese should turn lightly tan but not brown. You can control that by putting the Parmesan cheese in prior to the slices of provolone. I actually prefer to use separate baking dishes so that the dish is only one layer deep in eggplant as that method yields the best appearance, texture and taste.

Fettuccine Carbonara - ☺♥♥♥☺T

Pasta provides the home chef great versatility as it goes well in red sauces, oil, butter or cream or cheese sauces. Fettuccine Carbonara is a superb way to serve pasta in a cream sauce, along with Prosciutto ham and vegetables. Some recipes call for using regular ham, diced or ground, or even broken up pieces of bacon, but I much prefer chopped or ground Prosciutto ham for a far superior taste, though a mixture of both types of ham is fine.

No recipes I have ever seen use sun dried tomatoes ... but the flavor they add is really great, for it remains in the tomato pieces and does not flavor the sauce. There was a restaurant in Wilmington DE named the Town House® that used sun dried tomatoes in one pasta dish that had a cream sauce. That dish was delicious, thus this recipe was developed with that addition in mind. It was/is a good decision. Buy sun dried tomatoes that are not packaged in oil ... I use Sunbest® natural sun dried tomatoes that I bought via the Internet.

Marie used to make this dish and she got rave reviews from the family. The recipe I provide here may or may not be similar to hers but it is so delicious I have elevated it to the Food Nirvana status of Super Star. I have also enhanced it to be a teaching recipe. In short, you really want to make this stuff. You will get many compliments.

Per usual with pasta and sauce dishes, keep the pasta separated from the sauce. Let each guest put the two together in their own serving bowl. In that manner any leftovers can be packaged separately, which will retain the quality of the dish instead of having the pasta suck up the sauce liquid during refrigerator storage. Note, however, if you expect all of the dish to be eaten at one sitting, mixing the pasta with the sauce and serving that in a wide pasta serving bowl is very attractive.

Ingredients: (Serves four adults)

1 lb. box of Fettuccine noodles

1 pint of heavy cream

3 cups of 4% butterfat milk (Start with 2 1/2 cups and add a final 1/2 cup if needed to keep the sauce from being too thick)

1 lb. of Prosciutto ham, defatted, either ground or sliced about 1/16th inch thick and torn or cut into pieces roughly 1" by 1".

(Optional) 1/2 pound of diced or ground baked ham

1 cup of frozen or fresh peas (never, ever use canned peas!)

1 small sweet onion, chopped fine

2 large cloves of garlic, minced or very thinly sliced

1/3 cup of chopped sun dried tomatoes, cut into pieces roughly 1/3" on a side

1/2 cup of lengthwise halved ripe olives (optional)

2 tbsp. of butter

3 tbsp. of cornstarch

1/2 tsp. of white pepper

Sea salt (Use only if wanted after the completed dish is divided into individual servings)

2 cups of freshly grated Locatrel or Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese in a bowl at serving time

Directions:

Pre-heat the oven to 180°F. Put a 2 quart sauce bowl, a large pasta bowl, and four wide, shallow, individual serving bowls into the oven.

Put 4 quarts of water and 1/2 tsp. of salt into a one and one half (or a two) gallon pot. Cover the pot with a lid and heat the water on high heat until it is boiling. Turn off the heat and keep the pot covered. This will facilitate later cooking of the pasta when the Carbonara sauce is done, as the water in the pot will still be hot and easy to bring back to a boil.

Melt the butter in a large (3 or 4 quart) skillet with high sides. Sauté the chopped onion on low heat until it is translucent. Add the garlic and sauté for one more minute.

Add the peas and the sun dried tomato pieces and the (optional) ripe olives and mix well on low to medium heat. Add the pieces of Prosciutto ham (and optional baked ham) and the white pepper and mix briefly.

Mix the pint of cream with 1 1/2 cups of milk in a bowl. Mix the cornstarch with one cup of milk in a separate bowl.

Add the bowls of milk & cream and milk & cornstarch to the skillet slowly while stirring and heat on medium heat, with stirring, to a scalding temperature

(around 190°F) until it is lightly steaming but not boiling. Note: If you see the sauce start to bubble then remove the skillet from the heat.

The sauce may appear to be too thin, but note that it thickens after cooking. If the sauce is too thick then add the other one half cup of milk and mix well. Cover the skillet with a lid and turn off the heat.

Put the covered skillet into the warming oven.

Reheat the water in the pot to boiling on high heat and add the Fettuccine. Mix well two or three times with a large spoon in the first few minutes to assure the pieces of Fettuccine do not stick together. Boil per the directions on the package, typically 12 to 14 minutes.

When the Fettuccine is done cooking pour the pot contents into a colander in the sink to drain the Fettuccine. Rinse it with cool water to eliminate excess starch (which could make it stick together later), then let it drain for a few seconds, then put the Fettuccine into the pre-warmed pasta serving bowl. Note that keeping the pasta moist/wet (but not laying in water) is a good idea to avoid having it stick together at serving time. Cover the serving bowl with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven.

Pour the skillet contents into the pre-warmed Carbonara sauce bowl. Cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven until serving time.

Serve the Fettuccine Carbonara using the pre-warmed individual serving bowls along with a dish of freshly grated Locatel or Parmesan or Pecorino Romano cheese on the side for table use.

Guests can individually put Fettuccine into their serving bowl and then add the Carbonara sauce as desired, mixing both together and then adding the grated cheese. Alternatively, the chef can divide the Fettuccine and Carbonara sauce equally, to make sure no one gets cheated.

Let each guest individually add salt if they want to adjust the seasoning and also add the grated cheese as desired.

Enjoy! This is a fine tasting and very filling dish. If you want to serve dessert, keep it light, like a sorbet or a fruity gelato.

Serve this meal with a chilled light white wine like a Pinot Grigio or a French White Burgundy, along with separate glasses of ice water.

A side salad with Italian dressing provides a fine taste contrast to the creamy Fettuccine Carbonara to make each bite provide maximum enjoyment. You

might also serve some Italian bread and butter or olive oil or other dipping oil like the Carrabba's dipping oil in the Food Nirvana Appetizer section.

German Schnitzel Meal - ☺♥

Schnitzel with Spatzle or with German Potato Salad

I found the recipes below on the website www.DaringGourmet.com and I believe that website is loaded with what I call first class recipes for different/various cuisines. I plan to return to it often for recipes, cooking techniques and ideas that will improve Food Nirvana.

Do note that the high level of professionalism in the Daring Gourmet recipes is obvious. In short, people looking for fast convenience meals (yuck!) should either improve their lifestyle or look elsewhere for something to make for dinner.

My objective in this particular recipe collection is to help the serious cook make a traditional and delicious German meal. It is a three course meal with meat, starch and salad components. I recommend serving a great white wine with this meal, like a clean, crisp French white burgundy like Louis Jadot Pouilly Fuisse, or a Pinot Grigio like Santa Margherita, perhaps a nice Chardonnay like Kendall Jackson Reserve, or even a German Riesling (sweet) wine, in all cases chilled. I also suggest serving a light red raspberry gelato with crisp cookies on the side and freshly made hot coffee for a dessert course.

Schweine Schnitzel: (This means pork schnitzel as opposed to Weiner Schnitzel which is made with veal.)

Ingredients:

4 boneless pork chops (to make Wiener schnitzel use thin veal cutlets)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

½ cup all-purpose flour combined with 1 teaspoon salt

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

¾ cup plain breadcrumbs

Oil for frying (I recommend fresh peanut oil but soybean or corn oil will be okay too.)

Directions:

Place the pork chops between two sheets of plastic wrap and pound them until just ¼ inch thick with the flat side of a meat tenderizer. Lightly season both sides with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Place the flour mixture, egg, and breadcrumbs in 3 separate shallow bowls. Dip the chops in the flour, the egg, and the breadcrumbs, coating both sides and all edges at each stage. Be careful not to press the breadcrumbs into the meat. Gently shake off the excess crumbs. Don't let the schnitzel sit in the coating or they will not be as crispy once fried - fry immediately.

Make sure the cooking oil is hot enough at this point (about 330 degrees F) as you don't want the Schnitzel to sit around in the coating before frying. Use enough oil so that the Schnitzels "swim" in it.

Fry the Schnitzel for about 2-3 minutes on both sides until a deep golden brown. Transfer briefly to a plate lined with paper towels.

Serve immediately with slices of fresh lemon and parsley sprigs or with your choice of sauce. Serve with German Spatzle or German potato salad, and with a fresh leafy green salad.

Spatzle:

Ingredients:

4 cups all-purpose flour (you can also use whole wheat flour)

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg (optional)

4 large eggs

¼ cup milk or water (milk produces a richer Spatzle) (add more flour if the dough is too runny, add more milk or water if it's too stiff)

Directions:

This recipe calls for using a special tool to press the dough through holes to form the pieces of raw spatzle ... kind of like the old potato ricers used by our grandmothers. Note that you can cut the dough, or, attempt (as I will do) to use a pasta maker attachment for a stand mixer ... specifically the one to make linguine. You can also press the dough with a hard spatula, through a steel steamer pan insert/top section that has holes in the bottom.

Add the flour, salt and nutmeg to the bowl of a stand mixer. Stir to combine.

Crack the eggs into a small bowl and whisk them.

Make a well in the center of the flour mixture and pour the eggs in it.

Add the milk.

Attach a dough hook to the stand mixer and "knead" the dough for 16-20 minutes, or until bubbles appear. After 15 minutes or less of beating, use a wooden spoon to scoop and pull the dough. If bubbles/holes appear, the dough is done.

Bring at least 2 quarts of lightly salted water to a boil, then reduce to a simmer.

Using a Spatzle maker of your choice, press the noodles into the simmering water and cook for about 2-3 minutes, or until the noodles float to the top.

Use a slotted spoon to transfer the noodles to a colander, and then dump the noodles into a large bowl of ice water.

Drain the noodles again and toss with a little vegetable oil or melted butter.

The spatzle can be stored in the refrigerator for at least a couple of days and then heated to serve.

To heat before serving, melt some butter in a large skillet and toss the Spatzle in it to heat through.

Geschnetzeltes: (This is an extra optional step to make an authentic German gravy/sauce for the spatzle.)

This is a recipe for making a gravy/sauce to serve over spatzle. As shown it is a complete pork dish. Omit the pork to simply make the gravy/sauce to pour over spatzle.

Ingredients:

1 lb lean pork, cut into thin strips

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 small yellow onion, diced

8 oz fresh white button mushrooms, sliced

3 tablespoons butter

3 tablespoons flour

1 cup whole milk

1 cup heavy cream

1 tablespoon sweet paprika powder

2 beef bouillon cubes

Salt and pepper to taste

Spatzle, homemade or purchased and cooked according to package directions.

Directions:

Heat the oil in a stainless steel skillet over medium-high heat and brown the pork on all sides. Transfer the pork to a plate and set aside.

Add the onions to the skillet, adding more oil if necessary, and sauté until translucent and beginning to brown, about 5-7 minutes. Add the mushrooms and sauté until tender, about 5 minutes. Transfer the onion mushroom mixture to pork and set aside.

Melt the butter in the skillet and whisk in the flour, continuing to whisk until the mixture is a rich caramel brown. Add the milk and heavy cream, whisking continually, until the mixture is smooth and thickened.

Add the paprika and crumble in the beef bouillon and whisk until smooth.

Return the meat mixture to the sauce and bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add more milk if the sauce is too thick, or add a flour slurry to thicken.

Serve immediately with hot spatzle and a fresh green salad.

Swabian Potato Salad:

This particular potato salad is known as Schwäbischer Kartoffelsalat (Swabian Potato Salad). It is not the hot variety and it does not contain bacon. Make it the day before you plan to serve it for the best flavor. Be careful to use Yukon gold potatoes, not Russet or Maine or other common varieties found in the USA.

Ingredients:

3 pounds small Yukon gold potatoes of similar size, skins scrubbed and peels left on

1 medium yellow onion, chopped

1½ cups water mixed with 4 teaspoons beef bouillon granules

½ cup white vinegar (add a few dashes of Essig Essenz if you have it)

¾ tablespoon salt

¾ teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

1 teaspoon sugar

2 teaspoons mild German mustard (I recommend Düsseldorf Style German Mustard. If you can't get it, use regular yellow mustard)

⅓ cup vegetable oil

Fresh chopped chives for garnish

Directions:

Boil the potatoes in their skins in lightly salted water until tender. Allow the potatoes to cool until you can handle them. Peel the potatoes and slice them into ¼ inch slices. Put the sliced potatoes in a large mixing bowl and set aside.

Add onions, beef broth, vinegar, salt, pepper, sugar, and mustard in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. As soon as it boils, remove from heat and pour the mixture over the potatoes. Cover the bowl of potatoes and let sit for at least one hour.

After at least one hour, gently stir in the vegetable oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. If too much liquid remains, use a slotted spoon to serve. Serve garnished with fresh chopped chives.

Serve at room temperature.

Note: This potato salad is best the next day (remove from the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before serving).

Create a Leafy Green Salad to accompany the schnitzel and spatzle/potato salad:

Make a Leafy Green Salad of your choice. This could be a simple tossed salad, a hot spinach salad with bacon or a lettuce wedge with bleu cheese and bacon or the Food Nirvana salad with sweet and sour dressing. You might even make the Wilted Lettuce Salad, which sounds very appropriate for this meal from my

point of view and is also easy to make. I have included the Wilted Lettuce Salad recipe here.

This salad is best served either very warm or hot. In a sense it serves as both a pungent appetizer and as a salad. It is enjoyed best during cold weather, and it certainly does stimulate your appetite. It is a delicious combination of a cooked sweet and sour dressing with bacon. Sometimes it is a thin dressing. At other times people use a small amount of cornstarch to thicken it so that it sticks better to the lettuce.

It is called a wilted salad because hot dressing is poured over room temperature chopped iceberg lettuce, and the hot liquid when mixed with the lettuce causes the lettuce to turn partially translucent and to wilt. Thus, the lettuce in this salad is not crisp, nor is it intended to be crisp.

Ingredients:

1 head of iceberg lettuce at room temperature, chopped into 1 ½"x1 ½" pieces

6 strips of bacon

1/3 cup of diced onion

1/3 cup of white or rice vinegar

¼ cup of sugar (or less, depending on whether you want it more tart or more sweet)

1 cup of water

2 tsp. of cornstarch (optional)

Directions:

Warm a glass bowl large enough to hold the chopped lettuce in a 200°F oven. Also pre-warm the number of small salad or side dishes you plan to use for your guests.

Fry the bacon in a skillet on medium heat until the bacon is fairly crisp without large fatty spots, but not burned. Drain the bacon on a paper towel. When it is cool break it into very small pieces. Set the pieces aside.

Pour the hot bacon grease into a cup. Clean the skillet and return about 2 to 3 tbsp. of the bacon grease to the skillet. Then sauté the diced onion in the bacon grease on low heat until it is translucent.

Add the vinegar to the bacon grease and onion mixture and mix well. Then add the sugar and mix well. If you plan to use the optional cornstarch then mix it with the cup of water. Gradually add the water (with/without cornstarch mixed in it) while continuing to mix the skillet contents. Add the small bacon pieces and mix. Heat the mixture to a simmering temperature around 200 degrees F and then remove the skillet from the heat.

Put the chopped lettuce into the warmed glass bowl. Then pour all of the skillet contents over the lettuce and mix everything thoroughly with two large forks, so that the lettuce all gets coated and wilts.

Return the bowl to the 200°F oven briefly to keep the salad warm.

Serve the salad warm in the pre-warmed small salad or side dishes as your guests sit down to eat.

Enjoy ... the bacon and sweet and sour dressing served warm on the warm wilted lettuce is quite tasty.

Note that no salt was used because the bacon contributed plenty of salt. Some guests might choose to sprinkle a small amount of black pepper on their salad serving.

Homemade Pasta with Vodka Sauce - ☺♥

Marie and I used to make homemade pasta often, to be used with her scratch recipe for pasta sauce with meatballs and sausages. As I think about it, that general time frame was 37 years ago. We made fettuccine, manually, from hand mixing the dough ingredients to rolling out the sheets of pasta with a rolling pin to cutting them into long thin strips with a sharp knife, and then hanging the strips over chair backs to partially dry them. The homemade pasta was so superior to the dry stuff in boxes at the supermarket that we limited the supermarket purchases to items like macaroni that we couldn't make at home. It was a quality of life decision and we loved the superior homemade pasta.

Years later we noticed the good stuff, relatively freshly made pasta, still moist, being sold in packages at the supermarket, at premium prices. We laughed, noting that the product was likely fine but the cost absurd. Now, so many years later, I make the homemade pasta, and I surely think of Marie when I do it. But the methods I use now are radically different and easier, thanks to thinking through the dough making process and also from acquiring pasta accessories for my Kitchen-Aid® stand mixer.

I recently looked up a number of homemade pasta recipes on the Internet and I found that none of them used an electric mixer as part of the dough preparation. They were all stuck in the past with entirely manual methods. The upshot is that I studied the various ingredient recommendations and selected a combination that appeared to me to be best. I then simply combined the ingredients, sequentially, starting with the liquid items, and used the electric mixer to do all the initial mixing, with a great saving of labor and time.

Yes, I still put flour on a granite surface and knead the dough manually for a few minutes, let it rest for 30 minutes, covered, then separate it into pieces that I can readily process through the electric mixer pasta accessories, first making sheets of pasta and then cutting them into long strips of fettuccine. Wow, it is so easy and so perfect!

This time around my sweetheart, Peggy, hung the strips of fettuccine on dish towels that had been placed over the backs of bar stools. This was to keep her dogs from stealing the fettuccine as fast as we could make it! Earlier, Peggy had made homemade meat balls and a homemade vodka sauce, and she put some Italian sausage links into the sauce along with the meatballs. What a fine combination!

After a brief time of drying, about fifteen minutes, we cooked the fettuccine in batches in boiling salted water. Freshly made pasta cooks a lot faster than the

dried stuff in boxes, so each batch took only about two to three minutes to be cooked perfectly. You can tell it is done when it floats on the surface of the water. We removed each batch of the cooked pasta from the boiling water and drained the water from it, and we put the bowl of drained pasta, batch after batch, into a 200 degrees F warming oven, assuring that all of the pasta would be warm at serving time.

Oh, yeah ... What a fine meal! A bit of grated Parmesan cheese on top of the sauce and meat covered pasta and we chowed down with pleasure. Well, I simply had to make an addition to Food Nirvana to capture what we did so you can have fun and great enjoyment too. I put the needed recipes below and you can make any or all of them to suit yourself. If you can, make this a family meal preparation, where everyone has a part in creating dinner. It is both fun and educational, not to mention delicious at mealtime.

You may want to make a side salad with Italian dressing and possibly serve some warmed fresh Italian bread with butter. I also suggest serving one of the milder red wines, like merlot or pinot noir, as the vodka sauce is less intense in herb flavors than traditional red pasta sauce. The idea is you don't want to serve a robust Chianti when you serve a mild pasta sauce.

Okay ... have fun!

The Meatballs: (four servings)

Ingredients:

1/2 lb. of 90% lean ground beef

1/2 lb. of ground pork

1 small sweet onion, diced

1 1/2 tsp. of Italian seasoning

3/4 tsp. of dried oregano

3/4 tsp. of crushed red pepper

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of garlic salt

1 1/2 tbsp. of Worcestershire sauce

1/2 cup of ricotta cheese

1/4 cup of grated Parmesan cheese

1/2 cup of plain or Italian bread crumbs

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Line a four-sided cookie sheet with aluminum foil.

Put all ingredients except the ricotta cheese, parmesan cheese and breadcrumbs into an electric mixer bowl and mix on low to medium low speed until well combined.

Add the ricotta cheese and mix for one minute.

Add the parmesan cheese and the breadcrumbs and mix for two minutes.

Form meatballs 1 1/2 inches in diameter by hand and place each meatball on the cookie sheet.

Bake the meatballs until they are not pink in the center, about 20 to 25 minutes, turning them over after the first ten minutes.

Turn the oven off, open the oven door for a few minutes, then close it and let the meatballs stay warm in the oven.

The Sausages: (four servings)

Ingredients:

We simply buy any good commercial brand of sweet Italian sausage links. For this recipe one pound of sausage links is the right amount to use.

Directions:

You can bake room temperature sausage links along with the meatballs as described above. Stab each link two or three times with a fork prior to baking to allow fat to render out during baking. Turn the sausages over after the first ten minutes of baking.

Leave the baked sausage links in the oven with the meatballs ... but be sure you have turned the oven off.

The Vodka Sauce: (eight servings)

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of olive oil
1 stalk of celery, diced
1 small sweet onion, diced
4 large garlic cloves, minced
1, 28 ounce can of diced tomatoes
1, 14 ounce can of diced tomatoes
1, 28 ounce can of tomato sauce
1 tsp. of sea salt
2 tsp. of sugar
1/2 tsp. of black pepper
4 sprigs of fresh basil or 2 tsp. of dried basil
1 cup of vodka
1 cup of heavy cream

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet and sauté the diced onion and diced celery on medium heat until the onion is translucent. Then add the minced garlic and sauté for one more minute.

Stir in all the other ingredients except the vodka and the heavy cream and mix them together. Then transfer the mixture to a slow cooker.

Add the meatballs and sausage links to the sauce, mix gently and then cover the slow cooker.

Simmer the meat and sauce about two hours in the slow cooker on medium to high heat, covered.

Turn off the slow cooker, remove the lid and let the contents cool for 15 minutes.

If you used basil sprigs remove them now and discard them.

Add the vodka to the sauce and mix gently.

Add the heavy cream to the sauce and mix gently but thoroughly.

Set the slow cooker temperature to warm, or, the lowest slow cooker setting higher than off.

Keep the vodka sauce, meatballs and sausages warm in the slow cooker until meal time.

The Pasta: (four servings)

Ingredients:

2 extra large eggs plus one egg yolk

1/4 cup of water

1 tbsp. of olive oil

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

1 1/2 cups of all purpose flour

1/2 cup of Semolina flour (You can buy it in different amounts at www.bulkfoods.com or other Internet web sites)

Directions:

The right time to eat the pasta is immediately after cooking it, so prepare any side dishes you intend to have at the meal now.

Turn on the oven to 200 degrees F. Then put a pasta serving bowl and dinner plates or wide shallow bowls into the oven to pre-warm them.

Put all the ingredients except the flours into the electric mixer bowl and mix on medium speed for two minutes.

Gradually add the semolina flour while mixing and then mix for two minutes.

Gradually add the all purpose flour and mix until a nice dough is formed.

Remove the somewhat sticky dough with floured hands and place it on a hard floured surface for kneading.

Knead the dough, letting the flour help eliminate sticky spots during kneading. Knead for about three minutes.

Let the dough rest, lightly floured and covered in plastic wrap, for 30 minutes.

Tear or cut the dough into six equal parts, roll each part in your hands into a ball and if necessary use a bit of flour to eliminate stickiness.

Process each dough ball by flattening and lengthening it and either using the sheet pasta accessory for your electric mixer, or, use a rolling pin on a hard floured surface to roll the dough into a roughly 15 inch long sheet of pasta about 1/32 of an inch thick.

Process each sheet of pasta using the fettuccine pasta accessory for your mixer, or, simply cut long strands about 1/4 inch wide from each pasta sheet using a sharp knife.

Hang the strands of pasta on a dish towel that has been placed on a chair back and allow it to partially dry for 15 minutes.

If you are serving a loaf of Italian bread with the meal now is the time to put it into the warming oven.

Cook the pasta in a gallon of boiling, lightly salted water, in four batches, for about two to three minutes per batch. Then use a pasta scoop or tongs to remove the cooked pasta from the water, placing it in a spaghetti drainer that you hold partially over the pot of boiling water.

Put the drained pasta into the warmed serving bowl and put the bowl back into the 200 degrees F warming oven.

Repeat the steps above to cook and drain each batch of pasta until all of it is cooked.

Now you can serve the entire meal and enjoy the expressions of pleasure from your family and/or friends. And you have nice warm plates or wide shallow bowls to keep the warm food warm while you are eating it.

Be sure to serve some freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

Lasagna Bolognese - ☺♥

For some reason I never tasted any lasagna that lit my fire. They mostly seemed too dry and simply some kind of red meat sauce on flat noodles, with nothing special to get excited about. My sweetheart, Peggy, said she loves lasagna and that she used to make it to the delight of family and friends. I still wasn't convinced that I wanted to make it. Then, upon reading my guru J. Kenji Lopez Alt's dissertations on Bolognese Sauce and Lasagna Bolognese in his great food science book, The Food Lab©, I knew I had to rethink everything.

To cut to the chase, we first made his recipe for Bolognese Sauce, and later modified it to improve it. It is yummy and also quite a long process to make the stuff ... so one makes a lot at one time, using it for different meals in different ways. Peggy and I first had it with Ziti pasta ... only a small amount but enough to know the sauce is seriously good. Finally the day came when I was willing to pretty much use Kenji's recipe for making Lasagna Bolognese. Per usual I simply had to impose a few of my own preferences in making that dish.

Do make any side dishes for your meal, like a Caesar Salad, before making the lasagna.

The recipe below is 90% Kenji's and 10% mine and I will now explain why I varied somewhat from his recipe.

Kenji decided to forego the spinach. I wanted it for appearance and taste. I added the Ricotta cheese because I like lots of cheese in my pasta dishes. I used only 3/4 of the recipe of Bolognese Sauce instead of all of it because I didn't want to overpower the dish with the meat. Beyond that, I added one cup of plain marinara sauce to give slightly more tomato taste to the meat sauce, along with some added moisture. I added chopped chives for appearance and taste. I specified the amounts of salt and pepper to use, knowing guests could later add more if they wanted more. I added 1/4 cup of heavy cream to the Béchamel sauce to somewhat more moisten the lasagna, to avoid the drying effect of baking.

Peggy and I assembled the lasagna together and she gave it her blessing before baking based on content and amounts of each ingredient, slightly increasing the grated Parmegiano Reggiano from 4 ounces to 5 ounces. So, how did it come out? Well ... in a word, delicious! The recipe pretty much stands as is, with one minor point ... I had to increase the baking time to 55 minutes. Done.

If I decide to tweak the recipe in the future I will increase the mozzarella cheese to 16 ounces and cut the amount of milk to 1 1/2 cups instead of 2 cups. Why? The answer is I want even more cheese and slightly less moisture so the final

baked lasagna holds together better when servings are removed from the baking casserole.

Ingredients: (Serves six to eight people)

3/4 recipe of Food Nirvana (really Kenji's, slightly modified) Bolognese Sauce

1 lb. of uncooked lasagna noodles

6 oz. of frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained

12 oz. of ricotta cheese

2 medium size garlic cloves, minced

2 tbsp. of chopped fresh chives

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of pepper

1/2 tsp. of ground nutmeg (freshly ground or grated is best)

5 oz. Parmegiano Reggiano cheese, grated

8 oz. of fresh milk mozzarella cheese

1 cup of marinara sauce

2 tbsp. of butter

4 tbsp. of flour

2 cups of whole (4% butterfat) milk

1/4 cup of heavy cream

Directions:

Make the Bolognese Sauce a day in advance and vacuum seal and freeze 1/4 of it for some later use. Refrigerate the remaining 3/4 of the sauce in a sealed container.

Set the oven at 375 degrees F.

Place an aluminum foil covered cookie sheet on the bottom oven shelf, reserving the middle shelf for later placement of the casserole of lasagna. This will catch any overflow from the casserole during baking.

Put the 3/4 recipe of Bolognese Sauce into a 2 quart bowl. Add 1 cup of plain marinara sauce and mix until incorporated.

Mix the Ricotta cheese and the chopped spinach in a 1 quart bowl.

Now it is time to make the cheesy, seasoned Béchamel (white) sauce.

Cut the mozzarella cheese into small chunks about 1/2 inch thick and set them aside.

Put the butter into a medium saucepan and heat it on medium heat, whisking lightly, until the foaming mostly subsides.

Add the flour to the butter and whisk well for one minute to form a lightly blond colored roux.

Add the minced garlic and the nutmeg to the roux and whisk and cook on very low heat for one minute.

Add the heavy cream while whisking the roux mixture.

Increase the heat to medium and add the milk slowly but steadily while whisking the mixture. Continue heating until the sauce reaches a low simmering temperature.

Add the mozzarella cheese chunks a few at a time and continue to heat on medium heat while whisking to melt the cheese.

Add the salt and pepper and chopped chives and continue whisking, heating on medium heat until the mixture again simmers, but do not let it come to a boil. You now have a seasoned Béchamel sauce with cheese and chives.

Remove the saucepan from the heat. Set it aside.

Prepare the lasagna noodles according to package directions, or try Kenji's trick for cooking dry pasta, as I did. I simply crisscrossed the dry flat noodles in a large, deep skillet and added enough water to cover them. Then I heated the water to a boil, shut off the heat and left the contents cool and absorb water for 30 minutes.

Drain the noodles and place them spread out on a dish towel or a few paper towels, stacked, with a towel(s) between each layer, for ten minutes, to absorb excess moisture. This method allows for gentle handling of the now soft flat noodles.

Grate the 5 ounces of Parmegiano Reggiano cheese and set it aside.

Mix together the Ricotta cheese and spinach mixture with the cheesy Béchamel sauce.

Spread 1/6th of the Bolognese and marinara sauce mixture around the interior bottom of a 9" x 13" baking casserole.

Spoon 1/6th of the combined Ricotta cheese and spinach and cheesy Béchamel sauce on top of the Bolognese Sauce in the casserole.

Hand sprinkle 1/6th of the grated Parmegiano Reggiano cheese on top of the sauces mixture in the casserole.

Place three of the soft, flat lasagna noodles on top of the casserole ingredients.

Repeat the above steps starting with spreading the next layer of the Bolognese Sauce mixture, and continue until you have used all 15 noodles and put the final layer of the other ingredients on top of the top noodle layer.

If you have an extra piece of flat noodle then cut it into six pieces, place them evenly on the top of the casserole and spread a small amount of marinara sauce or even some thin slices of fresh tomatoes on top of each piece.

Place the casserole of Lasagna Bolognese into the oven on the middle shelf, directly above the foil covered cookie tray.

Bake for 45 minutes.

Cover the casserole with aluminum foil, then bake for an additional 15 minutes.

Remove the casserole from the oven and place it on a wooden cutting board.

Let the lasagna rest for ten minutes.

Serve and enjoy! That is pretty much a guarantee unless you are a pure vegan.

A nice red wine like a Classico Chianti or a Pinot Noir and a side salad, like Caesar salad, go well with this lasagna.

Linguine con Aglio y Olio y Alici y Olive Nere - ☺♥

Seldom do we come across a superb dish in a restaurant only to find that we can never get that same dish again, anywhere. Well, that happened to me back in 1979. Marie and I ate at a local middle class Italian restaurant named Marina's® in Wilmington DE which she knew, but which was new to me. I happened to spot an entrée that I had never seen before and I decided to try it. Wow! It was pungent and it knocked my socks off! I had so much garlic on my breath after eating that meal that I could have breathed on a large oak tree and knocked it down! Okay, I'm just kidding, but the garlic was really there. In fact, all the different flavors were intense, and that pleased me highly.

The recipe title above simply means linguine with garlic and oil. But as served to me at Marina's® that one time, the garlic had been sautéed with anchovies and halved ripe olives as well. Of course, I used a liberal amount of grated Parmesan cheese on top. What made the dish so superb was the precise cooking of the slices of garlic such that they were sautéed to the point of being sticky, not soft, yet they were not crisp. There is that magic point in sautéing garlic where the flavor is most intense and the garlic sticky so that it will stick to your teeth. That may not sound appetizing but believe me it was/is unforgettably delicious. Even a slight undercooking or overcooking will not result in the right effect.

I was never able to have that dish again in any restaurant, including Marina's®. I attempted to tell the chefs in numerous restaurants, via the waitresses, exactly how to cook the dish, to no avail. They blew it every time in different ways. I was so annoyed I decided to make perfection myself. And I did. And now so can you.

Ingredients: (Serves two or three adults)

3/4 lb. of linguine (uncooked)

4 oz. of Extra Virgin Olive Oil

1, 2 oz. tin of flat anchovies in olive oil

6 oz. of extra large ripe olives, sliced in half lengthwise (one can, drained net weight)

6 cloves (or more, yes, more!) of fresh garlic, sliced 1/16 to 1/8th of an inch thick lengthwise

1/2 cup of Parmesan cheese (used at serving time)

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

Directions:

Prepare a large pot of boiling water, half full in a one gallon or six quart pot on high heat. When the water boils add the sea salt and turn off the heat and cover the pot.

Put the olive oil into a medium to large skillet. Add the tin of anchovies including the oil in the tin.

Prepare the drained ripe olives by slicing them in half lengthwise. Add them to the skillet.

Heat the skillet on medium heat to begin the sauté process and mix the contents. The anchovies will break up and seem to disappear during sautéing. Once the ripe olives begin to bubble as they lose water reduce the heat to low. Stir every few minutes. You may want to cover the skillet with a screen cover as the olives often cause oil to expel from the skillet as they sauté.

Prepare the sliced garlic while the skillet contents sauté.

Meanwhile, reheat the pot of water to boiling on high heat and add the linguine and stir well after one minute to assure it will not stick together while cooking. Follow the directions on the box for cooking time to obtain an al dente (literally "to the teeth," which means not cooked to the point of total softness) degree of doneness.

Add the sliced garlic to the sauté skillet when the olives show wrinkling on the outside surfaces.

Reduce the heat to low while the garlic sautés. Remove the skillet from the heat when the outside edges of the garlic turn slightly tan. That is the exact time to stop the cooking process.

Drain the linguine and put it onto a platter. Pour the sauté skillet contents over the linguine, mix and serve.

Each person can add Parmesan cheese to his or her liking on an individual portion, and then mix again.

This dish is best served with cold beer to counter/complement the intense flavors, though younger folks may prefer a different carbonated beverage.

Also, a fresh salad with Italian dressing will provide some useful vinegar contrast to the oil and garlic of the main dish. In general, contrasts make both types of food more enjoyable as each clears the palate for fresh enjoyment of the other

food. Taking a drink of beer or wine or some other flavored beverage will also contribute to the contrast effect.

This stuff is so good I almost became Italian!

Linguine with Seafood Sauce - ☺♥

This recipe is an outgrowth of trying to cook simple food for my now deceased lifetime best friend Morrie Shaffer during his convalescence. The recipe shown below, however, has been enhanced to become truly "knock 'em out" delicious. The best part is that it is completely original, and it receives rave reviews, and I get a real kick out of watching people dive back in for seconds. This recipe will easily feed eight people. Remember to look at the recommendations at the end of this recipe for appetizers, side dishes and dessert. Life can be beautiful!

Ingredients:

2, 1 lb. boxes of linguine

2, 8 oz. bottles of clam juice

2, 6 oz. cans of chopped clams in clam juice

2, 6 oz. cans of lump crabmeat

2, 6 oz. cans of sliced mushrooms

1½ lbs. of small shrimp, peeled (raw or cooked, frozen)

1 lb. of raw bay scallops or sea scallops (quartered)

1 tbsp. of dried basil

5 tbsp. of cornstarch

1, 14 oz. can of chicken broth

2 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of white pepper

½ stick of butter

¼ cup of extra virgin olive oil

1 cup of Parmesan cheese (served separately in a bowl)

Directions:

Prepare a large pot of water (about 5 quarts) to cook the linguine. Put 1 tsp. sea salt and the ¼ cup of extra virgin olive oil into the pot, cover it and heat to boiling. Keep the pot covered and shut off the heat. This will provide a quick

means later to cook the linguine, just before serving the meal, as the water will not take very long to come to a boil.

Use a very large skillet with high vertical sides and a glass cover available. Pour in the bottled clam juice and chopped clams with clam juice from the cans. Add the cans of the sliced mushrooms including the liquid. Add the crab without the liquid. Add the bay or quartered sea scallops and the basil and mix the contents. Chop the shrimp into pieces the size of the scallops. Add the shrimp, 1 tsp. of sea salt and the white pepper to the skillet and mix the contents.

Put the cornstarch into a medium bowl and pour $\frac{1}{2}$ can of the chicken broth into it while mixing. Pour the mixed contents into the skillet and mix well. Use the other $\frac{1}{2}$ can of chicken broth to get any remaining cornstarch out of the bowl and pour that into the skillet. Mix very well. Slice the butter into small pieces and add them to the skillet.

Heat the skillet contents on medium heat, with the skillet covered. Stir gently but thoroughly every two minutes, until the mixture comes to a boil. Let it boil gently for two minutes while stirring. The sauce should be thickened and the seafood cooked just enough. Remove the covered skillet to a warm 200°F oven. Place plates or large shallow serving bowls for each person into the oven to pre-warm them.

Heat the pot of water to boiling on high heat, add and stir in one pound of the linguine and partially cover the pot to maintain medium boiling while cooking for nine minutes (or less per package instructions). Stir to assure the linguine pieces are not sticking together after the first minute of boiling. When done, use a utensil to extract the linguine and put it into a medium bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven. Cook the second pound of linguine in the water used for the first pound. When done, drain it and place it and the linguine made earlier into a very large serving bowl. Add the contents of the skillet and mix well.

Serve the meal with freshly sliced warmed Italian bread and butter and a Caesar salad, with the bowl of Parmesan cheese on the side for sprinkling on the linguine with seafood. A nice white wine like a chilled Pinot Grigio with chilled wine goblets goes very well with this meal. Ice water is also recommended.

The recipe for excellent homemade Caesar salad is contained within this collection of recipes. To feed eight people I recommend three large heads of romaine lettuce and a double recipe of the salad dressing.

Melon (very ripe cantaloupe is best) wrapped in prosciutto ham makes a great appetizer, along with some kalamata and/or oil cured olives and some marinated

artichoke hearts and snack crackers, plus a robust provolone or gorgonzola cheese.

Spumoni ice cream with Pepperidge Farm® Milano or Brussels cookies and freshly made coffee makes a nice dessert course.

Burp! Ahhh ...

Linguine with White Clam Sauce - ☺♥♥♥☺

(Serves four to six people)

This recipe is the very best I have ever used for this meal, and I really love linguine with white clam sauce. The recipe is a composite of different recipes I have tried in the past, with some additions I learned about from other folks, and it combines the best of flavors and procedures. Credit goes first to Marie's sister Joanne who found the original excellent recipe. Then I made a few improvements. I modified the recipe based on what Linda Lange told me Patricia Mallon used in her recipe, which includes two ingredients I had not used previously ... dried oregano and a can of anchovies. Boy, did they amp up the taste! One ingredient I found in the original recipe and in other recipes was a choice of onions or shallots. I avoid both as I have found they interfere with the taste of the other ingredients.

My original recipe only called for a relatively small amount of chopped clams and clam broth. Then I tried making the sauce using the chopped ocean clams and broth from a 51 ounce large can. What a fine improvement! You will notice the recipe suggests going beyond the amounts listed for a few of the ingredients. And that is very nice. Just don't go overboard.

A nice addition to this meal is a loaf of crusty Italian or French bread and butter. A small tossed salad (or Caesar salad) is also nice as a side dish. If you want an appetizer I suggest bite size pieces of very ripe sweet cantaloupe wrapped in prosciutto ham. For the beverage I recommend Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay or French white burgundy (like Louis Jadot® Pouilly Fuisse) wine as these have a clean taste that goes well with this particular meal. A glass of ice water along with the wine is also nice.

The white clam sauce has a very rich flavor. It is unforgettable and it will delight your guests. They will want the recipe. My son, Ray, Jr., has made this one of his signature dishes.

Ingredients:

1 lb. of linguine (or more, uncooked)

1, 2 oz. can of anchovies (or more)

6 large cloves of garlic, peeled and sliced

1, 6 oz. net drained weight can of ripe olives

1/2 tsp. of red pepper flakes (Or less. Heat fanatics may add habanero flakes.)

¼ lb. of butter

2/3 cup of extra virgin olive oil for the white clam sauce

¼ cup of extra virgin olive oil for the linguine

1, 51 oz. can of Sea Watch® (or other brand) chopped ocean clams in clam broth

1 tsp. of dried oregano

1/4 cup of fresh parsley leaves, pressed gently into the measuring cup, then chopped

1 tsp. of lemon zest

1 cup of pinot Grigio or similar dry to medium dry white wine

½ tsp. of black pepper

½ tsp. of sea salt for the clam sauce

½ tsp. of sea salt for the linguine

1 cup (or more) of freshly grated Parmegiano Reggiano or Pecorino Romano cheese

Directions:

Set the oven at 190°F and put in wide individual serving bowls and one large (1 1/2 quart) bowl to later hold the linguine and a second larger (2 quart) bowl to hold the white clam sauce.

Fill an eight-quart pot with four quarts of water and add the ½ tsp. of sea salt. Cover with a lid and heat on high. Start preparing the ingredients for the white clam sauce while the water is heating. When the water boils turn off the heat and keep the lid on the pot to retain heat.

Make the white clam sauce in a large (12" diameter, 2 1/4" deep) skillet. Put the 2/3 cup of olive oil and one half stick of butter into the skillet and heat on low. Add the can of anchovies to the skillet.

Drain the can of ripe olives, discarding the liquid, and cut the olives in half lengthwise, then add the pieces to the skillet. Peel and then slice the garlic cloves into thin pieces and add half of them to the skillet. Stir gently to distribute ingredients evenly. At this point the skillet contents should be sautéing gently. If not, increase the heat to medium.

Drain the clam broth from the can of chopped clams into a one quart bowl and reserve it for later use in this recipe. Set the chopped clams aside.

Add the red pepper flakes and the oregano to the skillet and mix gently. Sauté until the olives begin to wrinkle or until the garlic becomes a pale tan at the edges. Add the remainder of the garlic and mix gently. Add the chopped clams, mix gently and reduce the heat to low. Add the salt and the pepper to the skillet and simmer the contents gently on low heat while making the linguine.

Reheat the water in the pot to boiling. When it boils, add the linguine and stir it after one minute to avoid clumping. Partially cover the pot and boil the linguine for nine to eleven minutes (some brands require less than nine minutes). Drain it in a colander, give it a hot water rinse and a second period of draining, then mix it with ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil in the large pre-warmed serving bowl. Cover the bowl of linguine with plastic wrap to retain moisture and put it back into the warm (190°F) oven.

Pour the reserved clam broth through a very fine mesh sieve into the skillet slowly, avoiding any sand or grit that might be present on the bottom of the bowl. Mix the ingredients in the skillet and increase the heat to high. Add the wine and the parsley and continue mixing gently. When the skillet contents begin to boil reduce the heat to low and add the lemon zest. Mix gently and then add the remaining ½ stick of butter. Mix gently until the butter melts. The white clam sauce is done. Place it in the larger pre-warmed serving bowl and provide a soup ladle for mixing and dispensing the sauce later.

Serve the grated cheese in a small serving dish. Remove the linguine from the warm oven and serve it. Place the warmed individual serving bowls on place mats to avoid damaging the surface of your table.

Do not mix the sauce and the linguine together except in the individual serving bowls, for any leftovers must be kept separate from each other or the linguine will absorb sauce and become water logged.

Add the clam sauce to individual servings of linguine and top each dish with the grated cheese.

Eat. Wow!

After this feast dessert is generally unnecessary, but if you insist on having dessert later I suggest cherries jubilee. You can find an exact recipe for that item, but in general it is a bag of frozen pitted dark cherries and a small amount of water, cooked briefly with sugar, butter, corn starch and a touch of cherry liquor

or brandy. The warm thickened mixture is served over a high quality vanilla ice cream, with a side of tea cookies and a cup of freshly made good coffee.

Prepare to join Weight Watchers®!

Mike and Rachel's "Jambalaya" - ☺♥

My grandson Mike and his wife Rachel made a delicious version of Jambalaya for one of our large family gatherings around Thanksgiving of 2022. Mike indicated that they cut back on the hot pepper ingredients to accommodate family members who would prefer a milder version of Jambalaya. I have done that within this recipe by reducing the red pepper flakes from one tablespoon to one teaspoon. If I recall correctly Mike and Rachel indicated they did put in one ghost pepper, and that was actually quite nice. I definitely recommend using one super hot pepper very finely diced.

As is typical, I took the given recipe and reformatted it and modified the text slightly to reflect the standard recipe presentation methods used within Food Nirvana. But the ingredients and amounts have not been changed, except as noted above regarding red pepper flakes.

I hope you make this dish as it is very tasty, and it was most popular with virtually all of our family members. It is, in a few words, very satisfying!

Ingredients:

1 pound of kielbasa (turkey polska, andouille sausage, etc. either sliced or diced)

1 pound of boneless skinless chicken breast (cubed 3/4")

2 cups of uncooked basmati rice

4 cups of chicken broth

2 cups of water

1 medium yellow sweet onion

2 large bell peppers (of different colors, like red and orange)

2 jalapeno peppers

2 cloves of garlic, minced

2 tbsp. of Extra Virgin Olive Oil

1 tsp. of red pepper flakes (variable ... increase for more heat)

The seasonings listed below are to be combined in a bowl and then one third of the mixture added three times during the cooking process:

1 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of white pepper

1 tsp. of garlic powder

1 tsp. of garlic salt

1 tsp. of onion powder

1 tsp. of onion salt

1 tsp. of celery salt

Optional Ingredients:

1 super hot pepper (Ghost, Scorpion, or Carolina Reaper)

6 oz. of white portabella mushrooms (washed and cut into slices 1/3" thick)

Directions:

In a 2 gallon or larger cooking pot, add the oil and cook the diced or sliced sausage and the cubed chicken (and the mushroom slices if adding) thoroughly and add the first portion of the seasoning mixture.

Roughly chop the vegetables and blend them in a food processor to your desired consistency. Alternatively, you can dice the vegetables.

Add the vegetables and the minced garlic to the pot, and add the second portion of the seasoning mixture, then stir.

Add the rice, chicken broth, and water, and add the third and final portion of the seasoning mixture, then bring to a boil on medium high heat.

Simmer on low heat, covered, for 20 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes for a “soupy” consistency. Alternatively, simmer the Jambalaya an additional 10 minutes, uncovered, to get a thicker “glop.”

Serve and Enjoy!

Notes:

If you decide to use a super hot pepper, wear nitrile gloves while handling and cutting it to avoid skin irritation. Also, do the cutting in a well ventilated area. Later, do not wash the knife or the cutting board using hot water (residual volatile pepper oils will make breathing difficult).

Minute® rice or cauliflower rice can be used instead of basmati rice. If you decide to use either of them then skip adding the 2 cups of water shown in the ingredients list.

Pan Fried Gnocchi - ☺♥

Pan Fried Gnocchi with Bacon, Sausage, Onion and Peas

Lately I've been trying out various gnocchi recipes as these potato dumplings are a nice carbohydrate variation from our typical beans, potatoes, pasta or rice. I already make nice conventional dumplings of other types, like the wide heavy ones I make for chicken and dumplings and the puffy variety I make for pork and sauerkraut and dumplings.

I've had a boss recipe for years using boiled/drained gnocchi in a gorgonzola cream sauce but my sweetheart, Peggy, wanted me to try something other than a cream sauce. Thus, I found this recipe on the Internet and modified it considerably to amp it up in flavor and in amount of meat, making it essentially an entree rather than a side dish.

The best part for me is that the gnocchi are fried in this recipe and I confess to having a real weakness for certain fried foods ... especially when they have bacon seasoning.

A side salad goes well with this meal to provide complementary taste, texture and temperature. Some crusty warm rolls with butter (or roasted head of garlic and olive oil) might be nice too. You may also enjoy a light, medium dry white wine like chilled Pinot Grigio. Cold beer is also a good beverage choice. A light fruit gelato makes a nice meal accompaniment dessert.

Ingredients: (2 generous or 3 regular servings)

1 lb. package of gnocchi

4 slices of thick-cut bacon, fried and later broken up into 1/2 inch size pieces

4, 1 1/2 to 2 oz. raw breakfast sausage patties finely crumbled

5 tbsp. of extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium size onion thinly sliced (about 2 cups of slices)

3/4 cup of frozen peas

2 tsp. of minced fresh thyme or 3/4 tsp. of dried thyme leaves

1/4 tsp. of finely ground Sea salt

1/4 tsp. of ground Black pepper

1/2 cup (or more) of freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Directions:

Make any side dishes and/or dessert that you plan to serve with this meal first. Chill the wine (optional).

Pre-warm a two quart serving dish and the plates or bowls you will use when you serve the pan fried gnocchi in a 200 degrees F warming oven. If you are serving rolls it is nice to warm them too.

Grate enough Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese to make 1/2 cup or more of grated cheese. Set it aside.

Bring a two quart saucepan half filled with salted water to a boil. Cook the gnocchi at a low boil until all of it floats at the surface of the boiling water.

Reserve 1/2 cup of the cooking water in a small cup. Drain the gnocchi in a large sieve and then set them aside in a bowl.

Fry the bacon in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat until crispy (but not burnt) on both sides, about 5 minutes. Transfer the bacon to a plate covered with a paper towel and set it aside. Pour off and discard most of the melted bacon fat from the skillet. Wipe the edge of the skillet to avoid having any melted fat on the outside surface of the skillet.

Add 3 tbsp. of the olive oil to the skillet and heat it over medium-high heat. Add the onion slices and cook until they begin to brown, about 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium-low and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are limp and turning light brown in color, about 5 minutes more.

Stir in the peas and the thyme, heat for about two minutes, season the mixture with the salt and pepper and then transfer the mixture to a one quart bowl.

Add the remaining 2 tbsp. of olive oil to the skillet and heat over medium-high heat. Then add the crumbled raw breakfast sausage patty pieces and fry the sausage meat for about three minutes while lightly stirring until it starts to become crisp.

Use a slotted spoon to remove/drain the oil back into the skillet from the fried sausage pieces as you remove them, and add the drained sausage pieces to the onion mixture bowl.

Add the gnocchi to the skillet and cook them on medium high heat, stirring occasionally to brown them on both sides, until they're lightly brown, about 5 minutes.

Break up the cooled fried bacon while the gnocchi are frying and add it to the onion mixture bowl.

Add 1/4 cup of the freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese to the onion mixture bowl.

Stir in the onion mixture along with 1/4 cup of the reserved cooking water, then mix gently to moisten and coat the gnocchi. If necessary, add more of the reserved cooking water and mix briefly.

Cook for two to three minutes on medium heat with light stirring, then put the completed entree into the pre-warmed two quart serving dish.

Serve the fried gnocchi entree hot immediately, with the top sprinkled with the remaining Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

Enjoy! You and your guests will love this gnocchi dish.

Pierogies and Blintzes - ?

I have been experimenting with our Kitchen Aid® pasta maker accessories and having lots of fun. I decided to make Raviolis but we don't have the Kitchen Aid® accessory for that so we made them manually from sheets of pasta dough from the pasta roller accessory.

It wasn't as easy as I had hoped so I went searching the Internet for the Ravioli accessory, only to find that the cheapest price was \$133 plus shipping. Not good! That device is significantly overpriced and though it attaches to the front accessory port of the mixer it is completely manual in use, i.e. all done by hand cranking with no mixer power used at all. It is stupid to pay that much money for a manual device.

I went looking for other devices available via the Internet that would be less expensive. The best items I found make pierogies or raviolis or a variety of other filled dough foods, like pot stickers. I bought the devices in two sizes, large and small, and the total cost plus shipping was \$45. They are made in Canada.

Well, it turns out that I love pot stickers, pierogies, blintzes, etc., so we will be using our new purchases first to make pierogies, then other related but unique foods.

The recipe provided immediately below is from the Internet from a guy in Pittsburgh, PA. It looks to be a very traditional recipe and we are anxious to try it ... And so we will when our ordered pierogie maker devices arrive.

Following the initial recipe I have included a variety of other filling recipes, savory and sweet, along with some dough recipe variations, especially for the sweet pierogies or blintzes.

I will report back with my results later. I will then weigh 300 pounds!!!

Ingredients:

2 cups of flour, plus extra for kneading and rolling dough

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1 large egg

1/2 cup of sour cream, plus extra to serve with the pierogie

1/4 cup of butter, softened and cut into small pieces

butter and onions for sautéing

ingredients for filling of your choice (potato & cheese filling recipe below)

Directions:

Pierogie Dough:

To prepare the pierogie dough, mix together the flour and salt. Beat the egg, then add all at once to the flour mixture. Add the 1/2 cup sour cream and the softened butter pieces and work until the dough loses most of its stickiness (about 5-7 minutes). You can use a food processor with a dough hook for this, but be careful not to overbeat. Wrap the dough in plastic and refrigerate for 20-30 minutes or overnight; the dough can be kept in the refrigerator for up to 2 days. Each batch of dough makes about 12-15 pierogies, depending on size.

Making the Pierogies:

Roll the pierogie dough on a floured board or countertop until 1/8" thick. Cut circles of dough (2" for small pierogies and 3-3 1/2" for large pierogies) with a cookie cutter or drinking glass. Place a small ball of filling (about a tablespoon) on each dough round and fold the dough over, forming a semi-circle. Press the edges together with the tines of a fork.

Boil the pierogies a few at a time in a large pot of water. They are done when they float to the top (about 8-10 minutes). Rinse in cool water and let dry.

Sauté chopped onions in butter in a large pan until onions are soft. Then add pierogies and pan fry until lightly crispy. Serve with a side of sour cream for a true Pittsburgh pierogie meal.

Homemade Pierogie Tips:

If you are having a hard time getting the edges to stick together, you may have too much flour in the dough. Add a little water to help get a good seal.

If you don't want to cook all of the pierogies right away, you can refrigerate them (uncooked) for several days or freeze them for up to several months.

You can fill pierogies with pretty much anything you want, though potato and cheese is the most common (recipe below). Sweet pierogies are often filled with a prune mixture.

Pierogie Filling Recipes:

Potato, Cheese & Onion Filling:

Peel and boil 5 large potatoes until soft. Red potatoes are especially good for this. While the potatoes are boiling, finely chop 1 large onion and sauté in butter until soft and translucent. Mash the potatoes with the sautéed onions and 4-8oz of grated cheddar cheese (depending on how cheesy you want your pierogies), adding salt and pepper to taste. You can also add some fresh parsley, bacon bits, chives, or other enhancements if you desire. Let the potato mixture cool and then form into 1" balls.

Meat Filling:

Ingredients:

1/2 pound of ground beef

1/2 pound of ground veal

1/2 pound of ground lamb

2 cups of grated onion

1 teaspoon of salt

3/4 teaspoon of marjoram

3/4 teaspoon of basil

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper

1/3 cup of fine dry bread crumbs

2 tablespoons of beef stock, or more as necessary

Directions:

In a large skillet, fry ground meats and onion until meat is cooked and onion is tender. Drain.

Transfer meat-onion mixture to a large bowl and add seasonings and bread crumbs. Add just enough beef stock for meat to hold together. Use immediately or refrigerate for up to 2 days.

Smoked Sausage Filling:

Ingredients:

10 ounces of fully cooked, smoked Polish sausage, skinned and chopped

1/2 cup of chopped mushrooms

1/4 cup of fine dry bread crumbs

1 large egg, beaten

Directions:

Combine all ingredients, mixing thoroughly. Use immediately.

Cabbage and Mushroom Filling:

Ingredients:

1 (1-pound) head of green cabbage, shredded

1/3 cup of water

1 large onion, halved and sliced

1 (4-ounce) can of mushrooms (stems and pieces), drained

2 tablespoons of butter

1 teaspoon of salt or to taste

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper

2 finely chopped hard-cooked eggs (optional)

Directions:

In large saucepan over medium-high heat, combine cabbage, water, onion, mushrooms and butter. When cabbage collapses to half its volume, reduce heat to low, cover and simmer until tender, about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally and adding water, if necessary.

Drain. When cool enough to handle, chop finely. Stir in salt and pepper to taste. At this point, mixture can be refrigerated until ready to use. Just before filling, add hard-cooked eggs, if using, and mix well.

Blueberry Filling for Blintzes or Pierogies:

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of sugar

1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon

1 teaspoon of diced lemon zest(optional)

1 1/4 pounds of washed, stemmed blueberries

Directions:

In a large saucepan, combine sugar, cinnamon, lemon zest (if using), and blueberries. Toss and place over medium heat. Allow it to come to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Let cool completely.

When filling pierogie, use a slotted spoon to place 3 to 4 blueberries on each piece of dough for pierogie. Use more berries for nalesniki. Use the reserved sauce to garnish the cooked, plated dumplings or crepes.

Here is Georgia's Pierogie Dough recipe, very suitable for all types of pierogies, regular or sweet.

Ingredients:

2 large eggs

5 tablespoons of sour cream

3 tablespoons of vegetable oil

1 teaspoon of salt

3/4 cup of chicken broth

4 cups of all-purpose flour

Directions:

In a large bowl, combine eggs, sour cream oil, salt and chicken broth until well mixed. Add flour and knead by hand or in a stand mixer until the dough is smooth. Wrap with plastic and let rest at least 10 minutes. Fill with your favorite pierogie filling.

Nalesniki dough recipe to make sweet blintzes:

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of all-purpose flour

1/2 cup of milk

1/4 cup of lukewarm water

2 large eggs

2 tablespoons of butter, melted

1 1/2 tablespoons of sugar

A pinch of salt

Directions:

In a blender or food processor, combine all ingredients until smooth. Transfer to a pitcher, cover with plastic wrap and let rest for 30 minutes so the liquid can be absorbed by the flour.

Using a 2-ounce ladle, portion out batter into a nonstick crepe pan or small skillet that has been lightly coated with butter. Rotate pan and swirl batter until it covers the entire bottom of pan. Cook until lightly brown or spotted brown on the underside. Turn and cook second side until light brown.

Remove to waxed paper or parchment paper and repeat with remaining batter and butter. Serve immediately or wrap and freeze up to 1 month.

Use the savory nalesniki recipe for savory fillings and the sweet nalesniki recipe for sweet fillings. Place 2 heaping tablespoons filling on each nalesniki and fold the sides in first and then bottom, rolling away from yourself, as for an eggroll or burrito.

Filled nalesniki may be pan fried in butter or baked in a buttered casserole dish until the filling is set. Some prefer to dip their nalesniki in beaten egg and then in fine, dry bread crumbs. They are then fried in butter or a small amount of hot oil until golden on all sides.

Nalesniki Sweet Cheese Filling:

Ingredients:

2 cups of farmers cheese or ricotta

3 ounces of cream cheese, softened

1 large egg yolk

2 tablespoons of melted butter

1/2 teaspoon of salt

3 tablespoons of sugar

1 teaspoon of vanilla

Directions:

Place cheese in bowl of a food processor and puree until smooth. Add remaining ingredients and process until fluffy.

Divide filling among 12 crepes and roll. Sauté in small amount of butter and serve with fruit sauce, like fresh blueberry sauce, if desired.

Fruit Filling:

Ingredients:

2 cups of pitted cherries, peeled and chopped apples, or stemmed blueberries

3/4 cup of water

1/3 cup of sugar

1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon or cardamom (optional)

1 teaspoon of lemon juice (optional)

2 to 4 tablespoons of fine dry bread crumbs

Directions:

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine fruit, water and sugar. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 5 to 10 minutes or until fruit is tender and water is almost evaporated. Remove from heat.

Mash fruit slightly and add spice of choice and lemon juice. Return to heat and cook over low heat until mixture is thick.

If mixture is not thick enough, stir in enough bread crumbs so fruit is not liquid.

Pizza - ☺♥

Who doesn't love a delicious, hot pizza? Okay ... when we live close to a pizza parlor that makes delicious pizza (a maybe thing) we simply go there to eat, or order one and pick it up, or order it and have it delivered. That is pretty simple and nice. But what can we do when local pizza parlors make marginal pizza? Buy the frozen boxes of garbage labeled pizza that are found in supermarkets in many different brands? Oh, yes, they are garbage compared to a real pizza with at least adequate ingredients and amounts.

We happen to have one supermarket (10 miles away) we use that makes delicious hot pizza, but even that pizza is too scant in amounts of toppings. Their profit motive gets in the way of top quality. So sometimes we have added toppings and heated the pizza we brought home long enough for the extra toppings to be cooked or to get hot. But ... it just doesn't taste the same as a perfect pizza made right from scratch, fresh out of the oven. It is sadly amazing how quickly fresh hot pizza turns into plain old leftovers! You have to eat it very soon after it comes out of the oven originally to enjoy the real thing.

With that preamble it is time to move on to a fine homemade pizza recipe. What you are about to read is one of the Food Nirvana teaching type of recipes, so there is more detail than in a typical recipe. Note that I tried different methods and recipes for years at home with, in my opinion, only marginal success. Frankly, it was depressing to be so ineffective in my own kitchen. Note also that numerous Internet recipes or boxed mixes that I tried led nowhere good. It is pretty obvious that I finally succeeded in making perfect pizza at home, else this recipe would not exist.

Recently I really wanted a fine meat lovers pizza but I was avoiding going out in public due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, by accident, I got lucky. I thought about baking a loaf of Rhode's® frozen white bread ... one you thaw, let rise, and then bake. I keep a supply of those frozen loaves in the deep freeze to cover any event where I need bread but lack regular store bought bread. Note in passing that I can also use my bread machine, but sometimes I just don't feel like measuring out ingredients, etc.

My eureka moment was when I thought about using a thawed and risen loaf of the white bread as pizza dough. I didn't know how that would work but it was worth a try. Ultimately it was perfect dough for making pizza. All I had to do was think my way through how best to roll it out with a lightly oiled rolling pin, add the other ingredients, and bake it. I had another eureka moment, when I realized I could use the flat baking stones in the oven and set the oven temperature to 500 degrees F. Along with that I realized if I rolled the dough out

on parchment paper to form a rectangle that the dough would then have excellent contact with the very hot stones during baking. Sometimes one fine idea leads to another, and this was one of those special times.

The idea is that the very hot stones in virtually direct contact with the dough makes it bake like perfect thin crust pizza ... the perfect crust! The secret is extremely rapid (and sufficient) heat transfer from the stones into the dough. All I had to do was slide the raw pizza covered parchment paper from a baking sheet onto the surface of the hot stones, and that was easy ... simply pull out the shelf with the hot stones and use a corner of the parchment paper to pull it from the baking sheet to the right position on the stones. Then push the shelf back into the oven and bake for ten minutes at 500 degrees F. I checked after ten minutes and allowed the pizza to bake for two additional minutes. Then ... Voila! I used the process in reverse to pull the completed pizza away from the hot stones and on to the baking tray, ergo, the parchment paper could be grabbed and pulled, carrying with it the completed pizza, without burning my fingers (as long as I didn't touch the stones or the pizza). Or, you can play it safe and grab the parchment paper with a pair of tongs.

Okay ... now you understand the process and the key steps. The remaining part is simply adding the ingredients to the top of the pizza dough before baking, which I describe below. Note that some ingredients should not be put on to the pizza until the last five minutes of baking, to avoid burning them or drying them out. Some examples would be crushed pineapple or tidbits, or chives, or separated leaves of artichoke hearts, if you happen to like any of those or similar ingredients. Read on ...

Ingredients: (one 12" by 18" thin crust meat lovers pizza ... serves three adults two each of 6" by 6" slices of pizza)

1 pint of pizza sauce (or a bit more depending on how much sauce you like on your pizza)

A loaf of Rhode's® frozen white bread or equivalent product (thawed and risen)

Olive oil to lightly coat a rolling pin

1 pound (or more) of shredded mozzarella cheese

6 sandwich size thin slices of mild provolone cheese

3/4 pound of lightly fried ground sweet Italian sausage

1/2 cup of thinly sliced pepperoni

1/2 cup of diced lunch meat ham

1/2 cup of sliced green olives or ripe olives

1/2 cup of thinly sliced, drained canned mushrooms

1 cup of freshly grated Parmegiano Reggiano cheese (at serving time)

Directions:

Set the oven temperature to 500 degrees F. Make sure the shelf you plan to use is close to the top of the oven and has flat stones on the shelf of total size 12" by 24" or more. Also put a large baking sheet with sides on a lower shelf directly under the baking stones to catch any melted cheese that falls from the baking stones while the pizza is being baked.

Roll the loaf of thawed, risen white bread on a 12" by 20" sheet of parchment paper, to a size of 12" by 18", thus leaving one inch of extra parchment paper on each end. This will take multiple passes with the rolling pin in all four directions to get the rolled out dough to stay extended in size to 12" by 18".

Spread the pizza sauce evenly over the dough surface except for a thin quarter inch or so of dough border around the perimeter of the pizza.

Add the shredded mozzarella cheese evenly over the surface of the sauce.

Add the slices of provolone cheese spaced evenly on top of the mozzarella cheese.

Add the ground, lightly fried Italian sweet sausage evenly on top of the pizza.

Add the thin slices of pepperoni evenly on top of the pizza.

Add the sliced olives evenly on top of the pizza.

Add the canned mushroom slices evenly on top of the pizza.

Use a flat baking tray and slide the parchment paper and pizza on to the baking tray.

Open the oven and pull out the shelf containing the flat stones.

Hold the baking tray next to the stones and slide the parchment paper and pizza on to the stones.

Close the oven and bake the pizza for ten to twelve minutes, checking it for doneness after ten minutes.

Remove the parchment paper and baked pizza from the flat stones onto the baking tray by pulling it off, holding a corner of the parchment paper.

Place the baking tray on the counter and cut the hot pizza into six slices with a pizza cutter or sharp knife.

Serve the pizza immediately along with a one cup bowl of freshly grated Parmegiano Reggiano cheese.

Serve cold beer or cold sodas as the beverage.

Enjoy!

Pot Stickers - ☺♥

This delicious food item can be made at home easily as long as you remember to buy the dumpling or wonton wrappers at the supermarket or Asian market. Note that the wrappers sold for making wontons are just fine to use. I hope you make and enjoy these pot stickers.

Ingredients: (4 adult servings)

3/4 pound of ground pork or other meat

1 cup of minced cabbage

2 tablespoons of minced ginger

1 tablespoon of minced garlic

1 tablespoon of Chinese rice wine or Japanese Saki

6 scallions, the white and green parts separated, then sliced thinly crosswise, with the green parts reserved for making the dipping sauce

2 tablespoons of soy sauce

48 dumpling or wonton wrappers

1 egg, lightly beaten in a bowl

4 tablespoons of peanut oil, more or less as needed

1/4 cup of water

Directions:

Combine the pork, cabbage, ginger, garlic, scallion whites, rice wine and 2 tablespoons of soy sauce in a bowl with 1/4 cup water. Mix well.

Lay a dumpling/wonton wrapper on a clean, dry surface, and using your finger or a brush, spread a bit of beaten egg along half of its circumference.

Place a rounded teaspoon of filling in the center, then fold over and seal the pot sticker by pinching the edges together. (Do not overfill.) Place the pot stickers on a plate; if you want to wait a few hours before cooking, cover the plate with plastic wrap and refrigerate the pot stickers.

To cook the pot stickers, put about 2 tablespoons of peanut oil into a large nonstick skillet and turn the heat to medium-high. A minute later, add the pot

stickers, one at a time. They can touch one another, but they should still sit flat in one layer.

Cook for about 2 minutes, or until the pot sticker bottoms are lightly browned and most of the oil has been absorbed.

Add 1/4 cup water per dozen pot stickers to the skillet, and cover the skillet with a lid. Lower the heat to medium, and let the contents simmer for about 3 minutes.

To make the dipping sauce use the Food Nirvana recipe for pot sticker dipping sauce shown below. You have already prepared the green parts of the scallions. Uncover the pot stickers, set the heat to medium-high and cook them for another minute or two, until the bottoms are brown and crisp and the water evaporates. (Use more oil if necessary.)

Serve the pot stickers hot, with the warm dipping sauce as described next.

Enjoy!

Dipping Sauce Recipe

This is a simple, easy to make sauce for pot stickers.

Ingredients/Directions:

Dissolve 4 teaspoons of sugar in 2 tablespoons of water with stirring in a microwave safe cup.

Add the green scallion pieces prepared earlier, plus:

1/2 cup of soy sauce

4 teaspoons of rice vinegar

4 teaspoons of chili oil

4 teaspoons of minced garlic

4 teaspoons of toasted sesame seeds

1 tbsp. of toasted sesame oil.

Heat the mixture briefly in the microwave oven for 45 seconds to one minute.

Stir to mix the ingredients.

Serve this sauce warm with your steamed or fried pot stickers.

Ravioli Fillings - ☺♥

Ravioli fillings are most often mixed and used raw, put inside numerous pieces of raw pasta to form the ravioli, but some require partial cooking of a few ingredients before being put inside raw pasta. Especially raw meats. So read carefully.

The basic idea is that the other mixed raw ingredients will cook, along with the pasta that contains them, right before they are served with a hot ravioli sauce.

The short collection of fillings shown below is nice in variety, allowing you to experiment with both the fillings and accompanying sauces shown in the Food Nirvana Ravioli Sauces recipe list.

I've found that ravioli fillings, particularly those with ground meat, come out better if the filling is processed in an electric mixer to break up raw pieces of meat and blend them into the other ingredients. It is a matter of filling texture, in which a fine, even texture is superior to something that feels like a flat meatball when you eat it. Another approach is to process a batch of filling through a meat grinder with the smallest hole die (between 1/16th and 1/8th inch holes diameter).

As for the pasta, the easiest way to have it is to buy it as wonton wraps, which are 3"x3" squares of very thin raw dough dusted with cornstarch, and they can be bought at the supermarket for about \$2.50 for 50 wraps. Use two of them for each ravioli, lightly brushing the perimeter of the bottom piece with a light egg wash, putting a tablespoon of the filling in the center, and then placing the top piece on, somewhat flattening the filling and sealing the top piece edges with the bottom piece edges, expelling air in the process so the completed ravioli does not have air pockets inside. It is very easy to make a lot of ravioli this way, later boil it in water for five or six minutes, then drain and serve that ravioli with the hot ravioli sauce you have made or purchased.

Note that ravioli so made are large ravioli, so serving sizes per guest will vary from four to six ravioli.

Ricotta, Spinach and Prosciutto Filling

1 1/2 lbs. of Ricotta cheese (drained)

1/4 lb. of freshly grated Romano cheese (about 1 cup)

2 eggs, slightly beaten

1/2 lb. of prosciutto ham, diced, then ground in a meat grinder

10 ounce box of frozen chopped spinach, thawed and then squeezed dry
1 dash of ground nutmeg
salt and pepper, to taste

Ricotta and Romano Cheese Filling

1 1/2 lbs. of Ricotta cheese (drained)
2 eggs, slightly beaten
1/4 cup of freshly grated Romano cheese
2 tablespoons of finely minced fresh Italian flat leaf parsley
1/4 to 1/3 teaspoon of ground cinnamon
salt and pepper, to taste

Beef, Pork and Spinach Filling

1/4 lb. of lean ground beef
1/4 lb. of lean ground pork
1 tablespoon of butter, melted
1 clove of garlic, sliced thinly
1/2 cup of cooked chopped spinach, squeezed dry
1 tablespoon of chopped Italian flat leaf parsley
2 eggs, slightly beaten
2 tablespoons of freshly grated Romano cheese
1 dash of ground nutmeg

Sausage Filling (makes 36 large 3"x3" ravioli)

1/4 lb. of lean ground beef

1 lb. of loose sweet Italian sausage
2 eggs, beaten
1/2 cup of freshly grated Romano cheese
1 tsp. of sea salt
1 tsp. of dried oregano
1 tsp. of dried basil

Crab Filling

1/4 shallot or one scallion (sliced thinly)
1 garlic clove (chopped)
1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp. of butter, softened
6 oz. of canned, cooked lump crab meat
1 tbsp. of fresh basil (chopped)
3 tbsp. of Ricotta cheese (drained)
salt and pepper, to taste

Feta Cheese and Olive

8 oz. of cream cheese
4 oz. of tomato and basil flavored feta cheese (crumbled)
1/2 cup of sour cream
1/2 cup of kalamata olives (finely chopped)
1/2 tsp. of lemon pepper seasoning

Chicken Marsala

8 oz. of chicken breast (cut into thin strips, then ground)

2 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1/2 shallot (sliced thinly)

1 garlic clove (sliced thinly)

1/4 cup of dry marsala wine

Cook above items first by sautéing the chicken, olive oil, shallot and garlic in a skillet, then adding the wine last, let it mostly evaporate, then add that mixture to the items below and mix well.

4 thin slices of prosciutto ham, chopped

2 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1 tsp. of fresh thyme leaves

2 tbsp. of bread crumbs

2 tbsp. of Parmesan cheese (grated)

salt and pepper, to taste

1 egg, beaten

1/4 cup of heavy cream

The final three filling recipes include directions for making them.

Mixed Meats

Ingredients:

2 teaspoons unsalted butter

2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 pound ground pork, veal, turkey, or chicken (or a mixture of all four)

1/2 small onion, minced

1 garlic clove, minced

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup dry white wine

1/4 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1 ounce mortadella, finely chopped

1 ounce prosciutto, finely chopped

Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg

1 large egg, lightly beaten

Directions:

In a skillet, melt the butter in the oil. Add the ground meat, onion, and garlic and season with salt and pepper. Cook over medium heat, stirring to break up lumps, until the meat is cooked and the onion is tender, about 10 minutes. Add the wine and cook over moderately high heat until it is evaporated, about 4 minutes.

Scrape the mixture into a food processor and pulse until the meat is finely chopped, or use a meat grinder with a small die to process the meat. Scrape the ravioli filling into a bowl and let it cool. Stir in the Parmegiano, mortadella, prosciutto, and nutmeg and season the mixture with salt and pepper. Stir in the beaten egg and mix well.

Beef and Cheeses

Ingredients:

1 lb. of ground beef

1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1/2 teaspoon of onion powder

1/2 teaspoon of garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon of dried oregano

1/2 teaspoon of dried basil

1/8 teaspoon of ground rosemary

1/4 teaspoon of black pepper

1/2 teaspoon of sea salt

1/3 cup of grated parmesan cheese

1/3 cup of Romano cheese

1/3 cup of mozzarella cheese

1/3 cup of ricotta cheese

Directions:

Brown the ground beef in a skillet with one tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil.

Add all the dry seasonings and gently heat for a few minutes, until you get a nice aroma of all the herbs.

Remove the seasoned beef mixture from the heat and cool it to room temperature.

Mix all of the cheeses into the beef mixture.

It should make a dry dense mixture that will hold together when you form a ball.

Use a tablespoon for filling each ravioli.

If you don't want to make the pasta dough you can always use wonton wrappers.

Once the ravioli have been assembled they only need to simmer in lightly boiling water for 4 to 5 minutes.

Beef, Pork and Ricotta Cheese

Ingredients:

2 eggs, beaten

2 tbsp. of fresh parsley, chopped

12 oz. of beef chuck, ground

12 oz. of country style pork sausage

16 oz. of ricotta cheese

1 cup of grated parmesan cheese

1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1 cup of baby spinach leaves, chopped

Directions:

Fry the meat in the olive oil until well browned. Drain the meat on paper towels.

When the meat cools a little put it into a large bowl and mix in the chopped spinach, chopped parsley, beaten eggs and the rest of the ingredients, and add salt and pepper to taste.

Put the filling into the food processor bowl and pulse several times until the mixture is fine, or process the mixture through a meat grinder using a small die.

Return the filling to the mixing bowl and refrigerate. (The filling is easier to work with when refrigerated.) You have enough filling to make about 90 to 100 ravioli.

To Cook The Ravioli:

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Salt the water.

Add the ravioli in batches. About 10 to 12 at a time. Don't overcrowd. Bring the water back to a gentle simmer and cook for about 3-4 minutes. If the ravioli is frozen, cook for an additional minute.

Remove the ravioli with a slotted spoon or a spider to a serving dish. Continue cooking the rest of the ravioli. Serve the ravioli with your favorite sauce or just with extra-virgin olive oil, butter, sea salt, and freshly ground black pepper. Sprinkle with fresh herbs.

Enjoy!

Ravioli Sauce Recipes - ☺♥

Ravioli can contain many different fillings and often there will be a particular kind of sauce that will go best with a given filling. For example, a robust red sauce will not be a good choice for a mild seafood filling. Instead, a mild creamy white sauce is best as it will not interfere with the mild taste of the seafood. For example, would you use a highly seasoned red sauce in any dish with lobster? With lump crabmeat or scallops? With mild haddock or sea bass? I am sure you get the point.

Now, if you have a ravioli filling with a seasoned beef or pork sausage, then that robust red sauce containing herbs and garlic is definitely appropriate. Then, somewhere in the middle there will be milder, somewhat creamy sauces that without cream would be red sauces. The idea is you can try to match or contrast the flavors of the fillings with the flavors and intensity of the sauces.

The short collection of sauce recipes below cover some of the opportunities you will want when you have made and are serving a fine homemade or purchased refrigerated ravioli of most any type. Most important, they give you a starting point from which to experiment to develop the perfect sauce for the perfect ravioli you have created/purchased.

Let's take a look at the types of ingredients you might use when making a sauce for ravioli. You can vary what you use and how much to achieve your sauce goal. And you can modify the ingredient combinations to suit yourself, and/or your guests.

Typical Ingredients:

Onion – chopped

Garlic – minced

Basil – fresh or dried

Oregano – fresh or dried

Salt and pepper

Red pepper flakes

Crushed tomatoes – canned

Tomato sauce and tomato paste

Chicken broth – or vegetable broth

Heavy cream – or milk

Sun-dried tomatoes – in herbed oil

Parmesan cheese – grated

Parsley – for garnish

Other nice sauce ingredients you might want to include:

Olives – black, green, Kalamata (halved or chopped)

Sliced mushrooms – lightly sautéed in butter and chopped

Artichoke hearts – canned in water or oil, chopped

Mozzarella cheese – cubed, then melted in the sauce

Ground beef – browned

Italian sausage – browned and cut into thin slices if you use sausage links.

Now we get to some specific recipes ... have fun!

A Purchased Red Sauce (for cheese or meat ravioli)

Ingredients: (makes enough sauce for one pound of fresh ravioli)

1 lb. of Fresh Ravioli (homemade or purchased)

1, 24 oz. jar of Marinara Sauce (Barilla's® is a great brand)

1/3 lb. of grated Pecorino Romano cheese

Directions:

Put the individual serving bowls you plan to use into a 180 degrees F oven to pre-warm them.

Put the marinara sauce in an 8"x12" casserole.

Heat the sauce in the microwave oven until it is steaming.

Boil the ravioli in salted water per package directions or gently for five to six minutes if you have made fresh ravioli, then drain them and gently mix the pieces into the casserole of sauce individually. Ladle sauce over each ravioli as it is added so none stick together later.

Then sprinkle the grated cheese over it.

Warm the casserole in the microwave oven for one minute.

Serve the ravioli in the pre-warmed wide individual serving bowls.

A Simple Red Sauce (for cheese or meat ravioli)

Ingredients: (makes enough sauce for one pound of fresh ravioli)

1lb. of Fresh Ravioli (homemade or purchased)

1, 28 oz. can of Peeled Plum Tomatoes with juice, chopped

4 large cloves of Garlic, thinly sliced

1 oz. of fresh basil, chopped

2 tbsp. of Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Salt and Pepper, to taste

Parmesan cheese, at serving time

Directions:

Put the individual serving bowls you plan to use into a 180 degrees F oven to pre-warm them.

Put the olive oil and the garlic slices into a large skillet and heat on low to medium heat. Let the garlic fry until the edges turn very light gold.

Add the plum tomatoes and the juice and the chopped basil and stir. Increase the heat to high.

Add 1/2 tsp. of salt and 1/4 tsp. of pepper.

Stir the mixture and bring it to a low boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to very low to maintain a simmer or low boil.

Cook for 30 minutes, then break up any remaining chunks of tomatoes.

Simmer/low boil on low heat until the sauce thickens (15 to 20 minutes), stirring every three minutes.

Taste the sauce and if needed add a small amount of salt, then mix it in.

Boil the ravioli in salted water per package directions or gently for five to six minutes if you have made fresh ravioli, then drain them and gently mix the pieces into the sauce.

Serve the ravioli in pre-warmed wide individual serving bowls, along with a dish of parmesan cheese.

Creamy Red Sauce for Ravioli

Ingredients: (makes about 5 cups of sauce)

2 tbsp. of olive oil

1 cup of onion, chopped

3 cloves of garlic minced

¼ cup of fresh basil, or 2 tbsp. of dried basil

1 tsp. of dried oregano

1½ tsp. of Kosher salt

½ tsp. of black pepper, freshly ground

½ tsp. of red pepper flakes

1, 28 oz. can of crushed tomatoes

½ cup of chicken broth

½ cup of heavy cream

1/2 cup of sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained and chopped

⅓ cup of Parmesan cheese, grated

2 tbsp. of flat-leaf parsley chopped, for garnish

1½ lbs of fresh ravioli

Directions:

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat.

Add the onion and cook, stirring frequently, until it starts to soften, about 3 minutes.

Add the garlic and cook for another 30 seconds.

Stir in the basil, oregano, salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes. Cook for another 30 seconds, stirring often.

Stir in the crushed tomatoes, the sun-dried tomatoes and the chicken broth. Stir to combine and bring to a simmer.

Allow the sauce to evaporate some water and thicken, for 20 to 30 minutes.

Add the ravioli and simmer for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Stir in the cream.

Stir in the parmesan cheese and mix until it has melted.

Serve the ravioli hot and garnish the dish with the chopped parsley.

White Wine Cream Sauce for Ravioli

This type of sauce is excellent for seafood ravioli.

Ingredients: (makes about one pint of sauce)

2 tablespoons of butter

1 tablespoon of flour

1/2 cup of dry white wine

1/2 cup of heavy cream

1/2 cup of chicken broth

1/2 teaspoon of Italian seasoning or Herbs de Provence

1/2 cup of freshly grated pecorino Romano cheese

2 tablespoons of parsley, chopped

Salt & pepper to taste

1 lb. of ravioli, simmered in water for five minutes and then drained

Directions:

Put the butter into a medium size skillet over medium heat.

Once it melts, sprinkle the flour in and cook for about 1-2 minutes, stirring fairly often. Let the resulting roux turn slightly golden but not dark.

Add the wine and stir to mix it with the roux. Let it bubble until it's reduced by half (this will happen quite fast, less than a minute, so keep an eye on it).

Whisk in the cream so the roux is incorporated completely, then stir in the Italian seasoning. Cook it for a two minutes on low heat until the sauce has thickened to your liking.

Stir in the cheese and mix it in until it melts, and then take the skillet off the heat.

Stir in the parsley and season the sauce with salt & pepper as needed.

Add drained, hot ravioli to the skillet and mix gently until it is all completely coated.

You can add a tablespoon or so of the hot pasta water to the sauce if it is too thick before you add the ravioli.

Serve the ravioli with cream sauce hot.

Creamy Tomato Sauce with Ravioli

Ingredients: (makes two to three cups of sauce)

2 tbsp. of olive oil

1 medium onion - finely diced

2 cloves of garlic - minced

1 red bell pepper - sliced

½ tsp. of Italian herbs

½ tsp. of red pepper flakes

½ tsp. of black pepper

a pinch of salt

1 tbsp. of tomato paste

⅓ cup of white wine

⅓ cup of sun dried tomatoes, diced

½ cup of chicken stock

⅓ cup of heavy cream

3 cups of baby spinach (packed)

½ cup of parmesan cheese - grated

1 tbsp. fresh parsley - chopped

1 lb. of fresh ravioli

Directions:

Add the 2 tbsp. of olive oil to a large frying pan (or skillet) and heat over medium heat, then add in the finely diced onion and cook for 4 to 5 minutes until the onion starts to soften.

Add in the minced garlic and cook for another 30 seconds, stirring continuously.

Add in the Italian herbs, chili flakes, black pepper and a pinch of salt, give it a stir then add in the sliced red bell pepper, the tomato paste and the wine, stir again, and cook for another minute or two to reduce the wine slightly.

Add the sun dried tomatoes, chicken stock and cream. Stir everything together and heat to a simmer.

Now add the ravioli and mix gently.

Allow the mixture to simmer for 5 to 6 minutes, until the center of the ravioli is cooked.

Add the spinach and parmesan cheese and cook for a minute to allow the cheese to melt and the spinach to wilt.

Sprinkle the dish with fresh parsley and serve it hot.

Ravioli in Creamy Bacon Sauce

Ingredients: (makes about one pint of sauce)

1 pound of fresh ravioli

1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1 tbsp. of butter

4 oz. of thick cut bacon, chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 shallot, finely chopped
¼ tsp each of sweet paprika and grated nutmeg
½ tsp each of black pepper and dried thyme
½ cup chicken broth
1 ¼ cups of heavy cream
1 oz. of grated Parmesan
1 tbsp. of lemon juice
2 tbsp. of chopped parsley
crushed red pepper flakes, for serving
freshly ground black pepper, for serving
sea salt (to taste)

Directions:

Get all the prep done before you start cooking: mince the garlic, finely chop the shallot and dice or cut the bacon into small pieces.

Bring a 2 gallon pot of salted water, 3/4 full, to a boil.

Heat the oil and butter in a skillet over medium. Add the bacon, and cook until crispy, about 5 minutes. Remove excess fat, if needed.

Add the garlic and shallot, and cook until they are soft, about 3 minutes.

Stir in the pepper, nutmeg, paprika and thyme. Deglaze the skillet with chicken broth, simmer for 2 minutes, while stirring, and then scrape the brown bits with a wooden spoon from the bottom of the skillet.

Pour in the cream and add the grated Parmesan cheese, then stir until the cheese is combined with the sauce. Simmer over low or very low heat, but do not boil it, for about 5 minutes or until the sauce starts to thicken.

Adjust the salt to taste.

While the sauce is simmering, add the ravioli to the pot with the boiling water and cook it, for about 4 to 5 minutes. Drain the ravioli using a colander, while reserving 1/4 cup of the cooking water.

Add the ravioli and chopped parsley to the sauce, and stir gently to combine. If needed, add a splash of the cooking water to thin the sauce.

Serve the ravioli topped with red pepper flakes and lots of freshly ground black pepper.

Enjoy!

Ravioli With Ricotta Cheese, Spinach and Prosciutto Ham - ☺♥

I'd been wanting to make superior ravioli's for a long time. I wanted something new and exciting as a filling. Peggy and I have had fun before making our own ricotta cheese and different fillings ... but this time I wanted something really different. I found two recipes on the Internet that called for prosciutto ham and I combined them appropriately to take advantage of different ingredients to create the recipe below. The instructions are mine. It all sounds delicious!

Peggy and I are about to create the ravioli's now, having first made the dough and the filling. We are using one of my pasta making attachments for my Kitchen Aid® mixer to create the thin, wide dough that will be cut out using simple tumblers of different sizes for the bottom and top pieces of dough for each ravioli and for the last step of pressing the two pieces of dough together after the bottom piece has been brushed with egg wash and the filling added. Thus, we are using yet a third tumbler of a smaller size to press the top piece of dough together onto/into the bottom piece of dough, thus making well sealed round ravioli's. Here is something very important that you will read later in this recipe ... make sure the thin, wide dough is less than 1/16th of an inch thick.

Okay ... all is well. The ravioli's are made. The process works very well. But will they taste exceptional? Ah, yes ... they were great! We each ate six and they were quite filling. I did make some minor changes to this recipe to get perfection, and those changes are reflected below.

As mentioned at the end of this recipe, you will find that a nice tossed salad with Italian dressing goes very well with this dish. Likewise, some freshly made garlic bread. Finally, a nice red wine is perfect ... like a Chianti Classico. Cold beer is a worthy substitute for the wine. Forget about dessert ... you won't need it. You will, of course, have to time the making of the salad and the garlic bread so that it all comes together as soon as the ravioli's are cooked.

Sauce Recipe:

I simply heat some plain spaghetti sauce or marinara sauce in a plastic wrap covered bowl in the microwave oven just prior to boiling the ravioli's. I serve Parmesan cheese on the side in a bowl, to be sprinkled on the ravioli's, once they have been covered with the warm sauce.

Filling Recipe:

Ingredients:

2 lbs of Ricotta cheese

1/4 lb. of freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese

1, 10 oz. package of frozen chopped spinach, squeezed dry

2 large or extra large eggs

8 ounces of Prosciutto ham, diced, then processed in a meat grinder

1/2 tsp. of salt

1/2 tsp. of pepper

A dash of nutmeg

Directions:

Put the eggs and the ground Prosciutto ham into a large mixing bowl. Mix on low to medium speed for one minute.

Add the salt, pepper and nutmeg and continue to mix for one minute.

Add the spinach gradually and mix for two minutes.

Add the Pecorino Romano cheese and mix for one minute.

Add the Ricotta cheese in 1/3 cup amounts, letting it mix in with the other filling ingredients before doing the next addition.

Stop the mixer, remove the bowl and mix the filling by hand using a wooden spoon.

Dispense the filling into a large, shallow bowl, and cover it with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until you are ready to use it.

Dough Recipe:

Ingredients:

3 cups of flour

1/2 cup (or a bit more) of water

2 extra large eggs

2 tsp. of olive oil

3/4 tsp. of salt

Directions:

Put the flour and salt into a mixing bowl and mix on low speed for a minute.

Add the eggs and mix for two minutes on low to medium speed.

Add the olive oil and continue mixing for one minute.

Set the speed of the mixer to medium.

Add the water in small amounts (one tbsp. at a time) and allow 30 seconds after each addition for the water to incorporate into the dough.

After all of the water has been added, let the dough mix for one minute to see if it comes together well to form a dough. If not, add additional water, one tbsp. at a time, mixing between additions for one minute, until the dough forms.

Remove the dough.

Separate the dough into six approximately equal amounts.

Use your hands to form each piece of dough into a shape two inches wide, 1/2 inch thick, and whatever length results.

Place the pieces of formed dough onto an 18" long piece of plastic wrap such that the dough pieces do not touch each other when the plastic wrap is folded to cover the dough pieces.

Refrigerate the dough for 30 minutes or longer.

Procedure to make the Ravioli's:

Ingredients/Materials:

Flour to dust surfaces that will receive the thin sheets of processed ravioli dough and the finished ravioli's.

One 24" long sheet of plastic wrap on a flat counter top, dusted with flour.

One or two large eggs, whisked, then a small amount of water added, followed by whisking, to make an egg wash, which will keep the top and bottom pieces of each ravioli stuck together during handling and later cooking in boiling water.

A pastry brush to apply the egg wash to the bottom piece perimeters of the ravioli's prior to placing the filling onto that piece and then the top piece of dough on the filling.

One 18" long sheet of waxed paper.

One or more dinner plates.

Directions:

You will create thin, long, wide sheets of dough either as I do or by using a rolling pin. Each sheet of dough will be processed as it is created to make the ravioli's, before making the next sheet of dough. Leftover dough from cutting out the top and bottom ravioli pieces will be added to the next piece of refrigerated dough that will be used to make the next thin sheet of dough. Knead the leftover dough into the piece of refrigerated dough prior to making the next sheet of dough. NOTE: The final thickness of the wide sheets of dough should be less than 1/16th of an inch thick.

One or more large dinner plates will be used to hold the finished pieces of ravioli prior to cooking, with flour dusted onto each plate and onto the top of each layer of ravioli's prior to applying a sheet of plastic wrap to keep the layers separated. The top side of each sheet of plastic wrap is also to be dusted with flour before adding any pieces of ravioli to create the new layer.

Three tumblers of different sizes are used, such that the middle size is used to make the bottom pieces of the ravioli, the large size used to make the top pieces of the ravioli, and the small size used to press the top dough piece onto/into the bottom dough piece, gently and evenly, after the egg wash and filling have been put onto the bottom piece. Actually, you will find yourself using your fingers to press the top piece of dough around the filling to eliminate air pockets and to lightly contact the top and bottom pieces of dough. Thus, the small tumbler is then used primarily to put pressure onto the perimeter of the top piece of dough to force it to stick to the bottom piece ... though very little pressure is required to accomplish that.

So, after laying the sheet of dough on the flour dusted surface of the plastic sheet, use the medium and large tumblers to cut through the dough, such that the bottom ravioli pieces can be removed to be processed on a sheet of waxed paper. Dust the waxed paper with some flour to make handling and removal of each completed ravioli easier. Peggy used a small plastic spatula with a very thin front end to help lift each ravioli from the waxed paper without deforming it.

Brush the outer 1/2" of the dough surface of the bottom piece with the egg wash.

Add one tbsp. (or more) of the filling. We used a dinner ware tablespoon and visually adjusted the amount until the filling content was a large as we could make it and still get the top and bottom ravioli pieces to seal.

Place the top piece on top of the filling and gently press the dough to form it around the filling without leaving any air bubbles. The top and bottom dough pieces will at this point be touching all around the perimeter. Use the small tumbler to press the top dough piece into the bottom dough piece, gently, to seal the two pieces together. Be careful to avoid having any of the filling in the sealed dough area.

Use the spatula to help move the completed pieces of ravioli onto the dinner plate as described earlier, prior to cooking.

Now, having processed all the dough, you may find you have some leftover filling. You can store it, refrigerated, for a few days, using it with some additional dough. Otherwise, discard it.

At this point you may want to save some of the ravioli's for a future meal. If so, then freeze them on a wax paper covered cookie tray in the deep freeze, then vacuum seal them and put them back into the deep freeze. If you don't have a vacuum sealer then wrap the frozen ravioli's in groups tightly in plastic wrap and put them into a Ziploc® gallon size freezer bag, expel as much air as you can, then store the package in the deep freeze ... and use the ravioli's within one month to avoid freezer burn.

Boil the ravioli's in a large pot in a gallon of lightly salted boiling water, in small batches of six, until each piece floats on the surface of the boiling water. Then boil them for two to three minutes longer to assure the dough is properly cooked. Be sure to check that no piece or pieces stick to the bottom of the pot during boiling or that will cause you to overcook the ravioli's. To unstick a piece, simply put a slotted spoon under it and push gently to release the dough from the bottom of the pot.

Remove each cooked ravioli using a slotted spoon and place it into wide and shallow individual serving bowls.

Serve the ravioli with the warm sauce and the Parmesan cheese. You will find that a nice tossed salad with Italian dressing goes very nicely with this dish. Likewise, some freshly made garlic bread. Finally, a nice red wine is perfect ... like a Chianti Classico. Cold beer is a worthy substitute for the wine. Forget about dessert ... you won't need it.

Red Beans and Rice with Chipotle Pepper - ☺♥

This is a yummy dish with a bit of a kick due to the use of a chipotle pepper and a teaspoon or two of the accompanying adobo sauce. The simplest version of the recipe shown below, without the optional ingredients, is one I put together looking at a variety of related recipes for a few different beans and rice dishes. I then talked with the expert, my daughter-in-law, Jane, to find out how to improve the simple recipe.

I thank Jane, who is a great cook, for her red beans and rice with chipotle pepper recipe, which is excellent. But then I decided to extend her recipe, optionally, with recipe variations shown below, one for adding Mexican pulled/shredded pork, which can be mixed in with her vegetarian recipe, and one using yet more basic vegetable ingredients along with the Mexican Pulled Pork and broth. It is funny how easily one can become addicted to trying recipe variations for dishes of this type, for the basic dish lends itself very well to many variations.

Note that the recipe for making the Mexican Pulled Pork is shown at the end of this recipe for your convenience if you decide to include it.

I made the recipe below using the optional Mexican Pulled/Shredded Pork, and I am reporting back with results ... Really good! In a word, authentic! For me the best part is that you can certainly tell the chipotle pepper and adobo sauce are present, but it is not a hotly seasoned dish. You can add hot sauce later if you prefer.

Okay, now for a brief discussion of the third choice. If I've made the Mexican Pulled Pork that means I have exceptionally well flavored broth as well as the shredded pork, so I can enhance the red beans and rice by using some of the broth. Second, the original red beans and rice recipe seems to me to be a bit light on the beans, so I've made the addition of a second can of beans optional ... but I like that version best. Finally, I decided to ramp up the seasoning and other flavors and the appearance of the dish, so I've listed optional use of red and green bell peppers, diced, and some fresh jalapeno peppers, diced, along with using only chicken broth and broth from the Mexican Pulled Pork and no water. The addition of the diced vegetables causes the amount of olive oil to be used to increase to 3 tablespoons, for the sautéing step.

Having now made this dish using all three recipe variations I clearly opt for the one using the most ingredients as it is more complex in texture and very flavorful. You can choose whatever you want to please yourself.

Ingredients: (four to five servings; six to eight servings if the optional shredded pork and other optional ingredients are added)

1 or 2, 15.5 ounce cans of red kidney beans, rinsed and drained

2 or 3 Tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1 cup of uncooked medium or long grain white or brown rice (I prefer basmati rice)

1/3 cup of finely diced white or sweet onion

2 cloves of garlic, diced

1/2 red sweet bell pepper, diced (optional)

1/2 green sweet bell pepper, diced (optional)

2 to 4 fresh jalapeno peppers, diced (optional)

1, 14 ounce can of chicken broth

1 1/2 cups of water or 1 additional 14 ounce can of chicken broth

8 ounces (or more) of broth from the Mexican Pulled Pork recipe (optional)

2 lbs. (or more) of Mexican Pulled Pork (optional)

3 Tbsp. of tomato paste

1 or 2 tsp. of kosher salt or sea salt

1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, diced

1 or 2 tsp. of the adobo sauce

1/4 cup of fresh cilantro leaves and tender stems pressed into the measuring cup and then chopped

Directions:

Heat the olive oil on medium-high heat in a large heavy bottom deep skillet. When the temperature is about right you can smell the heated oil, but do not overheat the oil to the point that it is smoking.

Add the rice, the diced onion and the diced garlic. If you are using the optional diced vegetable ingredients add them also. Stir the mixture to coat the rice and vegetables with the hot olive oil.

Reduce the heat and sauté on medium heat, covered, until the rice has an opaque color and the hot onion and garlic are fragrant, about 2 minutes. If you have used the optional vegetable ingredients sauté for an additional 2 minutes after mixing the ingredients.

Add the chicken broth, water or Mexican Pulled Pork broth, kidney beans, tomato paste, adobo sauce, diced chipotle pepper, cilantro and salt.

Add the Mexican Pulled Pork if you are using that optional ingredient.

Mix well to combine all ingredients evenly.

Cover the skillet, reduce the heat to very low, and simmer until the rice is cooked, about 20 minutes, depending on the type of rice used (uncooked vs. parboiled, and white, brown or basmati, all of which will have different cooking times, so follow the directions for the type of rice you use).

You will want to move the skillet to a small burner on low heat while cooking the rice, to avoid having it cook too fast and stick to the bottom of the skillet. You will also want to stir the mixture every few minutes to keep rice from sticking to the bottom of the skillet. This is particularly important if you are using a gas cooktop. If sticking becomes a problem then add additional broth or water to the center of the skillet and stir.

At the end of the cooking period, stir the mixture with a large spoon and then keep the skillet covered, with no heat, for five minutes. That will give the rice time to finish absorbing any remaining liquid. You may then want to adjust the moisture content of the dish by adding additional heated broth from the Mexican Pulled Pork before serving the red beans and rice. That balances the moisture with the solids to make the dish perfect, which means smooth and not pasty.

Serve the dish in pre-heated individual serving bowls that you warmed in a 180 degrees F oven, along with side of tortilla chips and mild salsa and cold Corona® or Dos Equis® or Tecate® beer. A small lettuce and tomato salad with a mild creamy dressing, like Ranch Dressing, is a nice accompaniment. Ditto warmed flour tortillas.

Enjoy!

Below is the recipe for making the optional Mexican Pulled Pork.

Mexican Pulled Pork

I had some terrific tacos at a Mexican Grill restaurant. One of them contained shredded/pulled pork and it was fabulous. While I can't precisely identify all of

the ingredients they used in preparing that pork I have provided a general recipe for making it that turned out to be fine. You can experiment with various fresh ingredients and sauces later to make the taco of your choice if that idea appeals to you. Lots of people love shredded pork tacos. The purpose for presenting the recipe here is to use some (about half) of the shredded pork as an addition to the red beans and rice and chipotle pepper recipe shown above. I'm sure you will find a good use for the other half, or, you can halve the recipe shown below, or, you might double the above recipe for red beans and rice with chipotle pepper.

Mexican Pulled Pork

Ingredients:

1, 4 to 5 lb pork butt

2, 32 oz. cartons of chicken broth

2, 15 ounce cans of diced tomatoes or equivalent diced fresh tomatoes

20 whole garlic cloves, chopped

4 whole jalapeno peppers, sliced (do not remove the seeds)

1 small can of diced green chilies

2 teaspoons of oregano (dry leaf, or, two Tbsp. of fresh oregano, pressed tightly into the measuring spoon)

Directions:

Combine all the ingredients in a two gallon pot and simmer, covered, until fork tender. This can take from 3 to 4 hours. If the meat is not fully covered with liquid I recommend turning the meat over to expose the submerged part once every 30 minutes.

When the pork is tender (it falls apart if you stick a fork in it), remove the pot from the heat and remove the pork to a wood cutting board.

Shred (or "pull") the pork with two forks, discarding all fat, cartilage or bone. This turns out to be very easy. If not, then the pork was not cooked long enough.

Defat the hot broth. Use a soup ladle to skim the surface of the hot broth to capture liquefied fat. Discard the fat.

Place the shredded pork in a storage container and add a pint or more of the defatted broth and vegetables to keep it moist. Save some or all of the remaining

broth in a separate container, because you may want to add some of it to the red beans and rice and chipotle pepper dish at serving time.

Refrigerate the shredded pork and the extra container of broth until they are needed.

Reheat the amount of pork needed either in a microwave oven or in a saucepan, using a little of the broth to keep it moist.

The pork can be used very nicely in tacos or as an ingredient in other Mexican dishes.

One example is to add half of the shredded pork from this recipe, heated, to the red rice and red beans with chipotle pepper recipe shown above. Yummy! You may also want to add a pinch of salt. As mentioned earlier, you may/will want to add a small amount of the saved broth, heated, to create what for you is the perfect level of moisture in the final product, as served.

Enjoy! The combination of flavors and textures by combining the recipes is excellent. This dish has depth. And warmed flour tortillas are an excellent accompaniment.

Ropa Vieja - ☺♥

Ropa Vieja is called The National Dish of Cuba. I was searching the Internet for other recipes when I saw this one, and it looked so good I decided to try it. So I did. Wow! Excellent taste without any hot stuff.

The recipe comes from Kimberly Killebrew, on the website www.daringgourmet.com. The cooking process reminds me of the Food Nirvana recipe for Mexican Pulled Pork except this one uses beef. Making accompanying dishes of black beans and rice was a fine way to make this a complete meal. But I was wondering how Ropa Vieja would taste as the meat and vegetable filling of a soft flour tortilla. Either way, I suggest serving an ice cold Cerveza (beer) as a beverage, perhaps Corona® or Dos Equis®.

Here is an interesting update. Peggy and I used some leftover Ropa Vieja along with heated and cut (like a pie) flour tortillas, guacamole and sour cream to create hors d'ouvres. They were delicious! On a later night we made burritos with the soft flour tortillas, stuffed with the meat, some leftover black beans, sliced raw onion, diced tomato, guacamole and sour cream and chopped lettuce, and we gobbled them down with gusto.

Kimberly indicated that this recipe will serve six to eight people. Based on the weight of the beef, four to six adult servings for people with large appetites is more accurate. I removed most of her ingredient comments as they were explanatory for the decisions she made rather than essential. Similarly, I made a few grammatical changes and added a few of my own explanatory comments.

Finally, Kimberly advertised the use of certain "Lindsay" products as ingredients, and I'm sure you can substitute brands there if necessary, though be careful to buy the right type of olives. Ergo, don't use the typical ordinary pimento stuffed Manzanilla olives in jars that we find on shelves at the supermarket. Go to the deli area and get a package of firmer, extra large pitted Sicilian green olives.

Having now made Ropa Vieja twice, using chuck one time and a leaner roast the other time, I can tell you with certainty to avoid the chuck if it has any appreciable fat content. Why? Well, you can choose chuck if you like to spend a lot of time trying to remove melted fat from the final dish, but if you choose a leaner cut of beef you still get beef that is plenty tender and tasty without have to defat the final dish at all. Your choice.

I know you will have fun with this recipe and really enjoy the Ropa Vieja. My sweetheart Peggy and I loved it! I'm now thinking the build it yourself burrito

method will be great to use at pot luck dinner parties or when you have a group of friends watching events like the Super Bowl. Yes, indeed it was!

Ingredients:

2 pounds of extra tall cut defatted boneless chuck, or, use a thick, lean beef roast cut to make long strands of beef

1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced

1 each of large green, red and yellow bell peppers, thinly sliced

4 cloves of garlic, minced

2 teaspoons of dried oregano

2 teaspoons of ground cumin

2 teaspoons of sweet paprika

1 teaspoon of smoked paprika

1/8 teaspoon of ground allspice

1/8 teaspoon of ground cloves

2 teaspoons of kosher salt

1/2 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper

1/2 cup of dry white wine

1 cup of chicken broth

1, 14.5 ounce can of crushed or diced tomatoes

1, 6 ounce can of tomato paste

2 bay leaves

1 large carrot, cut in half

1 large stalk of celery, cut in half

1 cup of pitted extra large Sicilian Green Olives, sliced in half lengthwise

1/2 cup of sliced Roasted Red Peppers, drained

1/4 cup of Pimientos, drained

2 tablespoons of Capers, drained

½ cup chopped of fresh parsley

2 tbsp. of olive oil for searing the beef

Directions:

Remove and discard any excess fat and then pat the beef dry and sprinkle it on all surfaces with the Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Heat the olive oil in a Dutch oven or large pot over high heat. Once it is very hot add the beef and brown it generously on all sides. I like to keep the pot covered during each stage of that process and also use an exhaust fan to remove any smoke from the searing/browning process from the cooking area.

Turn off the heat temporarily. Transfer the beef to a plate. Do not discard the drippings and dark beef bits in the pot, for they are key to creating the flavor.

Add the sliced vegetables to the pot and cook over medium heat for 15 to 20 minutes until the vegetables are caramelized (shiny and softened), stirring occasionally.

Add the minced garlic and spices, then stir and cook for another minute.

Add the white wine and bring the mixture to a rapid boil on high heat, deglazing the bottom of the pot (scraping up the browned bits on the bottom of the pot with a spatula).

Add the chicken broth, crushed tomatoes, tomato paste and bay leaves. Stir to mix well and then simmer on low heat for 5 minutes.

Return the roast to the pot along with the pieces of carrots and celery.

Bring to a boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to very low.

Cover and simmer/low boil the mixture for 3 to 4 hours or until the beef is fork tender and falls apart easily. Stir the mixture, initially about every 30 minutes, flipping the beef over to submerge any part that was not under the liquid. Repeat that process and make sure during the last hour of cooking that the mixture does not stick to the bottom of the pot.

Put individual serving shallow bowls or plates you plan to use for your guests into the oven and set it at 200 degrees F. Similarly, put larger serving dishes/bowls into the oven. Keeping hot food warm during the meal enhances it, and pre-warming plates and bowls is the perfect way to do it.

Discard the celery, carrots and bay leaves.

Transfer the beef to a wood cutting board and shred it with two forks, discarding any pieces of fat.

Stir in the sliced olives, sliced roasted red peppers, capers and pimientos.

Simmer the mixture uncovered on very low heat for 20 minutes to thicken the sauce, stirring every few minutes.

This is a good time to prepare whatever side dishes or accompaniments you plan to serve with the meal, like rice, beans, plantains, etc., or warm some soft flour tortillas and prepare raw vegetable accompaniments and make burritos.

Stir in the chopped parsley.

Mix the shredded beef with the other pot ingredients and heat the mixture for two to three minutes.

Serve the Ropa Vieja and the rice and bean dishes hot using the pre-warmed serving bowls and the pre-warmed individual plates or bowls for each guest.

Your guests can add salt or pepper to suit themselves. We did not need any additional seasoning.

You might serve some hot sauce on the side for heat aficionados.

Remember to serve the Cerveza!

¡Por Dios! ¡Lo esta excelente!

Sausage and Mushroom Calzones - ☺♥

Hey, this is a fine recipe as attested to some years back by the Italian expert, Marie. She stated that "These calzones are every bit as good as any commercial outfit could make." Oh, yeah! I got the dough recipe from *The Joy of Cooking*© and, as usual, modified the ingredient amounts and preparation procedures to please me. I got lucky! The filling ingredients are to my liking. You can try any variation that pleases you, like pepperoni slices instead of sausage. Simply consider what you like best on a pizza and use those toppings inside a calzone.

Total preparation time is about one hour, but the total elapsed time is about three hours due to the dough rising and baking cycles. This recipe will feed four hungry adults as it makes six calzones. Note also that the calzones can be frozen without baking for future use. If you want to freeze some for later use, I recommend freezing followed by vacuum sealing ... and then put them back in the freezer.

First, the dough ...

Ingredients:

Three and one half cups of flour

One package of active dried yeast

One teaspoon of salt

Two tablespoons of vegetable oil

1 1/3 cups of warm water

1 tsp. of sugar

Directions:

Mix the yeast in 1 1/3 cups warm water (110°F) to make a yeast starter. Add one teaspoon of sugar. Stir until mixed and keep the mixture warm. Hold for about five minutes.

Put the flour and salt into a four or six quart mixing bowl (I use a Kitchen-Aid® mixer with a dough hook). Add the cooking oil and start the mixer on low speed. Add the yeast starter.

Mix at higher speed (medium) and stop after one minute to scrape down the bowl to assure proper mixing of ingredients. Repeat the mixing and stopping two more

times, making sure the dough is not climbing up the dough hook. If it is, push it down and restart the mixer. Let the mixer run for about five more minutes until the dough is obviously well kneaded.

Make a one gallon bowl warm by filling it with hot tap water. Drain the bowl, rub vegetable oil on the inside and put the dough into it. Roll the dough around to get oil all over the surface. Make a dishtowel (not terry) wet with very hot water and wring it out just enough so that it will not drip. Fold it in half and cover the bowl. Alternatively you can cover the bowl with plastic wrap that has been sprayed on the underside with Pam®. Place the covered bowl in the oven and set the oven temperature to 100° F. Let the dough rise for two hours. We have a "Proofing" cycle on our oven, so I am not totally certain about the operating temperature ... only that it is neither hot nor cool, but uses a fan to circulate the air for even temperature everywhere in the oven.

Now for the filling:

Ingredients:

4 links of Italian sausage (sweet or hot, a bit less than a pound)

½ to ¾ cup of grated hard Provolone cheese (not the soft sandwich type)

6 oz. of whole milk mozzarella cheese

½ medium onion, chopped

12 oz. of canned sliced mushrooms (drained weight from two 8 oz. cans)

1 small eggplant (optional)

1 qt. jar of Classico® Marinara sauce

1 tbsp. of dried oregano

1 tsp. of garlic powder

1 tsp. of sea salt

½ tsp. of cayenne pepper

Pam® (as needed)

¼ cup of cornmeal

Directions:

Use four links of Italian sausage (four inches long by one inch or more in diameter) and remove the casing. Form a mixed ball of the sausage and then break off pieces about one tablespoon in size. Cook the sausage in a medium hot skillet turning frequently and chopping the pieces in half after they have browned on two sides. Mix them around in the skillet to assure browning (or at least cooking) on all surfaces. Place the cooked sausage on a paper towel, cover with a second paper towel and press to soak up as much grease as possible. I do the sausage in two batches and use a total of four paper towels. Note that the smaller pieces allow for better fat removal and they taste better in the final product because they have been browned on all surfaces before the calzones are baked.

Grate the hard provolone cheese until you have $\frac{1}{2}$ cup to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of grated cheese. Cut six ounces of mozzarella cheese into $\frac{1}{2}$ by $\frac{1}{2}$ by $\frac{1}{4}$ inch pieces. Drain about 12 ounces of canned mushrooms. You can use all the drained contents of two eight ounce cans. Chop about $\frac{1}{2}$ medium onion into separated pieces about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, one layer thick. I also peeled and diced one small eggplant and salted it to remove moisture ... I then put the pieces between two paper towels to remove all the excess moisture. The pieces will be about one half the size they were after dicing.

Prepare the sauce by using $\frac{2}{3}$ bottle of Classico® Marinara sauce with or without basil included in the sauce as purchased. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated parmesan cheese. Add one tablespoon or more dried oregano or "pizza spices". Add one teaspoon garlic powder. Add one teaspoon salt. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper. Mix well and set aside. Do not cook.

Prepare one large baking tray by spraying it well with Pam® and shaking a generous amount of cornmeal evenly over the oil.

Prepare the surface you will use to form the dough into six circles. We used a flexible whiteboard that Marie found that rolls up and that is about 24 inches by 30 inches when laid out flat. Spray Pam® on the whiteboard (or other) surface.

When the dough has risen for two hours you will notice the towel (or plastic wrap) is raised in the middle. This is good for it means the dough has risen properly. If not, you have a problem with either dead yeast or a proofing oven that was either too hot or too cool. Do note that the dough can rise at a room temperature of 75°F or warmer but the rising process will take longer than rising it in a proofing oven.

Preheat your oven to 400°F. My oven has a lower stone surface similar to what is used in commercial pizza ovens. You can create this environment with any type of large flat stones like the flagstone people use in walkways. It takes longer to preheat your oven but the food cooks perfectly.

Spray your hands with Pam®. Remove the dough and tear off enough to make the first of six eight inch circles of dough for the calzones. How you manage to make the dough form the correct size circles and hold the size is your problem. The dough will tend to pull together after stretching so be prepared to stretch it two or three times to get it to relax at the right size.

Ladle the sauce onto one side of the dough circle, avoiding the outer edge. Then add the sausage and cheeses evenly. Add the mushrooms and the onions. Add the eggplant if you are using it. Try to keep all the ingredients on one side of the dough without spilling over the edge. It is best to keep a ½ inch border without sauce or other ingredients so that you can pull and fold over the side of the circle that you did not cover with ingredients and achieve a seal in the dough ... by pressing or pinching the edges together.

Carefully transfer the calzones onto the baking sheet with a spatula. Spray them with Pam® and sprinkle on a generous amount of cornmeal on top. Bake them for 45 to 50 minutes. Remove them from the oven and let them rest for about five to ten minutes. Serve them and go wild with pleasure ... well, okay, that is a bit of an overstatement. I am sure, however, that you and your guests will be quite pleased.

Sautéed Squash, Bacon and Rice - ☺♥

Peggy and I were figuring out what to have for dinner and I decided to use the fresh zucchini and summer squash from our garden to create a one dish meal both healthy and very tasty. Part of that idea involved the use of leftovers from other meals, like bacon, crushed Ramen noodles and some of my hot Giardiniera condiment. I added onions and tomatoes and garlic as well. The basic carbohydrate, which was mixed with the above ingredients just before serving, was basmati rice prepared using chicken broth. Given the salt content of the bacon I simply used some black pepper for additional seasoning.

The dish turned out to be excellent! We were both surprised and pleased and the taste, texture and appearance were simply great. And I must admit that I have never heard of any dish similar to this one ... pure serendipity.

You want to make this meal. The hot Giardiniera condiment adds just the right amount of "Zing" to the bacon and garlic flavors, and the squash, tomatoes, onions, Ramen noodles and rice are the perfect base to make this a complete and satisfying meal. I knew I had a winner when Peggy ate a large portion and went back for seconds.

Ingredients: (makes three to four servings)

1 seven inch long zucchini squash

1 seven inch long yellow summer squash

2 tbsp. of butter

5 slices of fried dry cured hickory smoked bacon

1/2 cup of chopped sweet onion

4 thinly sliced garlic cloves

1/2 cup of crushed Ramen noodles

1 large ripe tomato, chopped with seeds removed

1/4 cup of hot Giardiniera condiment (recipe is in Food Nirvana), or similar substitute (see below)

1/4 cup of water

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

1 pint of chicken broth for cooking the rice

1 cup of uncooked basmati rice

Directions:

Fry the bacon until it is fairly crisp in a large skillet, put the bacon on a paper towel to absorb excess grease, then break up the slices into pieces roughly 1/2 inch square. Set the bacon pieces aside.

Pour the hot bacon grease from the skillet into a cup or waste container, wipe the outside of the skillet to remove any bacon grease, but do not clean the inside of the skillet. Set the skillet aside.

Turn on the oven to 200 degrees F and put a serving casserole and plates or wide bowls into the oven.

Make the rice by heating the chicken broth to boiling in a covered saucepan, then adding and mixing the rice into the broth, then simmering the mixture on very low heat for 12 to 15 minutes, covered. Set the pan aside, covered.

Peel the summer squash, cut off the ends, cut it in half lengthwise, then cut each half again lengthwise. Cut the squash pieces into smaller pieces about 1/2 inch long, cutting crosswise.

Do the same procedure for the zucchini squash except only peel off about half of the skin, leaving the remainder for appearance.

Chop the onion into small pieces.

Add the butter to the large skillet used to fry the bacon and melt it on high heat. Then add the onion pieces and mix well. Then reduce the heat to low.

Cover the skillet and let the onions sauté until they are almost translucent, which will take three to four minutes. Then add the bacon pieces, mix well, cover and heat for one minute.

Add the thinly sliced garlic to the skillet, mix well, cover the skillet and cook for two minutes.

Add the black pepper, the hot Giardiniera condiment, the tomato pieces and the crushed Ramen noodles to the skillet and mix well. If you do not have any hot Giardiniera condiment then you may want to add two thinly sliced jalapeno peppers or two thinly sliced chipotle peppers instead.

Add the squash pieces to the skillet and mix well.

Add 1/4 cup of water to the skillet, then cover the skillet and let the mixture simmer on low heat for five minutes.

Add the rice to the skillet and mix well, then put the mixture into the preheated serving casserole.

Serve the meal using the preheated plates or wide bowls. They keep the food warm while you are eating it, and that is a nice touch. Those who want additional salt can add it at the table.

Various beverages are fine with this meal. I suggest a chilled, light white wine like Pinot Grigio. You might also serve a small fresh fruit salad with a touch of Chambord® liquor as the perfect dessert.

Enjoy!

"Veal?" Parmegiano - ☺♥

Something triggered my memory about how much I love the dish, Veal Parmegiano, particularly when made by an expert. Of course, Marie was an expert. It was yummy! Then I realized I didn't have a recipe in Food Nirvana from Marie or any other source for this wonderful dish. I collected a variety of Internet recipes, analyzed them and decided Emeril's recipe from Food Network® was clearly the best. It looked so good I decided to try it pretty much as I found it. But I did change the procedure as most folks don't have a skillet large enough to do what Emeril required. There is one caveat regarding the ingredients. Emeril uses both dried red pepper flakes and cayenne pepper and I suggest you go easy on those ingredients unless those who will be eating it love hot stuff.

Thinking further I considered the fact that Poor Man's Schnitzel uses lean pork chops processed like veal, and the results are fantastic. And the cost is so much lower! So once again I decided to use pork instead of veal to make this classic dish. If you can tell you are eating pork instead of veal, well, good luck! I prefer using pork instead of veal for tenderness, moisture and taste, but the choice is up to you.

I will report back with results when I try this recipe.

Ingredients: (four servings)

2 lbs. of center cut boneless pork chops (eight pieces)

Essence (see the recipe immediately below)

1 tsp. of Salt

½ tsp. of Pepper

1 cup of flour

1 cup of bread crumbs

2 eggs

1 cup of milk

2 tbsp. of butter

3 tbsp. of olive oil

3 strips of bacon

½ cup of yellow onion, chopped fine
1 tbsp. of minced garlic
½ cup of dry red wine
1, 28 oz. can of peeled Italian plum tomatoes
1 cup of tomato puree (sauce)
1 tbsp. of fresh basil, chopped
1 tsp. of fresh parsley, chopped
1 tsp. of fresh oregano, chopped
1 tsp. of dried red pepper flakes (or less)
8 tbsp. of Parmesan cheese
8 oz. of Mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced or shredded

Essence Ingredients:

2½ tbsp. of paprika
2 tbsp. of salt
2 tbsp. of garlic powder
1 tbsp. of black pepper
1 tbsp. of onion powder
1 tbsp. of cayenne pepper (or less)
1 tbsp. of dried oregano
1 tbsp. of dried thyme

Essence Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Combine all ingredients in a small bowl and mix thoroughly. Then store the essence in a plastic container with a tight fitting lid.

"Veal?" Parmegiano Directions:

Trim any fat from the pork chops and discard it. If you have four thick chops instead of eight thin chops then cut them so they are half as thick.

Use a meat mallet to pound each chop to a 1/4-inch thickness. Do this evenly over the entire surface such that both sides of a chop are pounded to achieve the final thickness.

Lightly season the pounded chops on both sides with Essence, salt and pepper, rubbing the seasoning into the meat surface.

Place the flour in a wide, shallow bowl and season it with 1 tablespoon of Essence. Place the breadcrumbs in another wide, shallow bowl and season them with 1 tablespoon of Essence.

Whisk the eggs in a shallow bowl. Then add the milk and whisk until the mixture is uniform.

Dredge the chops in the seasoned flour and shake off any excess. Dip the chops in the egg wash, and then coat both sides with the breadcrumbs.

Heat the butter and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a heavy, very large, nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté the chops until they are golden on both sides, about 2 minutes per side. Remove them from the skillet and place them on a plate. If the skillet isn't large enough to accommodate all the chops at one time then do them in two batches, melting an additional 1 tbsp. of butter in the skillet before doing the second batch.

Add the bacon to the pan and fry it in the remaining fat. Remove the fried bacon from the pan to a paper towel. When it is cool, crumble it.

Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil and the onion and sauté, stirring, until the onion is translucent, about 3 to 5 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté it until it is fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Add the wine, and cook, stirring, to de-glaze the pan over high heat for 2 minutes.

Add the tomatoes and the puree/sauce, the basil, parsley, oregano, and dried red pepper flakes. Cut each of the tomatoes in half. Bring the sauce to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium and add the crumbled bacon. Simmer the mixture until the sauce thickens slightly, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes.

Pour the sauce onto an oven proof platter large enough to hold the chops in one layer.

Arrange the cooked chops on top of the tomato pieces/sauce, spooning the sauce over each one. Sprinkle one tbsp. of Parmesan cheese over each chop, then cover that with a slice or one ounce portion of shredded mozzarella cheese.

Put the platter into the oven and bake until the cheese melts, at most 5 to 6 minutes.

Serve immediately, 2 chops per person.

This dish goes well with herbed egg noodles. So says Emeril. I suggest pasta of any sort with a butter and garlic sauce, along with a light salad and some hard crusted rolls and butter. You might also want to drink some of that dry red wine, along with a glass of ice water.

PIES & PIECRUSTS:

Apple Crisp - ☺♥

My sweetheart, Peggy, has been asking me to make an apple crisp now that fall weather has arrived. I noticed that I didn't have a recipe for that food item in Food Nirvana so I looked a bit on the Internet and found the one below. And it turns out to be very nice. I did make a few changes/improvements to reduce the labor and enhance the topping and the apple mixture.

Two very pleasant items to have when processing apples are an inexpensive electric apple peeler, which can easily be found by shopping via the Internet, and an apple corer. They eliminate 90 percent of the labor and thus save time. The remaining chopping is trivial.

I like a fairly uniform topping composition so I put all of the dry ingredients for the topping into a Magic Bullet® mixer and blend them, and in the process reduce the size of the oatmeal flakes. You don't have to do that but it makes later mixing with butter easy and the topping nicely uniform in appearance and texture.

Making this dessert isn't rocket science but it sure is good when made well, served warm with a scoop of good vanilla ice cream, and maybe a freshly made hot cup of coffee.

Ingredients: (makes one 8"x8" baking casserole or about 9 generous servings)

6 golden delicious or gala apples, peeled, cored and chopped

2 tbsp. of white sugar

1 3/4 tsp. of ground cinnamon, divided

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1 cup of light brown sugar

3/4 cup of old fashioned oatmeal flakes

3/4 cup of all-purpose flour

1/4 pound stick of cold butter, diced into small cubes

A pinch of salt

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Put the chopped apples, granulated sugar, 3/4 tsp. of the cinnamon and the lemon juice into a mixing bowl. Stir to combine, then transfer the mixture to an 8"x8" baking casserole.

Put the dry topping ingredients (brown sugar, oats, flour, 1 tsp. of cinnamon, salt) into a mixing bowl and stir to combine. Then add the cold diced butter cubes.

You might use a pastry cutter to cut the butter into the oat mixture, using a slight downward twisting motion, until mixture resembles pea-sized crumbs. Or you can use two forks or even your hands to cut the butter into the mixture. But I suggest/recommend using an electric mixer on low to medium speed as a great labor saver.

Spread the topping over the apples in the baking dish, and gently pat the top to even it out.

Bake for about 50 minutes, until the apple crisp is golden brown on top and bubbly underneath the top.

Put the baking casserole onto a wooden cutting board and let the apple crisp partially cool.

Serve the apple crisp warm with a scoop of good vanilla ice cream and maybe a freshly made cup of hot coffee.

Enjoy!

Banana Cream Pie - ☺♥

A well made banana cream pie is a taste of nirvana. It is a rich dessert, the quality of which depends a lot on the ingredients used. Typical recipes use totally conventional methods and ingredients. This recipe is one Marie developed that got rave reviews. You will understand as you read.

The recipe for the graham cracker piecrust is provided later in this section of this book. You can use a conventional piecrust instead, and that is very good also, but I prefer the graham cracker crust with banana cream pie. It is a matter of complementary flavors and textures.

Ingredients:

1 graham cracker (or conventional) pie shell in a 9 or 10 inch pie plate

1 large (5 oz.) box of Jell-O® Vanilla pudding that you cook (no instant pudding!)

1 12 oz. can of evaporated milk (this is one secret rich pudding ingredient)

1 cup whole milk

½ cup heavy cream for the pudding (this is the other secret to rich tasting pudding)

1 cup heavy cream for the whipped cream topping

2 tbsp. sugar

1 tbsp. vanilla for the pudding (Jell-O® doesn't use enough vanilla flavoring)

1 tsp. of pure banana extract flavoring for the pudding (optional ... I buy it from OliveNation.com)

1 tsp. vanilla for the whipped cream topping

2 or 3 ripe but not overripe bananas (depending on size) chilled

Directions:

Refrigerate the graham cracker or baked conventional piecrust.

Put the pudding mix into a 2 or 3 quart heavy saucepan like the French tin coated interior heavy copper type used for making cream sauces and candy.

Add the evaporated milk, whole milk and ½ cup of heavy cream while stirring to mix the dry pudding mix with the liquid ingredients. Add the vanilla and the (optional) pure banana extract flavoring and stir. Note that commercial pudding mixes lack sufficient vanilla and that is why we added more here.

Bring the pudding to a light boil on medium heat stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. When the pudding is bubbling slowly on most of the surface it is done cooking and it should be removed from the heat. Dispense the pudding into a glass bowl barely large enough to hold the pudding, cover it with plastic wrap, such that the wrap is in contact with the pudding surface, and put the bowl into the refrigerator to thoroughly chill the pudding. This will take at least one hour.

Covering the hot pudding with the plastic wrap in direct contact will avoid having a thickened skin of pudding form on the top of the pudding. You want all the pudding to be soft.

The thoroughly chilled pudding is now ready for the bananas. Peel and slice the bananas into ¼ inch thick slices and gently mix the slices into the pudding with a wooden spoon. Note that adding the banana slices while the pudding was hot or even warm would discolor the slices and tend to over-soften them, which is not desirable. The bananas should retain their "just peeled" texture.

When all the banana slices have been added spoon the mixture into the chilled pie shell, smooth it out evenly, and cover the pie with plastic wrap and return it to the refrigerator.

Put your mixing bowl and whisk attachment for your electric mixer into the freezer 15 minutes before you plan to use them to make the whipped cream topping for the pie.

Immediately before serving the pie whip one cup of heavy cream at high speed in the chilled bowl using your electric mixer with the chilled whisk attachment. When soft peaks begin to form add two tbsps. of sugar and one tsp. of vanilla and continue mixing at high speed until firm peaks form.

Remove the plastic wrap cover from the pie and spread the whipped cream evenly over the surface.

Serve. Yummy!

Blueberry Pie - ☺♥

A well made blueberry pie is delicious! And I like both blueberry and cherry pies to have a crumb topping instead of a regular piecrust. Crumb topping can be made easily by hand with flour (1/2 cup), sugar (1/4 cup), cinnamon (1/2 tsp.) and cold, diced butter (3 tbsp.) but I leave it to you to choose the type of pie topping you prefer.

This recipe uses fresh or frozen blueberries which is fine except for one major point. That point is, do not make the pie with raw blueberries. Instead, cook them in a large saucepan over medium heat with the rest of the filling ingredients, using cornstarch as necessary to produce a thickened mixture. Otherwise, buy canned pie fillings of high quality, like Comstock®.

Once you have made a blueberry pie using canned pie filling you will know how thick the mixture made with raw blueberries in this recipe should be prior to baking.

Crust:

One double Crisco® recipe for pie crust dough, or use the single recipe if you plan to make the crumb topping.

Filling Ingredients:

6 cups of fresh (or frozen) blueberries, rinsed, drained and stems removed

1 teaspoon of lemon zest

2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

3 tbsp. (or more if necessary) of cornstarch (when the blueberry mixture boils it should noticeably thicken)

1 1/2 cups of white granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon

2 tbsp. of butter, cut into small pieces, if you are using a top crust

Directions:

Prepare the crust. If you made the double crust recipe, roll out half of the dough into a 1/8-inch-thick circle on a lightly floured work surface, about 13 inches in diameter. Otherwise use all of the dough when you roll it. Fit the dough over and

then into a 9-inch bottom diameter pie pan, and trim the edges vertically with a kitchen knife all around the outside of the pie pan.

If you are making a crust topping then roll out the other half of the dough into a 13 inch diameter circle. Set it aside.

Heat the oven to 425°F.

Mix the sugar, cornstarch, cinnamon, lemon zest, and lemon juice in a large (2 quart) saucepan. Then add the blueberries and mix gently but thoroughly.

Heat the mixture on medium heat while gently stirring until the mixture comes to a low boil and thickens. Then remove the saucepan from the heat.

If the mixture has not thickened appreciably then dust the top with another tbsp. of cornstarch and then stir the mixture well. It will thicken during baking.

Transfer the mixture to the bottom crust of the pie pan. Dot it with butter pieces if you are using a top crust.

If you are using a top crust place it over the pie pan and contents, then crimp the edges of the upper and lower pie crusts with your fingers.

If you are using a top crust then score the pie on the top with 4 cuts (so steam can escape while cooking).

If you are using a crumb topping then crumble it evenly on the top of the blueberry filling.

Place the pie on the middle rack of the oven with a 12" x 17" baking sheet positioned on a lower rack to catch any filling that may bubble over.

Bake the pie for 15 minutes at 425°F.

Reduce the oven temperature setting to 350°F and bake for up to an additional 30 minutes or until the crust has turned golden in color.

Transfer the pie to a wire rack to cool. Let it cool completely before serving.

Suggestion: Blueberry pie ala mode is fabulous!

Cherry Clouthie - ☺

This is a rich, French dessert guaranteed to be sinfully delicious. The batter puffs somewhat during baking.

Macerate two cups of fresh halved pitted dark sweet cherries in cognac. This simply means soaking the halves at room temperature for a few hours. Canned or frozen dark sweet cherries, drained and soaked in any decent brandy will also do just fine. You might also substitute a small amount of liquor, like Kirsch, for the brandy.

Batter Ingredients:

1 cup of flour

1 1/3 cups of milk

4 eggs, beaten

4 tbsp. of vanilla sugar (sugar stored with cut vanilla beans, or use plain sugar and 1 tsp. of vanilla extract)

zest of two lemons

¼ cup of sour cream

Directions:

Set the oven at 375°F

Use a Quiche pan (porcelain pie pan with vertical fluted sides) or glass pie pan

Mix the vanilla sugar and the lemon zest with the eggs. Mix in the sour cream. Mix in the flour. Slowly add milk and mix. The batter will be very thin.

Pour 1/3 of the batter into the baking pan and bake for 4 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and gently place the drained cherries on top in single layer. Add the remaining batter. Bake for an additional 20 minutes.

Serve the dessert hot with a generous dollop of whipped cream.

Cherry Crumb Pie - ☺♥

What a fine dessert this is on a cool fall or cold winter day. It is rich and fruity and very tasty. Served à la mode with a high quality brand of vanilla ice cream it is superb, and your family and/or guests will love it.

Note that this recipe is perfect for one 10" diameter deep dish pie plate, but if you need or want to use a 9" diameter regular pie plate then reduce the pie filling to one can and the lemon juice to one half tablespoon. Similarly, make only enough pie dough for the 9" diameter pie plate, and roll the dough out to a diameter of 12".

Ingredients:

2, 21 ounce cans of Comstock® or similar high quality cherry pie filling

1 unbaked Classic Crisco® recipe deep dish pie crust

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

2/3 cup of brown sugar

1/2 cup of all purpose flour

5 tablespoons of butter

1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon

1 teaspoon of vanilla

Directions:

Use the Food Nirvana recipe for Classic Crisco® pie crust and make enough dough for a single deep dish pie crust.

Roll the dough into the shape of a circle, to a diameter of 14 inches. I use 15" wide plastic wrap under the dough and on top of the dough before using the rolling pin. By so doing I do not have to use any extra flour. Neither do I have to clean the rolling pin afterwards.

If you do not have 15" wide plastic wrap then simply put two overlapped pieces on the counter to a width and length of 15" by 15". Do similarly, using two overlapped pieces of plastic wrap on top of the hand flattened ball of dough after placing it in the center of the bottom layer of plastic wrap.

After rolling I remove and discard the top layer of plastic wrap and then lift the rolled pie dough from underneath the bottom piece of plastic wrap.

I then invert the pie dough over a deep dish 10" diameter glass pie plate evenly and let/help the dough fit the inside of the pie plate. Then I remove the plastic wrap, adjust the dough if necessary and then trim any excess dough from around the top edge of the pie plate.

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Mix the cherry pie filling with the lemon juice in a two-quart bowl.

Pour/spoon the filling mix into the unbaked pie shell.

Blend the brown sugar, flour, butter, cinnamon, and vanilla on low speed in the bowl of an electric mixer.

Crumble the mixture evenly over the pie filling.

Put the pie into the oven on a middle shelf and put a cookie tray on the bottom shelf underneath to catch any drippings from the pie during baking.

Bake the pie for 40 minutes. Check for doneness based on the crust color and the color of the crumb topping. The crust should be light tan and the crumb topping should not show any dark or burned areas. If necessary, bake for an additional five minutes and again check for doneness.

Remove the pie from the oven, put it on a wooden cutting board, and let it cool to room temperature or to no more than slightly warm.

Serve. This dessert is delightful served à la mode. Use a high quality brand of vanilla ice cream, like the Food Nirvana recipe for French Vanilla ice cream.

Hot fresh coffee is a fine accompaniment.

Chocolate Cream Pie - ☺♥

A well made chocolate cream pie is delicious. It is a rich dessert, the quality of which depends a lot on the ingredients used. Typical recipes use totally conventional methods and ingredients. This recipe is one Marie developed that got rave reviews. You will understand as you read.

The recipe for the Oreo® cookie piecrust is provided later in this section. You can use a conventional piecrust instead, and that is very good also, but I prefer the Oreo® cookie piecrust with chocolate cream pie. It is a matter of complementary flavors and textures.

Note that you can skip the pudding and the chocolate in the recipe below and instead use the Food Nirvana recipe for Ray's Triple Chocolate Pudding, and it provides deep and rich chocolate flavor, far better than trying to enhance Jell-O® chocolate pudding with additional chocolate.

Ingredients:

1 Oreo® cookie (or conventional baked) pie shell in a 9 or 10 inch pie plate

1 large (5 oz.) box of Jell-O® Chocolate pudding that must be cooked. Do not use instant pudding.

2 oz. of 72% cacao dark chocolate bar or ½ cup of Ghirardelli® Premium Double Chocolate Cocoa Mix

1 12 oz. can of evaporated milk

1 cup of whole milk

½ cup of heavy cream for the pudding

1 cup of heavy cream for the whipped cream topping

2 tbsp. of sugar for the whipped cream topping

1 tbsp. of vanilla for the pudding

1 tbsp. of vanilla for the whipped cream topping

Directions:

Refrigerate the Oreo® cookie or conventional already baked piecrust.

Put the pudding mix into a 2 quart heavy saucepan like the French kind used for making cream sauces and candy. Break up the chocolate bar into small pieces

about ½ inch by ½ inch and add them to the pudding mix, or add the powdered Ghirardelli® cocoa mix.

Add the evaporated milk, whole milk and ½ cup of heavy cream while stirring to mix the dry pudding mix and chocolate or cocoa mix with the liquid ingredients. Add the vanilla and stir. Note that commercial pudding mixes lack sufficient chocolate and that is why we added more here. Vanilla was added for complementary flavor.

Bring the pudding to a light boil on medium heat stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. During heating all of the pieces of chocolate bar (if used) should melt and blend completely with the other ingredients. When the pudding is bubbling slowly on most of the surface it is done cooking and it should be removed from the heat. Transfer the pudding from the saucepan to a small glass bowl that barely holds the pudding, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it into the refrigerator to thoroughly chill the pudding. This will take at least one hour, more likely two hours.

The thoroughly chilled pudding is now ready for the pie shell. Spoon the pudding into the chilled pie shell, smooth it out evenly, and cover the pie with plastic wrap and return it to the refrigerator.

Put your mixing bowl and whisk attachment for your electric mixer into the freezer 15 minutes before you plan to use them to make the whipped cream topping for the pie.

Immediately before serving the pie whip one cup of heavy cream at high speed in the chilled bowl using your electric mixer with the chilled whisk attachment. When soft peaks begin to form add two tbsp. of sugar and one tbsp. of vanilla and continue mixing at high speed until firm peaks form.

Remove the plastic wrap cover from the pie and spread the whipped cream evenly over the surface.

Serve.

French Apple Pie - ☺♥

In my youth I often enjoyed a variety of apple pie that I do not see anymore, especially in New England. It is the version with a small amount of raisins and different spices mixed in with the apples, and the completed pie, when cool, is coated with a thin layer of simple white icing. Perhaps it was only a regional favorite in Pennsylvania and Maryland. Where I grew up it was called French Apple Pie. It was often served warm and à la mode with vanilla ice cream. Okay, now I remember ... a Philadelphia based commercial bakery called TastyKake® made/sold this pie in single serving packages, and it was made full size by many local restaurants, bakeries and super market suppliers.

In any event, I was asked to bake an apple pie for Thanksgiving dinner. It turns out that I didn't have a recipe for any type of apple pie in Food Nirvana, for I considered that dessert to be so common that most everyone would know how to make it. Well, as of now the less common French Apple Pie recipe is and will remain in Food Nirvana. I found the basic recipe on the Internet (And not in any of my wide variety of cookbooks!), rated at 5 stars. Hmmm ... this one must really be good!

I modified the Internet recipe considerably before making the pie and I have added procedures and tips that I use and also some from a dessert cookbook. The picture on the right is my first attempt at making French Apple Pie. It smells yummy and it looks great, but I will have to taste it first (see below) to know that it is up to my standards for Food Nirvana.

I recommend using a 9" diameter (measured at the interior bottom of the pie plate) glass pie plate or an 8" or 9" diameter deep dish pie plate. As to choice of apples, the experts recommend using multiple varieties in the same pie, and only those varieties that bake well. Typical easy to find choices are: Stayman, Johnathan, Golden Delicious, Braeburn, Granny Smith and Gala. Select any three of those types and go for it. The total number of apples you will need depends on their size. Six large apples or eight medium size apples will work fine.

I purchased two medium-large apples of four kinds to test this recipe, Gala, Granny Smith, Braeburn and Golden Delicious. I only needed to use five of the apples to get the 7 cups of slices required for the recipe below, so you can likely get by with fewer apples than I have indicated. The second time I made the pie I increased the number of apples to six and I was pleased with the result. Of course, I slightly increased the spices too, and the increases are reflected in the recipe below.

Here are some processing hints for preparing the apples. After peeling the apples, I use an apple corer that also cuts an apple into eight segments. The picture of the corer shows it mounted in a wooden device I built for processing many dozens of apples at a time each fall when we harvest our apples. You certainly do not need to have the wooden device to core apples for one pie! I put the segments into a one gallon bowl half filled with cold water in which the juice of half a lemon has been added to function as an antioxidant and thus to keep the apple segments from turning brown during processing. When all the apples have been cored, segmented and put into the lemon water, I then cut each in half lengthwise and put the two pieces back into the lemon water. When all the segments have been so processed I drain the water off and then the apples are ready to be used per the recipe instructions below. I note that other recipes do not mention the importance of keeping the apple segments/slices from turning brown due to oxidation when making any apple pie ... They should.

Enjoy this pie ... The flavors in French Apple Pie go together very well. Now for the taste test of my first attempt ... WOW! This is great stuff, and as far as I'm concerned it is pure serendipity. It is exactly the way a perfect French Apple Pie is supposed to be in appearance, texture and taste. After one taste I wolfed down the slice, grinned, and now the recipe is official for Food Nirvana.

Ingredients:

Pie:

1 (9 inch) pastry for double-crust pie (see the classic Crisco® pie dough recipe in Food Nirvana)

1/2 cup of sugar

1/4 cup of light brown sugar

3 tablespoons of cornstarch

1/8 teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon of cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon of nutmeg

1/2 teaspoon of allspice

7 to 8 cups of sliced apples (Peel, then core and slice the apples thinly, about 5/16" wide at the widest part.)

1/2 cup of raisins (I use Sun-Maid® dark raisins)

1/4 cup of orange juice

2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

3 tablespoons of butter

Icing:

1 1/4 cups of powdered sugar

3 tablespoons of butter, softened

3 or more teaspoons of milk

1/2 teaspoon of pure vanilla extract

Directions:

PIE:

Make the double crust pie dough per the Classic Crisco® recipe in Food Nirvana. Divide it in half. Flatten and shape each piece into a disc about one inch thick or less. Wrap each disc in plastic wrap. Put the dough discs into the refrigerator for a minimum of 30 minutes, or up to overnight. If you plan to use a deep dish pie plate then the dough needed for the bottom will be somewhat more than what is needed to cover the pie, so adjust the two dough portions to 60:40 instead of 50:50.

Peel and then core/slice the apples, cut each slice in half to make them thinner, then add them to a large bowl of water containing the juice of half a fresh lemon. Submerge the slices in the water.

Combine all the dry ingredients for the inside of the pie in a one quart bowl. Mix them briefly.

Put the wet apple slices, raisins, orange juice and lemon juice into a large, three or four quart bowl, and then add the dry ingredients. Mix the combined ingredients with a large spoon and then put that mixture into a large skillet or a Dutch oven.

Heat the mixture on low heat and cover it with a lid until it simmers. Stir occasionally while simmering for five to ten minutes on low heat, covered. This procedure partially cooks and softens the apples, it softens the raisins and it mixes the cornstarch with the liquids and thickens the mixture.

Most important, it later allows the top crust of the pie to remain close to the apples during baking instead of sitting an inch or more above the apples after baking, which typically happens when a tall mound of raw apple slices is placed in the center of the lower pie crust and then covered with a mountain of pie dough on top. This seemingly minor but important recommendation came from a special desserts cookbook Marie bought a few years ago, *The All-American Dessert Book*© by Nancy Baggett.

Remove the apple mixture from the heat and let it cool, uncovered, while you roll the pie dough.

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

It is a smart idea to measure the interior bottom of the pie plate, the interior side of the pie plate, and the top ridge of the pie plate. Add together the bottom measurement, two times the side measurement, and two times the top measurement to arrive at the correct diameter for rolling the dough to make the bottom pie crust.

I put two 15" long pieces of plastic wrap on a hard counter, overlapped by two inches along the length. I dust the center area with flour where the dough will be rolled out to the correct diameter. I place the disc of dough for the bottom of the pie in the middle and dust it with flour. Then I cover the dough with two 15" long pieces of plastic wrap, overlapped by two inches along the length. Finally, I am ready to roll the dough, and the best part is the rolling pin will remain clean. I won't have to wash it later.

Roll out the refrigerated dough for the bottom pie crust to the diameter of what you measured, remove the top pieces of plastic wrap, put your hands under the bottom plastic wrap to lift the dough, then and put it into a 9" glass pie plate or an 8" glass deep dish pie plate by turning it upside down and carefully placing/centering the rolled out dough, then putting it into the pie plate and removing the plastic wrap. Make any minor adjustments to the placement of the dough if needed. Prick the dough with a fork evenly spaced on the bottom about twenty places.

Pour the cooled apple and raisin mixture into the bottom crust and spread it out evenly, with a small mound effect in the middle of the pie.

Dot the mixture multiple places with small pieces of the butter.

Roll out the refrigerated dough for the top pie crust to a diameter of 13 inches. Add the top crust to the pie.

Flute the edges, sealing the top and bottom crusts together, cut away any excess pie dough, and cut 8 steam vents spaced evenly around the top crust with a table knife.

Bake the pie 25 minutes or until the crust is lightly browned.

Make an aluminum foil tent and spray it on the inside with Pam®. Put the tent over the entire top of the pie, covering the crust completely, with the edges folded down to enclose the pie.

Continue baking for another 20 minutes, then remove the pie from the oven and put it on a dry wood cutting board to cool. Check for doneness with a kitchen knife via one of the steam vents. Remove and discard the aluminum foil tent.

Cool the pie to room temperature, at least three hours, before applying the icing.

ICING:

Mix the powdered sugar and the softened butter in a small bowl with a soup spoon, adding small amounts of the powdered sugar to the butter at a time while mixing.

Add the milk and the vanilla extract and continue mixing until the icing has a good spreading consistency with are no lumps.

Spread the icing evenly on the top of the pie with the back of the spoon you used to mix the icing. I do it in small amounts working from the center of the pie evenly around the pie towards the inside edge of the crust.

TO SERVE:

Serve the pie either at room temperature or slightly warmed for 15 minutes in a 120°F oven.

Guests may want this pie to be served à la mode with vanilla ice cream and a nice hot cup of freshly brewed coffee.

Enjoy the compliments!

Grand Hotel® Key Lime Pie - ?

I have yet to try this recipe but it looked so good I just had to include it.

Ingredients:

1 envelope unflavored Knox® gelatin

1/2 cup sugar

1/4 tsp. salt

4 egg yolks

Juice of 4 limes

1/4 cup cold water

1 tsp. grated lime peel

2 drops green food color

4 egg whites

1/2 cup sugar

1 cup heavy cream, whipped

9" pie shell, pre-cooked

Directions:

Mix the gelatin, the first ½ cup of sugar and the salt in a heavy saucepan.

Beat the egg yolks, the lime juice and the water together. Stir the mixture into the gelatin mixture.

Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until barely boiled. Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Stir in the lime peels and the food coloring.

Chill until the mixture thickens, but is not yet set.

Beat the egg whites with the remaining 1/2 cup sugar until it forms stiff peaks. Fold them into the lime mixture. Make and fold in all but one cup of the whipped cream as well. Refrigerate the extra whipped cream.

**Smooth the filling into the pre-baked pie shell and refrigerate covered overnight.
Garnish with rosettes of whip cream just before serving.**

Lemon Chess Pie With Cheese - ☺♥

I remembered eating a chess pie sometime in my youth at some party at somebody's house. Beyond that I remembered nothing except it was delicious. As usual, I decided to search the Internet, and I found a likely recipe and I proceeded to modify it. Yeah!

Ingredients:

1 Unbaked 9" Pie Shell (make your own pie dough)

3 large or 2 jumbo eggs

2 Lemons

1 tsp. of Lemon rind

1 tsp. of corn meal

1 tbsp. of self-rising flour or (1 tbsp. of all purpose flour and a pinch of baking powder)

1/2 stick of butter

1 1/4 cups of sugar

1/2 cup of grated white cheddar cheese

1 tbsp. of Water

Directions:

Use an electric mixer and beat the eggs until they are fluffy. Add the water and the juice of 2 lemons and grate in approximately 1 tsp. of lemon rind; set the mixture aside.

Cream the butter, sugar, corn meal and flour using an electric mixer. Add the cheese, lemon and egg mixture and mix well.

Pour the mixture into the unbaked pie shell and bake at 350°F for 30-40 minutes or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean. (The pie will be a deep golden brown on top).

Here is an interesting variation:

I made my own pie crust using the classic Crisco recipe.

I rolled the dough to 1/8" thick and used an inverted 12 oz. tumbler as a cutout tool. I then put each cutout into a spot in a 24 position mini-muffin pan, to form 24 small pie shells. I then poured the filling into each shell ... it took a bit over one tablespoon per shell. The baking time was reduced ... but I waited until the tops were a golden brown. Simply keep an eye on the baking and the time to remove the small pies will be obvious. I believe I got a total of 36 small pies from the above recipe.

Peach Turnovers - ☺

I had extra pie dough from making a deep dish cherry crumb pie and some canned peaches that I needed to use, so I decided to find a few recipes on the Internet for peach turnovers. Most of those recipes used puff pastry, which was not what I had available, but I figured I could substitute pie dough provided I buttered and sugared the top of the turnover prior to baking. I was pleased with the result.

As you might expect my ratio of dough to filling was not balanced so I modified the recipe shown below to balance those items. If you have excess filling after making the turnovers you can do what I did, which was to make a warm sauce by heating the excess filling. That provides a nice addition to ladle onto the top of each warm turnover right before serving it.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of sugar for the filling

2 tbsp. of cornstarch

1 lb. of canned peaches

1 cup of canned peach juice

3 tbsp. of butter for the filling

1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon of nutmeg

1 recipe of Classic Crisco® Pie Crust (premade and refrigerated)

1 egg beaten with 1 teaspoon water

1/3 cup of sugar for the turnover tops

2 tbsp. of soft butter for the turnover tops

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Combine the peach juice with the sugar and cornstarch in a saucepan. Cook on low heat until the mixture boils and becomes thick and bubbly.

Add the peaches, butter, cinnamon and nutmeg.

Mix gently and let the mixture cool to 150°F.

Roll out the pie dough in the shape of a square. Actually, what I did was divide the dough into fourths, then I rolled out one piece of the dough so I could cut out a 7" by 7" square, and then return the small amount of leftover dough to the remaining unrolled dough pieces. I repeated that process until all the dough was used except for a tiny amount that I discarded after cutting out the fourth piece.

Brush the inside edges of the dough squares with a one inch wide coating of the beaten egg and water mixture.

Place 1/4th of the peach filling on half of each square, or as much as you can without overflowing the available volume of the pocket during the next sealing step.

Fold the unfilled side of the dough over the top to form a rectangular turnover and crimp the edges with a fork to seal each turnover.

Brush the tops of the turnovers with soft butter and sprinkle sugar on them.

Place the turnovers onto a baking sheet and bake at 400°F for about 20 minutes.

Cool the turnovers on racks.

Enjoy!

Pecan Pie - ☺♥

Warm pecan pie is yummy. I've tried this recipe from the Internet and it is the real thing. Enjoy!

Ingredients:

1 9-inch unbaked pie crust

1 cup of light corn syrup

1 cup of firmly packed dark brown sugar

3 large or 2 jumbo eggs, slightly beaten

1/2 stick of butter, melted

1/4 teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon of vanilla

1¼ cups of pecan halves

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

In a large mixer bowl, combine the corn syrup, sugar, eggs, butter, salt and vanilla. Mix well using an electric mixer. Add the pecans and mix gently with a spatula.

Pour the mixture into the unbaked piecrust.

Bake 45 to 50 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the pie comes out clean.

If the pie or crust appears to be getting too brown on top, cover it with aluminum foil for remainder of the baking time. My experience tells me that you should do that fairly early, like after the first 30 minutes of baking.

Allow the pie to cool. Warm the pie in a 150°F oven just before serving. I like a bit of vanilla ice cream on the side. As usual, it is the complementary flavor and texture and temperature effect I've mentioned in other recipes that makes these two items go well together.

Serve.

Pumpkin Pie - ☺♥

This recipe is from Paula Deen of the Food Network® and it looked so good I decided to capture it as a potential entry in Food Nirvana. I will be making this pie later today as tomorrow is Thanksgiving 2012. I think the use of cream cheese, half and half and extra egg yolks will make the filling deliciously rich and creamy.

Oh boy, what I suspected sure turned out to be true. The pie is delicious. My daughter compared it to something similar to a pumpkin cheesecake but still retaining the pumpkin pie character. Need I say more? This then is the official Food Nirvana recipe for Pumpkin Pie. Thanks, Paula!

The recipe says to bake the pie at 350°F for 50 minutes or until the center is set. In my case I used a steel pie pan and the required baking time was one hour and twenty minutes. I mention that here so that you do not become concerned if you also require a longer baking time. In any event the pie came out just fine and the crust was not dark.

Ingredients:

1 (8-ounce) package of cream cheese, softened

2 cups of pureed canned pumpkin

1 cup of sugar

1/4 teaspoon of salt

1 egg plus 2 egg yolks, slightly beaten

1 cup of half-and-half

1/4 cup (1/2 stick) of melted butter

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon of ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon of ground ginger, optional

Pre-made pie dough for one pie

Whipped cream, for topping

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Place 1 piece of pre-made pie dough into a (9-inch) pie pan and press down along the bottom and all sides. Pinch and crimp the edges together to make a pretty pattern.

Put the pie shell back into the freezer for 1 hour to firm up.

Fit a piece of aluminum foil to cover the inside of the shell completely.

Fill the shell up to the edges with pie weights or dried beans (about 2 pounds) and place it in the oven.

Bake for 10 minutes, remove the foil and pie weights and bake for another 10 minutes or until the crust is dried out and beginning to color.

For the filling, beat the cream cheese with an electric mixer in a large mixing bowl,

Add the pumpkin puree and beat until combined.

Add the sugar and salt, and beat until combined.

Add the eggs mixed with the yolks, the half-and-half, and the melted butter, and beat until combined.

Finally, add the vanilla, cinnamon, and ginger if using, and beat until incorporated.

Pour the filling into the warm prepared pie crust and bake for 50 minutes, or until the center is set.

Place the pie on a wire rack and cool to room temperature.

Cut into slices and top each piece with a generous amount of whipped cream.

Shoo-Fly Pie - ☺

Outside of Pennsylvania Dutch country (southeastern PA) few people get to taste Shoo-Fly pie. There are various recipes that result in different consistencies varying from a dry crumb like filling throughout the inside of a baked pie shell to the gooey-bottomed variety with two distinct layers that I really like. It's the extra molasses that makes the difference. As you will read below, baking time and temperature and the amount of baking soda used also affect the result.

I had to change the recipe shown below to decrease baking temperature and time. My first attempt resulted in the lower section of the pie heaving the rest of the pie up, making it a thicker pie in which the molasses layer blended a bit too much with the lower part of the crumb topping. The pie was still tasty and not burnt but to me the interior was over-baked, and possibly there was too much baking soda.

The changes I made are to reduce the baking soda from $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. to $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp., and to reduce the time at 400°F from 15 minutes to 10 minutes, and to reduce the time at 350°F from 30 minutes to 20 minutes.

Ingredients:

1 (9 inch) pie shell (Classic Crisco® Pie Crust recipe)

1 cup of molasses

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup of hot water

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of baking soda

1 egg, beaten

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of all-purpose flour

1 cup of packed brown sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. of Ground Ginger

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. of Cinnamon

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. of Nutmeg

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. of Ground Cloves

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. of salt

1/4 cup of Butter

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

To Make The Bottom Layer: In a medium bowl combine the molasses, hot water, salt and baking soda. Stir well. Whisk in the beaten egg. Pour the mixture into the pie shell.

To Make The Crumb Topping: In a medium bowl combine the flour and brown sugar. Mix well, then cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add the spices and mix well. Sprinkle the crumb topping on top of the molasses layer.

Bake the pie in a preheated 400°F oven for 10 minutes. Lower the temperature to 350°F. Bake an additional 20 minutes.

Cool the pie completely. Serve.

This pie is very sweet, especially the molasses layer, so it goes well with a hot cup of freshly made black coffee.

Strawberry Pie - ?

My mother used to make strawberry pie when I was a child and I loved it. The recipe below is similar to my mother's recipe, except that she topped the pie with whipped cream ... I have added that item to the recipe.

Enjoy!

Ingredients:

Classic Crisco® pie dough for one 9 inch pastry shell (see Food Nirvana recipe)

1/2 cup of sugar

2 tablespoons of cornstarch

1 cup of water

1, 3 ounce package of Jell-O® strawberry gelatin

4 cups of washed, hulled, sliced fresh strawberries in a 2 quart bowl

1 cup of heavy cream

2 tbsp. of sugar for the whipped cream

1 tsp. of vanilla extract for the whipped cream

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Prepare the strawberries and refrigerate the bowl of strawberry slices.

Make the dough for the pie shell, roll it out and put it into a 9" diameter pie pan.

Line the pie dough with a double thickness of heavy-duty aluminum foil.

Bake the pie shell at 450°F for 8 minutes. Remove the foil. Bake for 5 minutes longer.

Cool the pie shell in the pie pan on a wire rack.

Combine the sugar, cornstarch and water in a small saucepan to make a sauce and stir until the mixture is smooth. Bring the mixture to a boil on medium heat. Continue cooking while stirring for 2 minutes or until the sauce is somewhat thickened.

Remove the sauce from the heat. Stir in the gelatin until it is dissolved.

Refrigerate the completed sauce for 15 to 20 minutes.

Add the sauce to the strawberry slices and mix gently.

Pour the mixture into the pie shell spreading it evenly.

Refrigerate the strawberry pie until the filling is set.

Prepare the whipped cream using an electric mixer with a chilled beater and chilled bowl. Put the heavy cream into the bowl and operate the mixer at medium-high to high speed. When the cream starts to form soft peaks add the sugar and the vanilla. Continue mixing at high speed until firmer peaks form. Do not over mix or you will turn the cream into butter!

Serve the pie cold, topped with the freshly made whipped cream.

Crisco® Pie Crust Recipe - ☺♥

This recipe shows the amounts of ingredients and the procedure for making pie crust for single, double or deep dish double crust pies. While both manual and electric mixer methods are described I always use the electric mixer. It saves a lot of labor.

Pie pans vary in size so the pie dough you make will be thicker or thinner if your pie pan is small or extra large. Typical pie pans are seven or eight inches in diameter at the bottom and nine to eleven inches in diameter at the top.

Obviously the diameter to which you roll the crust is determined by the size of the pie pan, but also by the length of the tapered sides, as in a deep dish pie pan. Allow for the total size, ergo bottom diameter plus two sides, plus one inch extra for fluting the crust. When making an ordinary double crust pie divide the dough in roughly a 60:40 ratio, using the larger piece for the bottom crust.

There are different techniques described for rolling the pie dough and transferring it into the pie pan. Use whatever technique works well for you. They all work. It is a matter of choice. Do try, however, to have a uniform thickness of the pie crust when you roll it.

Ingredients:

Single Crust

1 1/3 cups of Pillsbury BEST® All Purpose Flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 stick well-chilled Crisco® All-Vegetable Shortening Sticks

OR 1/2 cup well-chilled Crisco® All-Vegetable Shortening

3 to 6 tablespoons of ice cold water

Double Crust

2 cups of Pillsbury BEST® All Purpose Flour

1 teaspoon of salt

3/4 stick of well-chilled Crisco® All-Vegetable Shortening Sticks

OR 3/4 cup well-chilled Crisco® All-Vegetable Shortening

4 to 8 tablespoons of ice cold water

Deep Dish Double Crust

2 2/3 cups of Pillsbury BEST® All Purpose Flour

1 teaspoon of salt

1 stick of well-chilled Crisco® All-Vegetable Shortening Sticks

OR 1 cup of well-chilled Crisco® All-Vegetable Shortening

6 to 10 tablespoons of ice cold water

Directions:

Blend the flour and salt in medium mixing bowl.

If you use the shortening sticks, then cut the chilled shortening into 1/2-inch cubes. Cut in the chilled shortening cubes into the flour mixture, using a pastry blender, in an up and down chopping motion, or use an electric mixer on low to medium speed until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs with some small pea-sized pieces remaining. If you simply chilled a container of shortening then use two teaspoons to extract small pieces from the container and add/drop them into the mixing bowl by scraping the shortening from one spoon using the other spoon, while the mixer is running.

Sprinkle/pour half of the maximum recommended amount of ice cold water over the flour mixture. Using a fork or electric mixer, draw the flour from bottom of bowl to the top, distributing moisture evenly into flour. Press any chunks that rise to the top down to the bottom of the bowl with a fork or a spatula. Add more water by the tablespoon, until dough is moist enough to hold together when pressed together.

Test the dough for proper moistness by squeezing a marble-sized ball of dough in your hand. If it holds together firmly, do not add any additional water. If the dough crumbles, add more water by the tablespoonful, until the dough is moist enough to form a smooth ball when pressed together.

Shape the dough into a ball for a single pie crust. Divide into dough in two for double crust or double deep dish crust, one ball larger than the other, roughly 60:40 ratio. Flatten the ball(s) into 1/2-inch thick round disk(s).

TIP: For ease in rolling, wrap the dough disks in plastic wrap. Chill them for 30 minutes or up to 2 days.

Roll the dough (do the larger ball of dough for double crust pie first) from the center outward with steady pressure on a lightly floured work surface (or

between two sheets of wax paper, plastic wrap or parchment paper) into a circle 3-4 inches wider than the bottom diameter of the pie plate for the bottom crust. Transfer the dough to the pie plate by loosely rolling it around the flour coated rolling pin, or by peeling off the top sheet and lifting the dough from the work surface by using your hands under the bottom sheet and inverting the crust over the center of the pie plate, then gently peeling the bottom sheet from the dough. If you roll the dough around the rolling pin then center the rolling pin over the pie plate, and then unroll, easing the dough into the pie plate from one side to the other.

For a Single pie crust, trim the edges of dough leaving a 3/4-inch overhang. Fold the edge of the dough under itself. Flute the dough as desired. Bake according to specific recipe directions.

For a Double pie crust, roll the larger disk for bottom crust, trimming the edges of the dough even with the outer edge of the pie plate. Fill the unbaked pie crust according to recipe directions. Roll out the smaller dough disk. Transfer the dough carefully onto filled pie. Trim the edges of the dough leaving a 3/4-inch overhang. Fold the top edge under the bottom crust. Press the edges together to seal and flute the crust as desired. Cut slits in the top crust or prick it with a fork multiple places to vent steam. Bake according to specific recipe directions.

Two Methods for Pre-baking Pie Crusts (Typically done when making Cream Pies):

Pre-baking without weights: Thoroughly prick the bottom and sides of the unbaked pie dough with a fork (50 times) to prevent it from blistering or rising. Bake the crust in the lower third of the oven, at 425°F, 10-12 minutes or until the edges and bottom are light golden brown.

Pre-baking with weights: Thoroughly prick the bottom and sides of the unbaked pie dough with a fork (50 times) to prevent it from blistering or rising. Chill or freeze the dough for 30 minutes. Line the pie dough snugly with foil or parchment paper. Fill the pan with dried beans or pie weights. Bake at 375°F for 20 minutes. Remove the weights or beans and the foil or parchment paper. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F. Bake 5-10 minutes or until the edges and bottom of the crust are light golden brown.

Flaky Buttermilk Pie Crust - ☺

This recipe combines a variety of special considerations for making a delicious tasting flaky pie crust. It is a composite of three hopefully good and different Internet recipes and some general information about different types of flour. The idea is you want to use a relatively low protein flour to make pie crust so it isn't tough. In particular, you want to avoid the creation of much gluten during mixing of the dough ingredients as that will result in tough pie crust, and you can achieve the low gluten goal both by flour selection and by minimal processing of the pie dough ingredients. Also, in this recipe you effectively achieve lower protein/lower gluten by adding a small amount of cornstarch to all purpose flour, thus creating something closer to a pastry or cake flour.

The delicious taste component is supposed to come from the use of buttermilk, which is also supposed to add to the lightness/flakiness of the baked pie dough. Similarly, the use of all butter for the shortening, processed very cold, adds to flakiness, as does the method of minimal mixing, which starts to approximate the directions for creation of other special types of flaky dough, like Filo used in making Baklava.

Note that this recipe, as shown, is best when making sweet fruit filling pies. Otherwise, if you plan on having a savory meat or other filling, omit the sugars.

I rated this recipe as excellent, initially, until I made the pie dough. Yow! Terrible! Changes had to be made during the original attempt to even have a dough dry enough to form a ball rather than being too dry and having to add a bit of extra buttermilk. In short, what you see below is the result of my experiment ... ingredient amounts and methods that actually work, though still in process to achieve excellence. At times I just hate Internet recipes, for often they need a lot of help. I reduced the recipe rating to good and it will stay that way until I perfect it.

Note that you can make half of the dough for this recipe, using it as the bottom of a pie, and then put a crumb topping on the pie just prior to baking. A good combination for a crumb topping is 1/2 cup of flour, 2/3 cup of brown sugar, 1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon and 3 or 4 tablespoons of soft butter. Simply mix the dry ingredients together and then incorporate the butter to form the crumb topping. Do check for doneness during baking so the crumb topping does not become dark. You can cover the pie with aluminum foil when the topping is just right, a medium tan in color, to avoid possible darkening. You can also reduce the standard oven temperature used for baking fruit pies by 25 degrees or more for the last 20 minutes of baking.

Ingredients:

4 tbsp. of cornstarch

2 1/3 cups of all-purpose flour (also see the flours information at the end of this recipe)

1 tablespoon of sugar (optional)

1 teaspoon of salt

1 cup (1/2 lb.) of unsalted butter, cold and cut into 1/2" cubes

1/2 cup of cold buttermilk

egg wash (optional)

sanding sugar (optional, I use Demerara sugar)

Directions:

Combine the flour, cornstarch, sugar (if using), and salt in a bowl. Mix briefly to combine those ingredients.

Add the cold cubed butter gradually while tossing the mixture with a large spoon to coat the butter with the flour mixture.

Dump the mixture out onto a clean surface and use a rolling pin to roll the butter into thin sheets, combining it with the flour. Use a bench scraper to scrape the rolling pin and to bring the mixture back into a pile as necessary. Continue until all of the butter is "barely incorporated" into the flour. Do not over mix. The mixture will be very sloppy looking.

Special Note: I am thinking that the entire process of combining the flour mixture with the butter, manually, as described above, is silly, particularly when you can achieve 90 percent of the desired effect using an electric mixer with the paddle attachment (not the dough hook) on a very low speed for a limited amount of time, and a soft spatula to force the mixture down from the inside of the mixing bowl during mixing. I will be trying that approach soon as I experiment further. And as noted earlier, do not over mix, or the goal of having sheets of buttery dough will be lost.

Return the mixture to the bowl and place it in the freezer for 5 minutes to chill the butter.

Remove the mixture from the freezer, let it rest for a minute or two, and add half of the cold buttermilk evenly over the surface. Use a spoon and then your hands

to stir/combine the mixture until it comes together into a dough ball. Do not knead the dough. If the mixture is too dry, meaning it won't form a ball that stays together, add the rest of the buttermilk a teaspoon at a time and briefly mix it by hand to form the dough ball. Use only as much buttermilk as necessary to form the dough ball. Discard the remainder, if any, of the buttermilk.

Cut the dough into two roughly even pieces and flatten/form each piece into a disk about five inches in diameter. Wrap each disk in plastic wrap and chill it/them in the refrigerator for an hour.

When ready to roll out the dough, let it rest at room temperature for five to ten minutes. On a lightly floured surface, dust the disk surface with flour and then use a rolling pin to roll out the first disk of dough into a rough 13 inch circle. The dough should be between 1/8th and 1/4 inch thick. Transfer the dough to 9-inch diameter glass pie plate.

Note that the transfer may be a bit tricky for flaky pie dough as it may have a tendency to fall apart. The easiest way to do it is to roll the rolled out dough around the rolling pin, well centered, gently, and then unroll it from the rolling pin directly onto the pie plate from one side to the other. Part of that procedure is making sure the last of the rolled up dough is not sticking to what was rolled up earlier, else unrolling won't happen.

Once that is done, then gently lift a small area of dough near the outside edge of the pie plate to help/let dough in that area to drop to the bottom of the inside of the pie plate. Continue that process, working all the way around the pie plate. At that point the dough is perfectly fitted into the pie plate, except for excess dough.

Form/press the excess dough onto the top edge surface of the pie plate, leaving 1/2" of overhang beyond the edge of the glass, cutting off any additional excess with kitchen shears. Then fold the excess dough under itself on the top surface edge of the pie plate.

Fill the pie with the desired filling. Be generous ... Who wants to eat a wimpy pie that is mostly dough?

Repeat the rolling procedure with the second dough disk. Cut the dough into strips if you want to make a lattice over the filling, or leave the circle intact and cover the filling completely, using the same "roll up the dough onto the rolling pin" method used earlier, then cutting a few air vents on the top dough cover with a sharp knife.

If necessary, when covering the pie completely, cut off excess top dough as before, leaving 1/2" of dough overhang, then pinch the top and lower dough

sections together all around the top of the pie to seal them together and create an attractive border to the crust, as described next.

Fold the edges of the top and bottom crusts together and use your index fingers and thumb to pinch the dough into a pattern as you work your way around the pie plate.

Optionally, brush the top of the pie crust with egg wash (one egg whisked plus two tsp. of water, whisked together) and then sprinkle it with sanding (large grain) sugar. I like doing both for appearance and taste.

Bake the pie according to the instructions for your specific pie recipe. Different fillings will require different temperatures and time. Fruit filling pies typically are baked for 40 to 45 minutes at 400 degrees F. Sometimes it is necessary to cover the pie with aluminum foil for the last 15 minutes of baking to avoid having the top crust become too dark. In other words, check it out while it is baking and do whatever makes sense at that time, like at 20 minutes and every 10 minutes thereafter. Alternatively you can reduce the oven temperature by 25 degrees after the first 20 to 30 minutes of baking.

Let the pie cool to room temperature on a wood cutting board.

Serve the pie in whatever way pleases you, with or without ice cream, or coffee, etc.

Below is a list of the protein content of various flours. As noted earlier, higher protein content in the flour leads to higher gluten formation in the dough, which is desirable in bread dough but certainly not in pie crust dough:

Bread Flour: 14 - 16%

All Purpose Flour: 10 - 12%

Pastry Flour: 9%

Cake Flour: 7-8%

Add 2 tablespoons of corn starch to a scant cup of all purpose flour to approximate the protein content and handling behavior of cake or pastry flour. To do this, add two tbsp. of corn starch to a measuring cup, then fill it the rest of the way to the top with all purpose flour. I suggest varying the amount of cornstarch, starting with only 1 tablespoon in a cup of flour, until you find the best mixture for the flour you are using. Note that cornstarch will tend to make a dough sticky and you may find yourself adding flour to form a decent dough ball. So, experiment.

Freezing And Later Baking Unbaked Pies - ☺

Basic Instructions:

Frozen pies take longer to bake than freshly made pies, and they should be baked from the frozen state.

Freezing an unbaked pie yields a better fresh fruit flavor than freezing a baked pie, but the bottom crust tends to get soggy unless you follow the recommendation immediately below.

Freeze the filling and crust separately to prevent the fruit juice from penetrating and softening the lower crust during freezing.

Method:

Freeze the fruit filling in one plastic wrap lined pie pan and the bottom dough in another unlined identical size pie pan.

After freezing put the filling, without the plastic wrap, into the frozen bottom dough.

Let the outside edge of the bottom crust partially thaw. Brush that edge with a light coating of whisked egg white.

Cover the pie with room temperature dough, pinch the top dough together with the outside edge of the partially thawed bottom dough, cut slits as necessary, and freeze the combination.

Wrap the entire pie tightly in aluminum foil. Return the pie to the deep freeze until you are ready to bake it.

Baking:

Always put frozen pies on cookie sheets prior to baking to catch any juices that might overflow. Putting aluminum foil between the pie pan and the cookie sheet will usually keep the cookie sheet clean even with juice overflow, and that makes cleanup easier.

For baking, use 425 degrees for 25 minutes and then 350 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes, covering the top crust with aluminum foil if the crust bakes to a light golden color before the end of the second baking period.

Other Essential Considerations:

Light colored fruit pies (Peach, etc.) will retain color better if 1/2 tsp. of ascorbic acid is added to the filling prior to freezing.

Add an additional 1/2 tbsp. of cornstarch to juicy fillings prior to freezing to avoid later boiling over during baking. Tapioca is an even better choice as a supplemental thickening agent, or use modified food starch like Thermoflo® if it is sold at your supermarket.

Graham Cracker Pie Crust - ☺♥

This recipe is included in this book because a graham cracker pie crust is the best base crust to be used for the yummy Banana Cream Pie recipe shown earlier in this book. You can vary the amounts of the ingredients shown. For example, more sugar and butter will produce a heavier less crumb like crust, which you may or may not like.

Ingredients:

1 1/2 to 2 cups of finely ground graham cracker crumbs

1/4 cup of white sugar

6 tablespoons of butter, melted

1/2 teaspoon of ground cinnamon (optional)

Directions:

Mix the graham cracker crumbs, sugar, melted butter and cinnamon until well blended. Press the mixture into an 8 or 9 inch pie plate.

Bake at 375°F for 10 minutes. Cool.

Note: If the recipe calls for an unbaked pie shell then chill the unbaked crust in the refrigerator for about 1 hour.

Oreo® Cookie Pie Crust - ☺

Ingredients:

This recipe is included only because it is the best base crust for the fabulous Chocolate Cream Pie recipe shown earlier in this book.

As you might expect, an Oreo® cookie crust consists primarily of Oreo® cookies. While the amount of cookies needed to create a crust can vary depending on the size of the crust and the thickness desired, start with about 1-1/2 cups of finely crushed Oreo® cookie crumbs. That works out to approximately 20-22 Oreo® cookies. A 20 ounce package of Oreo's® typically contains about 51 cookies, so you may be able to make two crusts out of one box. You will also need 3 tablespoons of melted butter for each crust made. It doesn't matter which flavor of Oreo® is used as the recipe remains the same.

Directions:

First, mix the Oreo® cookie crumbs and butter in a bowl with a spoon until they're well mixed and have a consistent texture.

Use your fingers to press the crust into a pie plate or spring form pan.

If you're baking the filling in the crust, there's no need to bake the crust first.

If you are filling the crust with a cream filling that is chilled, you will want to bake the crust for 10-15 minutes at 350°F and then chill the crust in the refrigerator before filling it. Baking the crust helps to keep it firm when the pie is cut.

Oreo® Cookie Crust Variations:

To make a mint Oreo® cookie crust, add 1/2 teaspoon of mint extract to the melted butter before mixing with the crumbs.

Another option is a vanilla Oreo® cookie crust. Simply use vanilla Oreo's® instead of original Oreo's®, and add 1/2 teaspoon of vanilla extract to the recipe.

For a cinnamon or coffee taste, you can also try adding 1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon or 1 tablespoon of espresso powder.

PORK:

Baby Back Ribs - ☺♥T

To save time and effort I usually slow cook baby back ribs in a 225°F to 250°F oven, wrapped in aluminum foil to retain moisture, for four to five hours to render the fat out and also to have very tender meat. Then I use the fantastic Kansas City Classic Barbecue Sauce® and baste them and then slow cook them without being covered with aluminum foil for an additional 30 minutes. The recipe for the Kansas City Classic Barbecue Sauce® is next in the index of this section of Food Nirvana.

I found the recipe provided below on the Internet and I decided to provide it here. It is well thought out and it has good explanations, so I have included it in Food Nirvana as a "How to" item for folks interested in barbecuing meat on a charcoal grill. As I recall, it is a Meathead's Amazing Ribs® recipe.

I make baby back ribs fairly often, and I have smoked many meats, fowl and fish so I know the information provided is good. In fact it is very educational for those lacking experience when barbecuing pork, and that is why I included it.

Note that there is a recommendation in this recipe to slash the baby back ribs membrane on the backside of the ribs between the bones while raw, or if you can, remove the membrane altogether. These steps are supposed to aid in rendering the fat out during baking or smoking. It sounds like a good idea but I have yet to try it. Also, complete removal of the membrane is said to be somewhat difficult.

I preserved the most of the text of this recipe as I found it on the Internet, so the first person comments within it are not mine.

Serves 2 adults.

Preparation time: Overnight dry rub marinating is optional.

Cooking time: We will be cooking low and slow at about 225°F, so allow 5 to 6 hours for St. Louis Cut ribs and 3 to 4 hours for baby back ribs. Thicker, meatier slabs take longer, and if you use rib holders so they are crammed close to each other, add another hour.

Hardware:

One grill with a cover. You can use a dedicated smoker or any charcoal grill or gas grill as long as it has a cover. A tight fitting cover with adjustable vents like those on the Weber® Kettle is best.

One 18 pound bag of charcoal briquettes for grills or smokers. You won't use all that charcoal, but because you will need more on cold, windy, or wet days than on sunny and warm days, have a full bag on hand. Hardwood lump is best, but regular briquettes will do fine. Absolutely do not use the instant igniting stuff that has solvent in it. Chimney starters are by far the best way to start charcoal, especially for long slow cooking where the smell of the solvent in charcoal starter fluid can ruin the taste of the meat.

One tank of propane for gas cookers. You won't need it all, but, until you get the hang of this technique, don't risk running out by starting with a partial tank.

Eight ounces of wood chips. It doesn't matter how many slabs you are cooking, 8 ounces should be enough. I prefer chunks of apple, oak, or hickory for pork. Never use any kind of pine unless you want meat that tastes like turpentine. Never use construction lumber because it is often treated with poisonous chemicals to discourage rot and termites. You do not need to soak the wood.

One pair of long handled tongs.

1 sauce brush, preferably one of the silicon types

One good digital oven thermometer

One six pack of cold beer (for the cook!)

One lawn chair

One good novel and plenty of tunes

Software:

One slab of SLC (Saint Louis Cut) ribs. That's 1/2 slab per adult. If you use baby back ribs get a whole slab per adult. You'll probably have leftovers, but what's wrong with that? SLC's are the meatiest and most flavorful ribs. They are spareribs with the tips removed so they form a nice rectangular rack. You can use baby back ribs if you prefer. They are smaller and cook faster. Country ribs come from the shoulder and are not really ribs, so don't use them for this recipe. Get fresh, not frozen meat if possible. Fresh meat has the best pork flavor and the most moisture. Ever notice the pink liquid when you defrost meat? You can't

get that back into the meat, so buy fresh meat whenever possible. Ask the butcher to remove the membrane on the backside.

Three tablespoons vegetable oil

Four tablespoons Meathead's Memphis Rub® or a similar spice rub

One cup of your favorite barbecue sauce.

Procedure:

Rinse the ribs in cool water to remove any bone bits from the butchering and any bacterial film that grew in the package (don't worry, cooking will sterilize the meat). Pat dry with paper towels.

If the butcher has not removed the membrane from the backside, do it yourself. There can be a lot of fat under there and you want to scrape some of it off. Insert a butter knife under the membrane, then your fingers, work a section loose, grip it with a paper towel, and peel it off. Finally, trim the excess fat from both sides. If you can't get the skin off, with a sharp knife, cut slashes through it every inch so some of the fat will render out during the cooking.

Coat the meat with a thin layer of vegetable oil because most of the flavorings in the rub are oil soluble, not water soluble. The oil should help the flavor get into the surface and for a better crust. A lot of seasoned barbecue cooks use a base of mustard, but I think oil works better. Sprinkle enough Meathead's Memphis Dust® to coat all surfaces but not so much that the meat doesn't show through. That is about 2 tablespoons per side depending on the size of the slab. Many of the herbs and spices in the rub are oil soluble, so the vegetable oil will help them penetrate a little better. Spread the Memphis Dust on the meat, rub it in, and let it sit in the fridge for about an hour. Some folks insist on putting the rub on the night before, but I don't think this is necessary.

Set up the cooker for two cooking zones. That means that one side is hot and the other is not. If you have a gas grill, use only one burner. Put a disposable aluminum pan with water on top of the hot burner. Moisture and combustion gasses in a propane grill combine to create a seductive, bacon-like flavor in the meat. If it has only one burner, put the water pan between the meat and the burner. If you have a charcoal grill, start with a full chimney, about 75 briquettes, and push the coals to one side. You can use a water pan, but it is not necessary. If you have an offset firebox smoker, follow the instructions for setting up an offset smoker. If you have a bullet smoker like the Weber® Smokey Mountain, again follow the directions.

Adjust the temperature. Preheat your cooker to about 225°F and try to keep it there throughout the cook. Adjust the air intake dampers at the bottom to control heat on charcoal grills. Intake dampers are more effective than exhaust dampers for controlling the temp because they reduce the supply of oxygen to the coals. Take your time getting the temp right. Cooking at 225°F will allow the meat to roast low and slow, liquefying the collagen in connective tissues and melting fats without getting the proteins knotted in a bunch. It's a magic temperature that creates silky texture, adds moisture, and keeps the meat tender. If you can't hit 225°F, get as close as you can. Don't go under 200°F and try not to go over 250°F.

Smoke. For charcoal or gas cookers, add 4 ounces of wood at this time. On a gas grill, put the wood right as close to the flame as possible. On a charcoal grill, put it right on the hot coals. Resist the temptation to add more wood. Nothing will ruin a meal faster and waste money better than over smoked meat. You can always add more the next time you cook, but you cannot take it away if you over smoke.

Relax. Put the slabs in the cooker on the cooler side of the grill, meaty side up. Close the lid and go drink a beer and read a novel.

More smoke. When the smoke disappears after 20-30 minutes, add another 2 ounces of wood. After the first hour, stop adding wood. Adding wood at the beginning of the cook allows better penetration before the meat surface seals itself.

If you have more than one slab on, halfway through the cook you will need to move the ribs closest to the fire away from the heat, and the slabs far from the flame in closer. Leave the meat side up. There is no need to flip the slabs. Otherwise, keep your lid on. Opening the lid just upsets the delicate balance of heat, moisture, and air inside your cooker. It can also significantly lengthen the cooking time.

The Texas crutch. This step is optional. It involves wrapping the ribs in foil with a little liquid for up to an hour to speed cooking and tenderize a bit, but not a lot. Almost all competition cooks use the crutch to get an edge. If you want to skip this step, feel free, you'll still have killer ribs.

The bend test. Do this after 5 to 6 hours for St. Louis Cut ribs or 3 to 4 hours for baby back ribs. The exact time will depend on how thick the slabs are and how steady you have kept the temperature. If you use rib holders so they are crammed close to each other, add another hour. Check to see if they are ready. I like the bend test (a.k.a. the bounce test). Pick up the slab with tongs and bounce them. If the surface cracks and is almost ready to break, it is ready.

Sauce. Now paint both sides with your favorite homemade barbecue sauce or store bought sauce and put it back in to bake the sauce on. Better still, move the slab directly over the hottest part of the grill in order to caramelize and crisp the sauce. On a charcoal grill, just move the slab over the coals. On a gas grill, remove the water pan and crank up all the burners. On a water smoker, remove the water pan and move the meat close to the coals. On an offset smoker, put a grate over the coals in the firebox and put the meat there. With the lid open so you don't roast the meat from above, sizzle the sauce on one side (only for a few minutes with a hot grill) and then the other. One coat of a thick sauce should be enough, but if you need two, go ahead, but no more! Don't hide all the fabulous flavors under too much sauce. If you think you'll want more sauce, put some in a bowl on the table, but only if the sauce tastes okay without caramelizing.

If you've done all this right, you will notice that there is a thin pink layer beneath the surface of the meat. This does not mean it is undercooked! It is the highly prized *smoke ring* caused by the combustion gases and the smoke. It is a sign of Amazing Ribs. Now be ready to take a bow when the applause swells from the audience.

Baked Ham - ☺♥T

Baked ham is not the typical type of recipe found in Food Nirvana as it is so simple to make. I decided to include a standard recipe simply for completeness, and the thought that once baked, a ham can be used in many different ways. Think of a slab of warm, moist, tender ham, or a ham sandwich, or ham salad sandwich, or fried ham for breakfast, served with eggs and toast, etc. Leftover ham can be chopped and used in many other dishes, like in a creamy sauce with melted cheese over pasta, or as the meat ingredient in lentil or other soups.

Note that the directions in this recipe are for baking an uncut half ham. If you are heating a spiral ham then follow the directions provided on the package.

In general most of the Internet recipes I read tell the cook to bake a ham on a rack in a large skillet or baking pan. The ham is to be loosely tented with aluminum foil because later serving dried out ham is a mistake you don't want to make. A cup or two of water can be put into the skillet/pan to help keep the ham moist during baking, but the ham is not supposed to be in the water.

I am ignoring any recommendations for additional accompaniments on the surface of the ham during baking, like pineapple rings or cloves or a later glaze. Do what pleases you.

The oven temperature is to be 325 degrees F.

The baking time depends in part on whether or not you have a half ham or a whole ham, but it is also based, most importantly, on having the recommended internal ham temperature of 140 to 145 degrees F at the end of the baking.

In general, plan on 18 to 20 minutes per pound for a ten pound ham, remembering to check the internal temperature every 15 minutes after the first two and one half hours of baking. Use an instant read thermometer with a sharp probe to puncture the ham surface and measure the internal meat temperature in the center of the ham, but not at/on the bone.

Additional water (one or two cups) can be added to the skillet/baking pan after ninety minutes of baking if the first addition has evaporated.

At the end of baking, put the tented ham on a large wood cutting board and let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes before carving it.

Carve the ham with a large, sharp knife, or even better with an electric knife, holding the ham in place, as needed, with a large meat fork. The thickness of the carved ham pieces will be whatever you decide you want to serve to your guests.

Remember to discard excess fat or skin from the carved pieces before serving them. If you are not serving the slices immediately then cover the serving dish with aluminum foil and keep the ham in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Cover the remaining ham with the aluminum foil tent and let it rest until it is at room temperature, then wrap the ham completely with aluminum foil, put it on a dinner plate, and refrigerate it. You can cut and enjoy additional slices of ham for the next few days, but any remaining ham after three days should be used at that time in other cooked recipes, or frozen, or discarded.

Meal accompaniments are your choice, but I particularly enjoy baked sweet potatoes cut in half lengthwise while hot, then score the insides deeply with a knife, and spread the scored halves generously with soft butter (that will quickly melt), then salt them. My sweetheart Peggy prefers regular baked potatoes with sour cream and real bacon bits.

If you are feeding ravenous teenagers or men/women who do active physical labor then consider baking/serving some store bought biscuits.

I also suggest serving steamed buttered broccoli or cauliflower, or a tossed salad with the dressing of your choice, and perhaps a chilled white wine like Sauvignon Blanc, along with glasses of ice water.

For dessert I suggest ice cream, and perhaps some freshly made hot coffee.

Enjoy!

Canadian Bacon - ☺♥T

The first version of this recipe originated via the Serious Eats® website. The pork made using low temperature smoking was perfect, so all the kudos for that enhancement goes to Serious Eats®. Except, of course, for my changes related to brine salt content (in my opinion the Canadian Bacon needed to be more salty), curing time and less expensive maple flavoring. Also, by comparing the Serious Eats® recipe to that from two other sources I found some interesting and important variations in ingredients, amounts and curing time. I decided to make this a teaching recipe for your benefit and your safety.

My goal was/is to combat the increase in pork prices by using pork loin for a variety of foods. Pork loin can be used in many different ways, and the effective yield per pound (about 75 percent), given its limited surface fat/silverskin, is the best of all pork cuts. Beyond that, pork loin is the meat typically used to make Canadian Bacon and various other smoked/unsmoked lunch meat products. In late 2024 the supermarket cost of pork loin is \$2.99 per pound. That is twice the price of pork loin back in 2021, when it cost \$1.49 per pound. With difficulty, I withhold further comments about the basis for the change in price.

I changed the Serious Eats® recipe to increase the kosher salt in the curing brine. Also the choice of ingredients for maple flavoring. Other than that, the flavors were fine. Undercooking the pork loin during smoking (140 °F final internal temperature) yielded a beautifully tender Canadian Bacon, and credit for that unique perfection goes to Serious Eats®. Later light skillet frying of thin slices of the Canadian Bacon elevates the final, safe temperature, to between 145 °F and 150 °F.

Digression (or, let's dig into the essentials):

The proper amounts of chemicals and seasonings to use when wet curing pork loin are considerably different from amounts used for dry curing. This recipe is for wet curing only. Do not use chemical amounts recommended in any recipe for dry curing when you intend to wet cure the meat.

Per the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), sodium nitrite content is not allowed commercially to exceed 200 ppm in the finished product. Of course, the minimum is about 120 ppm to have protection from botulism bacteria, which is the real safety reason we need to use a curing chemical. That allows a broad range of sodium nitrite content, where the upper limit is a matter of avoiding excessive/potentially harmful levels of consumption and the lower limit a matter of limiting the curing time as well as providing bacterial protection. Let's take a quick (no, make that long) look at what that means when doing wet curing.

The actual content of sodium nitrite in cured pork is what migrated into the meat after earlier migration of sodium nitrite that chemically reacted with the myoglobin in the meat, which turned the color of the meat pink and flavored it. Once chemically reacted, that amount of sodium nitrite was no longer sodium nitrite. It became nitric oxide, which further reacted with the myoglobin, turning it pink. At the end of curing all of the meat myoglobin has been reacted, thus sodium nitrite that migrates into the meat during curing but is not reacted with myoglobin remains as sodium nitrite. This is the reference to the FDA limit of 200 parts per million as the upper allowed limit of sodium nitrite content after the meat has been cured.

Let's play with some numbers to better understand what 200 parts per million actually means when translated to the amounts of sodium nitrite and meat amounts you will actually use. If you are curing a million pounds of meat then the allowed upper limit for sodium nitrite content in the meat after curing is 200 pounds. Well, I haven't cured a million pounds of meat, or anything remotely near that amount, so let's break it down to ten pounds of meat stepwise.

200 pounds of sodium nitrite in one million pounds of cured meat is the same as 20 pounds per hundred thousand, or 2 pounds within ten thousand pounds of finished product. Now let's go metric. One pound is 454 grams, so two pounds is roughly 900 grams. So if you have 900 grams of sodium nitrite within ten thousand pounds of meat then that is the same as saying you have 9 grams of sodium nitrite in 100 pounds of meat.

So, how much residual curing agent (Prague #1 pink curing salt) is required to have 9 grams of sodium nitrite remaining in the meat at the end of curing? The sodium nitrite content of Prague #1 pink curing salt is only 6.25 percent of the total weight used, so we divide 9 by 0.0625 and arrive at the value of 144 grams of residual Prague #1 pink curing salt in 100 pounds of meat, or, 14.4 grams in ten pounds of meat. Of course, ordinary salt is 93.75 percent of that total of 144 grams. Now that range of numbers is a lot easier to understand.

Okay, if 454 grams is one pound then one ounce is 454 divided by 16 ounces. That number is 29 grams per ounce. That number is about twice the residual amount of sodium nitrite that we would want in ten pounds of meat, so that translates, going back to the English system, to one half ounce of Prague #1 pink curing salt legally remaining in ten pounds of meat after curing. Of course, it is the curing brine that contains initially all of the Prague #1 pink curing salt and thus all of the sodium nitrite, and we have to know how much to put into the brine to cure the meat, for at the end of the curing period most of the Prague #1 pink curing salt, and thus the sodium nitrite, will remain dissolved in the brine, and not be in the meat. For 14.4 grams of sodium nitrite to remain in ten pounds

of meat, and that being roughly half the amount put into the brine, you would put one ounce of Prague #1 pink curing salt into two gallons of water and cure the ten pounds of meat in that brine. Of course, the result approximates the upper FDA limit of 200 parts per million. You can decide to limit the parts per million to perhaps 150, and you would do that by proportionally reducing the amount of Prague #1 pink curing salt put into the brine.

I know this is tedious, but once done you will actually understand exactly how that amount of residual Prague #1 pink curing salt gets into the meat. Basically wet curing means putting dry chemicals into water, (plain salt and Prague #1 pink curing salt), mixing those chemicals into the water, thus creating a salty brine, and then submerging the meat into the brine, refrigerating it, and waiting for the conversion of plain water within the meat to the approximate concentration of chemicals within the brine, by migration of the chemical ions in the brine into the meat. Given that meat itself can be up to 60 to 70 percent water it is easy to understand that migration of ions from regular salt and of sodium nitrite into the meat is not difficult over short distances, like a few inches (2" to 4") of meat thickness. It takes a few days to happen and that amount of time depends on the thickness of the meat, which will be described a bit later.

The net effect is to partially dilute the amount of chemicals in the brine by the amount of plain water content in the meat. This happens at the same time sodium nitrite is being reacted with myoglobin, and later with migration that wasn't reacted, so the amount of residual sodium nitrite in the meat approximates but does not quite equal the concentration of the brine, for 30% to 40% of the meat is not water. Equilibrium of ion concentration between the brine and the liquid of the meat is the approximate end result.

The change in concentration of sodium nitrite in the brine is thus seen as the additional water from the meat and the reduction of amount of sodium nitrite due to migration into the meat, with some of that reacting with the meat myoglobin. Yes, this is becoming damned tedious, but we're almost done.

Considering all of the experimenting done over the years, and the accurate measurement of initial and final amounts of chemicals, the net result is you need about 1/2 teaspoon (2.9 grams) of Prague #1 pink curing salt per pound of meat put into the water to make the brine, and enough water to be able to submerge the meat under the surface of the brine. In effect, the amount of Prague #1 pink curing salt is based on what will remain in the brine and the meat after curing, such that it is the combined weight of the water and the meat that determines how much curing agent to use. The safe/easy way to do that is to cure only four to five pounds of meat in one gallon of water/brine, as described in the recipes below.

I researched numerous Internet sources to determine the safe quantity of curing salt (Prague #1 pink curing salt, which is 6.25% sodium nitrite and 93.75% sodium chloride) and the recommended quantity of kosher salt, which is the transport chemical that helps the curing salt to penetrate the meat. In wet curing the amounts of chemicals used are related to the weight of the meat and the volume (weight) of water used, which in turn must be sufficient to cover the meat. In dry curing the amounts of chemicals used are directly related only to the weight of the meat.

Now let's review the essentials with a more simple look at what happens during wet brine curing:

The initial concentration of curing salt and kosher salt will change as wet cure brine mixes with and changes the ion content of the water initially present in the meat. It is actually a slow process of equilibrium in which the salts migrate into the meat and finally fully penetrate it, but with only a very small amount of the sodium nitrite, for much of it remains in the brine outside the meat, else we would not be talking about equilibrium. Beyond that, some of the sodium nitrite reacts chemically with the myoglobin in the meat to form nitric oxide, which is not potentially toxic like sodium nitrite and which reacts further with the meat. That reaction is what turns the meat pink in color ... and thus how you know whether or not the meat is completely cured, ergo no dull brown areas, especially at the center of the meat.

Now, if all of the myoglobin has reacted with sodium nitrite then the remaining sodium nitrite in the meat is what you will ultimately eat, and that is what you want to avoid in excess, as in ingesting too much, ergo, no more than 200 parts per million. The point is the amount of sodium nitrite and kosher salt put into the brine is supposed to be enough to react with all of the meat myoglobin in a certain number of days, but not enough to leave a high remaining concentration of sodium nitrite or kosher salt in the meat at the end of the cure. That is why the amount of curing time is limited to the number of days required for the salts to migrate all the way into the meat, but not much longer than that, for there might then be an increase in meat content of kosher salt and sodium nitrite due to some continuing migration of salts from the more concentrated brine into the meat. You do not want excessive kosher salt to migrate into the meat, for that will make the meat taste way too salty.

If you think about it, curing time only needs to be long enough for unreacted sodium nitrite to reach the center of the meat. So we pretty much intend to chop off the curing time as soon as we are sure the sodium nitrite reached the center of the meat.

In review, the final safe concentration range for sodium nitrite in the meat, per the FDA, is 120 ppm to 200 ppm. That implies you have some slack in curing time provided you did not use excess sodium nitrite when making the brine. Just don't assume you should/could intentionally extend the curing time by more than 20% of the minimum required days to cure a piece of meat, for that is when you risk getting the meat too salty and potentially higher in sodium nitrite content.

Well, now you know, if you were able to follow the details of the digression. If not, just follow the recipe directions exactly. Better, come back to the digression for a reread some days or weeks into the future, and you are likely to find it to be easier to understand as the pieces come together in your thinking.

All the above having been said, let us look at three different recipes for wet brine and figure out the best to use in making Canadian Bacon.

One recipe I found for brine/wet curing a four to five pound pork loin is:

One gallon of water, 90 grams (3.17 ounces) of Prague #1 pink curing salt and 400 grams (14 ounces) of kosher salt. You will note that the amount of curing salt is far more than what is recommended in the two recipes shown next. This should be alarming or at least confusing to the novice. Do not use the curing agent amount indicated in this first recipe. Yet, the amount of kosher salt recommended is very good. Note that kosher salt should be used by weight, not by volume, for the different brands have widely different weights per unit volume based on crystal size and shape.

Next, Meathead's Amazing Ribs® web recipe for brine/wet curing pork loin differs from the one above and from the Serious Eats® recipe, and I include a short list of the Amazing Ribs® ingredients next. Based on my experience it is low in kosher salt and seasonings, yet a good reference for the primary curing ingredient (Prague #1 pink curing salt) and for the required curing time for a thick, five pound pork loin. Thus, already you can understand that when using curing chemicals containing sodium nitrite it is wise to crosscheck any recipe with at least one other recipe from a well known source. It is a matter of avoiding toxic amounts of curing agent, while having enough to kill any botulism bacteria, and let's be honest ... a lot of Internet content is questionable at best.

5 lb., surface fat and silverskin removed, pork loin, 4 inches thick, fairly uniform thickness/any thin end(s) cut off

1.00 gallon of warm distilled water (or at least first boil and then chill tap water to kill bacteria)

2.6 teaspoons or 14.56 grams (about 1/2 ounce) of Prague #1 pink curing salt

Special Note: If the meat weight is 10 pounds instead of 5 pounds you do adjust the amount of Prague #1 pink curing salt, but you do not double it. For a 10 pound weight of meat the Prague powder #1 amount changes from 14.56 grams to roughly 17.3 grams. This nonlinear change, for other quantities, typically requires the use of a special calculator, using a tool created by a Professor Blonder and found at the Amazing Ribs® website. Use it as needed.

0.75 cup of sugar

0.75 cup of Morton® Coarse kosher Salt (measuring by volume instead of weight is not good, but this recipe uses a specific brand of kosher salt)

1.00 tablespoon of powdered garlic

Cure time: 10.0 days refrigerated at 34 to 38 °F

Note that it is the thickness of the meat that determines the number of days necessary to complete a wet cure, for the migration of salts into the meat is slow. Flat meats like brisket require twice as much cure time as tube shaped meats like pork loin. As this recipe uses pork loin, allow one day of curing time for meat 1" thick ... 2.5 days if 2" thick ... 4 days if 2.5" thick ... 5.6 days if 3" thick ... 7.7 days if 3.5" thick ... 10 days if 4" thick.

Note that the required amount of Prague #1 pink curing salt depends on both the weight of the meat and weight of the water, combined. For 2.5 pounds of meat in 1/2 gallon of water you need to use 7.3 grams of Prague #1 pink curing salt. Increase that to 11.8 grams for 5 pounds of meat. If you are using one gallon of water you need to use 11.8 grams of Prague #1 pink curing salt for 2.5 pounds of meat and 14.6 grams for 5 pounds of meat.

I recommend using the Amazing Ribs® quantity of Prague #1 pink curing salt per pound of meat, and the cure time, with the Serious Eats® recipe seasoning ingredients. A 3" thick, 4 pound pork loin will have a short cure time of 5.6 days, noting that cure time can be extended by 20% with no problem to be sure it is complete. That is significantly longer than the cure time used in the original Serious Eats® recipe, which was three to five days.

Putting it all together, I use the kosher salt recommendation from the first recipe, the curing agent and curing time from the Amazing Ribs® recipe, and the seasonings and later smoking directions from the Serious Eats® recipe. They all had something superior to contribute. The net result is my Food Nirvana teaching recipe, and the Canadian Bacon produced by using this recipe is excellent.

Now let's proceed with the (modified) Serious Eats® recipe for Canadian Bacon ...

Ingredients: (12 to 16 servings)

1 boneless pork loin, trimmed of excess fat and silverskin (about 4 pounds, 3 inches thick), cut in half crosswise

1 gallon of water

0.75 to 1 1/2 cups of kosher salt (this should be done by weight, not volume. I suggest using 1 cup if your kosher salt weighs 5 ounces per cup. Adjust the amount as needed based on the weight of one cup of the salt you are using, remembering that the salt weight should ordinarily be about 3% to 6% of the water weight. [But I wanted the Canadian bacon to taste more salty!])

1 cup of maple syrup (or, one or two tsp. of concentrated maple flavoring [Mapleine®] plus 1/2 cup of brown sugar)

1/3 cup of light brown sugar

2 teaspoons (13.3 grams) of Prague #1 pink curing salt (at the rate of one half teaspoon per pound of meat)

4 bay leaves

3 medium cloves of garlic, diced (I used large cloves and that is what I recommend)

1 tablespoon of black peppercorns (I cracked them to better release flavor)

For later smoking of the cured pork loin:

A smoker. I use a vertical electric smoker made by East Oak®.

About one and one half to two cups of light flavor intensity smoking wood chips, such as apple, maple or cherry, or if you want stronger smoke flavor you can use hickory wood chips

Directions:

To make the curing brine, combine 2 quarts of the water and all of the kosher salt, maple (flavor) syrup, brown sugar, Prague #1 pink curing salt, bay leaves, diced garlic, and cracked peppercorns in a two gallon pot.

Bring the contents to a boil over high heat, while stirring to dissolve the salt and sugar. Boil for 1 minute, then remove the pot from the heat.

Stir in the remaining 2 quarts of water. Refrigerate the pot contents until the curing brine is completely chilled.

Fully submerge the pork loin halves in the curing brine and let them sit in the refrigerator for 6 days. Here is where you need to consider the thickness of the pork loin ... if it is 3" thick then six days is about right. If it is 4" thick then cure it for ten days, noting that curing it for an extra two days beyond ten days pretty much guarantees the curing agent will have migrated to the center of the pork loin.

Alternatively, put each loin half into a 10" x 16" vacuum seal bag, pour half of the curing brine into each bag and then vacuum seal the bags. Then put them into the refrigerator for 6 [or a maximum of 7] days (or up to a maximum of 12 days if the maximum thickness of the pork loin is 4"). Turn the bags over once per day. That is the procedure I use.

Remove (or cut out) the pork from the curing brine/pot or bag, rinse it, discard the brine, rinse the pot (if you used it for curing the pork) and place the cured pork loin halves into it. Add enough fresh water to fully submerge the pieces of pork loin. Let it sit for 30 minutes, then remove the pork loin halves from the water and pat them dry with paper towels. The soaking step removes excess salt from close to the surface of the cured pork loin.

Allow the pork loin halves to air dry for one hour on a raised cooling rack. This creates a better surface for smoke to adhere. It is called the pellicle.

Put about one and one half to two cups of apple or maple or cherry (or hickory) wood chips into the smoke tray of the vertical electric smoker.

Put a disposable aluminum foil pan on a low smoker shelf. That will capture moisture dripping from the meat during smoking, and help keep the smoker interior clean.

Pre-heat the smoker to 250°F, or until the wood starts to smolder and produce smoke.

When the wood is smoldering and producing smoke, reduce the heat to 225°F.

Place the cured pork pieces into the smoker on a high shelf and smoke them to an internal temperature of 140°F, using a wireless thermometer inserted into thickest part of the pork loin. This will typically take about 1 1/2 hours (or less). If you do not have a wireless thermometer you can use an instant read thermometer and open the smoker door after one and one half hours, and then

every 10 minutes, to test the internal temperature of the pork and thus know when to remove it from the smoker.

You now have Canadian Bacon. Remove the Canadian Bacon pieces from the smoker.

Let the Canadian Bacon pieces cool for 30 to 60 minutes wrapped tightly in aluminum foil.

Unwrap the pieces of Canadian Bacon and vacuum seal and refrigerate them. Alternatively, you can keep the Canadian Bacon wrapped in the aluminum foil and refrigerated. Use/lightly fry thin slices of all of the Canadian Bacon within two weeks unless you freeze an uncut large piece of Canadian Bacon, which will extend the use period to two months. With good vacuum sealing the use period of frozen Canadian bacon is pretty much whatever you want, say up to six months.

A Final Digression:

I cheat a bit and vacuum seal the remaining piece of meat after I have cut thin slices from the cured hunk of Canadian bacon. That allows me a bit more flexibility in refrigerated usage time, for it blocks out air and any possible external contaminant. Thus, I am comfortable keeping the Canadian bacon refrigerated for up to one month by doing the extra vacuum sealing each time a piece of meat is used for slicing. You, of course, must make your own decisions regarding what you will do for convenience and safety.

It all comes down to many bacteria being aerobic, which means they need oxygen to grow/survive. Vacuum sealing removes the air and thus the needed oxygen, so the meat does not become contaminated with aerobic types of bacteria during refrigerated storage. But note that what I do with vacuum sealing does not protect the meat against anaerobic bacteria, though residual sodium nitrite in the meat does protect the meat from the botulism bacteria (*Clostridium botulinum*) and others.

I won't go into any detail in this document about the combined use of sodium nitrite with sodium ascorbate or sodium benzoate or potassium sorbate in inhibiting bacterial/mold growth, but note that commercially better lunch meat products (and many other types of products) do survive relatively long periods of refrigerator storage (months), and even non-refrigerator storage (jerky), especially prior to the package being opened, and even retain consumption safety for weeks after being opened. Beyond that, chemicals like BHT (butylated hydroxytoluene) and BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole) are used as antioxidants, so better lunch meats exposed to oxygen after package opening still retain their freshness. Those subject areas are outside the scope of this document, but you

can read about some examples in the early chapters of Food Nirvana. If you are really curious you might use the website <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/additives-meat-and-poultry> to learn more about all kinds of food additives.

Okay, now let's get back to the recipe and complete it:

Cut the Canadian Bacon into 1/8" to 1/4" thick slices, cross grain, and pan fry it briefly in a hot, thick bottom skillet, sprayed/coated lightly inside with a small amount of peanut oil or canola oil.

Fry it only on one side for about two minutes, using a bacon press (If necessary ... I didn't need to use a bacon press) to keep the slices flat during frying, then put the slices on a plate in a 150°F warming oven. Note: You are essentially just warming the undercooked meat to a safe temperature (145°F to 150°F) that will kill any possible remaining bacteria (you took care of the botulism bacteria concern with the sodium nitrite), but we'll call it frying. The sooner you use it after limited "frying" the more moist and tender (and delicious) it will be.

Repeat the frying step for the rest of the meat slices you cut.

You now have a plate full of warm, fine tasting, tender Canadian Bacon.

Serve it along with other breakfast foods. One excellent choice is to put it on half of a cut, toasted, buttered English muffin, top it with a poached egg, and cover that with hollandaise sauce and a sprinkling of chopped chives. That delight is called Eggs Benedict. Try it, along with some hot, freshly brewed coffee.

Enjoy!

Chicken Fried Pork Chops - 😊♥

We are usually familiar with the type of fried beef steak or fried chicken filet known as chicken fried steak or chicken fried chicken. Put simply the flesh item is batter coated and deep fried to produce a relatively flat, thin, crispy coated and tasty entree.

Typically the flesh portion of each chop is about six to eight ounces in weight, such that the final fried entree looks and is large, roughly the equivalent of a circle five to six inches in diameter. The amount of fried batter on the surface of the pork chop is sufficient to be considered the carbohydrate part of a meal.

At various times past I have purchased a very economical variety of pork titled sirloin end chops. They are not considered to be the prime meat areas so the price is about \$1.80 per pound in the year 2024. They are about 1/2" thick and of the right size to be used in making Chicken Fried Pork Chops. Given rampant inflation in the USA at this time in history, I smile knowing I can make a nice entree to serve three adults for about \$10 total cost for all ingredients! Plus about \$5 total cost to make three very nice side salads. And about \$4 for three bottles of good beer, like Corona®. You might compare that sum to about \$48 to feed three people the same food type at a meal in an average restaurant. Of course, they will also provide French fries ... just what you need, right? Beverage, tip and tax extra! Each bottle of beer will cost about \$7. Think ... about \$88 total compared to \$19 when you make the meal at home.

It is important to process these chops as purchased by washing them and then using paper towels to mostly dry the surfaces. Then all external fat areas are cut away and discarded. After that it is up to the cook to decide whether or not to cut out the areas of bone. Leaving them in place will produce a large final fried piece of meat, whereas cutting out the bone areas will most likely increase the number of pieces of meat but they will be proportionally smaller.

Pork chops containing bone(s) will distort in shape during frying due to the pieces of meat not being uniform. Instead, each raw pork chop is multiple areas of meat and bone loosely held together by thin fatty membrane. The distortion during frying does not hurt the final result at all. It simply looks different from flat servings of chicken fried chicken or chicken fried steak.

Note that this recipe calls for a second but short frying step. That is a very nice way to assure the fried batter is completely crisp on the surface of the pork at serving time, while the meat inside remains moist and tender. Do you have leftover batter? Why not make fried onion rings? Easy and yummy!

This item is not health food, but it sure is tasty. If you decide to make it then serve some type of healthy salad or vegetable medley as a side dish.

Here is one final point ... the use of multiple flours to control gluten formation, toasted sesame oil to impart a subtle extra flavor, and double frying to guarantee having crisp fried batter, are all techniques used in making fried Oriental foods. You will be pleased with the results.

Okay, let's get to it ...

Ingredients: (2 to 3 servings)

6 pork sirloin end chops (about 2.5 to 3.0 pounds)

1/2 cup of all purpose flour

1/3 cup of rice flour

1/3 cup of finely ground corn meal or corn flour

1/4 cup of corn starch (for the batter)

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of black pepper

1 teaspoon of garlic powder

2 jumbo or 3 extra large eggs

1 1/4 cups of water, divided

1/4 cup of toasted sesame oil

1 cup (or more) of corn starch for dredging the chops

1 gallon plastic bag to hold the corn starch for dredging the chops

2 to 3 quarts of either canola oil or peanut oil for frying

Directions:

Wash the chops in cold water and then lay them individually on sections of paper towel. Then press paper towel sections on top of the chops to partially dry them.

Cut away all areas that are completely fat. Optionally, cut away the bones.

Make the batter as follows:

Whisk the eggs in a two quart bowl. Then add one cup of the water and again whisk.

Add the toasted sesame oil and whisk briefly.

Put all of the dry ingredients in a one quart bowl and whisk them gently to mix the ingredients evenly.

Gradually add the dry ingredients mixture to the egg mixture while whisking.

When the batter is well mixed, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate it for 30 minutes.

Pre-warm a large serving bowl lined with paper towels in a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Start heating the oil slowly in a 6 quart (or larger) pot on low heat. The goal is to have the oil be 350 degrees F when all other preparations are done and it is time to start frying the pork pieces. Use an instant read thermometer. If the oil temperature is at 350 degrees F before you are ready to fry the pork then temporarily turn off the heat.

Now dredge the pork chops/pieces in corn starch in the one gallon plastic bag, one large chop/piece at a time. Remember to close the top of the bag before shaking it. Use tongs to extract the dredged pork from the bag. Put all pieces of dredged pork on a plate, on top of each other.

If you use all the corn starch and still have more pork to dredge then put another 1/2 cup of corn starch into the one gallon plastic bag and continue the dredging.

Take the batter from the refrigerator and whisk it. It will likely be thicker than what is needed, for the batter should be thin for frying the chops, so add 1/4 cup of water and whisk until the batter is uniform.

Check the oil temperature and if necessary increase the heat to high to get it up to 350 degrees F. Then turn the heat to very low.

The battering step uses tongs to introduce each dredged pork chop (or piece of pork chop) into the batter. Be sure both sides of the chop are completely coated with batter. Then use the tongs to hold the chop above the batter for about ten seconds to let excess batter run/drip back into the bowl of batter.

Fry the dredged/battered pork chops one at a time (or multiple pieces at a time for a given chop if you cut away the bones earlier) for five minutes.

Use a spider or equivalent tool like a slotted spoon to remove and discard small pieces of batter that float to the top of the hot oil.

Maintain the oil temperature at 350 degrees F by varying the heat as needed.

Put each piece of fried pork on a cooling rack above a baking sheet.

When all the pork has been fried and allowed to cool somewhat, then do a second frying at 350 degrees F for three minutes. The pork pieces can be added, three chops (or the equivalent) at a time, into the hot oil for the second frying.

Put the completed second frying pieces of chicken fried pork chops on the cooling rack to drain excess oil, and then into the pre-warmed serving bowl.

Serve the pork chops hot, along with other meal items, like a salad. Cold beer is a nice beverage to serve with this meal.

Have additional salt and pepper available for those guests who want more seasoning.

Enjoy!

Chinese BBQ Pork Fried Rice - 😊♥

If you make Chinese BBQ pork (Char Siu) for various other uses you will find it is also a great ingredient in pork fried rice. It is also the only ingredient that takes much time to make and which needs to be made in advance. All other ingredients can be prepared fairly quickly.

Pork fried rice is made with Chinese BBQ pork, day old steamed rice, diced onion, garlic, ginger, bean sprouts, scrambled eggs and chopped scallions, plus a variety of seasoning ingredients in a sauce. It is often served with other foods (think Chinese takeout) to add variety to a meal, or it can be a fine meal in itself.

The recipe below is one I found and modified considerably as the ratio of seasonings to rice was clearly deficient. Then, a study of various recipes for pork fried rice made me decide to combine the best parts of each worthy recipe to make a great one.

On making the fried rice I later decided you don't stir fry cooked rice. What you do is heat uncooked rice in a hot skillet with stirring until it turns tan (like you would when making red beans and rice), then steam that rice with small amounts of sesame oil and hot sauce in the water, and a day or two later simply add it to the other ingredients of pork fried rice and mix it all together with the sauce as the next to last step. Then add the bean sprouts, chopped scrambled eggs and chopped scallions, mix well, cover the wok and warm the contents on low heat for five minutes.

You will love this dish. So will your guests. So make it.

Ingredients: (makes 4 to 6 servings)

Sauce ingredients:

2 tablespoons of hot water

2 teaspoons of brown sugar

1 tablespoon of toasted sesame oil

1 tablespoon of Shaoxing wine

3 tablespoons of light soy sauce

3 tablespoons of dark soy sauce

1 tablespoon of oyster sauce

2 teaspoons of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of white pepper

Other ingredients:

3 extra large eggs (whisked with 1 tablespoon of Shaoxing wine and then scrambled)

1 pound of Chinese BBQ pork (cut into 1/4 inch pieces or ground using a meat grinder with a coarse die)

5 tablespoons of peanut oil (divided)

1 medium size onion (diced)

2 cloves of garlic, minced

1 teaspoon of minced ginger

5 cups of day old cooked Basmati or Jasmine rice (add 1 teaspoon of toasted sesame oil and 1 teaspoon of hot sauce to the water when steaming the rice)

1 cup of canned bean sprouts (drained)

6 scallions (chopped into 1/4" long pieces, both white and green parts)

Directions:

Combine the hot water, sesame oil, Shaoxing wine, light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, brown sugar, salt and white pepper in a small bowl. This is the sauce that you will be adding later to the pork fried rice mixture.

Whisk the eggs with the tablespoon of Shaoxing wine, then heat your wok over high heat and add 2 tablespoons of peanut oil. When the oil begins to smoke, swirl the oil around to coat the wok up about two inches from the bottom, all the way around.

Slowly pour the whisked eggs mixture into the oil at one edge of the perimeter of the pooled hot oil, letting the liquid eggs fry as they spread out across the top of the oil. Cook for about 30 seconds, then flip the eggs over with a flat spatula. Don't worry if they fall apart ... simply flip over the pieces. Cook for another 30 seconds, then put the scrambled eggs into a bowl, roughly chop them, and set the bowl aside.

Mix the day old cooked rice (special instructions/ingredients for making it are described above in the introduction) with two forks, eliminating clumps.

Heat the wok over medium heat and add 3 tablespoons of peanut oil. When the oil begins to smoke, stir fry the BBQ pork for two minutes, then add the diced onion, garlic and ginger and stir fry the mixture until the diced onion is translucent.

Reduce the heat to low and gradually add the day old rice to the pork mixture with stirring to create a uniform mixture.

Add the sauce mixture to the wok and mix with a scooping motion using a large spoon until the rice is evenly coated with sauce.

Add the bean sprouts, chopped scrambled eggs, and chopped scallions. Mix thoroughly for another minute or two, then put the lid on the wok and heat it on low heat for five minutes.

Serve the pork fried rice hot.

Provide light and dark soy sauces in small bowls or pitchers for guests who might want additional seasoning.

Enjoy!

Kansas City Classic Barbecue Sauce® - ☺♥♥♥☺

This is one "perfect" barbecue sauce ... so much so that I simply deleted my other recipes for barbecue sauce. It is not cloyingly sweet. It has a great taste. If you are hooked on very sweet barbecue sauces you will have to look elsewhere for a recommendation.

The way to use this sauce best is not at the table, though it tastes mighty good at the table too. Baste it on baby back ribs that have already been wrapped tightly in aluminum foil and baked at 230°F for 4 to 5 hours, then drained of water and rendered fat. Cut the baked ribs, baste them in sauce, and bake the basted ribs on a baking sheet an additional 30 minutes without the aluminum foil.

Now let's digress a bit and look at the world of commercial sauces that claim to be Kansas City Classic barbecue sauce. I found only one, KC Masterpiece® Kansas City Classic, and you can no longer buy that product, for someone acquired the rights and took it off the market ... no doubt to promote their own brand! I truly despise that practice as it denies us the best for the least cost. So, what can you do if you don't have time to make the barbecue sauce? I found that Cattlemen's® Kansas City Classic was deficient but correctable with the addition of tamarind paste and chili powder ... one tablespoon each per quart of sauce. Enough said ... I hope you take the time to make the sauce in this recipe as it is a real winner.

Yield: 5 cups

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons of chili powder

1 teaspoon of ground black pepper

1 teaspoon of table salt

2 cups of ketchup

1/2 cup of Yellow mustard

1/2 cup of cider or white vinegar

1/3 cup of Worcestershire sauce

1/4 cup of lemon juice

1/4 cup of steak sauce

1/4 cup of dark molasses

1/4 cup of honey

1 teaspoon of Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce

1 cup of dark brown sugar (you can use light brown sugar)

3 tablespoons of vegetable oil or butter

1 medium onion, finely chopped

4 medium cloves of garlic, minced

1 or 2 teaspoons of Wright's® liquid smoke hickory flavoring

1 tsp. of Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution (optional)

Secret Ingredient: Add 2 tablespoons of Tamarind paste. This exotic ingredient isn't really all that exotic. It shows up on the ingredient lists of great BBQ sauces. It has a sweet citrus flavor and really amps up a sauce. If you can't find it in an Asian grocery it is available through the Internet.

I found tamarind paste in block form at an Asian market for \$3.99 for a 16 oz. package. That was much cheaper than the tamarind advertised on the Internet (at the time) but the processing was a pain in the butt. Then I came across the Tamicon® brand of tamarind paste via Amazon.com and it was inexpensive and easy to use and excellent. I recommend buying the prepared paste instead of processing a block of tamarind that has fiber and seeds included.

The tamarind does make a fabulous difference. Friends and relatives are going nuts over how great this sauce is with baby back ribs. Yeah ... that's what good cooking is all about!

Directions:

Mix the chili powder, black pepper, and salt in a small bowl. Mix the ketchup, mustard, vinegar, Worcestershire, lemon juice, steak sauce, molasses, honey, hot sauce, brown sugar, the sodium benzoate solution (optional) and finally the tamarind paste in a large bowl.

Warm the butter in a large 1 gallon pot Over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté them until they are limp and translucent, about 5 minutes.

Add the garlic, stir it into the onions and cook for another minute or two.

Add the dry spices and stir well for about 2 minutes to extract their oil-soluble flavors.

Add the wet ingredients from the large bowl. Mix well, heat to a simmering temperature of about 180 degrees F and simmer over medium heat for 15 minutes with the lid off to thicken the sauce, stirring a few times.

Taste and adjust the sauce. Add more of anything that you want a little bit at a time. It may taste a bit vinegary at first, but that will be less obvious when you use it.

Process the sauce through a conical colander with a conical wooden roller if you want the chunks of onion and garlic to be completely crushed/integrated into the sauce (That is what I do). You can use the barbecue sauce immediately, but I think it is better when stored overnight. You can store it in clean bottles in the refrigerator for a month or two. I like to use canning jars for that purpose.

I have also vacuum sealed the sauce in small canning jars and I keep them stored in the refrigerator. That makes the shelf life even longer. I also added sodium benzoate to my last batch and now the shelf life will easily be a year or more. One point regarding food preservation should be added ... many of the ingredients used already have a food preservative included, like the ketchup, the mustard, the Worcestershire sauce and the steak sauce, and of the other ingredients, some do not require a preservative, like the vinegar, the honey and the spices.

Memphis Dry Rub Seasoning - ?

I have yet to try this dry rub for ribs. But as in a few other recipes in this book I believe the results will be excellent so I have included this recipe. Plus, it is mentioned as something to be used in the Baby Back Ribs recipe. When I try it I will report on my results. Note that the first person descriptions in this recipe belong to the provider, not to me.

In Memphis it is common for the best rib joints to serve their ribs "dry", without sauce, just a liberal sprinkling of spices and herbs. The most revered dry ribs are served at Charlie Vergo's Rendezvous® (called "The Vous" by the locals). In fact, the Vous is probably the most *popular* rib joint in the world. Notice I didn't say the *best* rib joint in the world.

Baby backs are the cut of choice and they are sprinkled liberally with their top secret seasoning. "We call it a seasoning, not a rub, because it is sprinkled on, not rubbed in," says Nick Vergos, Charlie's grandson.

Because The Vous is so famous and popular, people, especially the media, are always asking the owners for their seasoning recipe. But, and I know this might shock some of you, the one they give out is most definitely *not* the one they use in the restaurant or sell in the bottle! Yet the bogus recipe is all over the Internet.

How can I be so sure? The bottle label of Rendezvous Famous Seasoning® says "Spices, paprika (color), garlic, monosodium glutamate, salt and less than 2% silicon dioxide added to prevent caking." The recipe they give the media contains only salt, pepper, garlic powder, oregano, celery seed, paprika, and chili powder. But if you eat there or buy a bottle and sprinkle some in your hand, you can't miss the whole coriander seeds, mustard seeds, and allspice among other things. So I have tried to reverse-engineer it. My version is *a lot closer* to the real thing than the one so widely circulated, but it is not perfect.

When in Memphis, you have to do the Vous because it is so much fun, the staff is great, and it reeks of history. But it is not even in my top five in the area for ribs in my book. And forgive me if I'm biased, but most folks think Meathead's Memphis Dust® is a better pork rub.

Yield. Makes a bit more than two cups, enough for about 12 pounds of ribs. You can keep in a jar for months.

Preparation time. 10 minutes.

Ingredients:

8 tablespoons of paprika
4 tablespoons of powdered garlic
4 tablespoons of mild chili powder
3 tablespoons of ground black pepper
3 tablespoons of kosher salt
4 teaspoons of whole yellow mustard seed
1 tablespoon of crushed celery seed
1 tablespoon of whole celery seed
1 tablespoon of dried crushed oregano
1 tablespoon of dried crushed thyme
1 tablespoon of whole allspice seeds
1 teaspoon of ground allspice
1 tablespoon of whole coriander seed
1 teaspoon of ground coriander
1 teaspoon of Ac'cent®

About the Ac'cent®. The label of the Rendezvous Famous Seasoning® states that there is Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) in the blend. Ac'cent® is made of MSG and you can find it in the spice section of your store. MSG, also known as the sodium salt of glutamic acid, is a flavor enhancer as well as a natural byproduct of some aging and fermentation processes. Some people believe that MSG can cause headaches, but scientists have had difficulty proving the connection. The eminent food writer Jeffrey Steingarten has attempted to debunk what he considers to be an urban legend in a famous essay "Why Doesn't Everyone in China Have a Headache?©" One might also ask, "Why doesn't everyone who eats at the Vons have a headache?" If you don't like MSG, just leave it out.

Note. If you use a brine, leave the salt out of your rub.

Directions:

Mix all the rub ingredients in a bowl, making sure to break up all lumps. Put it in an airtight jar.

Roasted Pork Tenderloin - ?

This is one of a number of recipes from the Internet that is simply too good to ignore. I suggest serving spatzle or noodles in butter with the pork and the braised red cabbage recipe in this book. The only ingredient that you might have difficulty finding, depending on time of year, is the apple cider. You can make that yourself with two apples and a blender and a sieve. You can also freeze small ice cube tray blocks of fresh apple cider and thus have them available anytime, or vacuum seal and freeze ½ cup of cider per bag, which is what I do.

Ingredients:

3 pork tenderloins (about 1 1/2 pounds) (These must be very small tenderloins!)

2 teaspoons of kosher salt

1/2 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper

3 tablespoons of olive oil

Bourbon Glaze, recipe provided below

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Season the pork with the salt and pepper.

Heat the olive oil in an ovenproof skillet over high heat and sear the pork on all sides.

Place the skillet into the oven and roast the pork for 8 to 10 minutes.

Let the meat rest for 5 minutes before cutting. Slice on a diagonal, cutting each tenderloin into 4 or 5 pieces.

Bourbon Glaze:

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon of olive oil

2 shallots, chopped

2 cloves of garlic, chopped

2 cups of brown sugar

3/4 cup of balsamic vinegar

1/2 cup of red wine

1/2 cup of apple cider

2 teaspoons of green peppercorns

1 bay leaf

1 cup of seeded and chopped plum tomatoes

1/2 cup of chopped red bell pepper

5 sprigs of Italian parsley

3 tablespoons of soy sauce

1 1/2 ounces of bourbon

Directions:

Heat the oil over medium heat in a 2 quart saucepan.

Add the shallots and garlic and cook until soft but not browned.

Add the brown sugar, balsamic, red wine, apple cider, green peppercorns, bay leaf, tomatoes, red peppers, parsley, and soy sauce. Simmer the sauce until reduced to 1/2 the starting volume.

Strain the sauce and add the bourbon.

Serve warm over the sliced pork tenderloin.

Breakfast Blend - ☺♥

This recipe is pure serendipity and it resulted from one of my experiments to perfect breakfast sausage. Here is what happened ... I kept changing the ratio of potato flour to pork, as well as doing herb and spice modifications with each experiment. What I wound up creating was a product that has characteristics and taste of both breakfast sausage and scrapple. Wow! I never ate anything like that before! It is really good and you sure do want to make some. I know you will be pleasantly surprised.

I am dedicating this recipe to my deceased best friend, Morrie Shaffer, as today is the anniversary of his death. Why Morrie? He would have eaten a ton of this stuff and loved it! And I would have really enjoyed making it for him.

I decided to call this stuff Breakfast Blend as I couldn't develop any meaningful combination of the words sausage and scrapple without creating something difficult to pronounce. Maybe I'll figure out a more appropriate name later ... Like "Cellulite Plus!" When fried it looks like scrapple but the composition and taste make it seem like a sausage/scrapple mixture.

Without further ado I will now proceed with providing this recipe to you, noting that I am experimenting further with this novel product and that means the recipe shown below has been changed already from my first attempt.

Ingredients: (makes about 6 pounds of Breakfast Blend ... [but a half recipe is much easier to make])

3 pounds of boneless skinless raw pork shoulder containing 10 percent fat (start with a four pound piece of pork shoulder containing bone and skin)

6 oz. of fresh beef liver

1 cup of stone ground cornmeal

1 1/4 cups of potato flour

1 1/2 quarts of water

1 tsp. of ground cardamom

1/4 cup of dried sage

3 tbsp. of dried marjoram

3/4 tsp. of ground mace

3/4 tsp. of ground thyme

3/4 tsp. of ground coriander

3 tbsp. of sea salt

2 tbsp. of ground black pepper

1 tbsp. of brown sugar

1/8 tsp. of cayenne pepper

3 tbsp. of agar agar (you can buy this versatile thickening agent inexpensively at www.bulkfoods.com)

Crisco® shortening for pre-greasing baking dishes and for frying the completed Breakfast Blend

Directions:

Cut up and grind the pork and pork fat from the pork shoulder using a butcher knife on a wood cutting board and, of course, your meat grinder or meat grinder attachment for your electric mixer. While cutting the meat to fit into your meat grinder remove and set aside any large areas that are entirely fat, but keep the smaller areas of fat.

You want about 10 percent fat and 90 percent lean pork. You can weigh the lean meat with a kitchen scale and then add enough fat to increase the weight by roughly 10 percent. Discard any excess pork fat. Note also that the weighing allows you to know exactly what weight of meat and fat that you are processing, so you can make any necessary adjustments to the amounts of other ingredients based on that weight.

Process the cut up pork and fat through your meat grinder. I like to do two passes through the meat grinder, the first time with the large holes disk and the second time with the small holes disk. Process the liver through the meat grinder during the second grinding with the small holes disk.

Use your electric mixer and regular beater on medium speed to pulverize and blend the ground pork meat with the ground pork fat and the liver to create a uniform pasty mixture. Operate the mixer at medium speed for five minutes. But stop the mixer every minute or two and use a plastic or rubber spatula to force the meat away from the sides of the mixing bowl above the beater and away from the top of the beater.

Note that the volume of meat and other ingredients processed at any one time may have to be adjusted based on the capacity of the electric mixer bowl and the size of the beater. The idea is you want to assure good mixing by not exceeding the capacity of your mixer bowl to hold and then properly mix all of the ingredients. If you need to do the processing in two batches then split the ingredients and processing described into two batches to assure the final product is uniform.

Add the water to the mixer bowl gradually while mixing on low speed. Allow time for each water addition to mix with the other contents thoroughly.

Add the potato flour and the stone ground cornmeal to the mixer bowl gradually while continuing to mix.

Add the herbs/seasoning ingredients and the agar agar to the mixer bowl and mix on medium speed for five minutes, pausing after each minute or two to use the spatula to force any part of the mixture from the sides of the mixing bowl above the beater and also away from the top of the beater.

Preheat the oven to 200 degrees F, using the convection setting if you have that option.

Dispense the mixture into two to three glass baking dishes of the size used to bake bread. Fill each baking dish to within 3/4 of an inch of the top edge. Insert a spatula to find and eliminate any air pockets. Smooth the top of the mixture in each dish with the spatula, making it even and flat. Cover each dish tightly with aluminum foil.

Put the baking dishes into the oven and let the Breakfast Blend cook for two hours at 200 degrees F.

Remove the baking dishes from the oven and let them cool on a wooden cutting board to room temperature, covered.

At this point the Breakfast Blend is complete. Uncover the baking dishes and, if necessary, use a regular kitchen knife to separate the outer surface of the Breakfast Blend from the sides and ends of the baking dishes. Then invert each dish over a wood cutting board to cause the loaf of Breakfast Blend to come out of the baking dish. Tap the baking dish gently, if necessary, on the cutting board to make the loaf of Breakfast Blend come out. Cut each loaf of Breakfast Blend into slices anywhere from 1/2 of an inch thick to 3/4 of an inch thick.

Melt 1 tbsp. of Crisco® shortening (or rendered bacon fat) in a small skillet on medium high heat. Alternatively, you can use a larger skillet and two or three

tbsp. of Crisco® or rendered bacon fat. Add a few slices of Breakfast Blend to the skillet, allowing at least one inch of room on all sides to make later flipping of each piece easy. Fry the pieces of Breakfast Blend. Three to four minutes per side (the required time depends on the thickness you chose for the slices) is enough time if you start with a hot skillet on medium high heat. I flip the pieces over only once during frying with a spatula, once I am sure the first side exposed to the heat is crisp. Note that you can adjust the heat lower to a medium or medium low setting during the frying of the second side. That will avoid having the shortening or bacon fat smoke due to excessive temperature level.

Now we get to the fun part! Put the slices on a plate and enjoy eating them. You earned this reward! Actually, you might make a few eggs and a piece of buttered toast first to accompany this delight. Remember also to have a nice fresh cup of hot coffee.

Now it is time to process the sliced loaves of Breakfast Blend for freezer storage.

I put the Breakfast Blend slices on waxed paper on cookie trays and freeze them in the deep freeze for a few hours.

I then vacuum seal the pieces of frozen Breakfast Blend, two slices per bag, and then immediately put the sealed bags back into the deep freeze for storage.

Use the Breakfast Blend within three months for optimal quality/taste. Take a bag of the frozen pieces, open it and place the frozen pieces into a skillet in which a tablespoon of Crisco® shortening has already been melted and the heat turned off. Allow fifteen to twenty minutes for the frozen pieces to partially thaw, and then turn on the heat to medium high and fry them as described above, allowing some extra time for the skillet to get hot.

I know you will really enjoy this unique breakfast food. It is very tasty, crisp on the outside and tender and moist on the inside.

Breakfast Sausage - ☺♥T

Making sausage at home is a fine idea because there are only a few brands of breakfast sausage you can buy that have seriously good flavor, like that of the old time "loose sausage" made by our ancestor farmers when they slaughtered hogs. Mailhot's® is one good tasting but very expensive brand of loose breakfast sausage that you form into patties. All the link breakfast sausages like Johnsons® (\$5.32/lb.) sold by supermarkets, and a few loose sausages like Jimmy Dean® (\$3.99/lb.), etc., are so unreasonably expensive or fat laden or water logged that you might/should decide to stop eating breakfast sausage altogether. And note these were 2011 prices.

I experimented with many and varied recipes for making breakfast sausage, but I was never completely happy until I tried a modified version of J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's maple sage breakfast sausage, which is in his great food science book, *The Food Lab*©.

The economics of making the sausage is amazing. You can buy pork shoulder for \$1.29/pound (think \$1.79/pound in 2022!) and get about 60% yield of flesh and fat. The rest is skin, bone and excess fat. So the real meat cost is \$2.15/pound (etc. for inflation effects!) for the finished product. After you add the spices and other ingredients the total cost per pound is \$2.45. But what you get for the money is vastly superior in quality to the supermarket brands. You can also buy a Boston Butt roast, which is a pork shoulder with the bone, skin and most of the fat removed, for about \$1.99/lb.

I tried an alternate approach with great success. That was in getting pork fat from the supermarket and buying pork loin for the flesh. Thus, no waste at all. The loin varies in price from \$1.49/pound to \$1.99/pound (maybe, now in the 2022 timeframe). The fat was free. Taking the higher price the total cost of a pound of sausage I make is essentially \$2.40 ... and some of that extra cost is maple syrup. That means some tinkering with maple flavoring like Crescent® Mapleine® and some light corn syrup could bring the price per pound down to about \$2.10. But most important, think about the superb quality of the sausage you will make compared to the commercial brands. You can whip the pants off those players when it comes to quality/taste. As for actual price per pound, do the math for your present time, and compare this method prices to commercial prices for breakfast sausage.

Most breakfast sausage recipes call for buying and processing pork shoulder, which works but is labor intensive and the meat/fat yield is not consistent. The

boneless, skinless version of pork shoulder, Boston Butt roast, is much easier to process. The pork loin/pork fat approach described above is the easiest of all.

J. Kenji Lopez-Alt describes the combining of the pork, cut into 1" cubes (3/4" cubes will process better), some hickory smoked bacon, the salt and other seasonings in a plastic bag and refrigerating that mixture for, ideally, twelve to twenty-four hours prior to making the sausage. The purpose is to partially dissolve protein and allow cross-linking, resulting in a sausage that is more moist and springy, ergo superior. My advice is to do what Kenji recommends, procedurally, to have great sausage, so plan ahead. If you can't then rest the completed sausage for 24 hours in the refrigerator before cooking any of it.

I tried my modified version of Kenji's recipe for breakfast sausage in The Food Lab© ... the variation that starts with ground pork and uses maple syrup ... and it was delicious. The finest brand of dry cured hickory smoked bacon that I've found is Broadbents®. They are in Kentucky and they sure do know how to make bacon! You can order their bacon via the Internet. I buy their bacon slabs and cut them into slices with my commercial meat slicer at home. That saves money and is very easy to do, plus I get bacon exactly as thick as I want it.

Speaking of Broadbent's, their expensive breakfast sausage taught me to use more fat when making sausage at home. Lesson learned. Failure to use enough fat results in dry sausage at the table. Similarly, the Broadbent breakfast sausage is hickory smoked in cloth bags, so you want to add Wright's Liquid Smoke® to what you make. Or, if you have a smoker, do cold smoking of the sausage you make. Finally, having tried many variations of seasoning for breakfast sausage, I homed in on the three basics ... lots of salt, some pepper, plus a generous amount of liquid smoke. All the rest of the fancy seasonings will produce good sausage if used moderately but you can skip all of them and still have great sausage ... if you have plenty of pork fat, even in small pieces, in your sausage when you make it.

If you do not already have a meat slicer at home then get one now (one good source: Web Restaurant Store). They are too useful in multiple situations to ignore ... like making potato chips or shaved beef for steak sandwiches, or in this instance processing slab bacon. Or creating your own sandwich lunch meats, very economically. Just do it. You will be very glad you did.

Overall, it is quite easy to make sausage at home. The procedure is simple and there is little work involved. The results will make you cheer.

Ingredients: (makes about 6 pounds of sausage)

4 lbs. of boneless, skinless pork sirloin roast or pork loin cut into 3/4" cubes (or ground)

12 oz. of pork fat chopped fine (my addition to get the meat to fat ratio to about 70/30)

8 oz. of raw dry cured hickory smoked bacon, diced (Broadbents® in Kentucky is flavored best)

3 tbsp. of Kosher salt

1 tbsp. of ground black pepper

4 medium garlic cloves, minced

2 ounces of maple syrup

1/2 tsp. of red pepper flakes

3 tbsp. of dried sage

1 1/4 tsp. of dried marjoram

3 tbsp. of corn flour

1/4 cup of water

1 tsp. of Wright's Liquid Smoke® (optional)

1 tbsp. of peanut oil or canola oil for test frying a few sausage patties

Directions:

If you are going to follow Kenji's recommendation, cut the pork into 3/4" cubes, add all of the ingredients except peanut oil, mix well and then put it all into a plastic bag, seal it, and refrigerate it for 12 to 24 hours. Then proceed to the meat grinding step of this recipe below, and ignore the later instructions for adding seasonings, for you already did that.

If you decide you want to make the sausage immediately then proceed from here.

You cut up and then grind the pork and pork fat and bacon with a butcher knife on a wood cutting board and, of course, your meat grinder or meat grinder attachment for your electric mixer.

You want about 30 percent fat and 70 percent lean meat so that the sausage will fry well instead of burn in the skillet.

One way to be certain about the fat and meat ratio is to separate them during cutting and weigh them on a small kitchen scale. You can assume the bacon is 50% fat. If the amount of fat is too low, as it may be, cut up some of the fat you bought and add it in. Recently I asked the folks at Market Basket® to sell me five pounds of pork fat, and they gave it to me for free! Nice!

Process the cut up meats and pork fat through your meat grinder using the 1/4" diameter holes disk.

Use your electric mixer and regular beater to break up and blend the ground pork meat with the ground fat to create a fairly uniform mixture. Run it at medium speed for three minutes. Stop once or twice and use a plastic spatula to force the meat away from the sides of the mixing bowl and away from the top of the beater.

Add all the other ingredients to a bowl, except for the peanut oil, and mix them very well.

Turn the mixer to a slower speed and put the herb/spice/maple syrup/corn flour/water/liquid smoke mixture into the mixing bowl gradually, allowing each addition to mix into the meat.

When all of that mixture has been added, increase the mixer speed to medium. Run it on medium speed for three minutes, pausing after each minute to use the spatula to force the sausage mixture from the sides of the mixing bowl and away from the top of the beater.

At this point the sausage is complete. I recommend making and frying one small 1/3 inch thick patty right away to check the taste. Do not fry it for too long. Three minutes per side is fine if you start with a hot, lightly oiled skillet on medium heat. I recommend flipping the patty over a few times during the frying to heat the patty evenly from both sides. You will then see each side gradually browning and you will know when it is time to remove the patty from the skillet.

Now it is time to taste the sausage patty. If you are happy with the taste then proceed to vacuum seal and freeze the rest of the sausage. Otherwise, add whatever additional herbs/spices you want and mix for an additional three minutes. Then test fry and taste test another sausage patty. Repeat as necessary, but remember to make small additions as you can't take any out if you use too much in any addition.

You can vacuum seal the sausage in ten bags, about ½ pound each, and then freeze it. I flatten the sausage in the bag after vacuum sealing so that it is already the right thickness (3/8" to 1/2") to fry when I am ready to use it, which means I use a three cup vacuum sealing bag. Later, when the sausage thaws after deep freeze storage it is easy to use. You can make patties simply by cutting the thawed sausage into four or six rectangles with a knife. You can fry them as is or reform the rectangles into patties first.

Put the flattened vacuum sealed bags of sausage into the deep freeze. Use them within three to six months for best quality.

I know you will really enjoy this version of breakfast sausage. The sausages are tasty, crisp on the outside and tender on the inside and moist. Yummy!

Breakfast Sausage II - ☺♥

This breakfast sausage made from a Boston butt roast is simple and it uses less amounts and less varieties of spices than the first Food Nirvana recipe for Breakfast Sausage.

If you don't have a meat grinder you can request your butcher to grind a Boston butt roast (of your choice) for you, while you wait. Also, if your electric stand mixer is not large enough to handle five pounds of ground meat easily, for mixing, then make this sausage in two batches to assure even mixing of the seasonings with the meat.

You definitely want to make this sausage to compare its mildness and flavor differences to the other breakfast sausage. We all have taste preferences so why not find yours and make what you enjoy best?

Overall, once you start making sausage and varying the seasonings you can home in on what pleases you best.

Ingredients: (makes 5 pounds of sausage)

4 1/2 lbs. of pork butt

1/2 lb. of dry cured hickory smoked bacon, chopped fine

Enough pork fat so the ratio of lean meat to fat is 70/30

2 tbsp. of salt

2 tsp. of black pepper

1 tbsp. of dried rubbed sage

1/2 tsp. of ground nutmeg

1 1/3 tsp. of ground ginger

2 tsp. of dried thyme

1/2 tsp. of cayenne pepper

1 tsp. of Wright's Liquid Smoke®

1 tbsp. of maple syrup

3/4 cup of cold water

Directions:

Prepare the pork butt for grinding by cutting it into pieces that will easily fit in your meat grinder. Think 2"x3/4"x3/4" size pieces.

Remove excess fat and discard it. You want the fat to be 30% of the total weight of the sausage meat. You can make a pretty good guess visually, and consider the fat added by the bacon.

Grind the pieces of pork butt and the chopped bacon using the 1/4" diameter holes die in your meat grinder.

Now regrind the pork using the 1/8" diameter holes die in your meat grinder.

Put the water, the liquid smoke, the maple syrup and all the dry seasoning ingredients into a two cup bowl and stir to combine.

Mix the ground pork in the electric mixer on medium speed using the regular mixer beater (but keep the meat from climbing onto the beater by running it fast enough to toss the meat against the inside surface of the mixing bowl) while adding small increments of the water/seasonings mixture until all of the liquid and herbs/spices have been mixed evenly throughout the ground meat. A total of five additions of the water mixture is a good number, followed each time with two minutes of mixing. Note that you may need to use a soft spatula to scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl once or twice to assure even mixing.

Put the breakfast sausage into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, squeeze out the air, seal the bag, then refrigerate the sausage overnight.

Weigh out 8 ounce amounts of the breakfast sausage and put each into a one pint/quart vacuum seal bag. Vacuum seal the bags and then press on them to make the sausage flat and of even thickness, roughly 1/2" thick.

Mark the bags to identify contents and keep the bags of breakfast sausage in the deep freeze until you want to use them.

Thaw the frozen sausage in the microwave oven on full power for 30 seconds. Then flip the bag over and microwave on full power for 20 seconds. Then put the bag on a counter and let it finish thawing for about 30 minutes.

At this point you can put the whole slab of sausage into the skillet as indicated below and cut it up into pieces while it is frying, or, you may want instead to make patties by hand of whatever size pleases you and simply fry them like you would the cut up pieces.

Fry the sausage in a hot thick bottom non-stick skillet into which one to two tablespoons of vegetable oil have been added and heated. If/as necessary, press on the sausage with a spatula to keep it flat and of roughly even thickness.

After one minute flip the sausage over, then (if you left it in a slab) use a sharp spatula to cut it into the size pieces you want to serve.

Continue frying the sausage pieces on low heat, flipping them over every two minutes, until they are nicely browned on both sides.

Serve the sausages hot along with whatever other breakfast items you provide to your guests. The planning and order of preparation are up to you.

I know you will really enjoy this version of breakfast sausage. The sausages are tasty, crisp on the outside and tender on the inside and moist. Yummy!

Breakfast Sausage III - ☺♥

This breakfast sausage made from a Boston butt roast is simple and it uses less varieties of spices than the other two Food Nirvana recipes for Breakfast Sausage.

If you don't have a meat grinder you can request your butcher to grind a Boston butt roast (of your choice) for you, while you wait. Also, if your electric stand mixer is not large enough to handle five pounds of ground meat easily, for mixing, then make this sausage in two batches to assure even mixing of the seasonings with the meat.

You definitely want to make this sausage to compare its "zing" and flavor differences to the breakfast sausages from the other two recipes. We all have taste preferences so why not find yours and make what you enjoy best? In my opinion sausage from this recipe most closely matches the best of the premium commercial breakfast sausages.

Overall, once you start making sausage and varying the seasonings you can home in on what pleases you best.

Ingredients: (makes 5 pounds of sausage)

4 1/2 lbs. of pork butt (with a 70/30 ratio of lean meat to fat)

2 tbsp. of hickory smoked salt

2 tsp. of black pepper

1 tbsp. of dried rubbed sage

1/2 tsp. of ground nutmeg

1 1/3 tsp. of ground ginger

2 tsp. of dried thyme

1/4 tsp. of cayenne pepper

1 tbsp. of maple syrup

3/4 cup of cold water

Directions:

Prepare the pork butt for grinding by cutting it into pieces that will easily fit in your meat grinder. Think 2"x3/4"x3/4" size pieces.

Remove any excess fat and discard it. You want the fat to be 30% of the total weight of the sausage meat. You can make a pretty good guess visually.

Grind the pieces of pork butt using the 1/4" diameter holes die in your meat grinder.

Put all of the dry seasoning ingredients into a Magic Bullet® mixer and mix them for one minute.

Reserve 1/4 cup of the water and put the rest of the water and then the maple syrup into the Magic Bullet® container with the powdered dry ingredients and mix for one minute.

Mix the ground pork in the electric mixer on medium speed using the regular mixer beater (but keep the meat from climbing onto the beater by running it fast enough to toss the meat against the inside surface of the mixing bowl) while adding small increments of the water/maple syrup/seasonings mixture until all of the liquid and herbs/spices have been mixed evenly throughout the ground meat.

A total of five additions of the water mixture is a good number, followed each time with two minutes of mixing. Now use the reserved 1/4 cup of water in the Magic Bullet® container, shake it and then dump the contents in with the sausage. That will assure all the seasonings go into the meat. Then mix for two more minutes. Note that you may need to use a soft spatula to scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl once or twice to assure even mixing.

Put the breakfast sausage into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, squeeze out the air, seal the bag, then refrigerate the sausage overnight.

Weigh out 8 ounce amounts of the breakfast sausage and put each into a one pint/quart vacuum seal bag. Vacuum seal the bags and then press on them to make the sausage flat and of even thickness, roughly 1/2" thick.

Mark the bags to identify contents and keep the bags of breakfast sausage in the deep freeze until you want to use them. They will be fine for three to six months in the deep freeze.

Thaw the frozen sausage in the microwave oven on full power for 30 seconds. Then flip the bag over and microwave on full power for 20 seconds. Then put the bag on a counter and let it finish thawing for about 30 minutes.

At this point you can put the whole slab of sausage into the skillet as indicated below and cut it up into pieces while it is frying, or, you may want instead to make patties by hand of whatever size pleases you and simply fry them like you

would the cut up pieces. I prefer to prepare the patties before frying ... it avoids cutting the non-stick skillet surface.

Fry the sausage in a hot thick bottom non-stick skillet into which one tablespoon of either butter or vegetable oil have been added and heated. If/as necessary, press on the sausage with a spatula to keep it flat and of roughly even thickness.

After one minute flip the sausage over, then (if you left it in a slab) use a sharp spatula to cut it into the size pieces you want to serve.

Continue frying the sausage pieces on low heat, flipping them over every two minutes, until they are nicely browned on both sides.

Serve the sausages hot along with whatever other breakfast items you provide to your guests. The planning and order of preparation are up to you.

I know you will really enjoy this version of breakfast sausage. The sausages are tasty, crisp on the outside and tender on the inside and moist. Yummy!

Breakfast Sausage Made With Lean Pork - ☺♥T

I was thinking about the economics of making breakfast sausage and it was obvious I could minimize the cost per pound by using pork loin along with some pork fat. Why? The lean meat per pound of pork loin is higher than with any other cut of pork. But would it taste dry compared to sausage made from Boston butt roast, with 25% fat?

The answer is ... The recipe below makes a fine breakfast sausage that is not dry ... in fact, it is just fine. You, of course, are the boss, so if you want the sausage to be more moist/soft then you can add an additional small amount of water while mixing it. You can buy pork fat cheaply, but I typically get it for free at the supermarket [I call ahead and order it a few days in advance of needing it]. I suggest you try doing that.

What I found interesting while developing this teaching recipe was I could easily control texture and moistness as well as flavors. In general, the best texture is achieved by using 75% lean meat and 25% fat. Vary the water slightly and the sausage becomes more moist/tender or less moist.

As for frying to get a nice golden color, I like to spray a small amount of canola oil into a nonstick skillet and also a bit on top of the sausage patties once they are in the skillet. Frying time is in general two minutes per side, flipping the sausage patties every minute, for a total of four minutes frying time, but note that frying time can vary based on the heat produced by your stove and by the non-stick skillet you decide to use. The point? Keep an eye on the appearance of the patties, and know that when they are golden on both sides they are done frying.

You want to make this breakfast sausage. Note that the maple flavoring is optional but nice if you want that flavor. Actually, you can make the sausage without the maple flavoring, remove half of the sausage from the mixing bowl, then mix maple flavoring into the remaining half, and then you have both flavors. Nice. Note also that after trying this recipe you can change the amounts of salt and other seasonings in any direction you like.

You may wonder why rice flour (or potato flour or corn flour) are included as an ingredient. The answer is the flour absorbs water and keeps some of the water inside the patties, uniformly, while they are frying, resulting in a more tender, moist texture at eating time.

Similar to what you do with other homemade sausages, you can vacuum seal and freeze raw sausage patties or simply half pound amounts of sausage, flattened after vacuum sealing, and keep them in the deep freeze until you want to use

them ... but I recommend using them within three months of making the frozen, vacuum sealed packages.

Finally, this recipe scales up nicely. You can easily triple the amounts to get plenty of sausage for both the meal and for vacuum sealing/freezing for later use.

Ingredients: (makes approximately 1 pound of breakfast sausage)

3/4 lb. of lean pork loin, ground fine (1/8" die holes)

1/4 lb. of pork fat, diced and ground fine with the pork loin

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/3 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 tsp. of granulated garlic

1/2 tsp. of sugar

1 to 2 tsp. of dried sage

1/2 tsp. of McCormick® culinary maple flavoring (optional)

3 tbsp. of cold water

1 tsp. of Wrights® Liquid Smoke (Hickory flavor)

2 tbsp. of rice flour (or potato flour or corn flour)

Canola oil for frying

Directions:

Mix the ground pork and fat mixture with the salt by hand and put that into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, expel the air and seal it. Refrigerate that mixture overnight.

Mix the ground pork/fat for three minutes with all remaining ingredients except the rice flour and the canola oil, in an electric mixer, on medium speed.

Add the rice flour a little at a time while mixing on medium low speed and then mix the sausage for two minutes.

Scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl with a soft spatula to get all of the sausage together, then mix it again for two minutes.

Form sausage patties by hand, 3/8" to 1/2" thick, put them into a thick bottom non-stick skillet, preheated on medium heat and lightly sprayed with canola oil.

Spray the tops of the sausage patties lightly with canola oil.

If needed you can flatten the patties with a spatula at the beginning of frying, while the meat is raw and pliable, to get uniform thickness and the overall patty thickness you want. But note that the patty thickness will increase slightly during frying, partly due to some of the water in the sausage turning into steam, and partly due to the meat proteins tightening during frying.

Turn the sausage patties over a few times with the spatula until they are golden in color, about two minutes per side total time.

Serve the sausage patties hot, along with any other breakfast items.

Enjoy!

Sweet Smokey Breakfast Sausage - ☺♥

This breakfast sausage is made from a Boston butt roast and it is simple and it uses less varieties of seasonings than other Food Nirvana recipes for Breakfast Sausage. But it is very fine in taste and texture.

You definitely want to make this sausage to compare its sweet, smoky flavor to the breakfast sausages from the other recipes. We all have taste preferences so why not find yours and make what you enjoy best?

Overall, once you start making breakfast sausage and varying the seasonings you can home in on what pleases you best.

If you don't have a meat grinder you can request your butcher to grind a Boston butt roast (of your choice) for you, while you wait.

Ingredients: (makes 4 pounds of sausage)

4 lbs. of pork butt, ground fine

2 tbsp. of Kosher salt

1 tbsp. of black pepper

1 tbsp. of granulated garlic

3 tbsp. of rice flour

3 tbsp. of maple syrup

1/4 cup of cold water

1/4 cup of Wrights Liquid Smoke® (Hickory flavor)

Directions:

Prepare the pork butt for grinding by cutting it into pieces that will easily fit in your meat grinder. Think 2"x3/4"x3/4" size pieces.

Remove excess fat (any large all fat pieces) and discard it. You want the fat to be 25% to 30% of the total weight of the meat. You can make a pretty good guess visually.

Grind the pieces of pork butt using the 1/4" diameter holes die in your meat grinder. Then process the ground pork using the 1/8" diameter holes in the meat grinder.

Put all of the dry and wet seasoning ingredients into a bowl and whisk them to combine.

The mixing step described next assumes the size of your electric mixer bowl is six quarts or larger. If your mixer bowl is less than six quarts then divide the ground pork into two equal size amounts and process them separately, each with half of the seasoning ingredients. Later you can combine the amounts by mixing them together by hand before storing the sausage.

Mix the ground pork and seasoning ingredients in the electric mixer bowl on medium speed using the regular mixer beater (but keep the meat from climbing onto the beater by running it fast enough to toss the meat against the inside surface of the mixing bowl). Stop the mixer and use a rubber spatula if necessary to push the meat down off the beater. Total mixing time should be about four minutes.

Put the breakfast sausage into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, squeeze out the air, seal the bag, then refrigerate the sausage overnight.

Weigh out 8 ounce amounts of the breakfast sausage and put each into a one quart vacuum seal bag. Vacuum seal the bags and then press on them to make the sausage flat and of even thickness, roughly 1/2" thick.

Mark the bags to identify contents and keep the bags of breakfast sausage in the deep freeze until you want to use them. They will be fine for three to six months in the deep freeze.

Thaw the frozen sausage in the microwave oven on full power for 30 seconds. Then flip the bag over and microwave on full power for 15 seconds. Then put the bag on a counter top and if necessary let the sausage finish thawing.

Make sausage patties by hand of whatever size pleases you (but no more than 1/2" thick) and simply fry them as described next.

Fry the sausage patties in a hot thick bottom non-stick skillet into which one tablespoon of either butter or vegetable oil has been added and heated. Press on the tops of the pieces of sausage with a spatula immediately when each patty is put into the skillet to help keep them flat and of roughly even thickness.

After one minute flip the sausage pieces over and again press on the tops of the pieces of sausage with the spatula to help keep them flat.

Continue frying the sausage pieces on low heat, flipping them over every two minutes, until they are nicely browned on both sides. Use a 180 degrees F

warming oven and a paper towel covered plate to keep the fried sausage patties warm if you are frying multiple batches of sausage.

Serve the sausages hot along with whatever other breakfast items you provide to your guests. The planning and order of preparation are up to you.

I know you will really enjoy this version of breakfast sausage. The sausages are tasty, sweet, crisp on the outside and tender on the inside and moist. Yummy!

Chinese BBQ Pork - 😊♥♥♥😊

Here is a fine recipe for making Chinese barbecued pork (Char Siu), which can be an entree (like pork over rice and a cooked green vegetable) or part of many different Chinese food recipes, like cut into small pieces for making Pork Fried Rice, or diced for making Eggrolls.

I found the original recipe at the Woks Of Life website ... and it looked delicious! I just made it and it looks terrific. And it tastes wonderful! We used it in making Chinese Egg Rolls and it is perfect.

Ingredients:

3 pounds of boneless pork shoulder/pork butt

¼ cup of granulated white sugar

2 teaspoons of sea salt

½ teaspoon of five spice powder

¼ teaspoon of white pepper

½ teaspoon of sesame oil

1 tablespoon of Shaoxing rice wine

1 tablespoon of light soy sauce

1 tablespoon of hoisin sauce

2 teaspoons of molasses

1/4 teaspoon of red food coloring (optional)

3 cloves of finely minced garlic

2 tablespoons of honey

1 tablespoon of hot water

Directions:

Cut the pork into long slabs, strips or chunks about 2 inches thick. Don't trim any excess fat, as it will render off and add flavor.

Combine the sugar, salt, five spice powder, white pepper, sesame oil, wine, soy sauce, hoisin sauce, molasses, food coloring (if using), and garlic in a bowl to make the marinade (BBQ sauce).

Reserve about 2 tablespoons of the marinade and set it aside in a small bowl. Rub the pork with the rest of the marinade in a large bowl or baking dish. Cover the bowl/dish and refrigerate overnight, or at least 8 hours. Cover and store the reserved marinade in the fridge as well.

Preheat your oven to 'bake' at 475 degrees F with the shelf positioned in the upper third of the oven.

Line an 11x17 inch baking sheet with aluminum foil and place a metal rack on top. Place the pork on the rack, leaving as much space as possible between the pieces. Pour 1 ½ cups water into the pan below the rack. This prevents drippings from burning or smoking.

Transfer the pork to your preheated oven. Roast for 10 minutes, then reduce your oven temperature to 375 degrees F and roast for an additional 15 minutes.

After the 25 minutes of roasting, flip the pork. If the bottom of the pan is dry, add another cup of water.

Rotate the baking sheet 180 degrees to ensure even roasting. Roast another 15 minutes. Throughout the roasting time, check often (every 10 minutes) and reduce the oven temperature to 350 degrees F if it looks like it is becoming too dark (almost black).

Meanwhile, combine the reserved marinade with the honey and 1 tablespoon hot water. Stir well. This is the sauce you use next for basting the pork.

After the 40 minutes of elapsed roasting time, baste the pork, flip it, and baste the other side and the outside edges as well. Roast for a final 10 minutes at a convection setting of 375 degrees F if your oven has that feature. Otherwise roast for 15 more minutes.

The pork has cooked for 50 or 55 minutes total. It should be cooked through and caramelized on the surface.

If it is not caramelized to your liking, you can turn the broiler on for a couple minutes to crisp the outside and add some color/flavor. Be sure not to walk away during this process, since the sweet char siu BBQ sauce on the surface can burn quickly if left unattended.

Remove the char siu from the oven and baste it with the last bit of reserved BBQ sauce. Let the meat rest for 10 minutes before slicing, then slice and serve with some rice and a stir fried vegetable (like bok choy).

Alternatively, you might reserve some BBQ pork to be diced to be used later as an ingredient in making eggrolls. Or, you can use some of the pork in small pieces when making pork fried rice.

Enjoy!

Curing Raw Pork To Make Ham - ☺♥T

For many years I have been disappointed by typical commercially available ham, either cured water logged "half" hams or the water logged stuff we find for lunch meat in supermarket deli's. It/they simply don't have the taste or texture that I remembered from childhood. Specifically, now and then I'd find a cooked ham in my grandmother's refrigerator. I learned quickly that thin slices of that cold ham made truly delicious sandwiches with seriously good ham flavor and far better texture than any cold lunch meat purchased by my mother.

Along with the sandwich experience I fondly remember ham dinners served at church a few times a year. The slices were large, thick, and moist and tender and delicious. As the years passed, with me becoming an adult, I was interested (because I had money) in finding and enjoying great ham. But nothing quite seemed to measure up to my childhood memories, either in lunch meat or "half" hams. The meat was of presumably broader varieties, taste wise, in the deli. But the meat wasn't all that tasty, unless one wanted chemical flavors. The "half" hams became ever less appealing in taste and texture.

Finally, I noticed a significant yield reduction when purchasing what was advertised as shank or butt hams, but nowhere longer identified as half hams on the labels. The reason? The prime slices in the center of a whole ham had been removed, to be sold at much higher prices per pound, leaving the low yield dregs to the unwitting consumer. At that point I was plainly pissed off. The only ham occasionally worth eating was the popular and expensive spiral sliced hams, which were not as fluid logged. Still, they were a weak representation of what I remembered as a child in terms of taste and texture.

By coincidence I recently became interested in curing beef to make corned beef, and that experience was so positive I got curious about trying to make ham. I did some Internet research ... actually a lot of it ... to get a broad perspective on pork processing, different methods, different seasonings and aging considerations. I finally homed in on what looked to be easy, inexpensive and effective. Thus this extensive teaching recipe. In short, I was so successful and so pleased with my results I simply had to provide the information to a broad community of home chefs. And I want readers to understand why the stuff found in supermarkets has declined so badly in quality.

I decided to cure a four pound piece of partially defatted pork loin to make ham. I used Morton's® Sugar Cure®, which is (or at least was) used for making ham and bacon, etc. The spice pack that was supposed to be included with the Sugar Cure was missing so I went online and got a recommended spice mixture for making ham from uncured pork.

I learned that Mortons® no longer sells Sugar Cure®, but that turns out to be irrelevant, for other suppliers sell the equivalent of Sugar Cure®. Or at least that is what they claim. Make sure what you buy contains 0.5% sodium nitrate and 0.5% sodium nitrite along with salt, sugar, etc. Simply check it out on Amazon® and order what you want, inexpensively. Oh, I purchased ten pounds of dextrose (monoglyceride) online as the preferred sugar to use for curing meat (vs. sucrose[table sugar] which is a diglyceride of glucose and fructose). My idea, yet to be tried, is to use the dextrose in combination with Mortons® Tender Quick® curing mix to create a version of the Sugar Cure they no longer sell. That is my way of guaranteeing the right amount of curing ingredients and the best sugar for curing pork loin.

Special Note: I learned that Mortons® does have a recipe to use Tender Quick® instead of Sugar Cure® for making ham from raw pork. You simply use the Tender Quick standard amount per pound of meat and add one teaspoon of sugar to the cure mix per pound of meat. I, of course, will use dextrose to limit the sweetening effect.

I used almost 1/2 ounce (by weight) of the Sugar Cure per pound of pork. Morton's® recommended 2 1/2 pounds of Sugar Cure per 100 pounds of meat. That translates to 40 ounces per 100 pounds of meat, or 0.4 ounces per pound of meat, so I slightly exceeded the recommended amount of Sugar Cure. Not a big deal, but one should be careful of amounts when using sodium nitrate and sodium nitrite to cure meats. Use too much and you are either very sick or dead. In my case, the wetting of the pork loin surfaces with Wright's® Liquid Smoke® before applying the dry cure mixture partially dilutes the percentage of nitrate and nitrite available to the pork loin. I am satisfied relative to safety and flavor!

To the sugar cure I added one teaspoon each of ground cloves, ground allspice, black pepper and ground cardamom and mixed them well (but I started with some spices that were not ground ... Hey, no problem! See the directions later in the recipe for using a Magic Bullet® mixer to powder the curing agent and the spices.).

I spread a few teaspoons of Wright's® Liquid Smoke® over the raw pork before applying the mix of the cure and the spices because I did not intend to smoke the meat after it was cured and rested (the fancy name is "equilibrated" ... see below).

I put the cure and spice coated meat into a vacuum seal bag, vacuum sealed it, and put the bag into the refrigerator. It remained there for one week, being turned over once per day. In my first experiment I did a second curing cycle, which I later thought turned out to be mostly unnecessary and actually appeared

to make the meat too salty and too highly seasoned, at least for salt sensitive people. The idea is that thinner cuts of meat in general require fewer cure cycles.

My next experiment was to use a single cure but lengthen the cure cycle from seven days to ten days. That would provide me a middle of the road flavor and level of saltiness, and sure enough it worked perfectly. The idea that matters is that you can experiment to please yourself.

After a single cure cycle, or sequential cures, the meat was rinsed and patted dry, then I vacuum sealed it and allowed it to "equilibrate" in the refrigerator for 10 days.

The meaning of equilibrate in this application is allowing the sodium content of the meat to reach even concentration throughout the meat, ergo, the inference is that immediately after a cure there is a sodium differential between the outside edge of the meat and the center of the meat.

Morton's recommends a 20 day equilibration period for a ham, but a ham is far larger and thicker than the pork loin I was curing. My section of pork loin flattened out to a variable thickness of maximum about 2 inches, thus the shorter 10 day equilibration period.

Some commercial hams are aged for six months or more after a full cure (three curing rounds instead of one or two). Sometimes they are processed in a smokehouse as part of the aging process. The aging and smoking processes intentionally cause the ham to lose moisture. I did not plan to age the cured pork loin or smoke it this time around. Maybe later I will try smoking and aging with thick cuts of pork. Then again, maybe not. I'm really not trying to make a salty country ham. My goal is to have somewhat moist, tender and very tasty ham slices perfect for sandwiches or as meat for dishes like fettuccine carbonara, or quickly fried ham for breakfast.

One other reason for waiting before trying aging is that the temperature and humidity environment for aging needs to be tightly controlled, and the meat examined regularly for development of surface mold. Any mold color other than white (especially black) calls for wiping down the surface of the meat with a cloth soaked in a mixture of water and vinegar, and then drying the surface of the meat. I was not interested in that process or the potential problems.

What I did instead of aging was to keep the equilibrated cured pork loin in the vacuum seal bag and I cooked the pork loin that way in a convection oven at 180 °F until the internal meat temperature rose to 150 °F. At that point it was fully cooked and ready to be used in multiple ways just like a fully cooked ham purchased in a supermarket ... only with far superior ham to that of the typical

supermarket butt or shank portion of ham cured in brine or injected with brine. In short, I used a dry curing process, not a brine method ... or perhaps I should call it a hybrid method that includes liquid hickory smoke flavoring, a dry cure mix, plus vacuum sealing to force uniform and constant contact between the cure and the meat. Afterwards I pressure steamed the ham (high pressure for 30 minutes) to make it tender and moist. In short, I used my ability to go beyond the less than great recipes I found on the Internet ... the ones that were sure to produce "dried out" meat!

If you think about it, my goal was to have moist but not water logged meat as I describe in my planned uses next. I intended to try some very thinly sliced pieces as lunch meat. I also planned to lightly fry a few pieces cut to about 1/8 inch thick. There, the idea is that pork isn't very good when it gets too dry during cooking, so avoiding aging and also doing the initial cooking inside the vacuum sealed bag maintains the original moisture content, though some of the moisture will exit the interior of the meat during cooking, sometimes along with some gelatin and some melted fat, even in a vacuum sealed environment. Pressure steaming returns moisture to the ham.

This method was in total contrast to aging and smoking a whole ham, where the surface of the meat of the ham is covered by fat and skin, which will retain moisture during later brief baking to heat the ham. In my instance, the pork loin lacked both uniform surface fat and skin and so it could dry out with the meat exposed during any baking. Thus, no baking was done outside of the low temperature cooking in the vacuum sealed bag.

So much for my first attempts to do a sugar cure of pork loin to make ham. Wow, am I pleased! It was so very important to take the time to think through all the Internet recipes and recommendations and figure out what to keep and what to discard as stupid or at the least, outdated or unnecessary.

Now we get to the really good part of this narrative ... the Tasting!

To cut to the chase, what I made was virtually perfect. Lucky me! I was amazed that pork loin could be so perfectly moist and tender and delicious as a type of ham. I loved slicing the final product 1/8" thick in my meat slicer and using it directly for snacking and generously in making ham sandwiches. At first, I didn't even bother with frying any of it. And I didn't need to smoke it because of using Wright's® Liquid Smoke®.

My only caveat to all of this is that fat surrounding the areas of lean ham in a cured pork loin may or may not please you when you make a sandwich, or simply eat the meat as a snack. My preference was to simply peel or cut away

most of the layer of fat from the perimeter and some from the interior of the meat and let a small amount there and enjoy it all. Yes, it was/is most enjoyable. I am highly pleased!

Note: In later batches I started removing the bulk of the fat from the pork loin before curing it. In one instance that caused a loss of 25% of the starting weight. My point is the fat loss can vary a lot, from 10% to 25% based on the ratio of meat to fat in any given pork loin. You might want to examine the available loins at the market and pick one with less fat, right?

Okay, I will now provide specific recipe information below so you too can make this delightful and inexpensive ham. More on the economics later, after the recipe. You will be amazed.

Ingredients:

1, 4+ lb. piece of partially defatted pork loin

2 ounces, by weight, of Mortons® Sugar Cure® (this ingredient is no longer sold by Morton®.)

Alternative cure using Mortons® Tender Quick: 1 boneless pork loin, 1 tablespoon of Morton® Tender Quick® mix per pound of loin, 1 teaspoon of granulated sugar (Use Dextrose) per pound of loin (note that the amount of tender quick is basically identical the amount of sugar cure on a weight basis ... so this is totally easy)

1 teaspoon each of ground cardamom, ground pepper, ground cloves and ground allspice

3 or more teaspoons of Wright's® Liquid Smoke®

Directions:

Cut away any thick area of fat on the surface of the raw pork loin.

Mix together the Sugar Cure (or Tender Quick) with the spices. I use a Magic Bullet® mixer to basically powder all of it, so the fact that I started with whole cloves simply didn't matter. What I will note here is that the clove taste is noticeable, so you may opt to use half of what I used ... or not, for the clove overtone diminished in a few days.

Coat the raw pork loin with Wright's® Liquid Smoke® by hand. You may use 3 or more teaspoons of that product to moisten the meat surface.

Hand coat the meat with the cure and spice mixture. Do wash your hands afterwards ... unless you too would like to be "cured!" Of course, you might also wear latex or nitrile gloves and eliminate any skin exposure. Your choice.

Place the coated meat into a plastic bag and seal it tightly after expelling all the air, or, use a vacuum seal bag as I do and vacuum seal the meat, which guarantees there will not be any air in the bag.

Refrigerate the meat for one week to cure it and season it, turning the package over once a day.

After curing, remove the meat and rinse it and rub it to remove all curing agent and spices from the meat surface.

Pat the meat dry with paper towels, then put it into a plastic cook-in bag, or in a boil-in vacuum seal bag as I do, eliminate the air and seal the bag.

Equilibrate the meat for ten days in the refrigerator.

You are now at a decision point. You can follow the instructions below to cook the ham using a convection oven, or, you can read the Food Nirvana primer on Sous Vide Cooking in the Technology section and use that great technique for cooking the ham. It is your choice. Both methods will work well but the sous vide method is completely temperature controlled.

Put the bagged meat on a small rack on a baking sheet in the oven.

Set the oven to convection only at a temperature of 180 °F.

Check the meat temperature after three hours with an instant read thermometer, and periodically after that.

Once the internal meat temperature of the thickest part of the meat is 150 °F the baking is done.

Remove the bagged meat from the oven and let it cool to room temperature. There will be liquid surrounding the meat. Remove the bag.

Pressure steam the meat on high with one cup of water, for 30 minutes, long enough to moisturize it through to the center, then remove it from the steamer.

You now have excellent ham. Cool it to room temperature, wrapped tightly in aluminum foil, and then vacuum seal (only) the ham.

Put the vacuum sealed ham into the refrigerator to chill it overnight.

Use the great ham that day and later days (for up to a week, or even more) as you please. It is simply terrific! But do remember that once sliced a piece of ham should be eaten within a few days.

Now let's move on to the economics of making and using ham starting with raw pork loin, some curing agent and some spices.

I paid \$2.99 per pound for the raw pork loin. When the entire process was done for multiple pork loins I had an yield of 80 percent from the starting weight of the ham (that includes final perimeter fat elimination ... and no intentionally added water weight!). Thus, my 4 pound piece of raw pork loin (64 ounces) yielded 51+ ounces of "real" ham, which translates to \$12 / (51/16), or \$3.76 per pound for perfectly seasoned tender ham. The cost of the curing agent and the spices was almost nothing, for I buy both online with the spices at great prices from outfits like Nuts.com.

Now, given that the butt ham portion you buy in the supermarket at about \$2.20/pound (on sale) is converted to edible meat, we are talking about a weight loss of roughly 60% in bone, fat, skin and added water (you gotta' watch out for that game!). Thus, an eight pound butt ham produces only about 3.2 pounds of edible meat, for an expenditure of about \$17.60, and that meat is of far lower quality in taste and texture compared to what you made at home with the pork loin.

In short, if you bought the butt ham portion in the supermarket you paid \$5.86 per pound for inferior, tougher, water logged meat, compared to the \$3.76 per pound for the great stuff you made at home.

At this point it should be clear that what you make at home is a far superior experience. Yet, what about the premium ham products at the supermarket that are mostly all tasty edible meat? All I can say is, check the price per pound and you will have the answer. Compare the taste and the texture too. I'm rather sure I know what you will favor. Note, however, that supermarket sale prices for items like spiral hams can provide you the opportunity to buy them at only \$1.99/lb. And sometimes Master Cut hams (no bones, low fat) can be purchased for only \$2.99/lb. at places like Costco®.

Yes, being independent by choice, with little effort, improves the quality and economics of/for your life.

Ham and Cheese Casserole - ?

Here is a nice way to use leftover ham. It is one of many tasty variants of conventional macaroni and cheese. I can tell it will be tasty even before making it.

Ingredients:

3 cups of leftover ham, chopped into small (1/4" square) pieces

12 ounces of elbow macaroni, cooked al dente

8 ounces of white cheddar cheese, shredded

8 ounces of yellow cheddar cheese, shredded

8 ounces of room temperature cream cheese, chopped into eight pieces

1, 10 oz. can of cream of chicken soup

1½ cups of warmed whole milk

1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper

1/2 teaspoon of granulated or powdered garlic

10 salad tomatoes, halved

2 scallions, both white and green parts, diced

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Mix the shredded cheeses together.

Boil the macaroni in two quarts of water in a one gallon pot according to the package directions, then drain the macaroni and return it to the pot.

Heat the milk in a microwave oven safe container in the microwave oven for two minutes.

Add the ham, cream of chicken soup, milk, half of the shredded cheeses, the pepper, the garlic and the chopped room temperature cream cheese pieces to the cooked macaroni. Stir gently with a large wooden spoon until the mixture is combined and creamy.

Pour the mixture into a 9" x 13" glass casserole and top it with the remaining shredded cheeses.

Arrange the tomato halves evenly on top of the shredded cheeses, cut side down.

Bake the ham and cheese casserole uncovered for 30 to 40 minutes until the top is golden in color.

Top the casserole with the diced scallion pieces.

Serve hot.

Enjoy!

Ham Loaf - ☺♥

Ham loaf is comfort food that originated with the Pennsylvania Dutch (Germans) back in the 1800's. Basically it is a meatloaf made with ground smoked ham and some regular ground pork, along with a variety of other common ingredients. There are many recipes for ham loaf on the Internet and I reviewed a number of them and then combined the information with what I remember from the ham loaf my mother used to make. This food goes well with dishes like potatoes au gratin or macaroni and cheese. A side salad is also a nice addition to the meal.

Ham loaf can be served like meat loaf and it is excellent for making sandwiches when cold. The recipe I provide is slightly on the sweet side as I use some crushed pineapple like my mother did, and which is not found as an ingredient in the Internet recipes I reviewed. My mother's ham loaf did not have a glaze but the Internet recipes I reviewed do use a sweet and tangy glaze, so I decided that would be a nice thing to have in my recipe.

Ham loaf is quite simple to make provided you have a meat grinder. If you do not have one then go out and buy one as that device is very useful for many recipes in Food Nirvana. I use the meat grinder attachment with my Kitchen-Aid® mixer.

One of the Internet recipes indicated that in raw form the ham loaf or loaves can be wrapped in aluminum foil and frozen for later use. In other words the product stores well when frozen. If you do that then I suggest using it within three months. Personally, I will freeze it unwrapped and then vacuum seal it and return it to the deep freeze. That will provide at least twice the storage life as no oxygen will be present and there will be no possibility of freezer burn.

I tested my original recipe combination ideas with good results and I made final improvements that are included in the recipe below.

Ingredients: (Makes 3, 1 1/2 pound loaves)

2 lbs. of ground lean smoked ham

1 lb. of ground lean pork

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

2 cups of canned crushed pineapple

2 cups of cracker crumbs or bread crumbs

1/2 cup of regular oatmeal

1/2 cup of milk

1 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1 1/2 cups of either dark or light brown sugar

2 tsp. of ground mustard powder for the ham loaf

1 1/2 tsp. of ground mustard powder for the glaze

2/3 cup of apple cider vinegar or rice vinegar

1 tbsp. up to 1/4 cup of water for the glaze

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Combine the oatmeal with the juice from the can of crushed pineapple in a 2 cup Pyrex® measuring cup and microwave the mixture until it absorbs the water, stirring once after about 30 seconds. One additional 30 second period in the microwave oven, with stirring afterwards, will likely be enough.

Process the ham, pork, oatmeal, bread/cracker crumbs, and the crushed pineapple through the meat grinder, using a large bowl to collect the ground items. I do a first pass for the ham and the pork using the die with the 1/4" diameter openings in the meat grinder. If you want a finer texture to the ham loaf then process the meats through the grinder a second time using the die with the 1/8" diameter openings. Then process the oatmeal mixture through the meat grinder. Then mix the bread crumbs with the crushed pineapple and process that through the meat grinder.

Transfer all of the ground ingredients from the large bowl to a large (6 qt.) electric mixer bowl.

Combine the eggs, mustard powder, salt and pepper in a one quart bowl and whisk the mixture until it is well blended. Add the milk to the eggs and whisk until well mixed.

Using a regular beater, run the electric mixer for two minutes on low to medium speed to mix the ground ingredients together.

If you have a large electric mixer with a large mixing bowl of size 6 quarts or larger then you can do the next step all at once. Otherwise, divide the ground ingredients in half and put only half of them at a time into the mixing bowl. Similarly, if you divide the ground ingredients into two portions then divide the egg mixture into two portions as well, so that all mixing is done with half of the total volume of ingredients.

Add the egg mixture to the meat mixture gradually and then mix on medium speed for two to three minutes. At this point all the ingredients should be well blended. You will be able to handle the mixture in the next step without it sticking to your hands.

Form the ham loaf mixture into two large or three medium loaves. I use glass baking dishes about 4" by 9", like those typically used when baking loaves of bread. Spray them with Pam® before placing each formed loaf into the baking dish.

Combine the brown sugar, mustard powder and vinegar in a small saucepan to make the glaze. Mix the ingredients. Heat the mixture over low heat while stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Add up to 1/4 cup of water if the mixture is too concentrated to allow the sugar to dissolve easily when the mixture is at a simmering temperature. Mix further if necessary but to not boil the glaze. Remove the glaze from the heat.

Pour about one-third of the glaze over the ham loaves. Cover the baking dishes tightly with aluminum foil and bake the ham loaves for 50 minutes.

Uncover the ham loaves and discard the pieces of aluminum foil. Pour the remaining glaze over them, and baste them using a pastry brush every three to five minutes. The idea is to have the glaze get thick and somewhat sticky and to have the ham loaves to be cooked through completely. This will take about 20 to 30 minutes.

Remove the baking dishes from the oven and let them cool slightly on a wooden cutting board before serving the ham loaf. I suggest letting one of them cool to room temperature, covering it with aluminum foil and chilling it in the refrigerator, to be used later for making cold sandwiches.

Enjoy!

Serendipity Sausage - ☺♥

I've studied numerous sausage recipes and I've experimented a lot making various types of sausage. The one provided in this recipe happens to be pure serendipity. I can't say that it is a breakfast sausage, it isn't any ethnic sausage I ever tried before, yet I find myself very pleased with all aspects of this sausage so I'm labeling it "Serendipity" Sausage. If you study the ingredients it looks like a recipe for breakfast sausage, but the way the garlic comes through puts it in a class all by itself.

The simple truth is I was trying to perfect a breakfast sausage ... and I've pretty much put that to bed. But in my general efforts to make modifications I came up with the sausage in this recipe. Think of it as a likely result from a lot of experimenting that just happened to work very well.

I made the sausage today and it is excellent. Peggy and I love it. Try it and you will agree. It is so good "as is" that I don't want to change any aspect of this recipe. Well, okay, I did fry it before eating! You will notice the garlic ... and I think it is superb in this recipe ... but if you want you can use less than indicated in the ingredients section below.

Ingredients:

3 pounds of boned skinless pork shoulder, about 80% lean, ground using the 1/4" diameter holes meat grinding die

1/2 cup of potato or corn or sorghum flour (I used gluten free sorghum flour from www.nutsonline.com)

1/2 tsp. of red pepper flakes

2 tbsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. ground black pepper

3 large cloves of garlic, minced

1/2 cup of water

2 tbsp. of maple syrup

2 tsp. of dried marjoram (or 1 tsp. of ground marjoram)

2 tbsp. of dried sage (or 1 tbsp. of ground sage)

Directions:

Trim the pork of excess external fat and discard that fat. Cut the meat into cubes about 3/4" on a side, including any internal fat, and grind it through the coarse (1/4" diameter holes) die/plate of your meat grinder. Then use your electric mixer with the beater attachment to blend the ground pork and ground fat for about three minutes on medium speed.

Put all of the other recipe ingredients into a one quart bowl. Mix them with a spoon until the mixture is fairly uniform.

Pour that flour, herbs, spices and water combination into the ground pork and fat mixture gradually while the mixer is running and mix thoroughly. I use the beater attachment of my electric mixer and run it on medium speed for about three minutes to blend the other ingredients completely into the ground pork.

Once the sausage is made, either stuff it into casings or make it into patties or bulk flat packages about 1/2" thick. The sausage should be refrigerated as soon as it is made. It can be kept in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days or vacuum sealed and kept in the freezer for up to 6 months.

What I like to do is test fry a few patties of the sausage in a very small amount of canola oil in a hot skillet. That gives me the chance to evaluate the sausage relative to seasoning ingredients and composition. When the frying is done I put the sausage patties on a paper towel, cover them with a paper towel, and press lightly to absorb excess oil into the paper towels. Then it is time for fun! I suggest you follow the same procedure ... For the testing/eating is most enjoyable. I bet you will repeat it a few times just to be sure!

You could serve this sausage with most any meal of the day. It will fit in nicely whatever you decide. I leave it to you to pick appropriate side dishes.

Ham In Sweet Syrup - ☺♥

One of my favorite childhood memories is of my mother preparing a yummy meal of ham in sweet syrup, patty cakes and buttered broccoli. Occasionally she would make that early on a Sunday evening and we would watch favorite TV programs like Roy Rogers or Walt Disney in the living room while eating the dinner.

Recently I decided to make the ham in sweet syrup. I didn't even need a recipe, for the ingredients are simply defatted thin sliced ham, butter, brown sugar and water, simmered in a skillet on low to medium temperature, turning the pieces of ham over every few minutes, until the liquid mixture turned into a syrupy consistency. Ham served hot that way is quite delicious.

Ingredients: (four adult servings)

1 cured and precooked supermarket ham (either butt or shank)

1/2 cup of brown sugar

1 cup of water

3 tbsp. of butter

Directions:

Cut the excess fat from the surface of the ham. Then cut four to six full size slices 1/4" thick. Then cut away all fat from the slices and cut the slices into pieces roughly 2" by 3" in size.

Wrap the remaining ham on the bone with plastic wrap and then put it into a gallon size Ziploc® freezer bag and put that into the refrigerator for a later use.

Put all of the recipe ingredients except the ham pieces into a large (12" to 15" diameter) skillet and heat the mixture with stirring until the butter is melted and the sugar dissolved in the water.

Add the ham pieces to the skillet and make sure they are all covered/coated with the liquid mixture.

Bring the temperature of the liquid to a low boil and maintain that low boil while turning the ham pieces over about every two minutes.

The ham is done cooking when the liquid has become a thin to medium thick syrup.

Serve the ham hot with other meal items. Enjoy!

Harmony Stir Fry Plus - ☺♥♥♥☺

Chao He Cai is a "harmonious" stir-fry of clear noodles, eggs, chives, carrots and bean sprouts, typically served as a side dish. I started with that recipe from the Woks Of Life® website, and I modified it to exclude noodles, and I added julienned Char Siu (Chinese BBQ pork), sliced canned mushrooms, sliced red and green bell peppers and shredded cabbage. My intent was to make a version of Chao He Cai that would be a complete entree instead of only a side dish. I also modified seasoning ingredients/amounts to accommodate the addition of the pork, the cabbage, the bell peppers and the mushrooms.

I was very pleased with the taste, texture and appearance of this modified Harmony Stir Fry. You will be too if you decide to make it. I made jasmine rice to be served under this main entree of meat, eggs and numerous vegetables. The combination was clearly a complete and very pleasant meal.

Ingredients: (4 to 5 servings)

12 ounces of julienned Chinese BBQ pork (see the Food Nirvana recipe for making Chinese BBQ pork)

3 jumbo or 4 extra large eggs

4 tablespoons of canola oil (divided)

2 cups of shredded cabbage

7 ounces of canned bean sprouts, drained

2/3 cup of canned sliced mushrooms, drained

1 cup of carrots (julienned)

1/2 large red bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 1/2" wide, 2" long strips

1/2 large green bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 1/2" wide, 2" long strips

4 ounces of chives (cut into 2-inch long pieces)

4 medium to large cloves of garlic (minced; divided)

1 teaspoon of fresh ginger (minced)

4 teaspoons of Shaoxing wine (divided)

1 tablespoon of oyster sauce

2 tablespoons of light soy sauce

1 tablespoon of dark soy sauce

1 teaspoon of sugar

1 teaspoon of rice vinegar

1 teaspoon of sea salt (divided)

1/4 teaspoon of white pepper

4 cups of cooked jasmine rice (to be served separately with the stir fry)

Directions:

Cook the jasmine rice according to package instructions. Set the rice aside, covered.

Whisk the eggs along with two teaspoons of the Shaoxing wine and 1/2 teaspoon of sea salt in a one quart bowl.

Preheat your wok over medium-high heat until it starts to smoke lightly.

Add 2 tablespoons of canola oil to coat the bottom of the wok, lift the wok briefly and swirl the oil to partially coat the inside of the wok close to the bottom.

Reduce the heat to medium low.

Add the eggs and cook for one minute until they are lightly scrambled but still a little runny. Use a spatula to turn the eggs over and make the remaining raw egg mixture contact the bottom of the wok briefly.

Remove the lightly scrambled eggs from the wok and set them aside in a bowl. Then chop the eggs with a spatula.

Add 2 tablespoons of canola oil to the wok and stir fry the minced ginger, julienned carrot and shredded cabbage for about 3 minutes on medium high heat.

Add half of the minced garlic along with the bean sprouts, red and green bell pepper strips, sliced mushrooms and the pork. Stir fry for two minutes to mix everything well.

Reduce the heat to low, then add the oyster sauce, light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, two teaspoons of Shaoxing wine, sugar, rice vinegar, 1/2 teaspoon of sea salt and white pepper.

Increase the heat to high and stir-fry until the ingredients are evenly mixed, about two minutes.

Reduce the heat to low and add the chives and the chopped, scrambled eggs, and stir-fry for two minutes until the ingredients are well combined.

Add the other half of the minced garlic.

Stir-fry until the chives are wilted, about two minutes. Then cover the wok with a lid and let the food cook on low heat for three minutes.

Serve the stir fry to your guests hot over bowls of warm jasmine rice.

Serve a chilled, crisp white wine like Sauvignon Blanc to adults and cold carbonated non-alcoholic beverages to young guests.

Enjoy!

Hot Italian Sausage - ☺♥

As usual, I studied various recipes and I created a composite that produces a delicious hot Italian sausage. But here is where personal preferences become very important. Different folks want different degrees of hot. What I show below in the ingredient list creates an extremely hot sausage suitable only for those who truly love hot stuff. After the directions I discuss how to vary the ingredients to have anything from mildly hot to fairly hot, so that you can decide what you want.

The meat to use is a boneless, skinless pork shoulder, which is sometimes labeled as a Boston Butt roast. The point is that a skin and fat trimmed, deboned pork shoulder, will usually have a near perfect ratio of meat to fat, around 20% fat.

I made this sausage multiple times and it is excellent. Try it and you will agree.

Ingredients:

5 pounds of boned, skinless pork shoulder, about 80% lean

2 teaspoons of fennel seed

1 1/2 teaspoons of coriander seeds

1 1/2 teaspoons of caraway seeds

2 tbsp. of red pepper flakes (see variations following directions)

2 tablespoons of kosher salt

1 tablespoon of coarsely ground black pepper (or crushed fresh peppercorns)

1 tbsp. of dried oregano

1 cup of ice water

2 tsp. of Cayenne pepper (optional, see variations following directions)

Directions:

Trim the pork of any thick external fat and cut the meat into 1 inch cubes, including the internal fat, and add the salt and mix by hand. Then put the salted meat into a bowl, cover the surface of the meat with plastic wrap, and refrigerate it overnight.

The next morning, grind the salted pork through the coarse (1/4" diameter holes) plate of your meat grinder. After the meat is ground, use your electric mixer with

the paddle attachment to blend the ground pork and ground fat for about three minutes on medium speed to blend the meat with the fat.

Put all the dry herbs/spices into a Magic Bullet® mixer and mix them for two minutes. Add them into a two cup bowl with the cup of ice water and mix with a spoon for about 30 seconds.

Pour the herb, spice and water combination into the ground pork and fat mixture gradually while mixing and mix thoroughly for at least 3 minutes. I use the paddle attachment of my electric mixer and run it on medium speed for about three minutes to blend the spices into the ground pork.

Once the sausage is fully mixed, I suggest you test fry a small, 1/4" thick patty of the sausage in a small amount of canola oil to test the seasoning. Fry for about three minutes per side on medium heat, flipping the patty over a few times during frying. Put the fried patty onto a paper towel, fold some towel over the top and press it to remove any remaining canola oil. Now cut the patty into four pieces with a fork and taste them.

If necessary, you can add more seasoning ingredients and mix them in and again test fry a small patty. Just remember to make any seasoning additions in small amounts, for you can always add more, but you can't get rid of excess seasoning once added.

You can stuff the sausage into casings or make it into patties or bulk packages about 1/2" thick. This sausage should be refrigerated as soon as it is made. It can be kept in the refrigerator for 2-3 days or vacuum sealed and kept in the freezer for up to 6 months.

This stuff is so delicious I doubt you will have much left to freeze.

Variations:

To create a mildly hot Italian sausage, eliminate the cayenne pepper and reduce the red pepper flakes from two tablespoons to one tablespoon. To create an average hot Italian sausage, simply eliminate the cayenne pepper and otherwise use the other listed ingredients. To create a somewhat hotter sausage, use one teaspoon of cayenne pepper, not two. Any amount of cayenne pepper adds a notable amount of heat, so try using a small amount first.

Mexican "Egg Rolls" - ☺♥

This recipe is a bit of crazy serendipity. I happened to make and thoroughly enjoy a pulled pork taco and later in the same afternoon make and enjoy some of my great French fries. Seeing some leftover ingredients from the taco along with the deep skillet of peanut oil that I used for the fries gave me a wild idea. Why not make a rolled up taco and fry it like a Chinese egg roll?

Yes, the idea is off the wall, but I proceeded to make one as described in this Food Nirvana recipe, and it turned out to be delicious. Go figure!

The ingredients I used when making the normal taco were juicy shredded pork, an 8" diameter soft flour taco/tortilla shell, thin slices of Pepper Jack cheese, halved pimento stuffed green Manzanilla olives, diced onion, diced tomato, Sriracha pepper sauce and chopped lettuce. That makes a yummy taco. Now, what would I put into a taco that I would fry like a Chinese egg roll? Well, it is pretty obvious that the tomato and lettuce and olives would not do well, so I limited the content to the pork, the onions, and the cheese, for they go together naturally.

One thing I didn't use was any egg. Thus, to keep a rolled up taco with the ends folded in to seal the moist meat, onions and cheese, I decided to use three wood toothpicks to keep the rolled up flour shell intact. So I guess I am guilty of a misnomer for calling this creation an egg roll. Ah, well ... I was trying to get you to visualize the product by using the egg roll description as an example.

As it all turned out the end product was very much like an egg roll ... crisp on the outside and filled with warm tasty ingredients on the inside. I simply used Sriracha sauce as a dip/condiment instead of the traditional Chinese Duck Sauce or Hot Mustard.

You can have a lot of fun with this recipe, both in surprising people when you serve the food and in thinking about all the ingredient variations you might try. Best of all, soft flour taco shells/tortillas are easy to buy and easy to handle when making this dish. There simply isn't anything complicated or any steps that require special techniques or knowledge. In short, it is easy.

Ingredients: (makes four fried tacos/Mexican egg rolls, or, two servings)

4, 8" diameter soft flour taco shells/tortillas

3 cups of moist Mexican pulled pork (taken from a container that has broth in it from the making of the pork)

1 cup of diced sweet onion

8 ounces (or more) of Pepper Jack cheese, sliced thinly or grated

12 plain wooden toothpicks (I use the rounded ones with sharp points on both ends)

2 quarts of peanut oil in a large, deep skillet, yielding oil about one inch deep

1 bottle of Sriracha Hot Chile Sauce as a condiment for dipping

Directions:

Heat the oil in the skillet to 350 degrees F. Use a quick or instant read thermometer to be accurate. Adjust the heat as necessary to maintain that temperature.

While the oil is heating cut or grate the cheese and dice the onion. Check the oil temperature periodically and adjust or maintain the heat as necessary.

Lay out the four taco shells on a counter and divide the filling ingredients evenly, making a six inch long straight line of ingredients towards one side of each shell, and leaving an unused border of dough about one inch wide on each side at the largest diameter at the center of the shell.

Roll up each taco from the ingredient side while folding in the extra dough on each end to seal the ingredients inside, then use three toothpicks to puncture all the way through each taco, one in the middle and one about an inch from each end. You should notice a small amount of moisture on each end from compressing the juicy pork and other ingredients during the roll up. This is desirable as it helps to seal the taco dough and protect the inner ingredients from the hot oil during frying.

At this point you should have four rolled up tacos that look like uncooked egg rolls with toothpicks sticking through them and sticking out evenly on both sides. Each rolled up taco should be five and one half to six inches long and about an inch and a quarter to one and one half inches thick.

Fry the tacos two at a time in the hot oil, allowing no more than two minutes on the first side. Note that the toothpicks should be made to stick out relatively horizontal. Then turn the tacos over with tongs to fry the second side, again limiting the frying time to no more than two minutes.

Put the fried tacos on a paper towel to drain any oil from them. Then immediately fry the other two tacos.

Be sure to turn off the heat under the skillet.

Serve the hot tacos immediately along with a bottle of Sriracha Hot Chile Sauce for dipping.

A small salad goes very well with this meal ... So why not use the lettuce, tomatoes and other ingredients that you would have used in making a regular taco? You might want a cool Ranch or Bleu Cheese dressing with the salad.

Ice cold Corona® beer in a frozen mug is a great drink for this meal.

Enjoy!

Mexican Pulled Pork (Carnitas) - ☺♥T

I had some terrific tacos at a Mexican Grill restaurant. One of them contained shredded/pulled pork and it was fabulous. While I can't precisely identify all of the ingredients they used in preparing that pork I am providing a recipe for making it that turns out to be just fine. You can experiment with various fresh ingredients and sauces later to make the taco of your choice if that idea appeals to you. Lots of people love shredded pork tacos. The Spanish word for that type of pork is Carnitas, meaning little pieces of meat.

Actually, I made some fabulous shredded pork tacos using 8" diameter soft flour taco shells, the pork, thin slices of Monterrey Pepper Jack cheese, halved green pimento stuffed manzanilla olives, diced onion, diced tomato, Sriracha pepper sauce and chopped lettuce. They beat the normal seasoned browned ground beef tacos to pieces! All I did was warm the taco shell with the shredded pork on it on a paper plate in the microwave oven and then build the taco with the other ingredients. Yummy! I quickly made and consumed a second one!

Note that the shredded pork and broth from this recipe can be used in many different dishes as the meat/broth component. Note also that you can easily scale up this recipe to use an entire eight or nine pound pork shoulder or even Boston butt roasts without significantly increasing the other ingredients. Simply use a little more chicken broth or water. You may also want to cut the whole pork shoulder into two pieces prior to cooking for later easy handling at shredding time.

I really amped up the recipe for red beans and rice by adding the pulled pork and broth to the other ingredients. Also, some years later I find I am still discovering great ways to use the broth as well as the meat. For example, I cooked barley in the broth, added some of the pulled pork, and created a delicious soup with a little bit of heat!

Ingredients:

1, 4 to 5 lb pork butt (otherwise known as pork shoulder)

2, 32 oz. cartons of chicken broth

2, 15 ounce cans of diced tomatoes or equivalent diced fresh tomatoes

20 whole garlic cloves, chopped

4 whole fresh jalapeno peppers, sliced (do not remove the seeds) or four chipotle peppers in adobo sauce

1, 4 ounce can of diced green chilies or green Chile sauce

2 teaspoons of oregano (dry leaf, or, two Tbsp. of fresh oregano, pressed tightly into the measuring spoon)

1 tsp. of sea salt

Directions:

Combine all the ingredients in a two gallon pot and simmer, covered, until fork tender. This can take from 3 to 4 hours. If the meat is not fully covered with liquid I recommend turning the meat over to expose the submerged part once every 30 minutes.

When the pork is tender (it falls apart if you stick a fork in it), remove the pot from the heat and remove the pork to a wood cutting board.

Shred (or "pull") the pork with two forks, discarding all fat, cartilage and bone. This turns out to be very easy. If not, then the pork was not cooked long enough.

Discard the melted, liquefied fat on the surface of the broth by skimming it with a ladle.

If you are planning to eat all of the pork right away you can skip this step. Okay, let's suppose you are making this food well in advance of needing it at a meal. Return the shredded pork to the pot, cover it, and return the contents to a boil. Let it boil gently for about five minutes, then turn off the heat and let the contents cool to room temperature, covered. Then put the covered pot in a cold place, like a refrigerator, for four to eight hours. The purpose for chilling the mixture is to get all or almost all of the remaining fat to aggregate into clumps on the surface of the broth. Thus, you can skim off the fat and discard it, keeping only the meat, vegetables and broth. At that point you can vacuum seal and refrigerate or freeze the mixture in as many vacuum seal bags as are appropriate for the amount of meat and broth you want to use at a meal. You can now skip the remaining steps shown below.

Place the shredded pork in a storage container and add a pint or more of the broth and vegetables to keep it moist. Save some or all of the remaining broth in a separate container, because you may want to add some of it to foods like red beans and rice and chipotle pepper at serving time.

Refrigerate the shredded pork and the extra container of broth until they are needed.

Reheat the amount of pork needed either in a microwave oven or in a saucepan, using a little of the broth to keep it moist.

The pork can be used very nicely in tacos or as an ingredient in other Mexican dishes, and as described above, completely new dishes like the soup.

Enjoy!

Moo Shu Pork - 😊♥

This dish has long been one of my favorites when eating in a nice Chinese restaurant, so I decided to get a recipe and perhaps put in a few changes to please my sweetheart Peggy as well as myself. I hope you make this Moo Shu Pork too ... I am sure you will love it. We really chowed down and this is now one of our favorites.

Ingredients: (makes 3 servings)

1 pound of pork tenderloin, julienned

4 tablespoons of canola oil, divided use

2 eggs, beaten

1 cup of shiitake (or other) mushrooms, stems removed, thinly sliced

3 cups of shredded cabbage

1 clove of garlic, minced

1 tablespoon of light soy sauce

1 tablespoon of dark soy sauce

2 tablespoons of hoisin sauce

1 teaspoon of sesame oil

1 teaspoon of honey

2 teaspoons of cornstarch

sea salt and pepper to taste

1/2 cup of scallions, divided, cut into 1/4 inch pieces (white and green parts)

For serving: Warmed flour tortillas or mandarin pancakes, sliced scallions, hoisin sauce, chili oil

Directions:

Whisk together the soy sauce, hoisin sauce, sesame oil, honey and 1 tablespoon of water in a small bowl, then whisk in the cornstarch until the mixture is smooth.

Heat 1 tablespoon of canola oil in a wok over high heat until it is lightly smoking. Add the eggs at the edge of the oil slowly and let the liquid eggs flow across the oil as they fry. Season the eggs to taste with sea salt and pepper.

Cook, undisturbed, until a flat omelet forms, about 30 seconds to one minute. Carefully flip the eggs and cook them on the other side until they are done, about 1 minute more.

Remove the eggs from the wok, put them on a plate and cut them into 1/2" wide x 2" long strips. Cover the egg strips to keep them warm.

Heat 2 tablespoon of canola oil in the wok on high heat until it is lightly smoking.

Add the pork pieces and stir fry, until they are light brown and cooked through, about 3 minutes. Season the meat with sea salt and pepper. Remove the pork from the wok and put it on the plate with the eggs. Cover the plate to keep the contents warm.

Add one tablespoon of canola oil to the wok and heat it on high heat until it starts to smoke.

Add the cabbage and mushrooms to the wok and stir fry for 3 minutes or until the mushrooms are tender and the cabbage is wilted.

Add the minced garlic to the wok.

Set the heat to medium and then return the pork and the egg strips to the wok. Put in half of the scallion pieces and then stir fry for one minute to mix everything.

Stir the sauce to get the cornstarch evenly mixed with the rest of the ingredients.

Add the sauce to the wok, stirring to mix it in with the other ingredients. Turn the heat to high. Stir fry for about one minute or just until the sauce starts to thicken.

Serve the Moo Shu Pork with warmed soft flour tortillas or mandarin pancakes, plus extra hoisin sauce and the remaining sliced scallions and chili oil.

Enjoy!

Roasted Pork Shoulder - ☺♥

This is one of a number of recipes from Kenji Lopez-Alt's book, The Food Lab©, that is simply too good to ignore. I happened to be shopping at a Market Basket® store and they had pork shoulder on sale at 89 cents per pound. Remembering Kenji's recipe I immediately bought a nine pound pork shoulder for the princely sum of \$8! I wasted no time when I got home preparing the pork to be roasted, per the directions below.

Kenji sure was right about this roasting method and the wonderful tasting pork and crisp pork skin. Besides us enjoying it thoroughly for multiple meals we even had lots of leftovers for our dogs as a supplement to their regular food. In short, what a fantastic purchase! I got more value for dollar spent than for anything else I have made for more years than I can remember.

You definitely want to make this wonderful roast. I provide directions for making a pork gravy so you likely want to make some mashed potatoes for the meal, along with whatever other vegetables or salad that please you. I suggest that you make those items near the end of the initial seven hour cooking period, for you will be busy making gravy and attending to the pork roast for the final thirty minutes of high temperature roasting.

As a bit of background information, note that a pork shoulder roast has light and dark pork meat, which is rich in pork taste, far better than cuts like pork loin. Note also that roasting provides crisp meat and skin at the surface and very moist and tender meat internally, partially due to the initial fat content of the meat, which is gradually melted away during a long low temperature cooking period. The key to keeping the roast moist and tender is to do the initial long period of cooking with the roast covered completely in aluminum foil.

Thanks, Kenji!

Oh, I did vary slightly from Kenji's recipe by doing the final roasting at a slightly lower temperature than what he recommended in his book. I did that to limit the production of smoke during the roasting process, noting that a slight increase in roasting time would accomplish the necessary crisping of the meat and skin surface.

Ingredients:

1 whole 8 to 11 pound pork shoulder (With skin attached on at least one side)

2 teaspoons of kosher salt

2 teaspoons of freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 250°F.

Season the pork with the salt and pepper, then wrap it in aluminum foil.

Place the wrapped pork in a large ovenproof skillet and cook it for seven hours or until the internal temperature is 165 degrees F. You can use a meat thermometer to check the temperature but remember to keep the thermometer tip away from bone.

Remove the wrapped pork from the skillet to a wood cutting board and set the skillet aside. Note that there will be melted pork fat and liquid from the roast and likely some particles of pork in the skillet, which will be used, except for the fat, when making the pork gravy.

Increase the oven temperature to 475 degrees F, while letting the meat rest for 15 minutes.

Put a fresh piece of aluminum foil on a large cookie sheet that has raised edges all the way around and put a wire cooling rack on the foil.

Unwrap the pork roast and place it on the wire rack.

Roast the pork for 30 (or more) minutes, turning the cookie sheet around every five minutes. I recommend using a timer. There may be a bit of smoke in your oven near the end of the 30 minutes.

While the pork is roasting you can defat the liquid in the skillet and make a pork gravy.

With the defatted liquid put back into the skillet, add one 14 ounce can of chicken broth.

Add 1/2 tsp. of salt and 1/2 tsp. of pepper as seasoning.

Heat the skillet on medium heat to a low simmer while using a wood spoon to scrape any particles from the inside of the skillet and mix them with the liquid.

Make a mixture of 1/2 can of chicken broth, 2 tbsp. of corn starch and 2 tbsp. of flour.

Add that mixture to the skillet and increase the temperature to high.

Use the other half of the can of chicken broth to rinse out the mixing cup with the corn starch and flour residue, adding that to the skillet.

Stir the skillet contents continuously to keep the corn starch and flour completely mixed with the skillet liquid until the gravy boils and thickens.

Turn off the heat and put the gravy into a one quart bowl.

Cover the gravy bowl with plastic wrap and set it aside, in a second warming oven if you have one. Otherwise, you can warm the gravy later in a microwave oven at serving time.

After the pork has roasted for the last 5 minute period, remove it from the oven and place the cookie sheet on a granite counter or other heat proof surface and let the pork rest for 20 minutes, and do turn off the oven.

You can now serve the pork and the gravy, hopefully with some nice mashed potatoes.

Absolutely yummy! Be sure to enjoy the crisp skin along with the pork meat.

Sweet Italian Sausage - ☺♥

I studied various recipes and I found a perfect one that produces a delicious Sweet Italian sausage. The recipe is very close to that for making Hot Italian Sausage, but it doesn't use any red pepper flakes or cayenne pepper. If you want the hot version then add 1/2 teaspoon of cayenne pepper and one teaspoon of crushed hot pepper flakes to the ingredients in this recipe.

The meat to use is a boneless, skinless pork shoulder, which is sometimes labeled as a Boston Butt roast. The point is that a skin and fat trimmed, deboned pork shoulder, will usually have a near perfect ratio of meat to fat, around 20% fat. You can tell easily when you cut it up for grinding if you have to discard any excess fat. If so, do so.

My food guru, J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, notes that it is essential to cut the pork into 1" chunks, mix them with the kosher salt, and then bag them and refrigerate them overnight. That gives the proteins time to break down and then crosslink. Then you can proceed to make the sausage.

I made this sausage and it is better than excellent. Try it and you will agree. It was so good that I eliminated the existing Food Nirvana recipe for Sweet Italian Sausage.

The picture shown with this recipe has the sausage in casings. I either use casings or simply make sausage patties or meatballs or skinless links. The most versatile form is the 1" diameter meatball as it is perfect for pasta sauces and hot sausage sandwiches, plus it is easily cut into perfect size pieces for pizza toppings ... and the meatballs are very easy to make, and freeze, and then vacuum seal and keep frozen until use, without later having to cook more than what is needed for a given meal.

Ingredients:

5 pounds of boned, skinless pork shoulder, about 80% lean

2 tsp. black pepper

3 tbsp. (one ounce) of kosher salt (If the salt is in large crystal form, process it in a Magic Bullet® mixer for one minute before using it)

2 tsp. of sugar

4 tsp. of fennel seed (or maybe just a bit more)

1 1/2 tsp. of coriander seed

1 1/2 tsp. of caraway seed

3/4 cup of cold water

Directions:

Cut the meat into 1" chunks, then mix them by hand with the (ground) kosher salt in a large bowl. Put the mixture into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, flatten it and seal it with no air pockets, and refrigerate the meat overnight.

Chill the meat grinder in the freezer for one hour.

If necessary, cut the pieces of pork so they will easily pass through the meat grinder.

Grind the pieces of pork using the 1/4" diameter holes die ... presumably using your Kitchen-Aid® stand mixer and the meat grinding accessory.

Let the ground pork fall into a stainless steel electric mixer bowl.

Pour the water into a two cup bowl. Then add the pepper and the sugar. Stir briefly.

Put the fennel seed, coriander seed and caraway seed into a Magic Bullet® container and mix them on high speed for two minutes.

Empty the ground herbs into the bowl with the water, etc. and mix well gently.

Now add the water and herbs mixture a little at a time to the mixing bowl and use the electric mixer on low to medium speed to mix each addition into the ground pork. Do this until all of the water and herb mixture has been well incorporated into to ground pork.

Remove the bowl from the mixer and mix/knead the sausage using your hands for two minutes. That will guarantee even distribution of the seasonings. You now have sweet Italian sausage.

At this point you might make and freeze meatballs, or you might put the sausage into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, squeeze out the air, seal the bag and put the bag into the refrigerator overnight.

In the morning, if you bagged the sausage, weigh out 12 ounce amounts and put each batch into a one quart vacuum sealing bag. Then vacuum seal each bag, flatten it to make the sausage thickness uniform and put it into the deep freeze. Or, if you have the equipment, make sausage links, then freeze them and vacuum seal them and keep them in the deep freeze until you use them.

For cooking, if you made sausage links, poach them at the time of use in gently simmering hot water for 15 minutes to cook them through, then fry them, with turning to brown all the surfaces, in a small amount of vegetable oil.

When you want to use some of the frozen sausage, put a bag of it into the microwave oven for roughly 30 seconds on full power. Then flip the bag over and microwave on full power for 20 seconds. Then lay the partially thawed bag of sausage on the counter to complete thawing. Flip the bag over after 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes after that the sausage should be nicely thawed.

You can shape flat sausage into skinless links or into meatballs if you want, or you can simply cut it and cook it as sausage patties.

If you are making sausage patties, put the patties into a 12" diameter non-stick thick bottom hot skillet heated with a tbsp. or two of vegetable oil in it. The patties should be pressed with an oiled spatula, if necessary, so they are no more than 1/2" thick. I actually prefer thinner patties so I flatten them to 3/8" thick when I first put them into the skillet. Cook the patties for a minute or two and flip them over to the second side. Flatten them again and cook for a minute or two. Flip the patties over a few times until they are cooked, which means nicely browned on both sides.

Enjoy the sausage pieces in any way you like. We love to make sausage links or meatballs with sautéed red and green bell peppers and onions and sliced garlic, and put those into a warmed, long sub roll.

Ray's Scrapple - ☺♥

One of the great tasty products whose origin is the Pennsylvania Dutch (Germans) is scrapple. As you might guess the name gives away the fact that the meat components of scrapple were/are those parts of the pig that we really don't want to discuss, and the making of scrapple was/is quite an ordeal if done at home from scratch using traditional recipes (But I am not traditional!). I always liked scrapple but most areas where I have lived do not sell it. It tends to be a regional favorite rather than national or international.

Some time ago I researched the making of scrapple, looking at many different recipes, all of them complex and time consuming, and I thought ... There simply has to be a better way to make this delightful stuff at home. Well, that is what Food Nirvana is all about, making great stuff at home, easily and inexpensively.

One morning I had seven pounds of ground pork that I had made from an 11 lb. pork shoulder roast. I planned to make breakfast sausage with all of it, but then my memories of scrapple came to the foreground. Without belaboring the subject I got the ingredients list from my earlier research and I modified them to suit what I had for pork and liver and what made the most sense to me regarding seasonings. I then got creative about how to process the ingredients to make scrapple easily. My first batch was really good but I made more modifications to achieve taste perfection and further simplify the process of making the scrapple.

The results of my experiments are this recipe. It is so damn good I'm angry with myself for waiting so many years to try making scrapple. Even better, it is a snap to make and I limit the fat content to make it more healthy to eat.

Ingredients: (makes about 8 pounds of scrapple)

3 lbs. of finely ground pork shoulder with some fat included (limit the fat to 10 percent by weight for the meat and fat combination). Wimps can simply buy ground pork at the supermarket!

10 oz. fresh beef liver (I normally don't like liver but it is important to use it when making scrapple, so I simply limited the amount.)

1 cup of flour

3 cups of stone ground cornmeal

2 tbsp. of sea salt

5 tsp. of ground black pepper

3 tsp. of dried sage

1 1/2 tsp. of ground mace

3 tbsp. of agar agar powder (you can buy this versatile thickening agent inexpensively at www.bulkfoods.com)

1 1/2 tsp. of ground coriander

1 1/2 tsp. of dried thyme

1 1/2 tsp. of dried marjoram

3 quarts of water

Directions:

Set the oven to 200°F on a convection setting.

If you process pork shoulder as I do, separate the meat from the fat, without worrying about a small bit of the fat that is difficult to remove. Then weigh the meat and the fat separately. Add enough fat to the meat to produce the combination that is ten percent fat.

Grind small pieces of the pork and the fat with your meat grinder, first with the large holes attachment and then a second time with the small holes attachment.

Use your meat grinder to process small cut up pieces of the liver, adding them to the pork and fat mixture.

Use your electric mixer with the regular beater on medium speed to pulverize the ground pork/fat/liver mixture and turn it into a homogenous paste. That takes about five minutes.

Add the water gradually to the mixing bowl while continuing to mix.

Add the agar agar a little at a time and mix well. Then add the flour and the cornmeal gradually.

Add all the remaining ingredients into the mixing bowl and mix for five minutes, scraping down the sides every few minutes to assure complete mixing.

Pour/spoon the scrapple mixture into four 9" by 4" by 3" glass baking dishes, the type you would use to bake bread.

Cover the baking dishes tightly with aluminum foil and place them on a cookie tray.

Bake for two hours on a convection setting at 200°F. I use the convection setting on my oven to assure getting uniform heat everywhere.

Remove the baking dishes from the oven and place them on a wooden cutting board.

Let the scrapple cool to room temperature, covered.

Refrigerate the finished scrapple overnight or for a minimum of four to six hours to allow it to chill completely and set.

Remove the aluminum foil from a chilled container of scrapple and use a kitchen table knife to loosen the scrapple where it touches the interior sides and ends of the glass baking dishes.

Invert the baking dish and shake it gently to extract the scrapple onto a wooden cutting board.

Cut the scrapple into slices about 5/8" thick, putting the slices on waxed paper on a cookie tray, then put the cookie tray into the deep freeze. Repeat this for the remaining baking dishes of scrapple.

Package and vacuum seal the frozen scrapple in two to four piece amounts. Return the vacuum sealed frozen scrapple to the deep freeze.

Repeat the above processing for the remaining baking dishes of scrapple.

Keep the scrapple frozen until you are ready to use it.

Take some scrapple from the freezer and let it partially thaw so you can easily remove it from the vacuum sealed package.

To fry the scrapple, heat two tablespoons of cooking oil or bacon grease in a large skillet and place four pieces of partially thawed frozen scrapple onto the hot oil. Fry them on medium heat until the scrapple is crisp on one side, about three to four minutes.

Carefully slide a spatula under each piece and flip it over onto the hot oil or bacon grease and fry the second side until it is crisp, another three to four minutes.

If you are making multiple packets of scrapple keep the ones you fried on a plate in a 160°F warming oven.

Serve the scrapple either plain or with ketchup or maple syrup. It is a fine accompaniment to fried eggs and toast, along with a nice hot cup of freshly brewed coffee.

Enjoy!

Pork and Sauerkraut and Dumplings - ☺♥

This is one of a number of recipes from my childhood that is simply too good to ignore. Given part of our heritage was German the dish was familiar and made very well. It is pungent due to the saltiness and lactic acid in the sauerkraut and the pork mellows the dish while providing delicious protein, for simmering a pork roast for an hour or more in sauerkraut and a bit of water makes it very tender and delicious. Top that off with drop dumplings steamed on top of the mixture for ten minutes prior to serving and you have a dish that is perfect! Your family will gobble it down with no hesitation.

This recipe is about as simple as it gets. Do note, however, that I make sauerkraut every year and mine is milder than the acidic garbage sold in cans in supermarkets ... and also delicious with a nice crispy texture. You can find the Food Nirvana recipe for making sauerkraut and I know you will be highly pleased no matter how you decide to use it.

I like to use part of a pork shoulder roast when I make this dish. That cut of pork has the best flavor and contains both light and darker pork so all can choose what they want. It turns out that I am making pork and sauerkraut right now as I create this recipe for Food Nirvana. I can't imagine why I waited so long to do so.

Ingredients: (Makes two to four servings)

2 lb. portion of a pork shoulder roast

1 quart of sauerkraut

1/2 cup of flour

1 extra large egg

Milk to mix with the egg to total 1/2 cup

1 tsp. of baking powder

1/4 tsp. of salt

1 or 2 cups of water

Directions:

Cut the pork shoulder roast into about eight pieces.

Put the sauerkraut (plus liquid), the water and the pork into a pot, cover it with a lid and heat on medium heat to a simmer, then reduce the heat to very low.

Simmer the pork and sauerkraut on very low heat, covered, for at least one and one half hours.

Near the end of that cooking period make the dumpling mixture, per the directions below.

Put the flour, salt and baking powder into a one quart bowl and whisk the mixture briefly.

Break the egg into a 1/2 cup measuring cup and then add enough milk to fill the cup.

When the pork and sauerkraut have simmered for at least an hour and a half then pour the egg and milk mixture into the flour mixture and whisk it to form a dumpling batter. If it is too stiff then add a small amount of milk and whisk again until the batter is flexible but not runny.

Use two soup spoons to add the raw batter in clumps to the pot of pork and sauerkraut, keeping the clumps separated from each other, such that the top of the pork and sauerkraut is covered with the dumpling batter clumps.

Put the lid on the pot and let the dumplings steam for ten minutes.

Turn off the heat and serve the meal in a large serving bowl.

Your family and friends will love it.

Pork and Shrimp Roberta - 😊♥♥♥😊

I ate at a nice Italian restaurant named The Chef, ordering a dish named Veal and Shrimp Roberta. It was stunningly good! I puzzled over the excellent and somewhat thick sauce, then realized it was a thick Marsala wine and brandy reduction sauce, sans mushrooms. I started to wonder whatever happened to my memory! I made pork or veal Marsala numerous times in the distant past, but my sauce was never prepared to be as thick (or as tasty), nor was the meat I cooked in it as tender and juicy.

In any event the chef did an outstanding job of combining lightly coated and sautéed veal cutlets and shrimp over pasta, everything coated lightly with a rich reduction sauce. It was delightful. I noted one of his fine methods was to barely cook the veal so that it remained juicy and very tender. Interestingly, so was the shrimp. And the egg batter coating on the veal and the shrimp was moist and soft at serving time ... perfect with the Marsala wine and brandy reduction sauce over it.

For whatever reason the next few times I ordered that dish it arrived with a sad attempt to make a decent sauce. It was like someone had mistakenly introduced a lot of water into the sauce. So much for depending on the restaurant. I suspect they changed chefs and/or became careless.

Thus, I decided to try to replicate this fine entree at home with the addition of some porcini mushroom slices and other sauce variations and this recipe is the result. I could tell that some of the rich sauce flavor from the original recipe at The Chef came from putting a very small amount of porcini mushrooms (they have intense flavor so don't overdo it) into the sauce (see below) so I've added that ingredient to the recipe.

Note that the richly flavored thick sauces served with this dish take some time to prepare as you will be concentrating the ingredients by slowly boiling the sauces and reducing the volume by half or more.

I decided to use pork instead of veal as the pork is literally superior to veal in taste and tenderness. If you are averse to eating veal you can pound 1/2" thick slices of lean pork loin to a thickness of 1/4" with a kitchen mallet and use them as a substitute for the veal. Be sure to cut away and discard any fat from the pork slices. You want only lean meat.

Optionally you may want to serve an appetizer before the meal. If so, I suggest making a dozen Tasty Ladies hors d'ouvres using the Food Nirvana recipe, and

servings them along with a small bowl of club crackers and a chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio wine.

Make a Caesar Salad per the Food Nirvana recipe, keeping the main ingredients separated, and serving it prior to the entree, along with a bottle of chilled white wine and warmed Italian Ciabatta bread and butter.

Note that this meal is best served with a chilled medium dry white wine, like a Pinot Grigio or a Pinot Gris. Avoid sweet wines. You can also really enjoy some warm, crusty Italian Ciabatta bread. Buy a loaf of the bread and heat it in the oven at 350 degrees F for ten minutes immediately before serving the meal. Put the bread on a wood cutting board. Cut it into eight thick slices with a serrated bread knife. You might serve it in a napkin lined basket. Be sure to have soft butter and/or an olive oil and herbs mixture to serve with it.

For dessert serve small bowls of gelato or ice cream with a few simple cookies like Pepperidge Farm Chessmen® tucked in with the gelato/ice cream, and cups of hot, freshly made coffee, perhaps with just a touch of Amaretto DiSaronno® added.

Ingredients: (makes four adult servings)

For meat and seafood cooking:

2 sticks of butter for sautéing the egg battered pork cutlets and shrimp

2 lb. or more of 1/2" thick slices of lean pork loin (fat removed) pounded on a wood cutting board with a knurled surface kitchen mallet to be 1/4" thick

1 lb. of peeled, raw, vein removed, extra large fresh shrimp

6 extra large or jumbo eggs for making an egg batter

2 tbsp. of flour as a batter ingredient

1/2 to 3/4 cup of cold milk as a batter ingredient

1 cup (or more) of all purpose flour for dredging the pork and the shrimp before coating them with the egg batter

Salt and pepper to taste on the pork slices prior to dredging them in flour

For the pasta sauce:

6 ounces of Asagio cheese, shredded

1 cup of dry Marsala wine (do not use sweet Marsala wine!)

1/4 cup of good brandy (like Remy Martin® or Courvoisier® cognac)

3 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced

1/2 cup of beef broth

1 cup of heavy cream

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

1 tbsp. of olive oil

For the reduction sauce to coat the cooked pork and shrimp:

1 tbsp. of olive oil

1 tbsp. of butter

2 cloves of garlic, minced

1 cup of dry Marsala wine

1/2 cup of good brandy (like Remy Martin® or Courvoisier® cognac)

2 tsp. of Better Than Bullion® roasted beef flavoring

2 tbsp. of cornstarch, mixed into 1/2 cup of beef broth

1 large shallot, thinly sliced

3 fresh rosemary sprigs

6 fresh thyme sprigs

1/4 cup of dried porcini mushrooms softened in 1/2 cup of beef broth

Remaining ingredients and other meal items:

Freshly chopped parsley, to be used as a garnish when serving the entree

1 lb. of linguine or fettuccine, cooked and kept covered, moist and warm until serving time

1/2 lb. of Parmegiano Reggiano or Pecorino Romano cheese, freshly grated, to serve at the table

1 loaf of Ciabatta bread and 1 stick of soft butter, and/or some olive oil with herbs for dipping

2 chilled bottles of medium dry white wines like Pinot Grigio or Pinot Gris or Sauvignon Blanc

Optional appetizer course of Tasty Ladies, a small bowl of club crackers and a third bottle of chilled white wine

Caesar salad made using the Food Nirvana recipe, keeping the primary ingredients separated until they are served

Gelato or ice cream plus some simple biscuit type cookies for dessert, like Pepperidge Farm Chessmen®, along with freshly made coffee

Directions:

This delicious but apparently simple meal, in terms of number of served items, takes some time to prepare so allow for three hours of preparation before meal time. Believe me, it is well worth the time spent as you the chef will get lots of applause.

Make a Caesar salad per the Food Nirvana recipe, keeping the different components in separate bowls, refrigerated. The salads will be made later individually at the table by each guest at mealtime. Remember to serve a small dish of anchovies for guests who enjoy them in Caesar salad.

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees F.

Put your serving bowls and individual serving dishes into the warm oven to pre-heat them. That will keep the food hot and delicious when served, and for a while after serving, which is most pleasant. Also, put your salad bowls into the refrigerator so they are cold when you serve the Caesar salad.

Prepare the dredging flour by using a one gallon Ziploc® freezer plastic bag and putting in the cup of flour.

Cut the pork loin into 1/2" thick slices, cut away and discard any fat, then pound both sides of each slice so the pork has a final thickness of 1/4". Each piece will be fairly large so cut the pieces in half for easier handling during sautéing, and more attractive serving later.

Season both sides of the pounded and cut pork slices/cutlets lightly with salt and pepper, rubbing it into the surface of the meat.

Remove the shells from the shrimp and rinse them, then lightly dry them.

Dredge the pork cutlets and then the shrimp a few at a time in the flour mixture, by closing and shaking the bag, then put them on separate dinner plates in preparation for battering and frying.

Prepare the egg batter:

Separate the whites from the yolks, putting the whites into the electric stand mixer bowl. Keep the yolks in a separate bowl. Mix the whites on medium speed for two minutes, then on high speed for five to ten minutes, until the egg whites are stiff enough to hold a shape.

Continue mixing on high speed, adding the yolks one at a time, about one per minute. When the last yolk has been added, mix for two more minutes and then slowly add the flour while mixing. Then add one half cup of the milk slowly while mixing. Mix for a final two minutes. If the batter is too thick then add in the remaining 1/4 cup of milk slowly and mix for two minutes. The egg batter is now ready to use. Note that when the batter is put on the pork or the shrimp it should be a thin layer no more than 1/8th inch thick. That is why the thickness of the batter is adjusted, if necessary, before using it.

Heat the two sticks of butter in a thick bottom 12" to 14" diameter skillet over medium-high heat until the bubbling ends. Reduce the heat to medium. Adjust the heat up or down to maintain a moderately high temperature during the next sautéing step, but not hot enough to turn the butter brown in color.

Dip dredged pieces of the pork cutlets into the egg batter one at a time with tongs or two dinner forks, holding each over the batter to let excess batter fall off, then place that cutlet into the hot butter. Continue until the inner skillet surface is about half covered with the pork cutlets. If you have worked quickly (do that) it is time to use a spatula and a fork to turn over the cutlets, gently, starting in the same order in which you put them into the skillet. That should provide them with about two minutes of sauté time on the first side.

Turn the cutlets over in the butter using a spatula underneath and a fork pressed into the middle of the cutlet on top. Sauté the pork cutlets in the heated butter 1 1/2 to 2 minutes on the second side. Then remove them with a spatula, let them drain for a few seconds, then place them on parchment paper on a baking sheet.

If you have remaining pork pieces waiting to be sautéed then repeat the above steps for those pieces, finally putting a layer of plastic wrap top of the cutlets.

Keep the pork cutlets warm in the preheated oven.

Repeat the above steps of dipping into the egg batter and sautéing the pieces for the dredged shrimp, doing about half of the shrimp in each batch. Sauté them two minutes per side, using tongs to turn them over once, gently, during cooking and also to remove them to a paper towel covered dinner plate after they have cooked on the second side. When done then cover them with plastic wrap and put the plate of shrimp into the preheated oven.

Set the skillet aside and allow the hot butter to cool. Next, you will cook the pasta and then set it aside while you make the sauce for the pasta.

Heat a gallon of water and a pinch of salt in a large pot on high heat to rapid boiling. Put the pasta into the boiling water and stir it until the pieces are well mixed (not stuck together) and under water. Cover the pot with a lid and turn off the heat. The pasta will be perfectly cooked thirty minutes later, at which time you simply drain it lightly in a colander and put it into a large bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the warming oven. Do not let the pasta stay in the water in the pot longer than thirty minutes.

Now make the sauce for the pasta ...

Mince the garlic cloves with the salt.

Heat the tablespoon of olive oil in a second (non-stick) skillet over medium heat, and sauté the minced garlic until it is fragrant. That should take about one minute.

Increase the heat to medium high, and stir in the Marsala wine, the brandy, one cup of beef broth and the pepper. Cook and stir the mixture for about five minutes.

Add the heavy cream and bring the mixture to a simmer or a low boil. Let the volume reduce to 1/2 of the starting volume on low heat.

Stir in the grated Asagio cheese 1/3 cup at a time until all of it is melted into the sauce.

Pour the completed sauce into a bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and put it into the warming oven.

Now make the thick reduction sauce to coat the sautéed pork and shrimp:

Reconstitute the porcini mushrooms in 1/2 cup of beef broth by heating the mixture in the microwave oven for one minute. Mix and let sit for three minutes.

Make a mixture of the corn starch and 1/2 cup of beef broth.

Heat the butter and the olive oil in a clean, small non-stick skillet.

Sauté the shallot, garlic and the 3 sprigs of rosemary and 6 sprigs of thyme until the shallot slices are soft.

Mix in the Better than Bullion® beef flavoring and the cornstarch and beef broth mixture.

Add in the porcini mushrooms and the liquid they were heated in.

Add in the Marsala wine and the brandy.

Cook the sauce at a low boil on medium heat with occasional stirring until the sauce is thickened and reduced in volume to about one cup. This will take time as you are reducing the volume of liquid from about two and 1/2 cups to one cup.

Remove and discard the thyme and rosemary sprigs from the sauce.

Remove the sauce from the heat and pour it into a serving bowl.

Cover the bowl of sauce with plastic wrap.

If you have only a single oven, remove the warmed bowls and serving dishes and warmed foods from the 180 degrees F oven. If you have a double oven, keep those items in the warming oven while you use the second oven to warm the loaf of Ciabatta bread. Also put the covered bowl of warm reduction sauce into the warming oven with the other items.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F and then heat the Ciabatta bread, uncovered, for ten minutes at that temperature. Then turn the oven off. Serve the bread on a wood cutting board or in a napkin lined bread basket after cutting the bread into eight thick slices.

If you have only a single oven, then keep the hot oven door open when you remove the bread and put the warmed entree items and serving bowls/dishes back into the oven to keep them warm while the guests eat the Caesar salad and the Ciabatta bread.

Serve the chilled Caesar salad ingredients with the chilled salad bowls, one bottle of the chilled wine, and the warm Ciabatta bread and some butter and/or olive oil with herbs for dipping.

Each guest will create and mix their own salad using the chopped romaine lettuce, Caesar salad dressing, grated parmesan cheese, optional croutons and optional filets of anchovies.

When the salad course is done, put the warm pasta into the four wide individual serving bowls and ladle about 1/2 cup of the Asagio cheese sauce over each pile of pasta and mix briefly. If the pasta is cooler temperature wise than you want then warm each bowl of pasta in the microwave oven for 30 seconds.

Put the warm pork cutlets and shrimp over the individual servings of the pasta.

Ladle 1/4 cup of the reduction sauce over the pork and the shrimp in each serving bowl and garnish the dish with the fresh parsley.

Serve the meal along with a side bowl of freshly grated Parmegiano Reggiano or Pecorino Romano cheese for the table.

Provide glasses of ice water as well as the other chilled bottle of wine.

Remember to serve the dessert and the coffee, about 15 minutes after the guests are done eating the main meal and relaxing.

Enjoy!

Pork Saltimbocca - ☺♥

Most of us have encountered veal saltimbocca as one of the available entrées in better Italian restaurants. It is a fine entrée. But a lot of us also stopped eating veal due to cruel treatment of the calves before butchering. Instead, I learned a long time ago that good quality pork is superior to veal in every respect for meals of this type, as the pork remains moist and tender, even with somewhat more cooking time than necessary. Veal, on the other hand, can get dry and tough quickly if it is overcooked.

I decided to find Internet recipes for veal saltimbocca and bring together the best of the ingredient and procedure recommendations, and also use pork loin instead of veal. I got lucky the first time around combining the best of the four best recipes I found. In short, this recipe will make a fine dish for you to serve to those you love ... or even like! And it isn't complicated at all.

You can have fun making the pork saltimbocca and later get nice compliments from those who eat your kitchen cuisine! Peggy and I really enjoyed this entrée, along with the meal accompaniments described below.

Ingredients: (Makes 3 to 4 servings)

1 1/2 pounds of thinly sliced (1/3 to 1/2 inch thick) lean pork loin, trimmed of any fat

1/4 pound of thinly sliced pieces of lean or fat trimmed prosciutto ham

4 large slices (5" diameter circles) of soft provolone cheese

1 red bell pepper, cleaned and sliced in long, thin 1/2" wide pieces (or equivalent pieces of roasted red peppers)

2 or 3 sprigs of fresh sage leaves

1/4 cup of extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 cup of flour

4 tablespoons of butter

1 cup of dry or medium dry white wine (do not use a sweet wine)

1/2 cup of canned chicken broth

1 to 2 tbsp. of juice from 1/2 lemon

1/2 tsp. of Sea Salt

1/4 tsp. of freshly and finely ground black pepper (or ground white pepper)

Long toothpicks to hold the pork rolls or stacks together, two per roll or stack, during cooking

Directions:

Make all other meal items before making the pork saltimbocca, or at the same time if necessary.

We decided to make gnocchi with gorgonzola cheese sauce and steamed fresh asparagus as accompaniments to the pork saltimbocca. Thus, we did not start the steaming of the asparagus until the pork entrée was almost done, so the asparagus would be served in perfect condition at the perfect temperature at the beginning of the meal ... with butter melted over it. Recipes for both meal items are in Food Nirvana, but feel free to use your own imagination in choosing meal accompaniments.

We chilled a nice bottle of Pinot Grigio wine prior to dinner ... an excellent choice for this meal. We also used that type of wine as the wine called for in this pork saltimbocca recipe.

Set the oven to 180 degrees F and place all serving dishes or platters, dinner plates and any already prepared hot food dishes into the oven.

Clean and slice the red bell pepper or just slice the roasted red pepper pieces into long thin strips about 1/2" wide.

If you are using the raw red bell pepper then put the strips on a plate and microwave them on high for two minutes, then set them aside. If you use roasted red peppers they are already cooked and they need no further heating.

Use a kitchen mallet, knurled side, and a wood cutting board, and pound the pork pieces to a thickness of 1/8" to 1/4".

Season the pounded pork pieces lightly with the salt and the pepper.

Dust or dredge the pork pieces lightly on both sides with 1/4 cup of the flour.

Layer 1/2 of the pork pieces with 1 slice of the prosciutto ham, trimmed or folded to fit the shape of the pork piece.

Place a slice or cut pieces of the provolone cheese on top of the prosciutto ham for each pork piece.

Place 1 whole sage leaf (or more if the leaves are very small) on top of the provolone cheese.

Put two or three slices of the cooked sweet red pepper, or roasted red pepper slices, on top of the sage leaf.

Put a piece of pounded pork on top of each stack of pork and other ingredients.

If you pounded the pork thin enough you can roll up each stack and stick two toothpicks through the roll at different angles along the length to hold the rolled up saltimbocca pieces together during cooking.

If the pork stacks are too thick or too small to form a roll then simply use two toothpicks at nearly flat angles along the length of each pork stack to hold the contents together during cooking.

Heat a large, heavy bottom skillet over medium high heat and put in the olive oil and 2 tbsp. of the butter.

When the butter is melted and mixed with the olive oil and the mixture is hot, put the stacks or rolls of pork saltimbocca into the skillet. If the skillet is large enough all the pieces will fit in without being crowded. If the skillet isn't large enough to do that then cook the pork saltimbocca in two batches.

Brown the pork stacks on both sides (or all around if in roll form) in the hot oil and butter mixture, roughly two minutes per side, and one minute extra per side if the pork pieces were pounded to 1/4" thick instead of 1/8" thick.

Transfer the cooked pork saltimbocca pieces to the oven warmed platter, then repeat the cooking step, if necessary, with any uncooked pork saltimbocca pieces/rolls.

Remove the skillet from the heat.

Transfer the last of the cooked pork saltimbocca to the oven warmed platter, put the platter back into the warming oven and then return the skillet to the heat.

Add the remaining 2 tbsp. of butter to the skillet, stirring to help it melt and mix with the pan drippings.

Reduce the heat to medium low.

Add the remaining 1/4 cup of flour to the skillet and use a whisk to mix the remaining oil and butter mixture with the flour to form a roux, while scraping pan drippings from the bottom of the skillet.

Add the wine, the lemon juice and the chicken broth to the skillet and use a spatula or the whisk to finish scraping up the pan drippings.

Stir the mixture with a wooden spoon or a whisk to blend the roux with the liquids and heat that mixture to a low boil on medium heat, until a thickened sauce forms.

Remove the skillet/sauce from the heat.

Ladle some of the sauce over the pork saltimbocca pieces and put the remainder of the sauce into a gravy boat for use at the table.

Serve the pork saltimbocca along with whatever other dishes you made for the meal. We made the gnocchi in gorgonzola cream sauce and steamed fresh asparagus. The combination was excellent.

The chilled glass of Pinot Grigio wine also was perfect with this meal.

If you happen to decide to make a salad instead of a cooked vegetable you might consider serving some nice fresh warmed Italian or French bread, with butter or Carrabba's® Dipping Oil (recipe also in Food Nirvana under Appetizers).

We didn't serve a dessert but a light, fruity gelato would be fine after this meal.

Life is fine ... Take the time to enjoy it!

Pork Schnitzel - ☺♥

I have always loved the wiener schnitzel served in good German restaurants. The buttery taste of the thin, pounded breaded veal is delightful, as is the hot German potato salad, or spatzle (German noodles), and the sweet and tart braised red cabbage, and sometimes cinnamon seasoned warm applesauce.

Marie used to make stacked platters of wiener schnitzel for our kids, along with lots of buttered noodles and homemade applesauce. They absolutely loved it and devoured it in quantity. In fact, Marie and I enjoyed lots of it at a great German restaurant named Max's®, in Pittsburgh PA, very close to the Allegheny General Hospital where my mother was undergoing a triple bypass operation for clogged arteries. Go figure.

Various folks I know will not eat veal for personal reasons, and yet others will not eat breaded or coated meats fried in butter for health reasons. Ah well, to each his own ... but keep reading.

Veal is fairly expensive when purchased as scaloppini slices, raw, which is the best form of veal to use for making wiener schnitzel. Back in 2010 the price, even at Costco®, was around \$10 per pound. But I don't even bother looking at veal prices anymore.

I decided some years ago to try to duplicate wiener schnitzel with slices of pork loin. Let me tell you the taste and texture, inside and out, are so good using lean pork that I have trouble telling the difference. In fact, lean pounded pork is easily as tender and moist as the veal. Best of all, it only costs about \$2 per pound, purchased as a boneless whole pork loin.

Thus, Pork Schnitzel, a very common dish in Germany, was developed my way in my kitchen, and I have had no interest in veal ever since. Now you too can clog your arteries as I have mine, with a smile and a great sense of satisfaction from eating excellent food inexpensively.

Ingredients:

2 lbs. of boneless pork loin

1/3 to 1 lb. of butter (or more based on how many skillet full of coated pork you fry)

2 cups (or a bit more) of Keebler® Club Cracker (tm) crumbs

1/2 cup of corn meal

1/2 cup of all purpose flour

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

1 tsp. of Sea salt (fine)

1 extra large or jumbo egg

1 oz. of water

Directions:

Make whatever side dishes you plan to make for this meal before cooking the pork. Buttered noodles or hot German potato salad are naturals, as are hot applesauce and/or sweet and tart braised red cabbage. There is a recipe for the braised cabbage in Food Nirvana and also for the hot German potato salad. Keep the hot side dishes covered in plastic wrap in a warm oven. See below.

Turn on your oven to 200°F and put a large dinner plate or small meat platter into it that will be used to hold the schnitzel. Put in the dinner plates you will use when you serve the dinner. Also, put your prepared side dishes, covered with plastic wrap, into the oven.

Cut away any layer of fat on the pork loin and discard it. Slice the pork loin crossways into slices between 1/2" and 5/8" thick.

Use a kitchen mallet with a metal knurled or indented wood surface used to pound meat. Pound each slice of pork on both sides on a hard surface like a granite kitchen counter or a wood cutting board until it is about 1/4" thick. Pound gently from one side to the other and over the entire first surface to do about half of the reduction in thickness. Then turn the slice over and repeat the process on the second side until the right thickness is obtained.

Repeat the above pounding process for all the pork slices, placing and then stacking the individual thinned pieces of pork onto a large dinner plate.

Use a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag to hold enough Keebler® Club Crackers (tm) and other dry ingredients to make about three cups of finely ground crumbs. Close the bag leaving as little air inside as possible. Crush the contents using the kitchen mallet and then open the bag and eliminate as much air as you can and then reseal the bag.

Use your rolling pin or the kitchen mallet to finish the process of crushing the crackers into very fine crumbs. Add the salt and the pepper to the bag and mix well by shaking it.

Make an egg wash. Break the raw egg into a wide shallow bowl and whisk it for about 30 seconds. Add the ounce of water and again whisk for 30 seconds.

Pour the cracker crumb mixture into a separate large shallow bowl (or as much as the bowl can hold) and spread it evenly.

Using a dinner fork, put a slice of pounded pork into the egg wash, coating both sides. Lift it out with the fork and let the excess egg wash run off back into the egg wash bowl.

Lay the pork slice on top of the cracker crumb mixture, then press down with the flat side of the fork over the whole surface to cause the cracker crumb mixture to adhere to the underside of the pork slice. Flip the pork over on to the second side with the fork and again press down all over the surface of the pork. If necessary you can spoon some extra crumb coating on top of the slice and press it into the meat with a finger or two to get total even coverage of the crumb mixture.

Remove the pork slice with the fork, holding it above the crumb bowl and shaking it gently to get excess crumbs to fall back into the bowl.

Put the crumb coated pork slice onto a separate large plate.

Spread the cracker crumb mixture out evenly in the bowl and repeat the above process starting with dipping a pork slice into the egg wash, until all the pork slices have been coated and placed on top of each other on the plate.

Use a large (12" to 14" diameter) non-stick skillet and heat it on medium heat with 1/3 stick of butter. Spread the melted butter around the inside of the skillet with a spatula.

When the butter is starting to bubble, place as many pieces of the coated pork into the skillet as you can, but only one layer deep, but do not let the slices touch each other.

After two minutes put a few teaspoons of butter between the pork pieces, then turn the slices over with the dinner fork, on top of the melting butter pieces, and again cook for two minutes. Repeat turning over the slices as necessary, but without adding any more butter, until the schnitzel has a nice light golden color on both sides.

Remove the warming plate/platter from the oven. Move the finished pork schnitzel pieces to the warmed plate or small meat platter, and then return the plate/platter to the warming oven.

Clean the skillet quickly with hot water and a dish cloth to remove butter and crumb residue, and wipe it dry with a paper towel. Return it to the stove. Add 1/3 stick of butter and repeat the above cooking process until all of the slices of raw coated pork have been cooked and placed on the warming plate/platter.

Discard any unused egg wash and/or crumb coating mixture. Do not reuse them.

Serve the hot pork schnitzel and the side dishes you prepared earlier.

Cold beer is a nice beverage to serve with this meal. Cold sodas are fine also. Some folks love a chilled somewhat sweet wine like Riesling.

Your guests will be very happy. You will be too.

Pork Tacos Al Pastor - ☺♥

I've eaten some great pork tacos in better Mexican restaurants and there is no reason why we can't make them at home. I found the recipe below on the Internet and have modified it a lot. The method used here is much easier in terms of labor than creating pulled pork by shredding a roast and then seasoning the shredded pork. I am reporting back now with resounding success! It is fabulous with the complex tastes that magically happen sequentially, like the best of French cuisine, only in this instance, Mexican Heaven!

You should try this recipe as shown and then in the future do what you will to please yourself. My bet is you will stick with this perfection. If you want you can control the heat level by means of the selection of the chili powder, the heat level of the salsa and through the use or omission of hot sauces at serving time. This recipe is mild ... a perfect beginning.

Ingredients: (10 to 15 small to medium size tacos)

5 lb. boneless pork shoulder (Boston butt roast)

3 tbsp. of Achiote paste

2 tbsp. of Guajillo (or other) chili powder

1 tbsp. of garlic powder

1 tbsp. of dried oregano

1 tbsp. of cumin

1 tbsp. of salt

1 tbsp. of black pepper

¾ cup of white vinegar

1 cup of pineapple juice

**1 pineapple, skinned and sliced into 1/2" thick rounds (at roasting time)
(Retain/do not remove the hard center core of each slice)**

For Serving:

10 to 15 small to medium size corn or flour tortillas, warmed together in a 150 degrees F oven or microwaved individually for 15 seconds immediately before being used.

1/2 medium size white onion, finely chopped

1 cup of fresh cilantro, finely chopped

1 cup (or more) of green or red salsa (you decide the level of mild to hot)

1 ripe avocado, diced (I actually used diced banana and it was superb!)

1 cup of sour cream

2 limes, cut into wedges

Special Equipment:

One 1/8" to 1/4" diameter, wooden or steel skewer with a sharp end and, if steel, a looped end, trimmed in length if wood, if necessary to fit the height of your oven. Do this by adjusting (lowering) your lower oven shelf to the bottom position and by raising your top shelf all the way to the top position, to allow an object about 15" tall to fit. If you cannot get that height clearance then modify the directions later to have two stacks of meat/pineapple on skewers only 7 1/2" long (tall). Now the recommended step is to also have the upper oven shelf very close to the top of the skewer so you can use cord or a fine wire to tie the top of the skewer to a rung of the oven shelf. That will keep the stack of pork and pineapple slices from falling over during roasting.

Directions:

Slice the raw pork shoulder into about 3/8" thick slices, across the grain, then stack the slices on a large plate. Then pound each slice to be 1/4" thick on a wooden cutting board, using a kitchen mallet with a knurled side.

Use a one quart bowl and combine the Achiote paste, chili powder, garlic powder, oregano, cumin, salt, pepper, vinegar, and pineapple juice, whisking/stirring until the marinade is smooth and free of lumps.

Pour the marinade into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, then put in the slices of pork individually, making sure each becomes coated with the marinade.

Close the freezer bag expelling as much air as you can before sealing it. Flatten the bag as best you can.

Put the bag into the refrigerator for at least four hours or for up to two days, turning the bag over a few times during the marinating.

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Line a 12" x 17" baking sheet with aluminum foil.

Process the pineapple: Cut off and discard the top of the pineapple and slice the skin off all the way around. Do not cut off or discard the bottom of the pineapple. Cut the pineapple into 1/2" thick slices. Do not remove the hard core at the center of each slice.

Place the bottom of the pineapple on the baking sheet. Take the sharp end of the wooden skewer and push it directly and vertically into the middle of the hard center of the pineapple bottom. Remove the skewer and reinsert it into the hole in the pineapple bottom, using the dull or flat end of the skewer instead of the sharp end.

Push slices of the pork and the pineapple through the sharp top of the skewer, centered, layering one after the other, pineapple then pork, until there is a 1" length of skewer left at the top or until all the pork and pineapple have been used. Push a final pineapple slice onto the top.

Now is the time to tie the top of the skewer to a rung on the upper oven shelf using butchers cord or any medium strength cord. Alternatively, you might use a metal clip or thin wire of some sort to accomplish the same purpose. That will keep the stack of marinated pork and pineapple from falling over during roasting as the contents soften.

Roast the stack of pork and pineapple slices for 3 hours, until the pork is slightly crisp on the outside and deep red.

Remove the baking tray from the oven to a heat proof counter top or onto a wooden cutting board. Cut off thin strips of the pork and roasted pineapple, cutting vertically from top to bottom and along the outside edge of the pork and pineapple stack with a sharp butcher knife. Turn the stack 1/4 turn after each vertical cut (or simply move the starting location of the knife for the next slicing).

To assemble a taco, place some pork on a small, warmed white corn or flour tortilla, followed by a few pieces of pineapple, a sprinkling of onion, a pinch of cilantro, a tablespoon or two of salsa, some diced avocado (or banana) and optionally some sour cream. Serve the pork tacos with lime wedges and cold beer.

These tacos are flat out fabulous! Enjoy!

Pork and Shrimp Egg Foo Yung Soufflé - ☺♥T

One of the neatest things about cooking Chinese food is that there are so many alternative recipes/ingredients for different dishes and alternative ways of cooking them. The various versions of Egg Foo Yung are many and they can be Wok Stir Fried then skillet fried or deep fried, or as you will read below, baked. Even the sauces used with that dish vary.

The result of all the variation is to stimulate the chef to think about and to select and create variants of the basic dishes to achieve particular results. As I have tasted many variations in different restaurants over many years I have developed my own set of standards. I started making pork egg foo yung in the 1970's as a result of learning so much from my great friend Dora Clark who was Chinese and a great cook.

My early success was nice but there was a hiatus from Chinese cooking of twenty years as I was learning about different cuisines. A few years ago I again made pork egg foo yung and I was pleased with the result. Alas, my wife Marie did not care for any kind of Chinese food so I did not repeat my success. Then about a year ago I tried making it and it was a failure. Worse, I couldn't initially figure out what went wrong. All I knew was that the puffy pancake effect didn't happen and I wound up with scrambled eggs and too many other ingredients.

It is obvious that balance is necessary across all the ingredients for the egg to hold the mixture together. But recently I decided to make a pork and shrimp egg foo yung using my new (at least to me) Chinese cookbook. The recipes and variety of possible ingredients really piqued my interest. Beyond that I remembered my recent failure and I went into think mode to figure out how to make a truly superior egg foo yung with lots of filling ingredients and with a resulting attractive presentation, similar to a sub gum egg foo yung.

This recipe is the result of my musings and an example of cooking creativity. My recipe is even healthier than those found in my new Chinese cookbook as I use less peanut oil than required for frying egg foo yung. What I did was realize that the dish could be made like miniature soufflés simply by adding some half and half to the raw beaten eggs. This is atypical of Chinese cooking as dairy products, especially milk products, are seldom used, for Chinese people often have difficulty digesting milk products. Then I used a non-stick mini Bundt pan with six openings that each hold between a cup to a cup and a half of product in volume. I am grateful that Marie acquired the mini Bundt pan sometime in the past. Do note that cupcake pans can also be used. In that situation you will make

twelve somewhat smaller pieces of egg foo yung instead of the six large pieces when using the mini Bundt pan.

Eureka! No longer did I have to create the pancakes of typical egg foo yung or worry about them holding together during frying. In fact, the frying of the egg mixture was eliminated entirely. All I did was lightly spray the non-stick mini Bundt openings with Pam® (though I think greasing with butter is better). Then I simply ladled the egg and other ingredients mixture into the pan openings and baked them at 350° F for fifteen minutes. They came out totally perfect, they were attractive, and the Bundt opening in the center of each serving was ideal later for holding some of the sauce I made to pour over the egg foo yung. Now I am most pleased to offer this recipe to you as I know it is very superior.

Oh, before I forget, white rice is a perfect accompaniment for this dish. I like basmati rice, and I typically season my serving of it with small amounts of sesame oil, Mongolian Fire Oil and soy sauce. You may want to cook the rice first. ☺

Ingredients:

Sauce:

2 tsp. of sesame oil

2 cups of chicken broth

1 tbsp. of cornstarch

2 tsp. of soy sauce

Egg, pork, shrimp and vegetable mixture:

½ lb. of raw lean pork (one thick pork chop), shaved and diced into 1/4" cubes, all fat removed

½ lb. of raw deveined shelled medium size shrimp cut into thin slivers

1 baby bok choy, chopped fine with green areas removed (about ½ cup)

1 small (6" long) stalk of celery, diced

¼ cup of sweet onion, shaved thin

1/2 cup of canned bean sprouts, drained

1/3 cup of canned bamboo shoots, drained and chopped

1/2 cup of fresh oyster mushrooms, chopped fine

2 scallions, finely diced, green areas included

8 jumbo eggs (or 10 extra large or 12 large)

1/4 cup of half and half

1/4 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

2 tbsp. of soy sauce

2 tbsp. of peanut oil

Butter or Pam® to coat the interior of mini-Bundt or cupcake/muffin pan openings

Directions:

Turn one oven on and set it at 350°F. Turn a second oven on and set it at 200°F. Put an oblong serving casserole into the second oven, along with the dinner plates you will use for each guest, and a serving bowl for the rice.

Make the sauce by putting all of the sauce ingredients into a small saucepan and heating it to boiling on medium heat while stirring. When the sauce clarifies and thickens it is done and it can be poured into a two and one half cup serving bowl, which should then be placed on a saucer and put into the warm 200° F oven.

Prepare the pork and the shrimp as described above in the ingredients list. Use a wooden cutting board and a very sharp knife. Set them aside.

Prepare all of the vegetables as described in the list of ingredients and put them into a one quart bowl. Add the salt and pepper and soy sauce to the bowl and mix well.

Mix the eggs using an electric mixer on medium high speed for two to three minutes. Add the half and half and continue mixing for one minute. Set the mixture aside.

Put the peanut oil into a large Wok and heat the Wok on high heat until the oil is very hot. You can test how hot the oil is by putting a tiny piece of pork in it and seeing if it fries instantly. Put all of the pork into the oil and stir fry it rapidly with a thin hard polymer slotted spoon until it is lightly browned.

Add the shrimp pieces to the pork and stir fry the mixture rapidly until the shrimp is pink. Then remove the pork and shrimp pieces to a bowl. Set the bowl aside.

Drain the liquid from the vegetable/seasonings mixture and add all of the vegetables to the Wok and mix them well and stir fry the mixture for one minute. Cover the Wok with a lid and adjust the heat to medium and let the mixture steam for three minutes.

Dispense the stir fried vegetable mixture onto a large plate and let it cool to close to room temperature. Mix it gently a few times during the cooling period of about ten minutes to get the warmer parts exposed to air to aid the cooling process.

Add the cooled stir fried mixture and the pork and shrimp pieces to the egg and half and half mixture and stir well.

Rub some butter onto the surface of the six mini Bundt pan or twelve cupcake pan openings, or alternatively spray a small amount of Pam® onto the surface of the mini Bundt pan or cupcake pan openings.

Stir the egg foo yung mixture to assure even distribution of the ingredients and ladle equal amounts of the mixture into the Bundt or cupcake pan openings. Typically that means dispense the solid ingredients and some of the egg mixture evenly into each opening, then divide the remaining egg mixture by pouring it on top of the dispensed solid ingredients, evenly. Push any solid pieces that may protrude above the surface of the egg mixture under it.

Bake the egg foo yung for 15 minutes at 350°F.

Check for doneness. If you used a twelve openings cupcake pan the egg foo yung is definitely done. If you used the six openings mini Bundt pan the pieces of egg foo yung are much larger, so you may need to bake them for five additional minutes.

Invert the mini Bundt pan or cupcake pan above the warmed oblong serving casserole and shake it gently. The finished pieces of egg foo yung should fall out easily.

Serve the completed pork and shrimp egg foo yung along with the sauce.

Ladle the sauce evenly over each serving of the egg foo yung.

Serve the sauced egg foo young, along with the rice and seasonings on the side, and most any beverage. A light chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio is nice. You might also consider serving warmed sake in the traditional small sake cups.

Enjoy!

Sautéed Napa Cabbage With Char Sui - 😊♥

I found myself wondering how to use Napa cabbage in recipes other than salads so I went looking on the Internet. I was pleased to find a dish where Napa cabbage is sautéed and combined with typical spices used in Chinese and other oriental dishes.

I decided to add Chinese BBQ pork (Char Sui), julienned, to make this dish suitable as an entree. That was a good decision as the resulting combination is delicious. You can find the recipe for making Char Sui in Food Nirvana.

Ingredients: (2 to 3 servings)

- 1 medium size Napa cabbage (about 1 1/2 pounds)**
- 8 ounces of Chinese BBQ Pork (Char Sui), julienned**
- 1 tbsp. of canola oil or peanut oil**
- 1 garlic clove, minced**
- 1/2 red bell pepper, sliced**
- 2 ounces of chives, chopped**
- 1 tsp. of minced ginger**
- 1/8 to 1/4 tsp. of red pepper flakes**
- 1/4 cup of chicken broth**
- 2 tbsp. of soy sauce**
- 1 tbsp. of rice vinegar**
- 1/2 tsp. of paprika**
- 2 tsp. of sesame oil**
- 1 tbsp. of sesame seeds**
- 1 cup of uncooked jasmine rice**

Directions:

Pre-warm a medium size serving bowl and two to three individual (guest) serving bowls in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Simmer on very low heat, one cup of uncooked jasmine rice mixed into two cups of boiling water in a two quart saucepan, for 15 minutes, covered. Then remove the saucepan from the heat, fluff the rice, recover it with the lid, and set it aside.

Remove and discard the outer leaves from the Napa, cut off and discard the stem, then slice the Napa crossways into 1 inch wide strips.

Add the canola/peanut oil to a wok and heat the oil on medium-high heat.

Add the garlic, ginger, and red pepper flakes and stir fry for about 1 minute, then add the chicken broth.

Add the Napa, julienned BBQ pork, red bell pepper, chives, soy sauce, paprika, and rice vinegar.

Stir-fry for about 5 minutes, on medium heat, until the Napa has softened.

Cover the wok and let the contents finish cooking for 5 minutes on low heat.

Serve the Napa with Char Sui in the hot wok on insulated pads, and drizzle it with the sesame oil, then garnish it with the sesame seeds.

Serve the jasmine rice in the pre-warmed serving bowl.

Eat the sautéed Napa with Char Sui while it is hot, over the warm jasmine rice, along with any other meal items you have prepared.

Enjoy!

Seasoned Pork Strips Taco - 😊♥

I like to buy thin slices of lean pork loin as they lend themselves to many different types of recipes. They are also relatively inexpensive.

In this recipe I cut them lengthwise into strips roughly 3/8" by 3/8" x 6", discarding any fat, then stir fry the strips briefly in a hot canola oiled non-stick skillet, seasoning them with salt.

Then the fun begins ...

I guarantee you will love these tacos ... they are simple and easy to make, but oh, so satisfying!

Let's make one now!

Ingredients: (per Taco)

1 slice of lean pork loin about 3" x 6" and about 3/8" to 1/2" thick

1 tbsp. of canola oil

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 of a large fresh garlic clove sliced very thinly

1 tsp. of chili powder (homemade is best)

6 thin strips of pepper jack cheese (1/4" x 1/4" x 4")

3 tbsp. of green Sofrito sauce

2 tsp. of medium hot taco sauce

1 leaf of fresh romaine lettuce chopped fine

1, 8" diameter soft flour tortilla shell

Directions:

Use a sharp knife and a wood cutting board to create long thin strips of pork from one thinly sliced pork loin piece (a lean piece about 3" x 6"). Cut away and discard any fat.

Stir fry the strips briefly with a spatula in a hot canola oiled non-stick skillet, seasoning them with salt. This will take about two minutes. Then flip the pieces over and stir fry for one minute.

Add the thinly sliced pieces of fresh garlic, mix them well with the pork for about a minute and get them hot and pungent, then add the teaspoon of homemade chili powder and mix everything well with a spatula, and continue to cook for about one minute.

At that point five 1/4" x 1/4" x 4" long thin strips of pepper jack cheese are placed on top of the seasoned meat strips and allowed to partially melt. Then all of the mixture is placed on a soft 8" diameter flour tortilla, spread out from the center, from one side of the flour tortilla to the opposite side.

Green Sofrito is added, about 3 tbsp. in a line on the meat and cheese, and a thin line of medium hot taco sauce is added along the length of the meat and cheese.

Finely chopped romaine lettuce is added evenly along both sides of the length.

The taco is wrapped up, placed on a paper plate, and put into the microwave oven for 30 seconds on high heat.

All done Now it is time to chow down and swoon!

A cold beer goes nicely with this yummy taco.

I bet you can't stop eating after only one of these beauties!

Enjoy!

Stir Fried Pork Lo Mein - ☺♥

I decided to replace the Food Nirvana recipe for Roast Pork Lo Mein with a far better recipe. The one below is from the website The Woks Of Life, which is an excellent place to visit to find very fine recipes for Chinese food. Of course, I made a few simple changes to please me, and maybe you.

I hope you make this dish ... I think you will be pleased. So will your guests.

Ingredients: (makes 4+ servings)

For the sauce:

2 tablespoons of light soy sauce

2 tablespoons of dark soy sauce

2 tablespoons of mushroom soy sauce

2 tablespoons of oyster sauce

2 tablespoons of hot water

1 teaspoon of sugar

2 teaspoons of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of ground white pepper

1 tablespoon of sesame oil

For the rest of the dish:

1 pound of Chinese BBQ roast pork (char siu) julienned into strips (or 1 pound of raw, lean pork, julienned into strips)

2 large cloves of garlic (minced)

1/2 cup of carrot (julienned)

1 cup of canned water chestnuts (If whole instead of sliced, then slice them 1/8" thick)

1 cup of canned bamboo shoots (in strips or sliced into bite-sized pieces)

1 cup of sliced mushrooms (such as shiitake, oyster, button, or optionally ,canned mushrooms)

5 cups of Napa or regular green cabbage (shredded)

1 1/3 cups of snow peas (ends trimmed with fibrous string removed)

2 cups of mung bean sprouts

28 ounces of cooked lo mein noodles (you can use 13 ounces of uncooked lo mein noodles, but first boil them according to the package instructions, or you can substitute some of the lo mein noodles or add to them by cooking a 3 ounce package of Ramen noodles separately)

4 tablespoons of peanut oil

3 tablespoons of Shaoxing wine

4 scallions (julienned)

Directions:

Prepare the lo mein sauce by combining the light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, mushroom soy sauce, hot water, sugar, sea salt, white pepper, and sesame oil in a small bowl. Set it aside.

Prepare the BBQ roast pork/char siu, garlic, and all the vegetables (the carrot, water chestnuts, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, Napa cabbage, snow peas, and bean sprouts) so they are ready for cooking.

If using cooked lo mein noodles, rinse them under hot tap water to loosen them and drain thoroughly. If using uncooked noodles, cook them according to package instructions until al dente, rinse in cold water to get rid of excess starch, and drain thoroughly. If using some Ramen noodles, cook them separately in chicken broth, drain them and add them to the cooked lo mein noodles. Set them aside.

Place your wok over medium heat. Add the oil and garlic. After 15 seconds, add the carrots, water chestnuts, bamboo shoots, and sliced mushrooms.

Increase the heat to high, and stir-fry for 1 minute.

Add the BBQ roast pork (or plain raw, lean pork), and stir-fry for another two minutes, and then add the Shaoxing wine around the perimeter of the wok.

Give everything a quick stir, and add the Napa cabbage and the lo mein (optional also cooked Ramen) noodles. They should be warm or at room temperature, and not stuck together.

Pour your pre-mixed sauce evenly over the noodles, and stir-fry with a scooping motion for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the sauce is evenly distributed, making sure to scrape the bottom of the wok to prevent the noodles from sticking. High heat and a well-seasoned wok should help prevent sticking.

Next, add the snow peas, mung bean sprouts, and scallions. Continue stir-frying on medium heat until the noodles are heated through and everything is thoroughly mixed. If the lo mein becomes sticky, add 2 or more tablespoons of water until they loosen up.

Reduce the heat to low, cover the wok with the lid, and let the contents warm all the way through for five minutes.

Give your lo mein a stir and a quick taste and adjust the seasoning to your liking. Add more sea salt, soy sauce, oyster sauce, sesame oil, or white pepper according to your personal preference.

Serve the stir fried pork lo mein with chili oil or your favorite hot sauce on the side.

Enjoy!

Sweet and Sour Pork Recipes - ☺♥ & ?

I have provided two very different recipes here for sweet and sour pork, the traditional Cantonese version and a Thai version that uses oriental noodles instead of rice. I know you will enjoy both of them. Have fun!

Note: My sweetheart said my Cantonese version sauce was way too sweet, so I eliminated the sugar. Alternatively, you might want to look at the recipe for Sweet and Sour Pork II.

Cantonese Sweet and Sour Pork - ☺♥

I really enjoy making and eating the traditional Cantonese version of Sweet and Sour Pork. It is easy to make and very tasty, and it is a complete one dish meal. I realized that I never followed any given recipe, but instead created my version. I was attempting to clone what was served to my great friend, Dora Clark, and me when we would eat lunch in local Chinese restaurants in Wilmington, DE back in the 1970's. I succeeded ... well at least I was close. Recently I realized my recipe was missing from Food Nirvana and I decided to provide it ... modified to some extent by reviewing various recipes from the Internet. Thus, the recipe below is a composite of my recipe and what I discovered from the Internet. I can guarantee that if you like Chinese food you will love this dish.

Ingredients: (makes 4 servings)

1 pound of pork tenderloin (you can use either raw pork or previously roasted pork)

2 to 3 tablespoons of soy sauce

1 tsp. of cornstarch

1 cup of raw rice (medium or long grain white rice)

2 cups of water brought to a boil in a small covered saucepan

Sauce:

4 tablespoons of ketchup

2 tablespoons of soy sauce

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1 cup of reserved pineapple juice from a 20 ounce can of pineapple tidbits or chunks

1 cup of duck sauce (buy it in one quart quantity at an Asian market or at your supermarket)

1/3 cup of rice vinegar

1 to 2 tablespoons of cornstarch mixed in 1/2 cup of water (determines the final thickness of the sauce)

1/2 tsp. of red food coloring

Batter:

3/8 cup of flour

3/8 cup of rice flour

1/2 cup of cornstarch

2 egg whites, lightly beaten with a whisk

3 tablespoons of vegetable oil

Up to 1 cup of warm water, as needed

Other:

1 carrot, shaved

1 red bell pepper

1 green bell pepper

10 maraschino cherries cut into quarters

2 cups of canned pineapple chunks or tidbits

3 or 4 cups of vegetable oil for deep-frying

Directions:

Mix the one cup of raw white rice into the two cups of boiling water in a small saucepan. Then simmer the rice on very low heat for 15 to 20 minutes (15 if the rice is basmati or jasmine, or if it is parboiled, otherwise 20 or up to 22 minutes) with the saucepan covered. Turn off the heat, mix the rice briefly and keep the saucepan covered until serving time. Alternatively, you can put the cooked rice into a one quart bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and keep it in a 200 degrees F warming oven until it is served.

Cut the pork into ½" by ½" by ¾" roughly rectangular pieces. Marinate the pieces in the mixture of the soy sauce and cornstarch for 20 minutes. Use a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag to hold the pork, soy sauce and cornstarch, expel the air, flatten the pork as much as you can, and seal the bag. Turn the bag over once after 10 minutes of marinating.

To prepare the sweet and sour sauce, combine and mix all the sauce ingredients in a one quart bowl. Set the mixture aside.

Peel the carrot and shave it into thin slivers about two to three inches long using a potato peeler.

Cut the bell peppers in half, remove the seeds and light membrane and cut them into thin slices about 3/8" wide and 1 ½" long. If you are using pineapple chunks then cut them in half.

To prepare the sweet and sour sauce, bring the sauce ingredients to a gentle boil in a two quart saucepan over medium heat, adding the carrot, green and red pepper and pineapple pieces before heating. Stir the sauce while it is heating to keep the mixture uniform and to assure even thickening as the sauce begins to boil. Reduce the heat to low and continue stirring. Remove the sauce from the heat after one minute.

Adjust the sauce seasoning, adding salt and/or rice vinegar if desired.

Cover the sauce with plastic wrap and put it into a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Heat the vegetable oil to 350 degrees F in a large wok or in a large deep skillet.

For the batter, combine the flours and the cornstarch. Add the egg whites and the vegetable oil and 1/2 cup of the warm water. Use a whisk to mix the batter ingredients. Add as much of the other 1/2 cup of warm water as needed to form a batter that is not too thick or too thin. The batter should not be runny or thick. If it is too thin you will see uncoated pork areas after frying. If it is too thick the fried pork pieces will have a fried coating that is too thick, which detracts from the dish by masking the pork with too much fried coating. The idea is to test the batter by frying one or two individual pieces of coated pork and observing the results ... then make any necessary adjustments to batter thickness. If it is too thin then add a tablespoon of flour and mix well. If it is too thick add two tablespoons of water (or more) and mix well.

Put all of the marinated pork pieces into the batter, mix gently to coat them, and then extract and deep-fry them in batches, taking care not to overcrowd the wok. Use tongs to extract each piece of battered pork from the batter, shake it gently

to eliminate excess batter, and then put it into the hot oil. If two or more pieces stick together then separate them using tongs and a fork. Deep-fry the pork pieces until they are gold in color. Check one or two pieces by cutting them in half to make sure the pork is cooked through if you used raw pork. No checking is necessary if you used previously roasted pork or if you used raw pork and intend to do a second frying. Adjust frying time as necessary to assure thorough cooking of the pork but do not allow the fried batter to cook to the point of becoming dark as that will ruin the dish. Remove the fried pork pieces from the wok and drain them on paper towels to remove any surface oil.

It is best if you deep-fry the pork briefly a second time just before serving it to make it extra crispy. That is what I like to do as the resulting crispness provides a perfect combination of different textures in the final dish. Make sure the oil is back up to 350 degrees F before you begin the second deep-frying. A very short frying time of about two minutes will suffice after putting all of the pork pieces into the oil at once. Drain the oil from the fried pork pieces by putting them on a paper towel, no more than one layer thick.

If you have to delay the meal then the pork pieces should be kept warm in a 200 degrees F warming oven. Alternatively, the second frying can be delayed until you are ready to serve the meal.

When you are ready to serve the meal, mix the double fried pork pieces with the sauce.

Using individual pre-warmed serving bowls, put the sauce with double fried pork pieces over a bed of hot white rice.

Serve ... and enjoy! This is a very tasty oriental dish.

Thai Sweet and Sour Pork with Oriental Noodles - ?

This recipe is a Thai variation of the traditional Cantonese version of Sweet and Sour Pork. I got this one from the Internet and modified it slightly so the dish would look like the picture ... a few ingredients were missing from the recipe provided. It is clearly different but it sure looks good! I want to try it soon and report back to you.

Note that as a Thai dish many varieties of oriental noodles can be used. I certainly recommend avoiding our traditional egg noodles in favor of rice noodles, ramen noodles, lo mein noodles or typical thin oriental noodles ... ones made without eggs. These types of noodles are easy to find in any Asian market.

Ingredients: (Makes two servings)

8 oz. of oriental noodles

8 oz. of raw pork, sliced into thin pieces

2 tablespoons of vegetable oil

2 cloves of garlic, minced

4 oz. of canned bean sprouts

½ sweet red pepper, sliced thin

1/2 tablespoon of oyster sauce (optional)

Salt, to taste

Marinade:

1/2 tablespoon of soy sauce

1/4 teaspoon of sesame oil

3 dashes of white pepper

1 teaspoon of garlic chili sauce

1/2 tablespoon of sugar

1 teaspoon of vinegar

Garnish:

Very thinly sliced scallion top (green portion), or, very thinly sliced and cleaned small hot green pepper, like a jalapeno

Directions:

Boil the noodles until they are al dente. Rinse them quickly with cold water, drain them well and set them aside.

Marinate the pork with all the ingredients in the Marinade, for 15 minutes.

Heat the oil until it is very hot in a wok.

Add the garlic and sweet red pepper and stir fry until the garlic is aromatic.

Add the marinated pork pieces to the wok, then stir and cook until the pork pieces are almost cooked.

Add the bean sprouts, follow by the noodles. Then add the (optional) oyster sauce.

Stir the wok contents to combine them and add some salt to taste.

When the bean sprouts are slightly wilted and cooked but remain crunchy, the dish is ready to be served.

Sprinkle the pieces of the garnish over the dish and serve it.

Sweet and Sour Pork II - ☺♥

This recipe is a second and very nice version of Sweet and Sour Pork. The earlier recipe for Sweet and Sour Pork makes a sauce that is too sweet for some guests.

This recipe makes four generous adult servings. I say try both recipes to find what you like best.

Ingredients: (makes enough fried pork for 4 servings of Sweet and Sour Pork)

Pork:

1 lb. of roasted pork, cut into 1/2"x1/2"x1" pieces

2 tbsp. of light soy sauce (for the marinade)

2 tbsp. of Shaoxing wine (for the marinade)

1 cup of cornstarch for coating the marinated pork

3/4 cup of all purpose flour for the batter

1/2 cup of rice flour for the batter

1/4 cup of cornstarch for the batter

1 extra large egg

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

3 tbsp. of canola oil

A pinch of white pepper

1 cup of water

One or two quarts of peanut oil for frying the pork pieces (depending on the size of the skillet)

Sauce:

4 tablespoons of ketchup

2 tablespoons of light soy sauce

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1 cup of reserved pineapple juice from a 20 ounce can of pineapple tidbits

1 cup of duck sauce (buy it in one quart quantity at an Asian market or at your supermarket)

1/3 cup of rice vinegar

2 tablespoons of cornstarch mixed in 1/2 cup of water

1/2 tsp. of red food coloring

Other:

2 cups of uncooked basmati rice

4 cups of water brought to a boil in a large covered saucepan

1 carrot, shaved into thin pieces and then cut into thin strips about two inches long

1 red bell pepper, diced

1 green bell pepper, diced

10 maraschino cherries cut into quarters

2 cups of canned pineapple tidbits

Directions:

Prepare the fruits and vegetables first.

Prepare/fry the pork:

Mix the pork pieces with the light soy sauce and the Shaoxing wine in a Ziploc® quart size freezer bag, and marinate them for 30 minutes. Turn the bag over once or twice while the pork pieces are marinating.

Whisk the egg in a one quart bowl. Add the canola oil and the water and whisk the mixture. Add the 3/4 cup of flour, 1/2 cup of rice flour, 1/4 cup of cornstarch, and the sea salt, garlic powder and white pepper.

Whisk the ingredients together until they are well combined. Let the batter rest in the refrigerator, covered with plastic wrap, for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, whisk the batter and add a small amount of water (two or three tablespoons) to thin it while whisking, so it doesn't coat the pork with a thick layer of batter.

Note: Most of the batter should drip or run off a piece of pork after it is dipped and then extracted from the batter using tongs. The final batter thickness on the surface of the pork before frying should be about 1/16th of an inch. That is how you know the batter has the proper viscosity. Adjust it as necessary with additional water and mixing.

Put 1 cup of cornstarch into a wide shallow bowl. Coat all of the marinated pork pieces with the cornstarch and put them on a plate in a single layer.

Put a paper towel covered holding plate for the fried pork into a 200 degrees F warming oven. Put four individual serving bowls into the warming oven.

Heat the peanut oil at a depth of 1 1/2 inches on medium high heat in a deep skillet to 350 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer to measure and to help maintain the temperature. Vary the heat as necessary during frying to maintain the temperature at or close to 350 degrees F.

Put the marinated, cornstarch coated pork pieces into the bowl of batter in groups of eight, then individually use each group of eight batter coated pork pieces for frying.

Take the marinated, cornstarch coated, battered pork pieces eight at a time (individually) from the batter using tongs, then let the excess batter drip/run off, then carefully place the pork pieces in the hot oil using the tongs.

Fry the pork pieces for 4 minutes, turning them over a few times with a slotted spoon so they fry evenly. If pieces stick together while frying then use tongs and a knife to separate them.

If the pork pieces are pale gold they are done frying and it is time to take them out of the hot oil with a slotted spoon or a spider and put them on paper towels to absorb excess oil. If they are not yet pale gold then fry them for up to 2 minutes more.

Transfer the fried pork pieces to the holding plate in the warming oven.

Repeat the battering and frying steps for the remainder of the pork pieces.

Use the warm fried pork pieces on top of the rice when making the sweet and sour pork as described later.

Reduce the warming oven temperature to 180 degrees F.

Make the rice:

Bring the four cups of water to a boil in a medium saucepan. Mix in the basmati rice.

Put a lid on the saucepan and move it to the smallest burner on the stove on the lowest heat.

Let the rice steam for 15 minutes, then remove it from the heat, stir it, put the lid back on the saucepan and let the rice rest for five minutes while you prepare the sauce/fruits/vegetables mixture.

Prepare the sauce and the fruits and vegetables mixture:

Combine all of the sauce ingredients in a large saucepan and heat to a boil with stirring on medium heat.

Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Add the prepared vegetables and fruits to the sauce and mix well.

Heat the mixture to a low boil and boil for two minutes.

Remove the sauce mixture from the heat.

Prepare the final dish:

Remove the four serving bowls for the guests from the warming oven.

Put one and one half cups of rice into each guest's serving bowl.

Distribute one fourth of the fried pork pieces over the surface of the rice in each serving bowl.

Stir the sauce and fruits and vegetables mixture and ladle it on top of the pork pieces in each serving bowl. You will likely have some leftover sauce and that can be stored for up to a week, covered, in the refrigerator, and used however you like.

Enjoy!

'Veal' Cordon Bleu_ - ☺

Many years ago I tasted traditional Veal Cordon Bleu and I was pleased. Later in life my wife Marie decided veal should be avoided due to the terrible treatment of calves prior to butchering them to obtain veal. I agreed with her yet I missed a variety of tasty meals based on veal. One day I decided to make Weiner Schnitzel using lean pork loin instead of veal and the results were terrific. The pork was far superior to veal in taste, tenderness and moistness. Thus, I realized I could substitute pork for veal in a number of my favorite dishes.

Recently I wanted to make Veal Cordon Bleu using pork so I found a variety of Internet recipes for the traditional veal dish and formed a composite sure to work using pork. I am pleased to report success. Once again, processing lean pork loin or boneless pork chops like veal resulted in a perfect Cordon Bleu. Simply make sure that any fat on the edges of the pork is cut away and discarded. I hope you try and enjoy the recipe below. It is quite good.

With this recipe it is important to have all side dishes for the meal prepared prior to cooking the pork as it is served immediately after cooking. I suggest lightly steamed asparagus or snow peas with melted butter, along with the carbohydrate of your choice (potatoes, rice, couscous, pasta in a light butter/garlic sauce, etc.), and a nice bottle of chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio. You might even like a small tossed salad with creamy French or Italian dressing with this meal, and a light dessert, like a fruit tart, served with fresh hot coffee.

Ingredients: (serves two)

8, 1/4-inch-thick lean pork slices from a pork loin or from boneless pork chops (all about the same size)

1/2 lb. piece of Gruyere cheese

4, 1/8-inch-thick slices of baked Virginia ham (or even better, 8, 1/16th inch thick slices of Country Ham)

1 cup of plain dry bread crumbs

2 teaspoons of salt

3/4 teaspoon of black pepper

3/4 cup of all-purpose flour

2 large or extra large eggs

2 tablespoons of butter

2 tablespoons of olive oil

Equipment: a meat pounder, which is a wooden mallet with crisscross indentations on one side in wood or metal; a cheese plane, which is a simple tool for shaving thin slices of cheese from a piece of cheese; a cookie sheet and a cookie cooling rack.

Directions:

Pound the pork slices to a thickness of 1/8" on a wooden cutting board with the crisscross side of the meat pounder. Do that by pounding on one side gently and evenly over the surface to reduce the thickness a small amount, then flip the piece over and pound the second side gently and evenly to result in a piece approximately 1/8" thick.

Shave enough Gruyere cheese using the cheese plane to make a double layer of very thin cheese slices for each of 4 of the 8 pounded pork pieces.

Pat dry two pounded pork pieces of roughly the same shape using a paper towel and arrange one of the pieces on a wooden cutting board. Put 1 slice of ham on it, trimming the ham to leave a 1/4-inch border of pork outside the ham, then arrange a double layer of cheese on the ham and top it with the second slice of the pounded pork. Lightly pound a 1/4-inch border around the outer edges of the pork using the flat side of the mallet, to seal the pork sandwich. Make 3 more of the pork "sandwiches" in same manner.

Line the cookie sheet with waxed paper. Stir together the bread crumbs, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in a wide, shallow bowl. Stir together the flour, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in another wide, shallow bowl. Whisk together the eggs, remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt, and remaining 1/4 teaspoon pepper in a third wide shallow bowl.

Dredge one pork sandwich in the flour mixture, gently knocking off any excess coating, then dip the sandwich into the whisked egg mixture to coat it, letting the excess whisked egg mixture drip off. Dredge the egg coated sandwich in the bread crumb mixture, patting the crumb mixture onto the surface on both sides to help it adhere. Transfer the crumbed, coated sandwich to the cooling rack set on the baking sheet. Dredge and coat the remaining sandwiches in same manner. Chill the sandwiches in a refrigerator, uncovered, for 1 hour, and then let them stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before cooking.

Heat 1 tablespoon of butter and 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a 12-inch diameter heavy skillet over moderately high heat until any foam subsides. Add 2 of the veal sandwiches, then reduce the heat to medium and cook the sandwiches, turning them over once after two minutes, or until golden on the cooked side. Cook for two minutes on the second side. Transfer the cooked sandwiches to dinner plates in a 180 degrees F warming oven and clean/wipe out the skillet with paper towels. Cook the remaining two sandwiches in the remaining butter and oil in same manner and place them on the warmed dinner plates.

Serve immediately along with the side dishes prepared earlier. Expect applause. Life is good.

PUDDINGS, PARFAITS AND MOUSSES:

Bread Pudding - ☺♥T

The recipe below is one I have continuously improved to create the true custard pudding variety served at the Hotel DuPont® Grill cafeteria. That bread pudding has all the bread in cubes submerged in the custard, with an excess of custard and no bread pieces ever harden due to surface exposure during baking. There is also no surface coating of butter, sugar or cinnamon. It is always served chilled. After a few attempts to create perfection, including variations in making the custard that contains the bread cubes, I believe I have finally figured out how the Hotel DuPont® did it. The short answer is that they make the normal bread pudding recipe as shown below, reserving some of the egg custard to be baked without bread cubes. By so doing they can combine both after baking to create the custard topped lower portion of their bread pudding. Then, the cream sauce goes on top of that and finally the final whipped topping is added.

Note that the picture shown on the right is certainly not an accurate representation of the product from this recipe. The picture shows the more conventional type of bread pudding, which while good isn't even close to the Hotel DuPont® Grill version, which is "knock your socks off" perfection.

The cream sauce I have developed in this recipe is perfect. The final whipped topping is very good but I am still experimenting. Why not try your own ideas? I'm thinking about using a variation of my clotted cream recipe (shown at the end of this recipe) with some of the cream sauce and a bit of Cointreau® liquor.

Pudding/Custard Ingredients:

1/2 lb. of French Bread (1/2 of 25 inch long baguette, which is about half the amount used in typical bread pudding recipes ... you can vary the amount to suit your taste), cut into 3/4 inch or smaller cubes

1 cup of dark raisins

9 large eggs

4 cups of heavy cream

2 cups of half and half

2 1/2 cups of sugar

2 1/4 tsp. of cinnamon

1 tsp. of ground nutmeg

pudding Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Beat the eggs, cream, sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium speed until smooth. That creates the basic custard for the pudding. Separate the custard into two portions, reserving one third of it for separate baking. Note that the instructions in the next two steps assume that both portions of the custard will be baked at the same time.

Put the bread cubes and raisins into a 9" by 13" glass baking dish. Pour half of the larger portion of custard over the bread and raisins and gently press down, then let it sit 5 minutes, pressing down occasionally. Pour the remaining part of that portion of custard over the bread and gently press down, let it sit another 5 minutes, then press down again. The idea is to have the bread cubes thoroughly soaked with the custard.

Pour the smaller portion of the egg custard into a 5" by 9" glass baking dish and cover it tightly with aluminum foil. Fill a second 9" x 13" glass baking dish half full with hot water and place the egg custard dish in it and then put the combination into the oven and bake for 90 minutes. Check the egg custard for doneness by inserting a knife into the center. If it comes out clean the custard is done and it should be removed from the oven and allowed to cool to room temperature, covered with the aluminum foil. If it is not done let it bake for an additional 15 minutes and test it again.

Cover the bread pudding in the 9" x 13" baking dish with aluminum foil tightly. This will inhibit moisture from escaping during baking and thus keep the top surface of the custard moist throughout the baking cycle. Then bake it for 90 minutes in a hot water bath, which requires a container larger than the 9"x13" inch glass baking dish. I use the bottom of a broiling pan to hold the water. Remove the aluminum foil and check for doneness by inserting a knife into the center. If it comes out clean the pudding/custard is done. If not, bake an additional 15 minutes or until the custard is just set in the center. Do not over bake or the custard will lose too much moisture. Remove the bread pudding from the oven and let it cool to room temperature, covered with the aluminum foil.

When the egg custard and the bread pudding have cooled to room temperature, mix the egg custard with an electric mixer to create a smooth spreadable

mixture. Spread that mixture on the top of the bread pudding evenly. Then recover the bread pudding with the aluminum foil.

Chill the bread pudding in the refrigerator. Serve it cold in individual serving bowls or on small plates, covered with the chilled Cream Sauce shown below. Just before serving, fold $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the cream sauce into freshly prepared whipped cream as an extra topping to go on top of the basic cream sauce (or try my idea mentioned earlier), ergo a three layer dessert. Details are provided below.

Cream Sauce Ingredients:

3 cups of heavy cream

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of milk

6 egg yolks

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup of Irish Cream® liquor (I actually used Sylk®, which is a liquor that contains cream, honey and Drambuie®. Any cream liquor can be used based on your likes and dislikes. For that matter you might try only $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Kahlua® to have a faint but tasty coffee flavor, but add an extra $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of milk)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar

2 teaspoons of vanilla extract

2 tbsp. of Cornstarch

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp. of Orange zest

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water

Cream Sauce Directions:

Mix the cream, milk, vanilla and cream liquor in a large heavy saucepan, . Mix the cornstarch with the water and then mix that with the other ingredients. Bring the mixture to a scald temperature (steam coming from the pan but the contents not quite to a boil) on medium heat while stirring and then remove the saucepan from the heat.

Whisk together the sugar and egg yolks and orange zest in a large mixing bowl until they are well combined, then gradually whisk the hot milk/cream mixture into the egg/sugar mixture. This can be done best by using an electric mixer with a whisk attachment.

Transfer the contents to a large double boiler (one that can easily hold 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ quarts of liquid) and cook over simmering water, stirring gently but constantly with a

rubber spatula or wooden spoon until thickened, about 12 minutes. The sauce does not need to boil. Remember that you are making a sauce, not a pudding, which would thicken considerably during cooking. Pour the sauce into a two quart bowl. Special Note: I have a very heavy French copper saucepan with a tin interior that is typically used to make cream sauces, so I do not use a double boiler when I make the cream sauce for the bread pudding.

Let the sauce cool completely to room temperature, then cover it and put it into the refrigerator and keep it cold until you are ready to use it. It will finish thickening as it chills.

Whipped Topping Ingredients and Directions:

Just before serving the bread pudding, whip 1 cup of heavy cream at high speed in your electric mixer. Add 1 tbsp. sugar, ½ tsp. vanilla and 1 or 2 tbsp. of Cointreau® liquor after soft peaks have formed. Continue mixing for one minute. Stop mixing and fold ½ cup of the chilled Cream Sauce into the flavored whipped cream gently to create a soft third layer to be put on top of the Cream Sauce and Bread Pudding.

As noted earlier, the whipped topping will be improved by putting all of the above whipped topping ingredients except the cream sauce together and processing them at very high speed in a small food processor (like a Magic Bullet®) with a maximum cup or container volume of no more than one pint. The expected result is a much thicker whipped topping resulting from the limited expansion space within the mixing container. The entire mixing time will be less than one minute and completion will be obvious when the mixer blades suddenly increase speed as if there is nothing in the container being mixed. Fold the whipped topping and the cream sauce together gently in a cold bowl to complete the whipped topping.

Final Assembly:

Use a spatula to cut the bread pudding into about 12 portions. Put one portion on each serving plate. Cover the bread pudding with 1/2 cup of cream sauce. Then cover the cream sauce with 1/3 cup of the whipped topping. Serve ... expect applause ... it will be forthcoming.

Ray's Triple Chocolate Pudding - ☺♥

I found through many years that I always increased the flavor of commercially available pudding mixes by adding additional chocolate or vanilla, etc. I avoid instant puddings like the plague for they are terrible compared to cooked puddings. As Thanksgiving approached this year I planned to make chocolate pudding as one of the desserts. I had Jell-O® pudding on my shopping list, but every time I thought about it I became irritated realizing that once again I would have to ramp up the flavor by adding chocolate.

Thus, I figured that if I had to add chocolate to get a decent bowl of pudding then there was no point in buying the pudding at all. It was finally time to make it in my kitchen and make it well. A bit of research yielded a few excellent looking recipes, and I modified and combined the best ones I found and now Food Nirvana has an outstanding triple chocolate pudding recipe.

I am certain you will really enjoy this pudding. It is very rich. Wow! I just made it and it is loaded with chocolate flavors and very creamy. My children and my grandchildren give it a two thumbs up for excellence. Well, it is excellent, so I will never again buy the commercial product.

Ingredients: (makes 4 very generous or 6 regular servings)

1/2 cup of sugar

3/4 cup of Ghirardelli® Double Chocolate premium hot cocoa mix

6 ounces of Ghirardelli® 60% cacao premium bittersweet chocolate chips

1/2 cup of cornstarch

1/8 teaspoon of salt

1 cup of whole milk

1 cup of evaporated milk

1 cup of heavy cream

2 large or extra large eggs

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

Topping:

1/2 cup of Ghirardelli® Dark Chocolate Dipping Chocolate, grated (about 2 or 3 ounces)

1 cup of heavy cream for making whipped cream

2 tbsp. of sugar for the whipped cream

1 tbsp. of vanilla extract for the whipped cream

Directions:

Whisk together the sugar, cocoa mix, cornstarch and salt in a heavy, thick bottomed 2-quart saucepan.

Gradually whisk in the milk, the evaporated milk and the cream.

Bring the mixture to a boil on medium heat, whisking constantly to get all ingredients thoroughly mixed and to avoid having the pudding stick and burn onto the saucepan.

Boil gently on low heat for a minute or two, whisking, until the pudding has thickened.

Remove the pudding from the heat.

Whisk the eggs and the vanilla in a 2-quart stainless steel or other heatproof bowl.

Very gradually add the chocolate pudding mixture to the egg mixture, whisking thoroughly with each addition.

Whisk in the chocolate chips until they are melted and the mixture is smooth.

Cover the surface of the pudding with plastic wrap to prevent a skin from forming.

Refrigerate the pudding until it is cold, at least 3 hours.

Make the whipped cream with the one cup of heavy cream, 2 tbsp. of sugar and one tbsp. of vanilla extract, using an electric mixer.

Serve the pudding with each dish topped with a generous amount of the whipped cream.

Spoon/sprinkle some of the grated dipping chocolate on top of the whipped cream.

Serve and moan with delight!

Crème Brûlée - ?

Crème Brûlée (French for burnt cream) is a rich egg yolk and cream based custard with crackly caramelized sugar on top. This recipe takes the traditional stance of flavoring the custard with vanilla beans, as it has been flavored in its earliest known form since 1691!

I love this dessert and I found the recipe online while shopping for vanilla beans at www.myspicesage.com. Those folks sell the Madagascar vanilla beans at a great price. Try them! I noted that a Crème Brûlée torch is listed as necessary for caramelizing the sugar. I do not have one of those torches but I expect a variety of small handheld butane torches available in hardware stores will work just fine.

I have yet to try this recipe but it looks fabulous.

Ingredients: (6 servings)

1 Madagascar vanilla bean

2 cups of heavy cream

6 egg yolks

6 tablespoons of sugar for the custard

3 teaspoons of sugar for the topping

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

Slice the vanilla bean down the center, lengthwise. Scrape the seeds (soft, moist pulp) into a small pot and place the pod and the cream in the pot.

Allow the cream to come to a boil on high heat. Remove it from the heat and let it cool for fifteen minutes.

While the cream is cooling beat the egg yolks and sugar in a medium bowl until thoroughly mixed.

After the cream has cooled for fifteen minutes, remove the vanilla pod pieces and slowly add the cream to the egg/sugar mixture, while beating (whisking) rapidly to avoid having the egg yolk curdle.

Once the ingredients are well mixed, strain the mixture with a sieve to remove any excess foam.

Pour the cream mixture into 6, five ounce ramekins and place the ramekins in a deep (9"x13"x2") glass baking dish.

Place the baking dish on the center oven rack and pour hot water half way up the sides of ramekins.

Bake the custards for 35 to 40 minutes or until the custard jiggles in the center when lightly shaken.

Carefully remove the baking dish from oven and allow the custard/ramekins to sit for 20 minutes, still in the water bath.

Remove the ramekins from the glass baking dish and refrigerate them for at least 2 hours or up to 3 days (covered).

Remove the custards from the refrigerator and place about ½ teaspoon of sugar on top of each one, leaving a light, evenly coated layer across the top of each custard.

Using a crème brûlée torch, caramelize the sugar on top of each custard, working in a circle from the outside of each ramekin into the center of each ramekin, keeping the flame at a distance where it is just licking the sugar.

Allow each crème brûlée top to cool for a minute.

Serve and enjoy.

Decadent Butterscotch Pudding - ☺♥

In other Food Nirvana pudding recipes I've railed about the cheap commercial puddings that have too little flavor to be worth buying ... like vanilla and chocolate ... so I recommend making them from scratch at home. It is easy, and oh, so superior!

There is one flavor exception. Either Jell-O® or Royal® butterscotch pudding that you have to cook (avoid instant puddings!) both have excellent butterscotch flavor with perfect flavor intensity. I am disappointed that I do not know how to make that type of pudding from scratch, as I don't know how to create the perfect butterscotch flavoring at home.

The directions for making the commercial puddings in the regular 3.5 ounce size box call for the addition of two cups of milk, some mixing, and then heating on low heat with stirring until a thick pudding forms. I decided to take the butterscotch pudding, the one commercial type of pudding that I really do enjoy, and AMP it up to make it a spectacular dessert.

Thus, this recipe. This stuff is "to die for" great! And it is totally easy to make.

Ingredients:

1, 3.5 ounce box of cook and serve butterscotch pudding mix

1 cup of heavy cream for the pudding

1, 12 ounce can of evaporated milk for the pudding

1 cup of heavy cream for making whipped cream

2 tsp. of vanilla for the whipped cream

2 tsp. of sugar for the whipped cream

Directions:

Set aside four small, 6 to 8 ounce size dessert bowls to receive the hot pudding immediately after it is made.

Use a heavy bottom saucepan and a wooden spoon for making the pudding.

Put the pudding mix, the cup of heavy cream and the can of evaporated milk into the saucepan, and mix slowly but thoroughly until all particles have been mixed into the liquid.

Heat the mixture on medium heat, stirring constantly, covering all of the interior bottom of the saucepan to avoid having any pudding stick, until the pudding thickens and starts to boil.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and pour/dispense the pudding into the four dessert dishes.

Cover each dish with plastic wrap to avoid having a thick skin of pudding develop on the surface.

Allow the dishes of pudding to cool to about room temperature, or, you can chill the pudding in the refrigerator for an hour or two.

Use a Magic Bullet® high speed mixer with the one pint size mixing container to make the whipped cream. Why? Because the density of the completed whipped cream will be very heavy, and thick ... and yummy good! This is a significant departure from the conventional way of making whipped cream using a stand kitchen mixer and a large chilled bowl and beaters.

Put the heavy cream, vanilla and sugar into the Magic Bullet® container. Seal the container and shake it to mix the ingredients.

Operate the Magic Bullet® until you hear the blade speed suddenly increase. Then shake the container and repeat the mixing operation two more times, each time shaking the container before resuming mixing.

Uncover the dishes of pudding and spoon the whipped cream on top.

Serve immediately.

Moan with enjoyment ... Yes, this is heaven!

And it is only 3 calories per serving, right? (Ha, Ha!)

In other words, don't serve this dessert very often or you will turn into a blimp!

Espresso Panna Cotta Mousse - ☺♥

Now we are talking about the real thing ... dessert thing, that is. Sue Gale generously provided this recipe for what I can best describe as a to die for mousse, with a hint of coffee flavor. She spoiled Janet and me on our first trip together to Russ and Sue's home in MA.

Serves four.

Ingredients:

1 cup whole milk

3 tsp. unflavored powdered gelatin

3 cups heavy cream

6 tsp. instant espresso powder, heaping

1/2 cup sugar

pinch of salt

1 small white chocolate bar, shaved

1 small dark chocolate bar, shaved

Directions:

Put the milk into a 4 qt. Saucepan and sprinkle the gelatin over the top. Let it stand for five minutes to soften the gelatin. Turn on heat to medium and stir only until the gelatin dissolves. Do not boil. It will only take about 2 to 3 minutes.

Add the cream, espresso powder, sugar and salt. Stir over low heat until the sugar dissolves ... about 3 to 4 minutes.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and let it stand and cool slightly.

Pour the mixture into 4 martini glasses, dividing equally.

Cover each glass and refrigerate, stirring every 20 minutes for the first hour.

(I'd like to try keeping the mousse in one container instead of the individual martini glasses as the processing would be easier. Then, when the mixture is set I would dispense it gently into the martini glasses.)

Chill until set, at least 6 hours and up to 2 days.

When ready to serve, use a vegetable peeler to shave about 1 tbsp. of each type of chocolate over each Panna cotta.

Serve cold.

Flan - ☺♥

Flan is a delicious Hispanic version of egg custard served as a dessert. What makes it unique besides the flavors in the custard is the caramelized sauce.

I happened upon a recipe for flan in an online version of the L.A. Times®. It looked so good I had to include it in Food Nirvana.

This recipe was adapted from that used by the La Golondrina Cafe. That restaurant serves the flan with a sprinkling of dried cranberries, toasted pecans, whipped cream and an optional strawberry sauce.

I know you will really enjoy flan, with or without the restaurant accompaniments. Beyond that, you might try some flavor variations in the recipe. For example, my grandmother Cora used to make a dynamite egg custard pie using nutmeg as the primary spice. It was very nice and a bit of nutmeg could be quite additive to flan instead of using the amaretto in the recipe provided below. Have fun trying different spices, like cinnamon.

Ingredients: (12 servings)

3/4 cup of sugar

Juice of 1 orange, about 1/2 cup

5 jumbo eggs or 6 extra large eggs

2 1/2 (14-ounce) cans of condensed milk

1 1/2 (12-ounce) cans of evaporated milk

1 3/4 cups of milk

1 tablespoon of amaretto liquor

1 tablespoon of pure vanilla extract

1/4 cup of water

Directions:

Combine the 3/4 cup of sugar with the 1/2 cup of orange juice and the 1/4 cup of water in a medium size, heavy-bottom saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil on medium heat, stirring occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved.

Continue to cook and watch carefully until the sugar caramelizes and turns an amber color. Be careful not to overcook/overheat the sauce (if it turns dark it is ruined).

Remove the saucepan from the heat and immediately pour the contents into a 13-by-9-by-2 inch glass baking dish and allow the caramelized sauce to cool to room temperature.

Heat the oven to 300 degrees F. In a large bowl whisk together the eggs, then whisk in the condensed, evaporated and regular milks. Whisk in the amaretto and the vanilla, and then pour that mixture into the baking dish.

Place the dish inside a large roasting pan (the roasting pan must be big enough so that there is a 1-inch clearance on all sides), or broiling pan with high sides, and fill it with enough hot water so that it comes halfway up the side of the glass baking dish. Place the pan in the oven and cook for 1 1/2 to 2 hours, until a knife inserted near the center of the flan comes out clean.

Remove the baking dish from the water bath and allow the flan to cool to room temperature. Place it in the refrigerator, loosely covered with aluminum foil, to chill until cold, preferably overnight.

Invert onto a platter and serve immediately either plain or with accompaniments like those named earlier.

Lemon Lush - ☺♥

I was surprised recently with this great dessert with two different names in Internet recipes ... Lemon Lush and Lemon Lust. Yes, this dessert is remarkably tasty with multiple textures by layer that go together exceptionally well. It is lush and I can easily understand someone lusting after it. The amazing part for me is the use of instant pudding, which I typically avoid like the plague. You do have to use instant pudding in this recipe.

My sweetheart, Peggy, wanted to make some type of dessert using lemons to take to a party, as one particular individual there loved lemon flavored pastries and other lemon flavored desserts. She recalled having a delicious layered lemon dessert in the past and she decided to make it. She looked at a variety of Internet recipes and selected one that appeared best to both of us. The results were wonderful, and she most recently made the dessert a second time for a Super Bowl party, and added an extra whipped cream topping layer, and it was a real hit.

Food Nirvana was created to bring best recipes for really tasty foods to lots of people. So the recipe for Lemon Lush simply had to be added. I hope you make it, for you and your friends and family are guaranteed to love it. It is actually quite simple to make.

Peggy and I decided the second time around to enhance the dessert by putting on an additional topping, a layer of whipped cream. That was a very nice addition but not required. You decide what you want and then do it.

Overall, this is a layered dessert with a shortbread base, a sweetened, flavored cream cheese layer, a pudding layer, a whipped topping layer and optionally a final whipped cream layer.

Ingredients: (makes 12, 2"x3" servings)

2 cups of flour

1 cup of butter

1/2 cup of finely chopped pecans or walnuts (we prefer walnuts for this dessert)

1/4 cup of sugar for the shortbread crust

2, 8 ounce packages of cream cheese

1 cup of sugar for the cream cheese filling

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

2, 3.4 ounce packages of instant lemon pudding

3 1/2 cups of milk

1, 16 ounce container of whipped topping like Cool Whip®, thawed

1 cup of heavy cream, whipped, with 2 tbsp. of sugar and one tsp. of vanilla (optional)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Mix the flour, butter, 1/4 cup of sugar and the chopped pecans or walnuts to create the shortbread dough. I suggest using an electric mixer on low to medium-low speed as it eliminates the labor of hand mixing.

Press the shortbread dough into a 9" by 13" glass baking dish evenly and then bake it for 20 to 25 minutes, or until it is light gold in color. You now have a shortbread crust, which is the base layer of the dessert.

Cool the shortbread crust to room temperature.

Use the electric mixer to beat together the cream cheese, 1 cup of sugar and the lemon juice until the mixture is completely smooth.

Spread that mixture on top of the shortbread crust.

Again use the electric mixer, on low to medium speed, to combine the instant pudding mix with the milk until it starts to thicken, which will take roughly three to five minutes.

Pour the pudding onto the cream cheese mixture and then refrigerate the dessert until the pudding is set, roughly one hour.

Spread the Cool Whip® or a different brand of whipped topping on top of the pudding.

If you want to add the whipped cream topping then use the electric mixer to beat the heavy cream at medium to medium high speed until peaks form, then add the sugar and the vanilla and continue mixing for about a minute. Do not over mix or you will make a weird kind of butter. Spread the whipped cream on top of the Lemon Lush as the final layer.

Keep the Lemon Lush chilled in the refrigerator, covered with plastic wrap, until you serve it.

The easiest way to serve it is to cut it into 12 rectangles and use a spatula to lift each piece from the baking dish.

Enjoy ... And that is guaranteed to be the result.

Pineapple Pudding - ☺♥

This recipe is compliments of my former wife, Janet. I never heard of pineapple pudding before and she surely provided a winner of a dessert. This is a family recipe that Janet's children have enjoyed for many years. Once I tasted it I knew it belonged in Food Nirvana. It is simple to make and you will love it.

There are a few variations to the basic recipe and serving style that you might consider as they are all very good. See below.

Ingredients:

2, 20 oz. cans of crushed pineapple, drained

1 pint of heavy cream

2 cups of whole/4% butterfat milk

1 10.5 oz. bag of Kraft® mini marshmallows

1 tsp. of vanilla

½ cup of sweetened shredded coconut, chopped (optional, see variations below)

16 Maraschino cherries, chopped (optional, see variations below)

Directions:

Scald the two cups of milk in a saucepan on low heat. That means heat the milk to 180° F. Do not boil it.

Put the mini marshmallows into a heatproof four quart bowl.

Pour the scalded milk over the marshmallows and mix them with a spoon until the marshmallows are dissolved. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the mixture until it is thoroughly chilled.

Drain and press out the juice from two cans of crushed pineapple using a sieve and a wooden spoon. Save the juice for other uses. Put the drained, pressed pineapple into a one quart bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and refrigerate it.

When the milk and marshmallow mixture is chilled fold the pineapple into it.

Put the vanilla into a cold mixing bowl along with the heavy cream and whip the cream with your electric mixer until firm peaks form.

Fold the whipped cream into the milk, marshmallow and pineapple mixture gently and then cover and refrigerate the pudding. Serve it cold.

Variations:

Using a small amount of sweetened shredded coconut that has been chopped into small pieces is a nice addition, added when the scalded milk and marshmallows are combined. The coconut adds a flavor that complements the pineapple and it adds a small amount of a different texture within the pudding.

Use Maraschino cherries, chopped into quarters, along with 1/8 cup of the cherry syrup from the jar of cherries to give the pudding additional color and taste. Add the chopped cherries and juice at the same time the chilled pineapple is folded into the chilled milk and marshmallow mixture.

Instead of serving the pudding refrigerated/cold, put it into an oblong 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish and cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the freezer for two or more hours. When completely frozen the pudding can be cut with a knife into 2"x2"x2" or larger blocks and served frozen using a narrow spatula to remove each piece to a saucer or small individual serving dish.

Enjoy!

Creamy Rice Pudding - ☺♥

My daughter Patty asked me if I knew the recipe for rice pudding as made by a family friend, Helene Kataria, way back in the 1960's. I don't know exactly how Helene made it but it was baked and had numerous additions of milk while baking, and it was the best tasting creamiest rice pudding I ever ate. I've no idea where Helene might be today so I started a quest to make an excellent rice pudding, both for my daughter and as an entry for Food Nirvana. After all, rice pudding is one of the best appreciated comfort foods by just about anyone you might ask ... provided it is a very creamy rice pudding and not some idiot's baked version of dried crud! Alas, the sad truth is that I tried to make it a few times many years ago and I failed miserably. Either the rice was hard in the middle or the sauce curdled. I gave up. Now things have changed a lot relative to what I know and what I found to avoid the problems I had making it as a young adult.

I captured three recipes from the Internet and I assembled what I thought was the best ingredients combination and amounts and cooking procedure. And I had the memory of my mom's great stovetop rice pudding from my childhood, but no recipe. I had some personal ideas about making this pudding creatively that I did not see in any Internet recipes. The first idea was to achieve a special taste and creaminess by using evaporated milk in the process to replace some of the initial amount of regular milk. My lovely wife (and excellent cook), Marie, taught me that trick years ago when she made homemade puddings for banana cream pie or coconut cream pie. The second idea was to avoid steps that produce a drier, custard-like pudding, such as happens in many baked versions, ergo never bake it unless you use Helene's method. Oh, yes, small amounts of different spices used often with desserts can be delightful with rice pudding if not overdone. Finally, I think if you want creamy pudding of top caliber then some heavy cream must be one of the ingredients, added after the boiling period is completed. Oh, I do love dark raisins in rice pudding so they are listed in my recipe, but you may choose to include them or not to suit your taste.

I made the pudding according to my ideas and the assembled composite of Internet recipes. I am very happy with my results! Food Nirvana now has a very fine creamy rice pudding recipe. My daughter is very pleased.

Does the pudding taste like that made by Helene? No. It is unique and perfect in its own right and I have no further desire to learn more about how Helene made her version. But I finally realized that Helene used evaporated milk in her additions during the baking cycle, which yielded a sauce ratio higher in evaporated milk than regular milk. If you want to try Helene's approach you can

do it in this stovetop recipe by doubling the amount of evaporated milk and using only one cup of whole milk.

You will see in the ingredients list a relatively small amount of sugars relative to other recipes I have seen. That is intentional, for the optional raisins add sweetness, and one can always add additional sugar, but you are never able to remove an excess amount of an ingredient like sugar. Thus, try it as listed, and then if you want, make small additions to achieve perfection on your own terms.

I have one other footnote to add. When first made, foods like rice and pasta have absorbed the proper amount of moisture to provide the right texture or tenderness. In both cases allowing that type of food to sit in a liquid or semi-liquid environment in refrigerated storage for a few days after cooking inevitably leads to additional moisture being absorbed, which is most often undesirable, for the overall food composition becomes drier, with pasta or rice swollen and the dish not as moist as when originally prepared. With pasta dishes it is easy to avoid that problem by keeping the pasta segregated from the sauce when serving it and especially when packaging leftovers. In the case of rice pudding, and other rice dishes, there is no easy or obvious way to avoid the problem, other than to 1) Eat all of it within a day or two, and 2) In the case of rice pudding you can add some milk to a dish of it and mix it when it is too thick, and perhaps also warm it a bit in a microwave oven, and that greatly improves the quality. Alternatively, if you use basmati rice and don't overcook it the rice pudding will be fine even after days of refrigerator storage, provided the surface of the pudding is kept covered with plastic wrap. Enough said.

Ingredients:

2 cups of whole milk

1, 12 ounce can of evaporated milk

1 cup of heavy cream

1 cup of uncooked white rice (Cooking times vary by type of rice. I prefer Basmati rice.)

1/4 teaspoon of salt

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

1/3 cup of dark brown sugar

1/3 cup of regular white sugar

1 tablespoon of vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon of ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon of ground cardamom

1/4 teaspoon of ground nutmeg

2/3 cup of raisins (optional; I use Sun-Maid® dark raisins)

Directions:

The rice should be precooked at a very low boil/simmer in water with the saucepan covered. Do so, according to cooking instructions appropriate for the type of rice you are using.

Bring the milk, evaporated milk, precooked rice and salt to a boil over medium high heat in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan (I use my 2 1/2 quart tin lined solid copper French saucepan that is perfect for making sauces and candies), stirring every few minutes. Reduce the heat to very low and simmer the mixture uncovered until the precooked rice is very tender and well coated, about five minutes. Stir the mixture frequently, like every minute or two, to prevent any rice from clumping or sticking to the bottom of the saucepan. Be sure to test the rice at the end of the cooking cycle as it should be tender all the way through. If it is not, then continue simmering and stirring for an additional five minutes, adding 1/3 cup of milk first to slightly thin the sauce and provide more liquid for the rice to absorb.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and keep it covered with a lid for ten minutes. That will complete any remaining moisture absorption process.

Whisk the eggs well in a 2 quart mixing bowl. Add the brown and white sugars and whisk until well blended. Add the heavy cream and whisk until the mixture is uniform. Add one cup of the hot rice and milk mixture to the egg mixture, gradually, while whisking rapidly to incorporate it.

Return the saucepan to the heat.

Add the rice modified egg, sugar and cream mixture to the saucepan of cooked rice and milk and stir slowly and continuously, on low heat, for 5 to 10 minutes, until it reaches a temperature of 160°F. Be careful not to have the mixture come to a boil at this point or it will curdle. I recommend using a candy or frying thermometer to be sure the temperature does not exceed 165°F. You may or may not notice a small amount of steam coming from the pudding periodically when it reaches the correct temperature. Note that the rice pudding may appear a bit too runny but that changes as it cools, and especially after it is refrigerated.

Remove the pudding from the heat and stir or whisk in the vanilla, raisins, cardamom, cinnamon and nutmeg until everything is well mixed.

Put the pudding into the 2 quart mixing bowl, stir briefly, and cover it with plastic wrap to keep the pudding surface from drying and forming a skin. That is accomplished by having the plastic wrap in direct contact with the surface of the pudding, not simply stretched across the rim of the bowl.

You can serve this pudding warm or cold. It is delicious both ways. As noted, it will thicken considerably if chilled in the refrigerator, and you may/may not decide to stir a small amount of heavy cream into it immediately before serving.

Zabaglione - ☺♥

Zabaglione is a classic sweet that you don't encounter much anymore on restaurant menus or home meals. That is a shame because it is delicious. Marie used to make this wonderful dessert, layering it with fresh fruit in tall sundae glasses, so I decided to get a couple of good Internet recipes, improve and combine them into one recipe, and provide it in Food Nirvana.

Zabaglione belongs to the family of custard-like sauces that use egg yolks to thicken a liquid, such as hollandaise sauce and mayonnaise. All of these require patience in adding the liquid to the egg yolks and, for the warm ones like zabaglione, care not to overheat and curdle the mixture. In this recipe, you whisk the egg, sugar and wine constantly until it becomes more of a mousse than a custard. You need arm muscle stamina if you're going to whisk by hand, but an electric whisk can make preparation easy.

Ingredients: (serves six people)

8 egg yolks

1/2 cup of sugar

1 cup of sweet Marsala wine

1/2 pint of fresh, chilled red raspberries

1/2 pint of fresh blackberries or blueberries, chilled

1 cup of chilled heavy cream

1 tbsp. of sugar for the heavy cream

1 tsp. of vanilla extract for the heavy cream

Directions:

Fill a large saucepan with several inches of water, and bring it to a boil over high heat.

Reduce the heat until the water maintains a strong simmer.

Place the egg yolks and half cup of sugar into a metal mixing bowl. Whisk the mixture until you have an even consistency.

Place the bowl over the simmering water. Whisk constantly, adding the Marsala wine gradually in a thin stream and continuing to whisk constantly, until the

zabaglione turns pale yellow and thickens to the consistency of softly whipped cream.

Transfer the zabaglione with a rubber spatula into a clean, chilled mixing bowl, set over ice, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon until the zabaglione is cold. Once it is cold, it is ready for the next step where you fold in the whipped cream.

Whip the cream in a separate chilled bowl with an electric mixer. When it forms soft peaks add one tbsp. of sugar and one tsp. of vanilla extract and continue whipping for no more than 30 seconds.

Fold the whipped cream gently into the chilled zabaglione.

Divide the berries to be used into portions for 6 large sundae glasses.

Layer the berries and the zabaglione in the glasses, ending with a berry or two on top. Keep the dessert chilled in the refrigerator for no more than one or two hours, covered with plastic wrap, until it is time to serve dessert.

Serve and enjoy!

SALADS & SLAWS:

Bok Choy Salad - ☺♥♥♥☺

I've found that using Bok Choy instead of Napa in my Food Nirvana Oriental Salad is a nice variation, so I decided to look for a Bok Choy salad recipe and I found one that looked pretty good on the Internet.

I changed that recipe to produce a hybrid with my Oriental Salad recipe, and I can tell you before even making this salad that I knew it would be delicious! And I was right. It is delicious. It is superb!

One of the things I liked about the Bok Choy salad recipe from the Internet was the use of a skillet to lightly brown a number of dry ingredients in melted butter. That is, to my way of thinking, a significant improvement over my method of roasting chopped, blanched almonds. Also, browning the ramen noodles enhances the flavor and texture. For vegans, some peanut oil or canola oil can be used instead of butter.

Note that this recipe does not use fruits like mandarin oranges and lychees.

The salad is of the same general type as my Oriental Salad but the differences make both salads unique as well as delicious.

Salad Ingredients: (four generous or six regular servings)

3 Tbsp. of butter (alternately two tablespoons of canola oil or peanut oil for vegans)

1 Tbsp. of sugar

1/4 cup of raw sesame seeds

1, 3 oz. package of Oriental flavor Ramen noodles (Use the seasoning packet when you make the salad dressing)

2 ounces of blanched, chopped almonds (or raw Pepita seeds)

About 1 lb. (or more) of a large Bok Choy with the outer edges and leaf areas of the green parts trimmed and cut separately from the white part

6 oz. of Brocoslaw (1/2 of a 12 ounce package of julienned broccoli stems/carrots)

3 scallions including the green tops (or alternately half of a 6 ounce box of French's® Crispy Fried Onions)

Salad Dressing Ingredients:

2 Tbsp. of toasted sesame oil

3 Tbsp. of canola oil

2 to 3 Tbsp. of rice vinegar (to taste)

1/4 cup of sugar

1 Tbsp. of soy sauce

Seasoning packet from the Oriental flavor Ramen noodles package

Salad Directions:

Use a wooden kitchen mallet gently to break up the dry Ramen noodles completely while they are still in the original package.

Melt the butter (or canola or peanut oil) in a nonstick skillet and add the sesame seeds, 1 tbsp. of sugar, the broken Ramen noodles and the blanched, chopped almonds (or Pepita seeds). Mix the dry ingredients using a plastic or wooden spoon with the melted butter (or oil) so the dry ingredients are evenly coated. Set the Ramen noodles flavoring packet aside for use when making the salad dressing.

Brown the skillet contents lightly on medium low heat. Use a plastic or wooden spoon to stir the skillet contents slowly but well, continuously, for about five minutes. Let the appearance of the mixture indicate when it is done lightly browning. Set the mixture aside in a bowl to cool. After the mixture has partially cooled you can add the French's® Crispy Fried Onion pieces (if you are using them instead of scallions) and set that mixture aside in the refrigerator, covered with plastic wrap.

Wash and then chop the trimmed bok choy white parts into roughly square pieces about 3/4" on a side, putting the pieces into a large salad bowl. Wash and then roughly cut the green tops into strips about 2" long and add them to the salad bowl. Wash the scallions (if using them) and then cut them into pieces 1/4" long, including the green parts, and add them to the bok choy pieces. Add the Broccoslaw. Mix gently but thoroughly and then refrigerate that vegetable mixture until you are ready to serve the salad.

Dressing Directions:

Mix the sesame oil, canola oil, rice vinegar, the 1/4 cup of sugar, and the soy sauce in a small saucepan.

Add the seasoning packet contents from the Oriental flavor Ramen noodles package.

Bring the dressing mixture to a low boil on low heat while slowly mixing it with a teaspoon, and cook it on very low heat for one minute while stirring.

Pour the dressing into a one cup size small bowl and chill it in the refrigerator, covered with plastic wrap.

Serving Directions:

Chill the individual serving bowls for your guests in the refrigerator for two hours before the meal.

Just prior to serving the salad, mix the bok choy and the ramen noodle mixtures together.

Pour all of the salad dressing over the salad and mix well.

Serve the salad in the chilled individual serving bowls and listen to your guests moan with delight!

A chilled light white wine like Pinot Grigio goes well with this type of salad. Or you might be adventurous and serve Japanese Sake (rice wine) warmed to 104 to 108 degrees F in a porcelain tea pot in the microwave oven. Pour the warmed sake into small 2 ounce porcelain Sake cups.

It is not necessary to serve rolls or bread with this salad as it already contains crunchy Ramen noodles, sesame seeds and almond (or Pepita) pieces.

Enjoy!

Caesar Salad - ☺♥T

History of the Caesar Salad:

This popular dish was originally created in 1924 by Italian chef Caesar Cardini at his restaurant in Tijuana, Mexico and was prepared and served right at the table. If you have never experienced "the show" that goes with table side presentation, you don't know what you missed. What an opportunity for a waiter to show off, mixing and whisking to the delight of the patrons!

Back in the 1970's and 1980's we used to enjoy Mr. Vincente of Vincente's Restaurant® in Wilmington, DE making his terrific Caesar salad tableside. What a showman he was, and his meals were excellent, what today we would call "Best of Breed."

What about the use of raw egg in Caesar salad? The same fear-mongering idiots who tell you not to drink eggnog will harp about the use of raw or partially cooked eggs in any dish. Ignore them. They continuously confuse possibility with probability and always lean towards the scary side.

Though some recipes use a raw egg, a coddled egg will give the dressing a smoother, creamier texture. Also, the emulsion formed in the final mixing of the ingredients will hold, ergo not break down, for up to a week in your refrigerator. Bring a one quart pan half filled with water to a fast boil and gently place an extra large or jumbo egg into it and cook for only 45 or 60 seconds based on the size of the egg. Then break the egg into a cool two quart bowl and whisk it quickly and thoroughly for thirty seconds to stop further cooking.

Ingredients: (4 generous or 6 average size portions)

For the croutons:

2 large garlic cloves

A pinch of salt

3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil (Using a spray can version of olive oil is superior. Also, Pam® can be used as a substitute.)

2 cups of French baguette slices cut into 1/2 inch cubes (plain white bread works well too)

For the salad dressing: (I list all of Cardini's ingredients and note the ones I avoid)

1 extra large or jumbo coddled egg

1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce (I omit this ingredient. Yuck!)

Juice from one fresh lemon. This is 2 to 3 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice.

4 large fresh garlic cloves, peeled and coarsely chopped

¼ tsp. sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper or you can use white pepper.

1 can of anchovies (including the oil) plus a second can, drained and reserved with the anchovy strips used when the salad is served

1 teaspoon of capers (I omit this ingredient. The flavor is not a good addition.)

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard (I omit this ingredient. Yuck!)

1 cup of extra virgin olive oil

2 medium to large heads of romaine lettuce -- outer leaf tips removed

1/2 cup of Parmesan/Loecatel cheese -- freshly grated

Directions:

Preparing the croutons - Preheat the oven to 350°F. Crush the garlic cloves with the side of a chef's knife (be very careful) or with a garlic press. Slice the baguette or loaf of plain white bread and cut the slices into 1/2 inch cubes.

Croutons - Combine the garlic, oil, salt, and bread cubes in a bowl. Mix until the cubes are coated evenly. Spread the coated cubes onto a baking sheet and bake until they are golden. (I think a light spraying with Pam® or olive oil spray before baking helps.) This should take about 10 minutes. Stir as necessary every few minutes to get even baking on all sides.

To make the salad - Bring a half filled one quart saucepan of water to a boil on high heat, then add the egg gently from a spoon and cook it for just 45 seconds if it is an extra large eggs or 60 seconds for a jumbo egg ... NO MORE! This is coddling the egg.

Remove the egg from the hot water. Break it into a cool two quart bowl and whisk it for 30 seconds.

Mix all the other ingredients in a blender. Blend them on medium or medium high speed until completely smooth, which should take about three minutes.

Add the blended ingredients to the whisked egg very slowly continuing to whisk with each addition until the mixture is perfectly blended. The coddled egg forms a stable emulsion with the other ingredients when this process is done correctly, and that will provide you a delicious dressing that will not separate even after a few days of refrigeration of leftovers.

Serving The Salad:

Tear/cut the romaine lettuce into 1 to 2 inch pieces and add them to a large bowl (wooden if you have one, and some chefs like to rub the inside of the wooden bowl with freshly cut garlic first). Let each guest put the amount of romaine they want into their individual serving bowl and add the amount of dressing they want and mix until the romaine leaves are evenly coated. Then add the Parmesan cheese in the amount wanted and mix again, then add the croutons, if wanted, and toss lightly.

Be sure to have a small plate with individual strips of anchovies on it, cut in half, for people who love anchovies with their Caesar salad. Add the anchovy strips in the amount wanted on top of each individual serving of Caesar salad.

If the romaine lettuce, croutons, cheese and dressing are kept separate from each other for making individual servings, then leftovers can be saved individually and refrigerated with no loss of individual flavor or texture, and then combined later to again serve what is essentially a freshly made salad. Conversely, if all the ingredients have been mixed together before serving the salad then storage of leftovers will result in less crisp lettuce and soggy croutons.

Caprese Salad - ☺♥

No salad menu is complete without the simple and delicious Caprese Salad. But you must have fresh basil leaves to make this salad, which can be a challenge during winter months. Pick a good supermarket and you will have no problem. I have included recipes for a regular Caprese Salad, a Mini-Caprese Salad that uses garlic and lemon juice and my great friend Linda Lange's Caprese Salad. You may want to try all of these recipes and then pick your favorite. I prefer the addition of the garlic and the lemon juice, but I use the sliced tomatoes and cheese approach of the first recipe and Linda's recipe instead of the balls of mozzarella shown in the mini-Caprese salad.

Ingredients:

3 vine-ripe tomatoes, 1/4" thick slices

1 pound fresh mozzarella, 1/4" thick slices

20 to 30 leaves of fresh basil

Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling

Coarse salt and pepper

Directions:

Layer alternating slices of tomatoes and mozzarella, adding a basil leaf between each, on a large, shallow platter. Drizzle the salad with extra-virgin olive oil and season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Mini-Caprese Salad - ☺

Ingredients:

1 lemon, juiced

1 garlic clove, minced

1 cup basil leaves, about 20 leaves, plus a few for garnish

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved

1 cup bocconcini (bite-sized fresh mozzarella balls), drained, halved

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Combine lemon juice, garlic, basil and olive oil in a food processor or blender. Process to form a smooth dressing. Combine tomatoes, cheese and dressing in a bowl and season with salt and pepper. Garnish with a few torn basil leaves.

Linda Lange's Caprese Salad - ☺♥

I particularly enjoy the Caprese salad made by my great friend, Linda Lange, so I asked for her recipe and it is shown below.

Ingredients:

5, Medium to large ripe tomatoes (sliced)

Big handful of fresh Basil – washed, rolled and cut into ribbons

Small Basil leaves for decoration

Extra Virgin Olive Oil – 1/3 cup

Salt and Pepper

One or two cloves of garlic, pressed or finely diced

A few sprinkles of Tuscan Herbs (maybe ¼ tsp.)

1 tbsp. Balsamic Vinegar

Buffalo Mozzarella Cheese (1 large ball or 2 medium balls)

Directions:

Slice the tomatoes and place the slices on a large tray.

Salt and Pepper the tomato slices lightly.

In a one cup measuring cup pour in the 1/3 cup of olive oil and add the garlic and the Tuscan Herbs. Mix gently.

With a teaspoon spread some of the garlic from the oil mixture over each of the tomato slices.

Slice the Mozzarella cheese about 1/8th inch to 1/4” thick and place a slice of it on each slice of tomato.

Drizzle the rest of the olive oil mixture over the tomatoes and cheese.

Dress the tomatoes and cheese with the ribbons of fresh Basil. Be sure to add some of the whole small leaves to decorate the finished product.

Chicken Salad - ☺♥

This is another of Marie's recipes. I know not where she got it but it sure is good.

Ingredients:

3 cups of cooked and diced chicken breasts

1 cup of mayonnaise

½ cup of sour cream

1 tbsp. of ranch dressing

2 tbsp. of chopped red onion

2 tbsp. of chopped celery

¼ cup of shredded carrots

8 red seedless grapes cut in half

1 tbsp. of sugar

½ cup of finely chopped pecans

Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Put all the ingredients except the grapes into a large bowl, mix them thoroughly, then add the grapes for a final light tossing.

Refrigerate at least 2 hours, toss lightly before serving and add more mayonnaise if needed. This is a crunchy chicken salad that is very attractive as well as delicious.

Serve a generous scoop of it on a bed of Bibb lettuce, with crackers on the side and a nice glass of chilled light white wine, like Pinot Grigio.

Coleslaw - ☺♥

This fairly common dish is something folks either know how to do well or not do well at all. I have had great coleslaw and awful coleslaw in restaurants and homes of friends and relatives. This creamy recipe is guaranteed by me to please you unless you are a vinegar and celery seed fanatic ... I created it, with flexibility in mind.

Ingredients:

1 small to medium size head of cabbage

1½ cups of mayonnaise

½ cup of light cream

½ cup of sour cream

½ tsp. of sea salt

½ tsp. of black pepper

2½ tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1 tbsp. of rice vinegar (or up to 1 tbsp. more if you want a more tart dressing)

3 tbsp. of sugar

Directions:

Mix the mayonnaise and cream and sour cream in a 3 quart bowl.

Add the sea salt, pepper, sugar, lemon juice and rice vinegar and mix thoroughly.

Shred the cabbage to the size pieces you prefer and gradually put them into the 3 quart bowl, with mixing.

Mix each addition of cabbage with the dressing until all pieces of cabbage are coated evenly.

Continue the shredding and mixing steps until all of the cabbage has been evenly coated with the dressing.

Transfer the coleslaw to a plastic storage container just large enough to hold the coleslaw and cover it.

Refrigerate the coleslaw for at least two hours. It is then ready to serve.

Note: Food items like coleslaw frequently taste better the day after they are made, as the flavors need time to blend, so you might want to prepare this recipe one day in advance of planned use. You can also adjust the seasoning the next day to optimize whatever taste you prefer ... sweet, salty, peppery or the tartness via lemon juice or vinegar.

Variations:

Some people like small amounts of grated carrot (1/3 cup) and/or drained crushed pineapple (1/3 cup) to be added to the above ingredients. Yet another variation is to add one teaspoon of celery seed to the above recipe.

Enjoy!

Greek Barley Salad - ☺♥

I was looking for barley recipes and came across this one via the Food Network® ... And it takes care of two needs at the same time ... It provides both a carbohydrate and fresh vegetables to accompany my prime rib steak! This recipe looked to be pretty good. Actually, it turned out to be excellent. The only change I made was to double the amount of salad dressing.

My daughter-in-law, Jane, should love this salad as she is a vegan. I suspect she would forego the prime rib steak part. Oh, well ...

It is best to make the Greek Barley Salad at least 3 hours ahead of time so the flavors have time to mingle during refrigeration while chilling the salad. It is also wise to eat all of the salad at the first sitting as the barley gradually absorbs enough of the salad dressing to make the salad too bland by the second day.

You might, however, serve the dressing separately from the salad, in a shakable container, and have each guest mix the two together in their individual salads. Another method would be to keep the barley separate from the rest of the salad until serving time and have the guests mix it into their individual salad servings.

Ingredients: (four to six servings)

1 cup of pearled barley

Kosher salt

2 cups of yellow and red cherry tomatoes, halved

1/2 cup of crumbled feta cheese

1/2 cup of pitted Kalamata olives, halved lengthwise

3 tablespoons of chopped fresh mint

1 small red bell pepper, seeded, ribs removed and diced

1 shallot, minced (or equivalent finely diced purple salad onion)

1 small cucumber, diced

6 tablespoons of red wine vinegar

4 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil

Freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Combine the barley, 3 cups of water and a pinch of salt in a medium-size saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to very low and simmer, covered, until the barley is tender, about 45 minutes. Drain the barley in a colander and let it cool to room temperature in a wide shallow bowl. If you want, you can chill it in the refrigerator, covered, for faster cooling.

Combine the tomatoes, feta cheese, olives, mint, bell pepper, shallot and cucumber in a large salad bowl. Add the cooled barley and mix gently but well.

Whisk together the red wine vinegar and the olive oil in a separate small bowl. Season it with salt and pepper.

Pour the dressing onto the salad and toss the salad to mix all of the ingredients well with the salad dressing.

Cover the salad with plastic wrap and place it in the refrigerator until you are ready to serve it.

Serve it in pre-chilled salad bowls, along with whatever else you have made for your meal.

Enjoy! This stuff is quite good ... Tasty and refreshing.

Greek Salad - ☺♥

I noticed that I had recently purchased a nice container of feta cheese blocks in brine. There it was, sitting patiently in my refrigerator, waiting to bring joy to anyone smart enough to use it.

Then I thought about the big jug of excellent Greek kalamata olives I had purchased (Attica® brand, seven pound bottle, via Amazon®) and, well the next move became obvious. Note: Kalamata olives vary a lot in quality/taste. The jars of them on supermarket shelves are generally not worth much, especially compared to the best ones you can purchase in bulk. Of course, there are lousy brands available in bulk too!

I just had to have a crisp and tasty Greek salad! After checking my inventory of fresh vegetables, I knew I had all the essential ingredients. I also found recipes for two different nice dressings for that type of salad.

Ah, yes ... Food Nirvana just gets better and better ... lucky me! And, lucky you! Have fun with this refreshing and lively (once you add either dressing) salad.

You can serve it with most any well seasoned grilled meat or seafood entree, or even a curry, along with an appropriate carbohydrate, perhaps couscous, or rice for a curry, or even just a fine loaf of any artisan bread with butter or Pita bread with seasoned olive oil (you can find a perfect recipe for that oil in the Food Nirvana appetizer section ... a clone of the seasoned oil served at Carrabba's® restaurants). And don't forget a chilled bottle of light white wine like Pinot Grigio.

As the applause starts you can take bows for your excellent skills as a chef.

When appropriate, like now, I like to remember fine friends and loved ones who are no longer with us. Here's to you, Nick Marcopoulos! You were a great guy and a truly fine friend! So I make this one in memory of you.

Ingredients: (six generous servings)

1 head of romaine lettuce, chopped

1 small red onion thinly sliced

1 cup of Kalamata olives, sliced in half lengthwise, or kept whole if they contain pits

1 green bell pepper, chopped

1 red bell pepper, chopped

2 large ripe tomatoes, chopped, or 1 1/2 cups of small salad tomatoes, sliced in half lengthwise

1/2 of an unpeeled English cucumber or 3 Persian cucumbers, ends cut off, sliced lengthwise in half and sliced thinly crosswise

1 cup (or more) of finely cut or crumbled feta cheese

Ground pepper and salt to taste

Directions:

Prepare all of the above and combine and mix those ingredients in a large, shallow salad bowl.

Serve the salad chilled. Mix individual servings with Greek Salad Dressing per either of the recipes shown below.

Enjoy ... And yes, you will do exactly that. Maybe with a nice loaf of Italian Sesame Scali bread or warm chewy rolls and butter (or seasoned olive oil) and the chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio wine.

Don't forget the grilled meat or seafood entree. Actually, the first time we had a Quiche, which normally wouldn't excite me, but in this instance it was okay as it kept the meal simple, providing both the protein and the carbohydrate. But I much prefer a well seasoned grilled meat entree, like grilled sausages or a grilled seasoned ground lamb patty.

I have two Greek Salad Dressing recipes from the Internet that looked pretty good. I show both of them below. I've tried both and they are both very good. The second one uses lemon juice instead of wine vinegar and I think it is the better choice for this salad, but that is strictly my personal opinion. You may prefer the wine vinegar version instead.

Beyond that I checked out the use of Xanthan gum powder to make the oil and lemon juice version, which, after a day of refrigeration and a few moments of shaking, made it miscible and creamy, which made using it and enjoying it a lot nicer. It stayed creamy and well mixed on/in the salad instead of separating in the manner typical of oil and vinegar dressings.

Here is a valuable digression/lesson regarding the use of Xanthan gum powder. If you decide to use it then use an immersion or regular blender for three minutes at high speed to blend it in with all the other salad dressing ingredients, ergo, have the blender mixing the other ingredients before very gradually introducing

the Xanthan gum powder into the mixture, so it can't clump together. Use it at the rate of 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon of Xanthan gum powder per cup of salad dressing.

For these Greek Salad Dressings it is best to start by blending the Xanthan gum powder with just the olive oil. Then add the other ingredients and continue to blend for two or three minutes. Start with 1/8 teaspoon of Xanthan gum powder per cup of salad dressing, and if necessary, after the initial mixing, add a second 1/8 teaspoon of the powder (in total) gradually during a second cycle of mixing. Important point: I found that waiting a day before using the dressing worked wonders in how creamy it was after light shaking. I stored it in the refrigerator for that day.

Most of all, don't use very much Xanthan gum powder. A little goes a long way. Overdo it and you will make a slimy mess. Simply remember that more can be added and mixed in later if desired. You can buy Xanthan gum powder cheaply in a one pound quantity, which will last a very long time, via the Internet, at www.BulkFoods.com ... I store mine in a tightly sealed large (about three cups volume) seasoning bottle that used to contain a dried herb.

Greek Salad Dressing Recipe #1:

As shown, this recipe does not make use of Xanthan gum powder.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of extra virgin olive oil

1 1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

1 1/2 tsp. of dried oregano

1 1/2 tsp. of dried basil

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

1 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of onion powder

1 tsp. of Dijon mustard

1/4 cup of red wine vinegar

1/4 cup of water

Directions:

In a one quart bowl, mix together the olive oil, garlic powder, oregano, basil, pepper, salt, onion powder, and Dijon mustard.

Pour in the vinegar and the water, and whisk vigorously until well blended.

I use a one pint canning jar with a lid so I can shake the dressing to blend the ingredients, albeit temporarily as oil and vinegar aren't miscible without a thickening ingredient like Xanthan gum powder. That means you can use the Xanthan gum powder method described earlier with this dressing if you want, instead of mixing the ingredients in a bowl.

Add the dressing to individual Greek salads after shaking each time the dressing is used.

Enjoy!

Greek Salad Dressing Recipe#2:

As shown, this recipe provides both the regular mixing method and the Xanthan gum powder mixing method .

Ingredients:

2 large cloves of garlic, grated or minced or squeezed through a garlic press

2 tsp. of dried oregano

1 tsp. of kosher salt

1/2 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper

1/4 to 1/3 cup of freshly squeezed, strained lemon juice

1/4 cup of water

1 cup of extra virgin olive oil

1/4 tsp. of Xanthan gum powder (optional)

Directions:

Grate or mince or press the cloves of garlic and put the contents into a one pint canning jar.

Add the oregano, the salt and the black pepper to the jar.

Pour in 1/4 cup of the strained freshly squeezed lemon juice and the water.

Pour in the olive oil.

Screw the lid onto the canning jar.

Shake the jar for half a minute or longer to mix the ingredients (or use the Xanthan gum powder method described earlier, in which you start with only the oil and use a blender).

Test the dressing on a small sample of salad for taste and acidity. If it needs more lemon juice then add another 1/8 cup of strained freshly squeezed lemon juice to the jar of dressing and repeat the shaking and the taste testing, etc., until you have the acidity level you want. We did not add any extra lemon juice. It wasn't necessary.

Serve the salad and let each person use the amount of dressing they want. Then, swoon with delight.

You can store these types of salad dressings, sealed well in jars, in the refrigerator. They will remain good for about a month. If you want to store them under refrigeration or in a food pantry for longer periods of time then you need to add a preservative like sodium benzoate when making the dressing, at a rate of 1/10th of one percent by weight for the total weight of the dressing. Read the Food Nirvana Technology section on the use of preservatives for more detail on amounts and methods.

Enjoy!

Creamed Cucumber Salad - ☺♥

There are many good recipes for creamed cucumbers, along with a few cucumber salad recipes that omit the creamed part. If you like cucumbers they all taste good. The most important parts are to get the right ratio of vinegar and sugar and to allow the completed salad to chill overnight to get all the flavors to blend throughout the sauce. This is especially noticeable with the onion and cucumber flavors. The cream sauce takes on both flavors and that is exactly what you want. The finished sauce should neither be thick or runny, thus the recipe below allows for a variable amount of cream or mayonnaise to be used. Two last points ... Do not use thick or overripe cucumbers as they will have wimpy flavor/texture and also have too many large seeds. The best cucumber type for this salad is an English cucumber, about 15" long, and you don't peel it.

Ingredients: (six servings)

2 medium large (8") to large (10") fresh crisp cucumbers, 1 ½ inches thick

1 medium size (3") sweet onion

¾ cup of Hellman's® mayonnaise

½ cup of sour cream

¼ to ½ cup of light or heavy cream

1 tbsp. of sugar

2 tbsp. of rice vinegar

¾ tsp. of sea salt

½ tsp. of black pepper

Directions:

Dice the onion fairly fine (¼" x ½" pieces) and put the pieces into a two or three quart bowl. Add the mayonnaise, the sour cream and ¼ cup of light or heavy cream. Mix well. Add the sugar, sea salt, pepper and vinegar and mix well. At this point the sauce may appear too thick. Don't worry ... the cucumber slices you will add next will provide moisture to thin the sauce.

Peel the cucumbers (unless you are using an English cucumber), cut off the ends and slice each cucumber lengthwise into two halves. Slice the halves crosswise with a thickness of less than 1/8th of an inch. Add the cucumber pieces to the bowl in six increments and mix each time to coat the pieces with the cream sauce.

When all the cucumber pieces have been coated the moisture from the cucumbers will have thinned the sauce somewhat. If it has a consistency you like it is done. If it seems too thick then add another 1/4 cup of cream and mix well. If it seems too thin then add another 1/4 cup mayonnaise or Miracle Whip® and mix well. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the salad overnight.

Mix the salad the next day, taste it and adjust the salt, pepper and/or vinegar/sugar to please yourself. I have not found it necessary to adjust the seasonings, but all of us have individual preferences, so please yourself and your guests.

Serve the creamed cucumber salad chilled.

Enjoy!

Hot German Potato Salad - ?

This untested hot German potato salad recipe is likely to be a perfect accompaniment to the Poor Man's Schnitzel recipe in the Pork section of this book. Add warm cinnamon applesauce and you should have a delightful meal. As usual, the recipe below is a composite of different recipes Janet and I found, discussed, modified and completed. I'll report back as soon as I have tried it.

Ingredients:

4 cups of sliced peeled potatoes

4 slices of bacon

4 scallions, chopped

1/4 cup of white vinegar

1/4 cup of water

1 tbsp. of flour

2 tablespoons of white sugar

1 teaspoon of salt

1/8 teaspoon of ground black pepper

1/4 tsp. of celery seed

1 tbsp. of chopped fresh parsley as garnish

2 hardboiled eggs sliced as garnish

paprika sprinkled on top as garnish

Directions:

Boil two raw eggs on low heat for ten minutes. Chill the eggs in cold water and remove the shells. Set them aside.

Peel and slice the potatoes and put them into a large saucepan and fill it with enough water to cover the potatoes. Add a small amount of salt.

Bring the water to a boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to low. Cover the saucepan and simmer for about 8 minutes or until the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork. Drain the water from the potatoes and set them aside to cool.

Place the bacon in a large deep skillet over medium heat. Fry until done medium (no soft fat remaining), turning as needed. Remove the bacon and set it aside.

Add the scallion pieces to the bacon grease, and sauté them over medium heat until they are translucent. Reduce the heat to very low. Add the flour and mix well to form a roux.

Add the vinegar, water, sugar, celery seed, salt and pepper to the pan. Bring to a boil on medium heat. Reduce the heat to low, then add the bacon and gradually add the potatoes while mixing gently.

Transfer the hot potato salad to a pre-warmed serving dish. Sprinkle the potato salad lightly with paprika. Slice the hardboiled eggs and place them around the perimeter of the potato salad as a garnish. Sprinkle the fresh parsley on top of the potatoes as a garnish.

Serve warm.

Macaroni Salad - 😊♥

Who doesn't like simple but yummy cold salads like macaroni salad? I suppose a simple food like macaroni salad seems a bit common to appear in Food Nirvana, but if it is made well it is delicious, so it belongs with other yummy foods in Food Nirvana. Some of the different versions of macaroni salad I have tasted in the past were so bland they were boring. Fear not ... the recipe variations shown below will all make excellent macaroni salad.

Peggy and I looked at multiple Internet recipes for macaroni salad, we used our own knowledge from making it in the past, and we combined all of that information, eliminating some recommended Internet recipe ingredients, to create the recipe variations shown below. I made the green Manzanilla olive version of this salad to please Peggy (she loves salty foods) and it is excellent. You may use halved green Manzanilla olives to create the more salty salad or diced sweet gherkins to create a sweeter salad. But don't use both.

You will see multiple ingredient variations below that all will produce unique and superior macaroni salads. We suggest trying the different variations to find what you and your family and friends like the best.

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups of Hellman's® mayonnaise

2 tablespoons of white distilled vinegar or unseasoned rice vinegar

1/4 to 1/3 of a cup of sweet gherkin pickle juice (Variation: Use juice from bread and butter pickles)

1 tablespoon of sugar

1 teaspoon of sea salt if using olives or 2 teaspoons of sea salt if using sweet gherkins or bread and butter pickles

1 teaspoon of ground black pepper (Variation: Use 1/2 teaspoon of black pepper and 1/4 teaspoon of cayenne pepper)

1 lb. of dry macaroni, cooked, drained, rinsed in cold water, drained again and then chilled

1 1/2 cups of diced celery

1/2 cup of diced green bell pepper

1/2 cup of diced sweet red pepper

1/2 cup of diced sweet onion (Variation: Use chopped scallions, including green part)

1 1/2 cups of halved green Manzanilla olives, or, one cup of diced sweet gherkin pickles (but not both)

Olive and Pickle Variation: Use 3/4 cup of sliced black olives and 3/4 cup of chopped bread and butter pickles

Directions:

Prepare the macaroni per the package instructions. Drain it well in a colander, then rinse and drain the cooked macaroni three times in cold water using the cooking pot and the colander. Then put the macaroni into a two quart bowl and chill it for one hour or more in the refrigerator, covered with plastic wrap.

Mix the mayonnaise, vinegar, sweet pickle juice, sugar, ground pepper(s) and salt in a three quart bowl.

Prepare the celery, green bell pepper, red sweet pepper, onion/scallions and the olives (or sweet gherkins and/or bread and butter pickles).

Add the prepared vegetables to the mayonnaise mixture and mix well.

Add the chilled macaroni to the mayonnaise and vegetables mixture gradually and mix gently but thoroughly.

Chill the macaroni salad, covered, in the refrigerator until it is used. This type of salad tastes best if the flavors are allowed to combine overnight.

Taste the chilled salad and make any ingredient additions you think will enhance it and mix it/them well into the salad.

When you are ready to serve the salad be sure to mix the bowl contents thoroughly to coat the macaroni uniformly with any dressing that accumulated in the bottom of the bowl. Note that any apparent extra dressing will be absorbed by the refrigerated, cooked macaroni within a day or two, so do not be concerned if there appears to be extra dressing at the time the salad is made. Do, however, mix the salad each time it is served to capture and evenly distribute any apparent extra dressing.

Enjoy ...

Mediterranean Cucumber Salad - ☺♥

Here is a Middle Eastern type of recipe for a refreshing, creamy cucumber salad. While planning a new recipe for curried seafood, I remembered a cool and creamy cucumber salad with obvious dill overtones served to me at an Indian restaurant in Bad Homburg, Germany. It was delicious and the perfect companion to the more spicy lamb curry entree I had on that occasion. Thus, as I've experimented some with curry entree's here, I realized I could replicate that salad and the nice experience by finding something close on the Internet and making a few adjustments.

I did find a near perfect salad from the "Feasting at Home" blog, that needed only minor recipe adjustments for me to get what I wanted.

I hope you make this salad as it is both tasty and mild, not to mention rather easy to make. And yes, it is the perfect companion to serve with a wide variety of spicy foods, like hot wings or highly seasoned chili, as well as with more highly seasoned curry dishes.

Per the Internet recipe, the salad is also perfect for serving with Mediterranean style grilled meats, which to me means well seasoned. I've had fabulous grilled meat combinations, well seasoned, each uniquely, at "high end" Greek restaurants outside the USA, which are hard if not impossible to find in most of the USA. If you do a bit of recipe research on the Internet and experimenting in your kitchen and on your charcoal or gas grill, you can make those delicious grilled meats yourself.

Having learned that this salad, especially the sauce, is perfect for gyros I will make a suggestion for you to try. If you make the recipe below using only one English cucumber you will have extra sauce that will be perfect to use if you make gyros.

Have fun! Live well! Life is too short to ignore opportunities for great pleasure in eating. Avoid a constant diet of the more bland fare we typically encounter, based on limited experience and limited ingredients, and thus limited opportunity, coming from our ancestors via many common but boring, weakly seasoned recipes.

Ingredients: (6 to 8 servings)

2 large English cucumbers (or 8 small Persian cucumbers)

1/2 cup of softly packed fresh dill (large stems removed) - chopped

1/2 cup of softly packed fresh mint leaves (stems removed) - chopped

1/3 to 1/2 cup of finely sliced red salad onion

1/2 cup of plain Greek yogurt

3/4 cup of sour cream

1/4 cup of fresh lemon juice, (and perhaps more, later, to taste)

3 garlic cloves- finely minced

1 tsp. of Kosher salt (for extracting moisture from the cucumber slices)

1/2 tsp. of Kosher salt (to later season the salad)

1/4 tsp. of white pepper

1/2 tsp. of sugar

1 tbsp. of olive oil

2 tbsp. of water

Directions:

Rinse the cucumbers under cold water. If you are using English or Persian cucumbers with thin skins, cut off the ends but don't peel them. Otherwise, for ordinary domestic USA cucumbers, cut off the ends and peel off about half of the skin by making a series of alternating peeled vs. skin areas along the length of each cucumber with a potato peeler.

Note that some domestic cucumbers actually have to be washed with some soap and warm water first to remove a waxy residue coating used to help prolong shelf life at supermarkets. Beyond that, the skin of some domestic cucumbers is thicker and somewhat bitter, thus the recipe recommendation to use English or Persian cucumbers.

Use a mandolin or a sharp knife, and slice the cucumbers into thin uniform disks no more than 1/8" thick, and preferably a bit thinner, and place the slices in a colander.

Salt the cucumber slices with the one tsp. of Kosher salt, mixing the salt into the slices. Let moisture extract/drain from the cucumber slices for 30 minutes.

Spread the cucumber slices out on a few paper towels and use the same number of paper towels on top. Press gently to absorb moisture into the paper towels and to remove residual salt/brine.

Put the cucumber slices into a large (one gallon) bowl.

Toss in the chopped dill, the chopped mint and the thinly sliced onions.

Combine the rest of the ingredients - yogurt, sour cream, lemon juice, minced garlic, 1/2 tsp. of Kosher salt, white pepper, sugar, olive oil and water in a one quart bowl, and whisk them until the mixture is smooth, to make the dressing.

Pour the dressing over the cucumber pieces and stir gently but well with a wooden spoon to combine all ingredients evenly and to coat all cucumber slices.

Taste the salad for saltiness and also brightness from the lemon juice, adjusting either salt or lemon juice or both if necessary.

Refrigerate the salad, covered with plastic wrap, for at least three hours, before serving it in pre-chilled small salad bowls. Note that creamy salads of this general type improve considerably by refrigerating them overnight, as that allows the flavors to blend/integrate, yielding a great rather than simply good salad.

Enjoy!

Mediterranean Quinoa Salad - ?

This salad is a variant of Greek Barley Salad but using Quinoa instead of Barley and corn instead of cucumber and red salad onion instead of shallot and cilantro instead of mint. I included the recipe in Food Nirvana as probably the only one using quinoa, plus it looks to be tasty.

I suggest serving this salad with side items like warmed, crusty or chewy artisan breads (like a French baguette) and herb and garlic infused dipping oil (like Carrabba's®), along with chilled, white wine, like Pinot Grigio.

Ingredients: (two servings)

For the salad:

1 cup of cooked and cooled quinoa

½ cup of kalamata olives, sliced

½ cup red bell pepper, chopped

½ cup of cold parboiled (or canned) corn kernels

¼ cup of red salad onion, diced

¼ cup of fresh cilantro, chopped

1/3 cup of crumbled feta cheese

For the dressing: (You might want to double the amount of dressing ingredients)

1 tbsp. of olive oil

1 tsp. of red wine vinegar

½ tsp. of dried oregano

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/4 tsp. of black pepper

Directions:

Put the salad ingredients into a two quart bowl.

Mix those ingredients gently with a large spoon.

Mix the dressing ingredients together in a small bowl and then gently mix the dressing into the salad ingredients.

Chill the Mediterranean Quinoa Salad in the refrigerator, covered, for two or more hours.

Serve the salad cold along with other meal items, as described earlier.

Enjoy!

Mediterranean White Bean Salad - ☺♥

Mediterranean White Bean Salad is made with white kidney beans, called cannellini in Italian. The combination of herbs and vegetables used with the cannellini, and also some feta cheese, along with lemon juice and olive oil, make the salad versatile enough to be served anywhere along the northern side of the Mediterranean Sea.

I found this recipe and a lot of others for the salad on the Internet and I liked this one the best. I also added a few ingredients, ergo basil and red bell pepper and celery. I noticed that this version of the salad had no onion ingredient. Other versions call for some thinly sliced red salad onion. You might think of including that also, so I included it as an optional ingredient.

I describe this type of salad, served cold, as bright and very flavorful. The different textures make it interesting also. It certainly can serve as both the carbohydrate dish and the fresh vegetable dish for a full meal, along with some grilled meat or seafood.

Ingredients: (6 servings)

2, 15 oz. cans of white kidney beans

1/2 cup of fresh parsley, chopped

1/2 cup of fresh basil, chopped

1 pint of grape tomatoes, halved lengthwise

1 red bell pepper, cleaned and diced

1 stalk of celery, finely diced

1/4 cup of very thinly sliced and quartered red salad onion (optional)

4 cloves of garlic, minced

2 Tbsp. of olive oil

2 Tbsp. of lemon juice

1/2 tsp. of ground black pepper

1/2 tsp. of salt

3 oz. of feta cheese, crumbled

Directions:

Rinse and drain the beans in a colander using cold water.

Rinse the parsley and chop it fairly fine but do not mince it.

Rinse the basil and chop it fairly fine but do not mince it.

Rinse the tomatoes and slice them in half.

Rinse and dice the red bell pepper.

Mince the cloves of garlic.

Combine the beans, parsley, basil, tomato, bell pepper, celery and garlic in a 2 quart bowl.

Add the olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper.

Stir to combine.

Taste and adjust salt and pepper content to your liking.

Cover and chill the salad in the refrigerator for two or more hours.

Either stir in the crumbled feta or serve the salad and sprinkle 1/2 oz. on top of each serving.

Enjoy!

Napa And Romaine Salad - 😊♥

This salad comes from my young adult years in Wilmington, DE, with my lovely wife Pat and our two picture perfect children, Ray, Jr. and Patty. As I remember it, we were enjoying the nicer local restaurants and in this instance the restaurant was Poor Richard's Inn. Said restaurant had a salad on the menu that I never had before ... and to be honest, I can't even remember how they named it. All I know is it was delicious and never left my memory ... except for the great sweet and sour salad dressing that existed nowhere else. And that memory was so true and intense that many years later I recreated that dressing from taste and smell memory, and with a great idea from my then current wife, Janet. What a success!

You can find the recipe for the sweet and sour salad dressing here in Food Nirvana, under the recipe category Dips, Dressings and Sauces. You want to make it.

As for the salad, it is easy to make and unique as it combines Napa and Romaine lettuce, shredded cheddar cheese and crisp croutons ... and the superb dressing.

Ingredients: (four to six servings)

1 head of Romaine lettuce at room temperature, chopped into 1"x1 ½" pieces

Napa cut similarly to the Romaine lettuce and in equal amount

4 (or more) ounces of grated aged cheddar cheese

1 cup of plain crisp croutons

About 1/2 to 3/4 cup of the Food Nirvana Sweet and Sour Salad Dressing

Directions:

Prepare the Romaine lettuce and the Napa and combine/mix them in individual serving bowls.

Dispense a generous amount of shredded cheddar cheese evenly over the greens mixture.

Put about 1/4 cup of croutons on the top of each salad, evenly distributed.

Drizzle the salad dressing over the surface of the salad ingredients.

Start eating the salad with a fork, no need to mix it, and prepare yourself to be delighted.

Yes, life is good ... very good!

Share the joy of having this salad with loved ones and close friends.

Nicoise Salad - ? & ☺♥

I have been thinking about a variety of foods I have eaten either in California or in various places in Europe. One salad item that I have not made is the Nicoise Salad, so I got the following recipe from the Internet.

I will make it and likely modify it and report back to you with the results. And I already know the results will be great.

Note that the text below, excepting parenthesized comments from me, is not mine.

Salad Niçoise (pronounced nee-suaz) is essentially a French composed salad, much like our American Cobb Salad, but with tuna, green beans, and potatoes, instead of chicken, bacon, and avocado. Salad Niçoise hails from Nice, on the Mediterranean Sea, though like so many foods we enjoy here of French origin, it has changed a bit to adapt to our tastes.

According to the Wikipedia® the Niçoise salads are always made with raw vegetables and served with anchovies. Niçoise salads that are served in America are typically served on a bed of lettuce and include cooked green beans and potatoes. According to our Paris Insider, the Niçoise salads there are all made with canned tuna. Depending on the establishment here, I've had them either with canned or with freshly grilled tuna.

Like its American Cobb salad cousin, the Salad Niçoise takes some time to prepare, given all of the ingredients. This is one dish where setting up your kitchen (all ingredients chopped and ready to go) will help the salad come together smoothly. (And that is how I typically do all my cooking!)

Ingredients:

Vinaigrette:

1/2 cup of lemon juice

3/4 cup of extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium shallot, minced

1 tbsp. of minced fresh thyme leaves

2 tbsp. of minced fresh basil leaves

2 teaspoons of minced fresh oregano leaves

1 teaspoon of Dijon mustard

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Salad:

2 grilled or otherwise cooked tuna steaks* (8 oz each) or 2-3 cans of tuna

6 hard boiled eggs, peeled and either halved or quartered

10 small new red potatoes (each about 2 inches in diameter, about 1 1/4 pounds total), each potato scrubbed and quartered

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 medium heads of Boston lettuce or butter lettuce, leaves washed, dried, and torn into bite-sized pieces

3 small ripe tomatoes, cored and cut into eighths

1 small red onion, sliced very thin

8 ounces of green beans, stem ends trimmed and each bean halved crosswise

1/4 cup of Niçoise olives

2 Tbsp. of capers, rinsed and/or several anchovies (optional)

Directions:

***Marinate the tuna steaks in a little olive oil for an hour. Heat a large skillet on medium high heat, or place on a hot grill. Cook the steaks 2 to 3 minutes on each side until cooked through (Are they crazy?! Use Ahi and cook them in a hot skillet until seared but rare, maybe one minute per side!).**

Make the dressing: Whisk lemon juice, oil, shallot, thyme, basil, oregano, and mustard in a medium size bowl; season to taste with salt and pepper and set aside.

Make the salad: Bring the potatoes and 4 quarts of cold water to a boil in a large pot. Add 1 tablespoon of salt and cook until the potatoes are tender, 5 to 8 minutes. Transfer the potatoes to a medium bowl with a slotted spoon (do not discard the boiling water). Toss the warm potatoes with 1/4 cup vinaigrette; set aside.

Build the salad: While the potatoes are cooking, toss the lettuce with 1/4 cup of vinaigrette in a large bowl until coated. Arrange a bed of lettuce on a serving

platter (I used two serving platters, shown in the photos). Cut the tuna into 1/2-inch thick (or thinner) slices, coat with the vinaigrette. Mound the tuna in the center of the lettuce. Toss the tomatoes, red onion, 3 tablespoons vinaigrette, and then salt and pepper to taste in the bowl; arrange the tomato-onion mixture on the lettuce bed. Arrange the reserved potatoes in a mound at the edge of the lettuce bed.

Return the water to boil; add 1 tablespoon of salt and the green beans. Cook until tender but crisp, 3 to 5 minutes. Drain the beans, transfer them to the reserved ice water, and let them stand until just cool, about 30 seconds; dry the beans well. Toss the beans, 3 tablespoons vinaigrette, and salt and pepper to taste; arrange in a mound at the edge of lettuce bed.

Arrange the hard boiled eggs, olives, and anchovies (if using) in mounds on the lettuce bed. Drizzle the eggs with the remaining 2 tablespoons of dressing, sprinkle the entire salad with capers (if using), and serve it immediately.

Oriental Salad - ☺♥

Marie and I first learned of this salad when her best friend, Linda Lange, served it to us. It is really good. The ramen noodles add just the right amount of crunch.

Salad Ingredients:

1 small head of cabbage or 1, 12 oz. package of broccoli slaw

1 or 2 bunches of green onions, chopped (including most of the green part)

1 single serving package of ramen noodles (Chicken or Oriental flavor)

½ cup of toasted sliced or chopped almonds

Dressing:

¼ cup of vegetable oil

2 tbsp. of balsamic vinegar

1/8 tsp. of salt

1/8 tsp. of pepper

1 tsp. of sugar

½ of the package of ramen noodle seasoning

Procedure:

Crush the ramen noodles. If using cabbage, shred it. Add the chopped green onions to the broccoli slaw or cabbage, add toasted almonds, mix the dressing and put it on the salad along with the crushed ramen noodles. Mix well and serve.

Note: If you expect to have leftovers, do not mix all of the crushed ramen noodles into the salad. Instead, prepare individual servings and save the extra salad separately from the extra ramen noodles. This assures that the noodles will be crisp when the leftover salad is served the next day.

Cost savings tip: I save the large stems from fresh broccoli that one would normally discard when steaming broccoli. I keep them refrigerated in a plastic bag. When I have half a dozen or so I cut off the dry ends with a knife and use a potato peeler to remove the hard stem surface and a grater to shred the stems,

and thus I create my own broccoli slaw. It is identical to the store bought stuff, and essentially free. Well, it was, but stores now don't provide it!

Potato Salad - ☺♥

When I was a teenager I had a close friend named Don Himes. Don claimed his mother made the best potato salad in the world. Hmm ... that was quite a claim. My mother's potato salad was not to my liking and sure enough one day I went fishing with Don and his parents and his mother brought her potato salad along. Wow! He was right, and to this day I have not tasted any homemade conventional potato salad to rival hers. Thus, I did my best to recreate her potato salad and I think I'm pretty close. You benefit from my experience. The secret is in slightly undercooking the potatoes and having sweet gherkins chopped into the dressing ... and mustard totally excluded and no &%^\$ hard-boiled eggs.

Ingredients:

6, large russet potatoes

1 1/2, cups of diced celery

1 1/2, cups of diced onion

2 tsp. of Celery seed

2 cloves of garlic

2 cups of mayonnaise

1½, tbsp. of Fresh lemon juice

3 tbsp. of Rice vinegar for the parboiling

1 tbsp. of Rice vinegar for the potato salad

1 tbsp. of Sea salt for the parboiling

1 tsp. of Sea salt for the potato salad

1 tsp. of Pepper

10, medium size sweet gherkins

3 oz. of sweet gherkin juice

1/3 cup of sweet relish

3 tbsp. of Sugar (amount optional ... try 1 tbsp. first and increase as you see fit)

3 hard boiled eggs, chilled (optional, for those who just don't understand ...)

Directions:

Peel and slice each potato into pieces approximately 1/4" thick by 3/4" by 3/4". Immediately put the pieces into a large pot with water initially at a depth of 4", for as each raw potato is processed it will not be exposed to air/oxygen and the pieces will stay light in color. When all of the potato pieces have been cut and are in the water then pour the contents into a colander, rinse the pot and refill it with fresh water. Add one tbsp. Sea salt to the pot along with 3 tbsp. Vinegar and mix. Rinse the potato pieces in the colander using cold water from the water faucet, then add them to the pot. Cover the pot and cook on high until the water boils. Reduce the heat to a medium simmer and cook the potato slices for five minutes, uncovered.

Test for doneness with a fork. The potatoes should not be soft and mealy, but instead tend towards firmness, yet be readily punctured with a fork. If they are too hard cook one minute longer and test again. When done, immediately put the potatoes into a colander and rinse them thoroughly with cold water. Gently toss the potatoes while the cold water is being sprayed on them. Be sure all potato slices have been cooled. Empty the drained potato slices from the colander into the serving dish you plan to use and cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the refrigerator.

Dice the celery and onion and slice the garlic thinly and put those items into a large bowl. Dice the sweet gherkins and add them to the bowl. Put the mayonnaise into a separate one quart bowl. Then add the fresh lemon juice and the 1 tbsp. of rice vinegar and mix thoroughly with the mayonnaise. Then add the sea salt, pepper and sugar and celery seed if you used it, and again mix thoroughly. Empty the contents into the bowl used for the diced vegetables and mix thoroughly. Taste the sauce and adjust the flavor to please yourself with additional salt, pepper, mayonnaise, vinegar or lemon juice, sugar and/or relish.

Remove the potato pieces from the refrigerator, drain off any water from the bottom of the bowl and gradually and gently add the potato pieces to the mayonnaise mixture and mix gently with each addition until all the potato pieces are completely and evenly coated. At this point the potato salad is finished and it can be put back into the serving bowl, covered and again refrigerated for a few hours to chill it to the proper temperature. It is then ready to serve, but it will actually taste better if prepared one day before it is used.

If you want to use chilled hard boiled eggs in your potato salad then make hard boiled eggs, peel them, chill them and then slice them and put the slices evenly on the top of the finished potato salad. Do this just prior to covering the potato salad

for the final chilling. I say, if you want egg salad then make egg salad. If you want potato salad then make potato salad. Avoid confusion.

Notes:

There are many different ways to make the mayonnaise mixture for potato salad. One of the best tasting versions in my opinion comes from the local delicatessen, and it seems like the only ingredients besides potatoes are mayonnaise (or Miracle Whip®) plus some kind of special vinegar and a very small amount of sugar ... and perhaps some salt. I have not been able to duplicate that taste yet, which I suspect is a matter of type of vinegar. → (I found a recipe for the deli type of potato salad and it is in the New Recipes and Research section of Food Nirvana, waiting to be tested. You may want to try that recipe.) In any event, it is worth your while to experiment with variety and quantity of all ingredients to produce what you believe to be the best potato salad you have ever tasted. To point, we can go through life eating ho-hum food, or, we can really enjoy eating ... it is up to each of us to decide if life should be simply okay or great. Be creative.

The true test of flavor for the potato salad is after it has been chilled for 24 hours. At that time when you taste it you know precisely if it is perfect or in need of more of some ingredient(s). If/when you add any ingredient(s) and are pleased with the result be sure to write the change(s) on the paper that contains your basic recipe.

Ray's Oriental Salad - ☺♥

Janet and I were planning a Chinese meal for our friends, Russ and Sue Gale, and one thing we decided to make was an Oriental salad. I looked at the two existing recipes in Food Nirvana for Oriental/Asian type salads and got the idea that they could partially be combined, some new ideas added based on some salads we've had in better restaurants, and thus would be created a new recipe. I was excited to try this experiment but also a bit worried that it was risky serving a dish to friends without first testing it ourselves.

What makes these types of Oriental salads so enjoyable is the combination of ingredient textures, colors and complementary tastes. Our conventional tossed salads in the USA are drab by comparison, even with typical store bought salad dressings used on them. The picture displayed to the right is not an entirely accurate view of our new Oriental salad, but it is close enough.

One thing I find important with salads is to keep the ingredients pretty much separated until serving time, and then, let each person build the salad to their own liking. Russ called it a "Table Salad Bar." This method has two benefits: 1) Each person gets exactly what they want, and 2) Any leftovers are stored separately so that later use of them does not result in soggy ingredients. I use the same approach with my Caesar Salad recipe.

I needn't have worried. By the time we completed our recipes combination, modifications and additions we had a knock your socks off delicious salad. This was verified, of course, at dinner that evening. All four of us gobbled the stuff up with gusto. Janet might not have liked me naming this delight as Ray's salad, for she was crucial to the ingredient selection, tasting and instant re-engineering of the salad to make it unique and very tasty. Oh, well!

Salad Ingredients: (serves four hungry adults)

12 oz. package of broccoli slaw, or, make it yourself from fresh broccoli stems as I "used to do before they removed them from what we can buy at the supermarket!"

3 large leaves of Napa, chopped

1 bunch of fresh green onions (scallions, about 8), chopped into 1/4" pieces(including most of the green part)

1 package of Oriental flavor dry Ramen noodles (soup mix package)

½ cup of roasted sliced blanched almonds

3/4 to one cup of Mandarin orange slices

3/4 to one cup of sliced Lychee, each whole lychee cut into four pieces. This canned product is like a sweet fruit, though I am told it is actually a nut. You can find it at a decent price in Asian markets, or, pay through the nose at your supermarket, if they even have cans of lychee.

Salad Dressing:

In a small saucepan combine 1/3 cup of sugar, 1/4 cup of sesame oil, 1/4 cup of rice vinegar, 2 tbsp. of soy sauce and the seasoning packet contents from the Oriental flavor Ramen Noodles package. Stir and bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat to very low and simmer it uncovered for one minute. Pour the dressing into a two cup bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, cool it to room temperature and then refrigerate it until it is used.

Salad Directions:

Turn on the oven to 350°F.

Crush the Ramen noodles. I use a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag to hold the noodles, I seal it, and then I use a kitchen mallet to gently crush the noodles. Put the crushed noodles into a small serving cup and cover it with plastic wrap and set it aside for later use.

To make the broccoli slaw you either buy it prepackaged at your supermarket, or, make it at home, at almost no cost. I used to buy fresh broccoli with long stems/stalks. Now if you want them the best way is to grow broccoli! About five large stems/stalks (one inch or larger in diameter, five or six inches long), processed, will provide the 12 ounces of broccoli slaw needed. I use a kitchen scale to be accurate. Cut off the heads of the broccoli and store/refrigerate them as broccoli crowns for later use in a different meal. Wash the stems and cut off the bottom edges. Use a paring knife and stand each stem vertically and cut off the lumpy areas. Use a potato peeler to peel the hard surface layer from each stem. Grate the stems to create the slaw, using either a hand grater or a grating cutter with a food processor. Put the slaw into a two quart salad bowl.

Remove three large leaves of Napa from one head. Cut off the bottom edges and rinse the leaves. Cut the leaves lengthwise into six to eight strips, including the leafy part. Crosscut the leafy parts by putting them together and chopping every half inch. Crosscut the stem parts by putting them together and cutting every 1 1/2". Add the Napa pieces to the salad bowl.

Cut off the bottom root areas and a small part of the tops from the green onions. If necessary strip any dried parts from the onions. Chop the onions into 1/4" long pieces. Add the pieces to the salad bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until it is used.

Open the cans of Mandarin oranges and Lychee. Fill a small serving dish with about 3/4 to one cup of the orange slices, add enough liquid from the can to keep the slices wet, and cover the serving dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until it is used. Similarly, remove some lychees from the can, cut each one into four quarters and put the pieces into a small serving dish that will hold about 3/4 of a cup to one cup. When the dish is full, add enough liquid from the can to keep the pieces wet, cover the dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate it until it is used.

I use whole almonds that I "used to buy inexpensively" at Costco® (three pounds for \$10 ... now around \$15) and blanch about 1/2 cup of them to remove the skins. An easy way to blanch the almonds is to put them into a one cup Pyrex® glass measuring cup and add enough water to bring the water level up to the one cup mark. Then microwave the water and almond mixture for about one and one half minutes ... just long enough to get the water barely boiling. Pour the water off and dump the hot, wet almonds onto a cutting board. Let them cool for a minute and then remove the skins by pressing each nut between your thumb and forefinger. Discard the skins. Dry the blanched nuts with a paper towel and chop each one into two pieces, lengthwise, with a medium to large kitchen knife. Put the chopped pieces onto a cookie tray and roast them in the 350°F oven for ten minutes, mixing them with a spatula after the first five minutes to assure even roasting. Remove the roasted almond pieces from the tray and allow them to cool, then put them into a small serving dish and cover it with plastic wrap until it is used. Remember to turn the oven off.

When you are ready to serve the salad whisk the dressing, add half of it to the salad bowl, and mix/toss the contents well to coat the broccoli slaw, Napa and chopped green onion pieces. If necessary, add additional dressing and mix again. Serve the remaining dressing along with the containers of Ramen noodle pieces, roasted almond pieces, Mandarin orange slices and Lychee pieces.

Have each guest build the salad individually, starting with the salad bowl contents and then adding as much of the other ingredients as wanted, then tossing the salad gently.

I don't know how to say 'Bon Appétit' in Chinese, Mandarin or Cantonese, but I am sure you understand my wish for you to enjoy this yummy salad. If you have any leftovers (which I doubt will happen), keep the various salad items separated from each other, covered and refrigerated until they are used.

Red Skin Potato Salad - ☺♥

I have always enjoyed potato salad made with red skin potatoes. Those potatoes are superior to other types when making potato salad. For me it is a matter of texture as well as taste. Regular potatoes can be mealy in potato salad if they are even slightly overcooked, but red skin potatoes maintain just the right amount of firmness. As I understand it, red skin potatoes are not at all good for making mashed potatoes. Okay, it is perfectly reasonable that different, though related, vegetables would do relatively better or worse in any given dish using that kind of vegetable.

Supermarkets sell various types of potato salad and I note the most expensive is always red skin potato salad. This difference is quite noticeable in the overall quality of the potato salads so the price difference makes sense.

This Food Nirvana recipe for red skin potato salad is a composite of the best I found on the Internet, modified by me to maximize taste and texture. One item in particular is the use of a small amount of vinegar used when cooking the sliced potatoes, which helps to make the texture perfect.

Let's get started ... I really hope you make this potato salad as it is excellent.

Ingredients:

3 lbs. of washed red skin potatoes, unpeeled and each quartered lengthwise and then cut into 1/4" thick slices crosswise

1/3 cup of mayonnaise

1/3 cup of extra virgin olive oil

1 tbsp. of unseasoned rice vinegar for the salad

2 tbsp. of unseasoned rice vinegar in the water used to cook the potato slices

1 tbsp. of Dijon mustard

1 tsp. of sea salt for the salad

2 tbsp. of Kosher salt for cooking the potato slices

1/2 tsp. of black pepper for the salad

3/4 cup of finely diced celery

1/2 cup of finely chopped fresh chives

1/3 cup of finely diced purple salad onion

Directions:

Put the washed/sliced potato pieces into a two quart saucepan, and fill it with cold water to barely cover the potatoes.

Add the 2 tbsp. of Kosher salt to the water. Also add 2 tbsp. of rice vinegar, then stir gently to mix in the salt and the vinegar.

Bring the water to a boil on medium heat and then simmer the potato slices in the hot water for eight minutes.

Drain the potato slices in a colander, rinse them briefly with cold water, and set them aside. The potato slices should be used in the next steps while they are warm.

Add the mayonnaise, olive oil, one tbsp. of rice vinegar, the sea salt and the pepper to a three quart bowl and whisk those ingredients until they are well mixed, making the dressing.

Put the warm potato slices into the salad dressing bowl in small amounts and use one of your hands to gently coat the potato slices with the dressing. Continue that process until all of the potato slices have been coated with the dressing.

Add all of the celery, chives and salad onion to the bowl and mix those ingredients into the salad by hand, gently.

At this point I suggest washing your hand!

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the salad for a few hours or even overnight to better blend the flavors. Or, you can choose to eat the potato salad while it is warm, for it is great both ways.

Enjoy this red skin potato salad as a fine side dish for many different types of meals.

Sinful Salad - ☺

This salad is a sweet Jell-O® based fruit and layered sour cream delight. It is perfect for summer picnics. I've modified Marie's recipe by adding more than the one cup of water I found in her recipe as I believe that was a typographical error. I also added all of the juice from the frozen strawberries and the fruit cocktail. A large package of Jell-O® calls for four cups of water, and I figure what I have used will be about three cups in total, which will make a fairly firm gelatin mixture without being too firm.

Ingredients:

1 large 6 oz. package of Strawberry Jell-O®

2 cups of boiling water

3 medium size ripe Bananas, mashed

20 oz. package of frozen strawberries

20 oz. can of fruit cocktail

1 pint of sour cream

Directions:

Combine the Jell-O® and boiling water in a two quart mixing bowl. Stir until the Jell-O® is completely dissolved.

Cover the bowl and chill the Jell-O® in the refrigerator for about 15 to 30 minutes but do not let it set. Add the mashed bananas, strawberries and fruit cocktail to the Jell-O® and stir gently to combine. Divide the mixture in half.

Pour one half of the Jell-O® and fruit mixture into a 13"x 9"x2" inch glass baking dish. Refrigerate it until it is set (about 1 to 2 hours). Keep the remaining Jell-O® and fruit mixture at room temperature.

Take the dish with the set Jell-O® and spread the sour cream evenly over the top.

Gently dispense the remaining Jell-O® mixture on top of the sour cream slowly and evenly. Cover the dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate the salad until it is set, about 1½ hours.

Serve cold.

Tabbouleh Salad - ☺

I ordered Tabbouleh Salad in a Lebanese restaurant a few years ago just to try it. Zowie! What a fine and different salad from our regular fare here in the USA. What I am learning about Middle Eastern foods is the focus on fine herbs and spices, sometimes in quantity, on/with very fresh and attractive produce. So be it. I am a willing student.

Tabbouleh Salad is usually made with bulgar wheat or cracked wheat but quinoa and barley are good substitutes and easy to find at the supermarket, so they are in the ingredient list below. I refer to them as starches later in this recipe.

I made this salad using barley and it came out fine. I put in a bit too much lemon juice by being careless, but that is easy to correct the next time I make Tabbouleh Salad. One thing I do know ... the parsley flavor came roaring through, and that was expected and pleasant.

Tabbouleh Salad is unique and you can serve it well at a meal of grilled meats or seafood, along with a nice soft white wine (for taste contrast) like a buttery Chardonnay.

Ingredients:

1/3 cup of quinoa or barley

1 cup of chicken broth

2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1 large bunch of flat leaf parsley, washed and dried

1 large bunch of mint, washed and dried

2 scallions

1 clove of garlic

2 medium size ripe tomatoes or about 20 small plum shaped salad tomatoes

1/4 cup of extra-virgin olive oil, divided

1/2 teaspoon (or more) of sea salt

Ground black pepper, to taste

1/4 teaspoon of ground allspice (optional)

1 small Persian cucumber or part of an English cucumber (optional)

A few whole leaves of mint for garnish

Directions:

Rinse the quinoa or barley or wheat well in a sieve. Simmer it on very low heat, covered, according to directions, in a cup of chicken broth with 1/4 tsp. of salt and a small clove of crushed garlic.

Prepare the herbs and vegetables. Chop the parsley and the mint. You will need roughly 1 1/2 cups of packed chopped parsley and 1/2 cup of packed chopped mint for this amount of starch.

Slice the scallions thinly to equal a heaping 1/4 cup. Medium chop the tomatoes if they are whole; they will equal roughly 1 1/2 cups. If you are using plum shape salad tomatoes cut them in half lengthwise. Slice the cucumber in half lengthwise and then into thin slices.

Process the quinoa or barley or wheat. When it is done cooking, drain off any excess water and place it in the large bowl. Add 2 tablespoons of olive oil, 1 tablespoon of lemon juice, and 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Toss to coat the grains. As you finish prepping the herbs and vegetables, add them to the bowl with the starch product, but reserve half of the diced or sliced tomato to use for garnish.

Season and toss the salad. Add 2 more tablespoons of olive oil and another 1 tablespoon of lemon juice and the optional allspice to the bowl. Toss everything together, then taste and adjust seasonings as needed.

Garnish the salad. To serve, garnish the Tabbouleh Salad with the reserved tomato pieces and a few whole mint sprigs.

Serve at room temperature with crackers, fresh bread, or pita chips, along with a nice white wine.

Waldorf Salad - ☺♥

I happened to reminisce about my old college days and think about dining hall food. Most foods served there were unremarkable, but one of the few items made well was the Waldorf Salad. I realized that a lot of years have passed since I ate a Waldorf Salad. They don't appear often on restaurant menus and I simply forgot all about that salad. This recipe corrects my weak recall! It is a composite of different ones I found on the Internet, adjusted to suit me. One excellent suggestion I found was to leave the skins on the apple pieces ... and provided you select nice apples that is surely the right thing to do. Speaking of apples, choose types that are fairly crisp, like Gala or Granny Smith, and they will provide the best texture.

What makes a Waldorf Salad really good is the sweetness and mild tartness combined with very different ingredient textures and tastes. They are very complementary, much like the fruit, nut and lettuce combinations found in the more modern Oriental salads. Waldorf Salad is also quite attractive and thus lends itself well to meals when you entertain. I hope you try it.

Ingredients: (4 to 5 servings)

1/2 cup of walnut halves, roasted for about 8 minutes at 325°F, then broken into pieces

3 Gala or similar apples - cored and chopped or sliced thinly but do not peel them.

1 cup of seedless grapes, washed and sliced in half lengthwise (I use seedless black grapes)

2 stalks of celery, diced fine

1/3 cup of raisins, plumped slightly for 30 seconds in a small amount of boiling water, then drained and pressed lightly.

1 cup of Hellman's® mayonnaise

2 or 3 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice for the dressing

2 tbsp. of sugar

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of white pepper

1 head of Boston Bibb lettuce or Romaine lettuce, or Iceberg lettuce, washed, trimmed, leaves separated, patted dry and chilled

Directions:

Set the oven temperature at 325°F. Roast the walnut halves on a cookie tray for about 8 minutes, then remove them from the oven, dump them from the hot tray onto a plate, and let them cool to room temperature. Break them into about four pieces each. Set them aside.

Core and chop or slice the apples. Put the pieces into a 2 qt. bowl with one quart of water containing 2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice. Let them soak in that lemon water to avoid having them oxidize and turn brown in color while you are preparing the other ingredients for the salad.

Slice the grapes and finely dice the celery and put the pieces into a bowl. Add the plumped raisin.

Put the sliced grapes, finely diced celery and plumped raisins into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag and put it into the refrigerator until you are ready to assemble and serve the salad.

Put the thinly sliced or chopped apples into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, then add about a cup of the lemon water from the bowl. Seal the bag and put it into the refrigerator until you are ready to assemble and serve the salad.

Whisk together the mayonnaise, salt, pepper, lemon juice and sugar in a small bowl. Cover the bowl and refrigerate the dressing mixture until you are ready to assemble and serve the salad.

Put the salad plates you will be using into the refrigerator until assembly/serving time.

When it is time to assemble the salad, drain the water from the bag of sliced/chopped apples and put them into a 2 quart bowl.

Add the bag of grapes, diced celery and raisins to the bowl and mix well.

Add the dressing to the bowl of salad ingredients and mix gently but thoroughly. You now have a bowl of Waldorf salad.

Arrange the lettuce pieces on the individual, chilled salad plates, cutting the leaves in half if you use Romaine lettuce. Optionally, you can choose to make a double layer of lettuce leaves on the salad plates.

Mound the Waldorf salad mixture evenly on top of the lettuce leaves and sprinkle the walnut pieces over the salads.

Serve the salad right away while it is cold. Yummy! Expect compliments.

Any extra Waldorf Salad will remain fresh and delicious if it is put into a sealed container, kept refrigerated and consumed within two days.

Wilted Lettuce Salad - ☺♥

This salad comes from my youth and it is one of the nice foods my mother Dorothy made for our family. I believe the origin of wilted lettuce salad is either Germany or the Germans who immigrated into eastern Pennsylvania around 200 years ago. We incorrectly named these people the Pennsylvania Dutch.

This salad is best served either very warm or hot. In a sense it serves as both a pungent appetizer and as a salad. It is enjoyed best during cold weather, and it certainly does stimulate your appetite. It is a delicious combination of a cooked sweet and sour dressing with bacon. Sometimes it is a thin dressing. At other times people use a small amount of cornstarch to thicken it so that it sticks better to the lettuce.

It is called a wilted salad because hot dressing is poured over room temperature chopped iceberg lettuce, and the hot liquid when mixed with the lettuce causes the lettuce to turn partially translucent and to wilt. Thus, the lettuce in this salad is not crisp, nor is it intended to be crisp.

Ingredients:

1 head of iceberg lettuce at room temperature, chopped into 1 ½"x1 ½" pieces

6 strips of bacon

1/3 cup of diced onion

1/3 cup of white or rice vinegar

¼ cup of sugar (or less, depending on whether you want it more tart or more sweet)

1/2 cup of water

2 tsp. of cornstarch (optional)

Directions:

Warm a glass bowl large enough to hold the chopped lettuce in a 200°F oven. Also pre-warm the number of small salad or side dishes you plan to use for your guests.

Fry the bacon in a skillet on medium heat until the bacon is fairly crisp without large fatty spots, but not burned. Drain the bacon on a paper towel. When it is cool break it into very small pieces. Set the pieces aside.

Pour the hot bacon grease into a cup. Clean the skillet and return about 2 to 3 tbsp. of the bacon grease to the skillet. Then sauté the diced onion in the bacon grease on low heat until it is translucent.

Add the vinegar to the bacon grease and onion mixture and mix well. Then add the sugar and mix well. If you plan to use the optional cornstarch then mix it with the 1/2 cup of water. Gradually add the water (with/without cornstarch mixed in it) while continuing to mix the skillet contents. Add the small bacon pieces and mix. Heat the mixture to a simmering temperature around 200 degrees F and then remove the skillet from the heat.

Put the chopped lettuce into the warmed glass bowl. Then pour all of the skillet contents over the lettuce and mix everything thoroughly with two large forks, so that the lettuce all gets coated and wilts.

Return the bowl to the 200°F oven briefly to keep the salad warm.

Serve the salad warm in the pre-warmed small salad or side dishes as your guests sit down to eat.

Enjoy ... the bacon and sweet and sour dressing served warm on the warm wilted lettuce is quite tasty.

Note that no salt was used because the bacon contributed plenty of salt. Some guests might choose to sprinkle a small amount of black pepper on their salad serving.

SANDWICH STUFF:

Dried Beef and Tomato - ☺♥

Dried Beef sandwiches are not common in the USA outside of the mid-Atlantic states, but they are delicious. They also have a fairly high salt content. I have enjoyed them since I was a child, but never as much as I have since finding a source of really great dried beef that is higher in moisture content and lower in salt content. Until recently my supplier was Fisher's Country Store in Cessna, Pa. Alas, they no longer ship any products.

I found the meat products company that makes the dried beef sold by my former supplier, Fisher's, and to cut to the chase they are shipping a 5 to 7 pound sealed whole dried beef to me for the price of \$8.99/lb. plus shipping. Now that is wonderful, for it allows me to use my meat slicer to process only what I need at any given time, then vacuum seal and refrigerate the rest.

You can also purchase the dried beef directly as I've done from Martin's Country Market, phone number 717-738-3754. Do so ... that is, if you have access to a good quality meat slicer. Otherwise you will be stuck paying top dollar for sliced dried beef from some other source.

Here is an exciting and delicious update. Food Nirvana now has a recipe for making dried beef using an electric smoker. Check it out.

Ingredients:

12" long roll for making a small sub

1 ripe fresh large tomato

Mayonnaise

Black pepper

¼ lb. dried beef (or more)

Directions:

Cut the sub roll part way through so you can open it and fill it.

Slather Mayonnaise on both interior surfaces.

Cut the tomato into 1/4 inch thick slices to fill along both sides of the interior length of the roll.

Sprinkle the tomato slices generously with ground black pepper.

Add the dried beef evenly on top of the tomatoes. Close the sandwich.

Serve.

The Story Behind the Sandwich:

I used to work in downtown Wilmington, DE and at lunchtime I had a variety of good restaurants and delicatessens to use. There was one delicatessen named Leo and Jimmies® on Market Street Mall that made great sandwiches for a decent price, so I loved going there from time to time and ordering either of my two favorite sandwiches.

My choice of which sandwich to order was based on who waited on me! The younger employees had no idea that dried beef should be used in lesser amounts than other cold meats in making the sandwiches. When one of them waited on me I would order the sandwich per the above recipe (Without stating the amount of dried beef!), and I swear they stuffed it with at least half a pound of dried beef. What a killer sandwich and I loved it! And my, was it cheap given the contents.

When one of the owners or their wives waited on me I ordered my other favorite sandwich, as I knew I would get far less dried beef from the business owners. My other favorite sandwich is in this sandwich section of the book ... the one with German salami, Swiss cheese and Russian dressing, all on a long roll. Don't miss that one either.

German Salami and Swiss Cheese with Russian Dressing - ☺♥

This sandwich is one of my two favorite sandwiches, the other being the dried beef sandwich described earlier in this book section. As with the dried beef sandwich, this one also has a funny story.

I used to patronize a Wilmington DE delicatessen on Market Street Mall named Tote A Treat®. They had a few good menu items as a restaurant and also good freshly made deli sandwiches. Their flagship sandwich was called the Tote A Treat® Deluxe, and it consisted of a medium long sub roll with Russian dressing, lots of white turkey breast pieces, Swiss cheese and German salami. It was expensive, and I never thought about buying one until I saw a friend at work (a fellow lunchtime bridge player named Bruce Smith) who declared that to be his all time favorite sandwich. Well, I tried one, and it was very good, but the turkey didn't do that much for me.

About that time I was becoming angry with the owner of the delicatessen as he was a real prick to his young employees. I actually saw him fire a girl who had simply displeased him by not kowtowing with lowered head to his constant harangue. That did it for me. I never went back.

Ah, what to do? Leo and Jimmies® delicatessen was just down the mall a few doors so I got the brilliant idea of patronizing them for the "Deluxe" sandwich, sans turkey. What a pleasant surprise! They packed the long roll with plenty of German salami and Swiss cheese and "lots of Russian dressing" per my instructions. The price was really low compared to that of the "Deluxe" sandwich at Tote A Treat®.

Ingredients:

A medium long sub roll (about 12")

Russian dressing

Swiss cheese

German salami

Directions:

Open the sub roll and slather a thick coating of Russian dressing on both interior surfaces. Put three slices of Swiss cheese along the length on both sides of the sandwich (six slices in all). Layer 12 thin slices of German salami along the inside of the sandwich and close it. Enjoy!

Why the German salami? Wouldn't Italian salami, hard or cooked do the trick? Well, in a word, no. The German salami was simply better tasting and less fatty than the Italian hard salami, and I would never eat the cooked Italian salami if I have a choice. 'Nuff said!

Grilled Cheese Taco - ☺♥

Wow! Talk about comfort food! This "sandwich" is superb.

Okay, it doesn't sound like anything special, so what is the secret?

The answer: You are grilling a 9" diameter flour tortilla in a buttered skillet on low heat. What you put on top is simple and delicious. The final "taco" that results, after using a spatula to fold it in half to form a taco shape, is lightly golden on the outside, somewhat crisp, and filled with warm, melted cheese and other ingredients that make the taco delicious.

What I find most interesting is how fast these can be made. Total time about 4 minutes each. As for dirty dishes to clean up, think one skillet and one spatula, one paring knife and maybe one soup spoon. I choose to serve these delights on a paper plate with a napkin and no silverware. You simply pick it up and eat it.

I do hope you make some of these delights. I happened on to this item one evening when I had no bread and wanted a grilled cheese sandwich. I found the burrito size flour tortillas in my refrigerator, and the rest is history.

And history has repeated because these things are so easy to make and so delicious!

Ingredients: (one serving)

1, 9" diameter flour tortilla

3, 4"x4" slices of American cheese

1 1/2 tbsp. of butter

4 grape tomatoes, quartered

4 queen size (or 8 small size) pimento stuffed manzanilla olives, quartered if queen size, otherwise halved

3 tbsp. of bacon bits

Directions:

Melt the butter in a 12" diameter non-stick skillet on low heat.

Coat all of the skillet surface with the melted butter using a spatula.

Lay out the flour tortilla on the counter.

Place full or partial slices of the American cheese on the surface of the tortilla to mostly cover it.

Place the pieces of olive evenly on the surface of the cheese.

Place the pieces of tomato evenly on the surface of the cheese.

Sprinkle the bacon bits evenly over the surface of the cheese and other ingredients.

Lift the tortilla carefully and place it flat into the skillet.

Grill the tortilla for two minutes on medium low heat.

Use a spatula to fold the tortilla into a taco shape.

Move the taco to the center of the skillet and let it grill for one minute.

Flip the taco over using the spatula and grill for one to two minutes.

Serve the taco hot on a paper plate with a napkin.

Enjoy!

Grilled Pastrami with Swiss Cheese on Rye with Deli Mustard - ☺♥♥♥☺

Oh, my ... as I type these favorite sandwich recipes my appetite alarm is sounding!

I learned about this sandwich from ordering it at a Jewish delicatessen and restaurant named Gamiel's® in Wilmington DE in the early 1970's. Actually, I learned a whole lot about Jewish foods in general, eating there many times. No doubt as I remember specific food items I will include the recipes in this book.

I used to make this sandwich for my best friend, Morrie Shaffer, when he would come to visit. He loved it.

The flavor combinations in this sandwich make it very popular. It is served hot with a side of kosher dill pickle and potato chips. The cured meat taste of the pastrami, grilled and piled high, is delicious. Add plenty of melted Swiss cheese on top of the hot pastrami and the two flavors are like the perfect marriage, intense and contrasting and clearly a "natural" combination.

The products that take this sandwich to the perfection level are very fresh seeded rye bread, grilled on one side with butter, and strongly flavored brown deli mustard. The pickle is a texture and taste contrast with a bit of crunchy moisture, albeit salty, and a strong garlic overtone. The potato chips might be considered a quiet food used to cleanse your palate for the next bite of sandwich.

You definitely want to make this sandwich as it is easy to make and most yummy! I recommend either cold beer or a soda as an appropriate beverage.

If you want to take the sandwich to a new, very high level ... make the pastrami and make the rye bread. Both recipes are in Food Nirvana.

Ingredients:

¼ lb. or more of top quality pastrami (not the cheap stuff ... or check out the Food Nirvana recipe for making Brine Cured Smoked Pastrami)

2 large slices of fresh seeded rye bread (check out the Food Nirvana recipe for making ... Ray's Rye Bread)

3 sandwich size slices of Swiss cheese

2 to 4 tbsp. of a Brown Deli Mustard

1 medium to large deli style kosher dill pickle (often sold from plastic tubs)

1 oz. of Potato chips

1 or 2 tbsp. of soybean oil (optional ... not needed if you've made the pastrami)

2 pats of butter

Directions:

Butter the slices of rye bread on one side and grill them to a light golden color in a skillet over medium heat. Remove them from the skillet and generously slather Brown Deli Mustard on the soft inside sides of the grilled rye bread. Set these aside on a paper plate.

Grill the pastrami on a medium hot grill or in a non-stick skillet after heating the soybean oil and spreading it over the grill or skillet surface. Store bought pastrami will shrink in size as it grills and loses moisture. This is to be expected and the pastrami is not done until it has shrunken.

Alternatively, if you make the pastrami it won't shrink, plus you simply warm it in the microwave oven with Swiss cheese on top!

Put the pastrami on a paper plate, formed into the shape and size of the rye bread, then put the Swiss cheese on top and heat it in the microwave oven just long enough to warm the pastrami and melt the cheese ... about one minute.

Put the pastrami and cheese between the slices of the grilled rye bread and cut the sandwich diagonally with a sharp knife. Heat the cut sandwich in the microwave oven for 30 seconds. Serve the sandwich on the paper plate with a bowl or bottle of some extra Brown Deli Style Mustard and the kosher dill pickle and the potato chips.

Serve the cold beer.

Expect applause.

Ham Salad on Soft White Bread - ☺

When I was a child ham salad sandwiches were a frequent menu item at home and at school. Perhaps it was a regional thing in western PA but today ham salad that I have been able to find outside of that region isn't particularly good. At one time a neighborhood store in Johnstown, PA, named Hesel's®, had a secret recipe that they simply would not share with anyone. People tried to duplicate it but typically failed.

I thought their ham salad was okay but not that great. Anyway, I eventually decided as an adult to make it myself and thus please myself. This recipe of mine below has been taste tested by a lot of people and it is popular. It is also simple. I like my ham salad on soft plain white bread.

Ingredients: (You can vary the amounts of all the ingredients to please yourself)

1 lb. of ham pieces from cold baked ham leftovers

1 cup of Hellman's® mayonnaise

3/4 cup of sweet relish

Directions:

Use a meat grinder or meat grinder attachment on an electric mixer to process the ham after removing all external fat. Put the ground ham into a one quart bowl.

Add the mayonnaise and mix thoroughly with a fork. Then add the relish and again mix thoroughly.

There! Wasn't that easy?

Use the bread of your choice and slather the ham salad on it about 1/3 to 1/2 inch thick.

Indulge.

Refrigerate the remaining ham salad in a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag, pressing the air out before sealing it, if you plan to eat the ham salad within two to three days. Otherwise, use your vacuum sealer and then refrigerate it for up to a week. In general, products like this one that contain meat and mayonnaise should be used rather than stored for any length of time, due to the risk of spoilage.

Hot Italian Giardiniera Condiment - ☺♥

This recipe creates a very popular condiment common in the Midwest and especially in Chicago. It is clearly Italian in origin and totally delicious. Locals use it on various popular sandwiches. You want to make this condiment.

There are various recipes, and mine is a composite of what I consider the best of all the other recipes I found, plus a bit of creative experimenting, and voila! Great stuff!

You use this condiment by putting the amount of your choice (be generous) on a sandwich like an Italian Sub or a Cheese Steak instead of other condiments or spreads. It also goes very well with sweet or hot Italian sausages in a sausage sandwich. Some aficionados even put it on pizza, though I've not tried that.

The only processing method I describe in this recipe for the finished condiment involves vacuum sealing it into bags and pasteurizing it to create a very long shelf life (easily a year) refrigerated product. You may decide instead to simply refrigerate the condiment after pasteurizing jars of it, but then use them within three months. Also, if you choose not to use the sodium benzoate then use all of the condiment within two to three weeks.

Let's get to it ...

Ingredients: (makes about 2 1/2 quarts)

2 yellow bell peppers, diced

2 red bell peppers, diced

8 fresh jalapeno peppers, sliced to form 1/8 inch thick rings (w/wo seeds)

1 or 2 diced habanero peppers (optional ... very hot)

1 large celery stalk, finely diced

1 medium carrot, finely diced

1 small onion, chopped

1 cup of fresh cauliflower florets, chopped fine

1/2 cup of canning or Kosher salt

2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 tablespoon of bottled capers

1 tablespoon of dried oregano
1 teaspoon of red pepper flakes
1/2 teaspoon of black pepper
1 cup of drained bottled whole pepperoncini, chopped
1 cup of large brine-cured green olives (or stuffed manzanillas), chopped
1 cup of oil-cured black olives (or kalamata olives), chopped
1 cup of white distilled vinegar (5% acidity)
1 cup of extra virgin olive oil
1 1/2 tsp. of sodium benzoate solution (purchased through Koldkiss®) - optional

Directions:

Place the processed yellow and red peppers, celery, carrot, onion and cauliflower into a large 3 or 4 quart bowl.

Add the canning/Kosher salt to the bowl and mix well by hand.

Partially fill the bowl with enough cold water to barely cover the vegetables, then cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the mixture overnight.

The next day, drain the salty water from the vegetables via a colander and put the vegetables back into the large bowl.

Process/Chop the capers, garlic, pepperoncini, jalapeno and habanero (optional) peppers, and the two types of olives and put them into a 2 quart bowl.

Add the oregano, red pepper flakes and black pepper and mix well.

Add the vinegar and olive oil and mix well.

Add the sodium benzoate (optional but highly recommended) and mix well.

Combine that mixture with the vegetable mixture in the large bowl and mix well.

Vacuum seal one or two cup bags of the condiment, then lay all of the sealed bags flat and spread out on a baking sheet.

The final step is to pasteurize the bag contents in a 180 degrees F oven. Use a convection setting if you have it as that will require the least amount of time.

Pasteurize the condiment by putting the baking sheet into a 180 degrees F oven and keeping it there until the condiment bags reach a temperature of 170 degrees F. This will take a few hours, and you need to check the temperature periodically after the first hour. Simply place an instant read thermometer tip on the surface of a bag and leave the tip there until the thermometer shows the current temperature. You can rotate the baking sheet every 30 minutes to assure even heating.

Remove the baking sheet from the oven and let the bags of condiment cool to room temperature, then refrigerate them.

Use this condiment by putting the amount of your choice (be generous, like at least 1/4 cup or more) on a sandwich like an Italian Sub or a Cheese Steak instead of other condiments or spreads. It also goes very well with sweet or hot Italian sausages in a sausage sandwich.

Enjoy!

Hot Sausage Sandwich - ☺♥

All I can say is, Yummy! My darling Marie used to make these sandwiches, or, to be precise, the arrangement of ingredients, so that each guest could make the sandwich to suit their individual taste. Oh my, Yes!

The word hot is sort of misleading. For some folks that means temperature. For others it means the seasoning of the sausages. Yet others know that the sausages should be hot by composition and temperature, and also the mixture, with peppers and onions in a well flavored sauce, all of which should be put into a fine soft bun.

The truth is that mild or sweet Italian sausages are also wonderful for this type of delightful sandwich. Simply prepare the mild or sweet sausages the same way as the recipe indicates for the hot Italian sausages.

What a delight! I have many fine memories of small parties where these wonderful "sandwiches" were served, such that each person built the sandwich as desired.

Ingredients:

For the Sausages:

2 Tbsp. of Extra Virgin Olive Oil

5, Six to eight inch (or 10, 4") long links of Hot or Sweet Italian Pork Sausage (or a mixture of both types)

1/2 cup of Water

For the Sauce:

2 Tbsp. of Extra Virgin Olive Oil for sautéing the vegetables

1 large onion, julienned

1 large green bell pepper, julienned

1 large red bell pepper, julienned

½ tsp. of sea salt

¼ tsp. of freshly cracked black pepper

5 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 tsp. of dried oregano

4 sprigs of fresh thyme or 1 tsp. of dried thyme

1, 15 oz. can of tomato sauce

½ tsp. of cayenne pepper or two thinly sliced jalapeno peppers or two tsp. of Sriracha sauce (optional)

¼ to ½ cup of medium dry red wine like Pinot Noir or dry red wine like Chianti

2 Tbsp. of torn fresh basil leaves (or one tsp. of dried basil added during sauce cooking)

5 Soft 7" or 8" long French (or Sub) Rolls

A small bowl of grated Parmesan cheese or five slices of provolone cheese (optional)

Directions:

For The Sausages:

Add the water, 2 tbsp. of olive oil and sausages to a medium sized skillet and turn the heat to medium-high.

Turn the sausages frequently as they boil in the water, until all the water boils out, about 10 minutes.

Turn the heat down to medium, and continue to cook the sausages in the remaining oil to brown them, turning them over every two minutes for a total time of about 10 minutes.

Remove the sausages to a cutting board and cut them in half lengthwise, returning the halves face down to the skillet. Let the sausages cook for about five minutes on medium heat.

When the sausages are finished cooking, turn off the heat, and set the skillet aside.

For The Sauce:

While the sausage cooks, heat a large skillet over medium heat and add the two tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil, onions, peppers, salt, and black pepper. Stir to coat the vegetables with the olive oil. Cook about 10 minutes with some stirring, until the onions are translucent. I like to keep the skillet covered during this process except when stirring as the retained heat hastens the cooking.

Add the garlic, oregano, thyme, (and dried basil if you are not using fresh basil leaves) and the tomato sauce, and the (optional) hot seasoning(s) of your choice, cooking for about 7 minutes on low heat with stirring until the sauce volume is slightly reduced.

Add the sausage halves to the skillet of sauce, along with any of the sausage juices, and bring them up to temperature, cooking for about 5 minutes on low heat.

Finish the sauce by adding the red wine and the torn basil (if you are using fresh basil), mixing well, then remove the sauce from the heat.

If you used sprigs of fresh thyme, remove the stems now and discard them.

Alternatively, you can keep the skillet on very low heat, keeping the mixture simmering but not boiling, as that will guarantee the sausages and sauce will be hot when served.

To Assemble:

Split or cut the French or Sub rolls down the middle, and toast them under the broiler, cut surfaces up, for about 3 to 5 minutes, or until they are golden brown. Check them often after two minutes and if necessary rotate or move the pieces to produce even browning. Note that browning effects accelerate quickly after they first become noticeable so pay close attention and don't let the broiler burn the rolls.

Remove the rolls from the broiler and place them in a bowl or basket.

Place a few sausage pieces against each other on the bottom portion of each toasted roll, cut side down.

Add your desired amount of sauce on top of the sausage pieces, sprinkle on some grated Parmesan cheese (optional) then cover all of it with the top of the French or Sub roll. Alternatively, put the (optional) provolone cheese slice on top of the sausage and sauce and place the lower half of the sandwich under the broiler for one to two minutes to melt the cheese, then cover the sandwich with the top of the French or Sub roll.

The obvious beverage for this meal is ice cold beer. A medium dry red wine like Pinot Noir is also okay, and remember sodas for the young people.

Enjoy!

Hot Sausage Sandwich II - 😊♥♥♥😊

I love to experiment with variations of the best recipes. One never knows exactly what might result from small, intentional changes. It turns out that experimenting with the recipe for Hot Sausage Sandwiches was a wonderful idea. The net result is that Food Nirvana now has two recipes for Hot Sausage Sandwiches that are significantly different from each other in the taste, texture and composition of the final product. I really love this second version the best.

One very basic change is the elimination of any sauce or sauce herbs or extra seasonings, other than salt and pepper. Thus, the resulting sandwich content is closer to what you will encounter when buying that type of sandwich from a street vendor or other fast service source. But close in concept/content doesn't begin to capture the excellent quality I developed with my other changes, described next in narrative form.

Tonight I decided to make hot sausage sandwiches ... you know the drill ... both sweet and hot Italian sausage links simmered/lightly boiled in water, rinsed, then fried/browned in a small amount of canola oil and then cut in half lengthwise ... plus separately cooking the mixture of chopped sweet onion, slices of green and red bell peppers, and thinly sliced fresh garlic, plus salt and pepper ... sautéed in a bit of canola oil. How can one go wrong with that combination?

Put all of it together, mix it, put a lid on it and keep it fairly warm on very low heat.

Note, however, that you don't do any of the above steps until you make the outstanding rolls that will hold those delicious ingredients, as described next.

There is the matter of the quality of the roll typically used to hold the delightful hot sandwich ingredients ... and that is where I tried something very different with remarkably delicious success.

I converted a frozen unrisen loaf of Rhodes® white bread into four 7" to 8" long rolls ... after some thawing time (2+ hours in a 100 degrees F proofing oven) and cutting the dough and changing the shape of the pieces into cylindrical roll lengths before the final rise ... then allowing the rising to finish, then lightly buttering the tops of the rolls, optionally cutting shallow diagonal slices (razor blade) across the tops to keep the roll tops from splitting during baking, and then doing the baking ... hot and fast with steam ... 425 degrees F convection oven for 16 minutes, rotating the baking sheet every four minutes, with steam provided by 1/2 cup of water dumped into a low shelf very hot cast iron skillet in the 425 degrees F oven at the beginning of the actual baking.

The rolls come out golden and crisp on top and slightly soft on the rest of the outside and very soft and chewy on the inside ... what a fine texture to go along with the great taste!

So, take a lengthwise partially cut through roll and load it with sausage halves and all the fixing's and then ... moan with delight.

That combination beats anything I ever had in the past relative to rolls used and thus the overall sandwich is truly great.

Totally perfect! So I rated it as exceptional per the Food Nirvana recipe rating system.

Let's proceed to make the rolls ... for that process takes a lot longer than cooking the other ingredients since we start with a frozen unrisen loaf of bread.

Oil a frozen loaf of unrisen bread lightly all over with canola oil and put it into a glass baking dish. Let the bread thaw in a 100 degrees F proofing oven for two hours, then put the soft, partially risen loaf on to a wood cutting board. If you do not have a proofing setting on your oven then let the bread thaw in a warm place in your kitchen, covered with a damp cloth, for three to four hours ... just until it is barely thawed and not much risen.

Use a pastry knife to divide/cut the loaf into four equal parts on a wood cutting board, then hand roll each part to form a cylindrical roll about six to seven inches long. Work with the dough by gently stretching it, to relax it enough so the cylinder of dough remains at least six inches long. Note that it will expand during rising and baking to around 7" to 8" long.

Put a sheet of parchment paper on a 12" x 17" steel baking tray. Note that in the recipe picture I use a special baking sheet made for holding the shape of multiple rolls while they bake. You can buy that type of baking sheet inexpensively via Amazon®. You might also note that I don't need to use the parchment paper as the special baking sheet is non-stick.

Put the four cylinders of dough on to the sheet of parchment paper with two inches of space between them.

Make a dish towel wet with hot tap water, wring it out, and cover the rolls with it.

Let the dough rise in the proofing oven for one hour (or elsewhere in your warm kitchen for up to two hours), then remove the tray from the oven and the towel from the rolls.

Optionally cut a few shallow (1/4" deep) diagonal slices across the tops of the rolls using a razor blade. That assures the roll tops will not split during baking.

Gently brush some melted butter on to the tops of the risen rolls, then allow the rolls to complete rising while you prepare the oven for baking them.

Put a large cast iron skillet on a low oven shelf.

Heat the oven to 425 degrees F with a convection setting. You can use a conventional oven setting if you don't have a convection setting but the baking time will increase.

Put the baking sheet with the rolls on to a middle height oven shelf. It is nice but not essential to have that shelf contain baking stones, that when hot accelerate the baking process.

Dump one half cup of water into the hot cast iron skillet and quickly close the oven door.

Bake the rolls for a total time of 16 minutes on the convection setting, rotating the tray front to back every four minutes.

If needed, increase the baking time by only a few minutes until the tops of the rolls are golden in color.

Remove the tray from the oven and let the rolls cool a bit while you make the sausages and sautéed vegetables.

Ingredients: (The sausage and vegetable toppings ingredients listed below are enough to make four generous hot sausage sandwiches)

For the Sausages:

2 Tbsp. of canola oil

4, Eight inch (or 8, 4") long links of Hot or Sweet Italian Pork Sausage (or a mixture of both types)

Water in a large skillet sufficient to almost submerge the sausage links

For the Vegetable Mixture:

2 Tbsp. of canola oil for sautéing the vegetables

1 large sweet onion, chopped into roughly 1/2"x1/2" pieces

1 large green bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 2" long 1/2" wide strips

1 large red bell pepper, cleaned and cut into 2" long 1/2" wide strips

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

3 large cloves of fresh garlic, finely sliced

Directions:

For The Sausages:

Add the water and the sausage links to a large size (12" diameter) skillet and turn the heat to medium-high.

Use enough water to essentially cover/almost submerge the sausage links.

Turn the sausages frequently once they boil lightly in the water, until they have cooked for about ten minutes.

Dump the sausage links and the remaining water into a colander in the sink and rinse the sausage links to eliminate any residue formed during the boiling.

Clean the skillet.

Put the sausage links back into the cleaned skillet, along with the two tablespoons of canola oil. Mix the links with the oil to coat them.

Turn the heat to medium or medium high, and continue to cook the sausage links in the oil to brown them, turning them over every two minutes with tongs for a total cooking time of about 10 minutes.

Remove the sausages to a cutting board and cut them in half lengthwise using a fork and a sharp knife, then put the halves into a medium size bowl. Set the bowl aside.

You will now use the skillet, without cleaning it, to sauté the vegetables.

For The Vegetables:

Heat the skillet over medium heat and add the two Tbsp. of canola oil, and the onion pieces, bell pepper slices, salt, and black pepper. Stir to coat the vegetables with the oil. Cook about 10 minutes with some stirring, until the onions are translucent. I like to keep the skillet covered during this process except when stirring as the retained heat hastens the cooking.

Add the garlic slices, mix well, and cook for about 3 minutes, covered, on low heat.

Add the sausage link halves to the skillet of vegetables, along with any of the sausage juices, mix gently, and bring them up to temperature, cooking for about 5 minutes on low heat, covered.

At this point, you keep the skillet on very low heat, covered, just to keep the ingredients warm.

To Assemble The Sandwiches:

Cut the freshly baked and still somewhat warm rolls, partially through, lengthwise, with a serrated bread knife, down the middle of one side. Note the soft and chewy interior of the rolls ... so deliciously different from typical rolls used to make these sandwiches.

Place two to four sausage link halves (depends on the original length of the links) into the inside bottom portion of each roll.

Add your desired amount of vegetables on top of the sausage pieces.

Eat and moan with delight.

The obvious beverage for this meal is ice cold beer, but do remember sodas for the young people, unless you can find someone to take them away while you gorge on this food!

Enjoy!

Lox Sandwich Variations - ☺♥

Having now made excellent cold smoked lox (see the Food Nirvana recipe for making lox under Seafood) I am collecting and assembling information about the variety of sandwiches one might make to most enjoy the lox. The picture shown on the right is one very fine example, with toast, cream cheese, chopped chives, cold smoked lox and thin slices of hardboiled egg. Yummy!

I am pleased that I found a good web site with most of the information below for any of us to use. I have somewhat modified and hopefully improved that content.

First, here is a partial list of different types of sandwich ingredients based on the basic type of food and the accompanying taste:

Creamy– Cream cheese, chèvre (aka goat cheese), avocado slices, Lemon Artichoke Dip, Simple White Bean Dip.

Crunchy– Toasted Bread or bagel, cucumber slices, red onion slices, radish slices and seeds used to enhance Bagels.

Sweet– Strawberry slices, pomegranate seeds, blueberries, blackberries and jellies or jams.

Salty– Lox, smoked salmon, bacon, capers, salt.

Savory– Arugula, micro-greens, chives, fresh dill, fresh herbs, hard boiled eggs or over easy eggs. Also, various grilled vegetables such as asparagus, eggplant and yellow squash.

Acidic– Tomatoes, capers, lemon zest, lemon juice, olives

Typical Sandwich Ingredients:

First Breads- choose from the list below:

Plain or Seeded Bagels

Cracked Wheat Sourdough Bread *See Note #1 below

Various Ezekiel Breads (made without common wheat flour)

Soft White Bread

Then Cheese:

Cream cheese or favorite flavored cream cheese, See Note #2 below

Then Cold Smoked Salmon or Lox:

Lox or cold smoked salmon - See Note #3 below

Additional Toppings: (choose one or more toppings from the list below based on what you like)

1 or 2 ripe avocados, peeled & thinly sliced

8 oz of strawberries thinly sliced

1/2 cup of pomegranate seeds

1 small eggplant - See Note # 4 below

1 bunch of asparagus - See Note 5 Below

1 small container of chopped fresh chives

1 small English cucumber cut into coins

1 to 2 cups of arugula

1 or 2 tomatoes thinly sliced

1 small red onion thinly sliced

1 shallot very thinly sliced

1 cup of your favorite sprouts or micro greens

1/4 to 1/2 cup of capers, drained

2 to 4 over easy eggs or 2 to 4 hard boiled eggs sliced - See note #6 below

1 tbsp. of freshly squeezed lemon juice

Directions for making the sandwich:

Toast the bread or bagel.

Spread the bagel or bread with cream cheese and layer the cold smoked salmon or lox on the cheese.

Top the lower half of the bagel or the bread slice with your selection of the toppings from the above list.

Top the sandwich with the other half of the bagel or another slice of the bread.

Cut the sandwich in half and serve it on a small plate. Remember to serve a beverage.

Recipe Notes:

Note #1 - Plain bagels, seeded bagels, sourdough bread slices and sourdough baguettes are all good options. Additionally, soft sliced white bread, crusts removed, is best for making tea sandwiches.

Note #2 - About 2 ounces of plain or flavored cream cheese will be needed per person. Goat cheese (chèvre) may also be substituted.

Note #3 - About 1 or 2 ounces of smoked salmon or lox will be needed for each serving.

Note #4 - Slice eggplant into about 1/4 inch thick steak slices. Lay them on a cookie sheet and lightly salt them to remove extra water. Let them sit for about 15 minutes. Dab them with a paper towel to absorb water. Turn the slices over and repeat the salting, sitting and dabbing. Spray both sides of the slices with a cooking spray and grill them over med/high heat for 4 to 5 minutes per side.

Note #5 - For the asparagus, cut off the tough bottom portion. Lay the spears on a plate and drizzle them with canola oil. Lightly salt them. Grill them over med/high heat for approximately five minutes, turning every min.

Note #6 - Place room temperature eggs in a small saucepan and cover them with cold water one inch above the eggs. Put the saucepan over high heat and bring the water to a rolling boil uncovered. Cover the saucepan and turn off heat. Let the eggs sit in the hot water for 6-15 minutes. The longer the time, the firmer the egg. I found 10 minutes to be perfect as the egg slices could be handled easily and the egg was moist and soft and not overcooked and rubbery. Once the time is done, drain the saucepan and pour cold water over the eggs to stop the cooking process. Place the eggs in the refrigerator until you are ready to peel them and slice them.

Monte Cristo Sandwich - ?

Here is an old classic delight. The first one was made in the USA around 1923, and the sandwich enjoyed popularity in the 1930's and in the 1960's when Disneyland decided to serve them. I have yet to make one, but I will.

Ingredients: (makes six sandwiches)

3 extra large or two jumbo eggs

1/2 cup of milk

1/4 tsp. of kosher salt

Pinch of nutmeg

3 tbsp. of mayonnaise

3 tbsp. of Dijon mustard

12 slices of white bread

1 lb. of thinly sliced lunchmeat ham (18 or more slices)

1 lb. of thinly sliced Swiss cheese (12 slices)

3 tbsp. of butter

Powdered sugar for dusting

Raspberry jam for serving/dipping

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 200 degrees F.

Whisk the eggs, milk, salt and nutmeg in a wide, shallow bowl.

Combine the mayonnaise and mustard in a small bowl.

Spread 1 1/2 teaspoons of the mayonnaise and mustard mixture on one side of each slice of bread.

Put one slice of Swiss cheese on each of six slices of bread.

Put three (or more) thin slices of ham on top of the Swiss cheese on each of six slices of bread.

Put one slice of Swiss cheese on top of each stack of ham.

Cover the sandwich bottoms with six slices of bread, mayonnaise and mustard side down.

Heat one tbsp. of butter on medium heat in a large (12" diameter) thick bottom skillet. Spread the melted butter around the skillet.

Use a spatula and dip two of the sandwiches into the egg mixture ... turn them over to do both sides of each sandwich.

Put the dipped sandwiches into the skillet and cook them on both sides until the cheese is melted and the sandwiches are golden brown ... about 2 to 3 minutes per side.

Put the sandwiches on a baking sheet and put it into the warm oven.

Wipe out/clean the skillet and repeat the above directions for the other four sandwiches.

Serve the Monte Cristo sandwiches by cutting each sandwich in half, then dusting it with powdered sugar.

Provide a cup of raspberry jam for dipping.

Enjoy!

Cheese Steak with Fried Onions and Mushrooms - ☺♥

This delicious, hot and filling sandwich is, like the Hoagie (SUB), something created originally in the Philadelphia PA regional area. It is now common elsewhere in the USA, and that is the problem ... The common cheese steak served almost all places outside of the Philadelphia regional area is deficient in most respects. This recipe is intended to correct that problem, at least in your kitchen.

Do note that this recipe is not a recipe for a true Philadelphia Cheese Steak, which has a Velveeta® type of cheese or Cheez Whiz® as one of the primary ingredients. That sandwich, while very good, does not measure up in taste to the variation described below. Of course, that is my personal opinion, and that of countless thousands of other people who prefer white American cheese for this specific sandwich.

Ingredients:

To begin, the proper bread for a cheese steak is similar to the type of bread used for the perfect sub. It is a very fresh soft 18" long roll, somewhat elliptical in cross section shape, flat on the bottom, and about three to four inches across. Few bakeries outside the Philadelphia regional area have the right dough recipe and/or the right baking procedure. If you are lucky you will find something close in your area. Read on ...

A good long roll substitute that is often available is a fresh loaf of Italian bread, typically found at supermarket bakeries. Note that the loaf of bread will be cut in half, lengthwise, from top to bottom, producing two nicely shaped long rolls that are perfect for making a cheese steak. If you make cheese steaks at home using these rolls adjust the ingredient amounts listed below to what will properly fit into the roll.

The beef used for the cheese steak must be very lean and shaved thinly, as in 1/16th of an inch thick or less, prior to grilling. Top round roast is a good choice, though sirloin is even better. Most sub and steak shops purchase commercial frozen shaved beef, and that is too bad as it is less than perfect compared to freshly shaved raw beef. I use my meat slicer to process a few pounds of raw top round roast into shaved beef. Then I vacuum seal 8 oz. packets of the beef and freeze it for later use.

A very hot lightly oiled cast iron skillet (soybean oil) is used to convert the raw beef into a soft rapidly cooked beef, which maintains its moisture and thus

tenderness. A pound and a half of the raw unfrozen room temperature shaved beef should be cooked to amply fill the 18" long roll. The pile of raw beef is turned over often with a large spatula during the first few minutes of searing in the hot oil to assure even cooking, with a total cooking time of 4 to 5 minutes.

During the last few minutes of cooking, after the beef is no longer raw, it is shaped as it will be when it is in the roll. It is then lightly seasoned with salt and black pepper. An ample number of thinly sliced American cheese slices are melted on top of the beef, such that the surface is 90% covered at least one layer thick ... and two layers is much better. The cheese mostly melts onto the beef simply from the heat from the beef and the cast iron skillet, in the last minute or two of cooking.

While the beef is first cooking, a cup and a half of raw diced onions are sautéed in a small amount of the same type of cooking oil until they are translucent, even slightly browned at the edges. They are turned over frequently while sautéing. Similarly, a cup or cup and a half of drained canned mushrooms are sautéed on the grill in a small amount of the cooking oil. Do not use fresh mushrooms.

Typically an opened roll has some of the soft interior dough removed to make room for the other ingredients. The interior is then sprinkled with extra virgin olive oil, or, some people ask for mayonnaise (but not me). The melted cheese covered beef is the first ingredient to be added at that point, using the very large spatula to coax it intact from the skillet into the opened roll.

The fried onions and mushrooms are then added on top of the cheese and beef. The roll is forced closed and the sandwich wrapped in multiple layers of off-white delicatessen wrapping paper. The sandwich is cut in half diagonally after the first few wraps of paper that keep it from unintentionally opening.

Now that is one delicious sandwich. People have widely different opinions about whether or not to add any other seasonings. I like a bit of ketchup inside mine. Some folks will want hot grilled peppers and they will ask for those when placing their order. Still others want no additional seasonings at all. It is all a matter of personal choice. In the Chicago area a local favorite used instead of mushrooms and onions is hot Giardiniera condiment, and the recipe for that mixture is in this section of Food Nirvana.

Now you have it ... The proper way to make the perfect cheese steak, with fried onions and mushrooms.

Pulled Pork Barbecue - ? & ☺

The recipe below from Tyler Florence of Food Network® includes a second recipe for coleslaw to accompany the pulled pork barbecue sandwiches. Pickle spears are also recommended to accompany it. The coleslaw recipe is quite different from my recipe and I am looking forward to trying it. I am also looking forward to trying the pork recipe itself. But in the meantime ...

Janet and I had some great pork barbecue sandwiches last night using a section of a boned pork shoulder roast in which I cut slices about ¼ inch thick and trimmed almost all the fat off, (and I saved that for future sausage making, freezing it). I then cut very thin strips of raw pork from the lean meat, and I sized/cut them to about 2 inches long. I put the thin pork strips into a skillet and baked them for one hour at 250°F turning them over after the first 30 minutes to assure even cooking. Then I baked them at 300°F for an additional 30 minutes.

When finished the pork was tender, juicy and yummy even without seasoning, but for seasoning I mixed it with some of the dynamite Kansas City Barbecue Sauce that I had just made. I returned the mixture to the 300°F oven for 30 minutes to lose some of the barbecue sauce liquid and thus concentrate the sauce. Finally we used long soft buns, warmed, and filled them with the pork barbecue and they were super. Technically the pork wasn't pulled but frankly that made no difference at all, and I know that as I have had pulled pork sandwiches lots of times in the past. The method I used involved less labor.

Well, here is Tyler Florence's recipe: (I will report back to you when I try it)

Ingredients:

Dry Rub:

3 tablespoons of paprika

1 tablespoon of garlic powder

1 tablespoon of brown sugar

1 tablespoon of dry mustard

3 tablespoons of coarse sea salt

1 (5 to 7 pound) pork roast, preferably shoulder or Boston butt

Cider-Vinegar Barbecue Sauce:

1 1/2 cups of cider vinegar
1 cup of yellow or brown mustard
1/2 cup of ketchup
1/3 cup of packed brown sugar
2 garlic cloves, smashed
1 teaspoon of kosher salt
1 teaspoon of cayenne pepper
1/2 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper

Pan drippings from the pork

Additional food items for the meal:

12 hamburger buns
1 recipe of Cole Slaw, recipe follows
Pickle spears, for serving

Directions:

Mix the paprika, garlic powder, brown sugar, dry mustard, and salt together in a small bowl. Rub the spice blend all over the pork. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

Preheat the oven to 300°F.

Put the pork in a roasting pan and roast it for about 6 hours. An instant-read thermometer stuck into the thickest part of the pork should register 170° F, but basically, what you want to do is to roast it until it's falling apart.

While the pork is roasting, make the barbecue sauce.

Combine the vinegar, mustard, ketchup, brown sugar, garlic, salt, cayenne, and black pepper in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer gently, stirring, for 10 minutes until the sugar dissolves. Take it off the heat and let it sit until you're ready for it.

When the pork is done, take it out of the oven and put it on a large platter.

Allow the meat to rest for about 10 minutes. While it's resting, use a ladle to remove and discard excess melted fat, then deglaze the pan over medium heat with 3/4 cup water, scraping with a wooden spoon to pick up all of the browned bits. Reduce by about half. Pour that into the saucepan with the barbecue sauce and cook 5 minutes.

While the pork is still warm, you want to "pull" the meat: Grab 2 forks. Using 1 to steady the meat, use the other to "pull" shreds of meat off the roast. Put the shredded pork in a bowl and pour half of the sauce over. Stir it all up well so that the pork is coated with the sauce.

To serve, spoon the pulled pork mixture onto the bottom half of each hamburger bun, and top the meat with some slaw. Serve with pickle spears and the remaining sauce on the side.

Cole Slaw:

1 head of green cabbage, shredded

2 carrots, grated

1 red onion, thinly sliced

2 green onions (white and green parts), chopped

1 fresh red chili, sliced

1 1/2 cups of mayonnaise

1/4 cup of Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon of cider vinegar

1 lemon, juiced

A pinch of sugar

1/2 teaspoon of celery seed

Several dashes of hot sauce

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the cabbage, carrots, red onion, green onions, and chili in a large bowl.

In another bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, mustard, vinegar, lemon juice, and sugar.

Pour the dressing over the cabbage mixture and toss gently to mix. Season the coleslaw with the celery seed, hot sauce, salt, and black pepper.

Chill for 2 hours in the refrigerator before serving.

The Gyro - ☺♥

I really enjoy a good gyro so it makes sense to me to be able to make them at home. Unfortunately we can't buy gyro meat (Souvlaki) at the deli. I decided to find some gyro meat recipes and capture the best of the information for inclusion in Food Nirvana.

The recipe I found that I liked best also included instructions for making the gyro, so that information is included in this recipe, with a few revisions.

Indeed, considering the fine Food Nirvana recipe for Mediterranean Cucumber Salad, I realized the only thing this combined recipe lacked was a super recipe for making pita bread. Why not go all the way, right? Okay, I did exactly that, so Food Nirvana now has a boss recipe for Pita Bread. In fact, I made it today and I just finished eating a fabulous gyro with all the right stuff! No wonder this recipe displays a happy face and a heart ... This is fine eating.

Returning to the recent past, I made the gyro meat, and my sweetheart Peggy and I enjoyed it, but I immediately knew I could improve the recipe, and so I did, by eliminating the fresh onion and minced garlic and using powdered versions of both instead. That was a very nice improvement.

There was also an easy and fine procedural equipment change ... the use of my Kitchen-Aid® mixer to turn the ingredients into a thick paste all at once instead of using a food processor and doing it in batches.

Finally, I included an optional ingredient, transglutaminase, which is called "Meat Glue" by chefs. They use it to bond pieces of meat together by chemical reaction to link the amino acids glutamine and lysine (two protein components) to each other. The linking yields a product that in this instance will be a perfect "loaf" of meat that is easy to slice and will stay together perfectly. I have listed the optional transglutaminase ingredient and optional steps for using it below in italicized print.

I found transglutaminase available for purchase on Amazon®, supplied by Modernist Pantry®, LLC. Thus, I purchased a 500 gram vacuum sealed bag of Activa® RM transglutaminase (1 pound equals 454 grams). If you decide to buy and use it in this and other recipes take the time to read the Transglutaminase entry in the Food Nirvana Technology section first for useful background information on using that type of enzyme.

In general, Activa® RM is used at a rate of 3/4 of one percent to one percent of the weight of the meat being cooked. That one percent level translates to 7 grams of Activa® RM in this recipe, so you will need to have a sensitive kitchen scale

that displays weight in grams to weigh out that amount. Oh, yes ... 7 grams of Aactiva® RM (1/4 of an ounce) costs about 60 cents if you buy the 500 gram package. The total package content is enough to do anywhere from 110 pounds of meat (at 1.00% rate) to 147 pounds of meat (at 0.75% rate).

The final recipe as shown below includes my changes/improvements, making the whole process much easier procedurally by using different equipment and some modified ingredients than originally indicated in the Internet recipe I found.

I hope you take the time to make this gyro meat, because it is now easy to do (especially if you buy ground lamb) and very tasty. If you happen to grind the meat yourself then do it in two steps to produce a fine grind and not a coarse grind as a fine grind will aid in later mixing the meat into a thick paste. Do note that finding a store that sells ground lamb is a great idea for saving money and reducing effort in processing.

Ingredients: (makes enough meat for four generously filled or six regular gyros)

3/4 pound of ground beef (85/15 lean to fat percentage)

3/4 pound of ground lamb

2 teaspoons of onion powder

1 teaspoon of garlic powder or granulated garlic

1 tablespoon of dried oregano

1 tablespoon of dried thyme

3/4 teaspoon of ground cumin

1 teaspoon of kosher salt

3/4 teaspoon of ground black pepper

1 teaspoon of fresh rosemary or 1/2 tsp. of dried rosemary

7 grams of Aactiva® RM transglutaminase powder (optional)

Directions:

Combine all of the seasoning ingredients (*but not the optional Aactiva® RM*) in a Magic Bullet® type of mixer and operate it for a minute or two to make the mixture composition very fine.

Combine the ground meats and the processed seasoning ingredients (*plus the Activa® RM powder, if you are using it, sprinkled over the meat*) in an electric mixer bowl. Then operate the mixer on medium speed for three to five minutes to convert the mixture into a thick paste.

Press the mixture a little at a time into a glass baking dish (of the type used to make a loaf of bread), taking care to eliminate any air pockets.

Press down firmly on the surface of the meat to even it out. Then cover the glass baking dish with plastic wrap and let it rest for at least 1 hour (*make that 4 hours if you are using the Activa® RM powder*) in the refrigerator.

Preheat the oven to 325°F and bring a 1 gallon pot of water to a boil.

Place a folded kitchen (dish) towel on the bottom of a small roasting pan or a large high sided skillet, and position the glass baking dish on top of it. Pour about a quart of the boiling water into the roasting pan.

Carefully transfer the roasting pan/glass baking dish combination into the oven. Now add more boiling water to the roasting pan/skillet. It should be 2/3 of the way up the outside of the glass baking dish. Adjust the hot water level as needed. Bake the gyro meat for 50 to 70 minutes, or until the meat measures 165°F on an instant read thermometer inserted into the center of the loaf.

Carefully remove the glass baking dish from the roasting pan and pour off any fat or liquid that accumulated in it. *If you used the Activa® RM powder you can skip the next step.*

Put the glass baking dish on a wood cutting board and place an aluminum foil wrapped brick directly on the surface of the meat. **Note:** Before using transglutaminase in this recipe I used a perfectly fitted 7 1/2" long piece of 1 1/2"x 3 1/2" (the real size of what carpenters call a 2 by 4 stud) wood. I wrapped it in aluminum foil and then put four 6"x6" ceramic tiles on top of the foil wrapped wood. That method guaranteed better weighted contact with more of the surface of the meat. Also, it was totally easy to cut the piece of wood precisely from a length of 2x4 lumber. No width change was needed.

Let the gyro meat rest like this for 20 minutes.

After 20 minutes, remove the brick if you used one (or the weighted wood). If more liquid is present then drain it off. Then, if necessary, run a knife around the edge of the loaf and then gently turn the loaf out on to a wood cutting board.

Wrap the loaf of gyro meat tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate it for several hours or overnight to allow it to chill for easy slicing.

To Make Gyros:

Ingredients:

Gyro meat fully cooled/chilled

Ghee (Clarified Butter) or extra virgin olive oil (or some of both olive oil and plain butter)

Flatbread pitas (or, in a pinch, 8" diameter flour tortillas, warmed for 15 seconds each in a microwave oven)

Mixed salad greens (optional)

Cucumber yogurt sauce (optionally, use Mediterranean Cucumber Salad per the Food Nirvana recipe)

Cherry or grape tomatoes, halved lengthwise

Thin slices of sweet onion (I use a purple salad onion)

Crumbled Feta cheese (optional)

Optional but tasty: Greek Kalamata olives on the side

Directions:

Unwrap the gyro loaf and use a sharp knife to cut strips across the width of the meat, no thicker than 1/4-inch. 3/16 of an inch thick is perfect.

Heat 3 or 4 tablespoons of ghee or olive oil over medium heat in a heavy-bottomed 12" frying pan and spread it around with a spatula to cover the inner bottom surface of the skillet.

Lay the meat strips down into the skillet and fry them on medium to medium high heat for at least 1 1/2 minutes on each side, using a small flexible spatula to flip them, until they are crisped and browned to your liking. I like to flip them three times during the frying period so that each side is heated twice.

Gently transfer the gyro meat to a plate, then assemble a gyro in your preferred order with the remaining gyro ingredients of your choice on a gently warmed flat-bread pita (or flour tortilla). But be sure to use the cucumber yogurt sauce.

Special notes: Do make the Mediterranean Cucumber Salad using the Food Nirvana recipe. It is perfect for use in a gyro. Also, if you make the pita bread (a really nice idea) you will find it to be great as an appetizer, warmed and served with (the Food Nirvana recipe for) warmed Carrabba's® Dipping Oil.

Fold the pita around the contents, then partially wrap one end of the completed gyro in aluminum foil to help hold it together ... and more important, to keep the sauce from oozing out and getting all over your hand.

Enjoy!

Ray's Gyro - ☺♥

One of the less common types of sandwich/wrap in the USA is the gyro. Typically the only place you will find great ones served is in a Greek deli or restaurant, with a few exceptions in restaurants operated by better, food diverse restaurateurs. The main reason people don't make gyros at home is the lack of necessary ingredients.

First, the meat most often used in the USA is a processed seasoned minced lamb and beef mixture, typically cut from a preformed conical roast that, while not the same, reminds me of the processed beef approach used at Arby's® restaurants. In this case the meat mixture is minced, seasoned and bound using a product like transglutaminase to form what looks like a conventional roast or oversized meatloaf, from which thin slices can be cut after cooking, on what looks like a vertical rotisserie, and then grilled and seasoned as a final step for making a gyro. Thus, it is easy to understand why we don't normally make gyros at home ... the meat is not typically made available to the general public. Besides that, how many home chefs get into using commercial enzyme products like transglutaminase?

For the record, I just read a treatise on how to use the different types of transglutaminase with different foods, even ceviche! And I just ordered a pound of it via Amazon®. That should be enough to process over 100 pounds of meat. So I will be having lots of fun experimenting in my kitchen with all kinds of different applications. You can expect sometime in the not too distant future to see an explanation of how to use it in the Food Nirvana Technology section. Now back to the gyro discussion.

Second, the rolled pita bread, or wrap, that holds the meat is not something we typically have at home unless we make it or, for ethnic reasons, keep a supply for our common foods. One does not normally use a pita pocket type of bread ... instead, a gyro is a wrap of pita bread.

Finally, gyros are served with a special sauce named tzatziki, which is a cucumber and yogurt and dill weed sauce that is very complementary used with the nicely seasoned, grilled meat.

Given the gyro description you might wonder why I would have a recipe in Food Nirvana. The answer is that I found a very easy way to make a delicious gyro-like wrap by pure serendipity. I was so impressed with the taste and composition from my experiment that I simply had to share the recipe with my readers.

Why? The simple fact is that making a gyro-like wrap at home is really easy, and the results delicious. You will see that I diverged from the typical method of making a gyro in terms of some ingredients, yet I maintained what I call 90 percent of the authenticity for the conventional gyro.

If you look carefully at the recipe picture you will note that the only ingredient not shown is the peanut oil. Also, you may note that the beef is something I prepare in quantity, then vacuum seal in individual portions and keep in the deep freeze until I need it.

I hope you make this delicious treat, for once you do, I know you will make it fairly often for yourself, your friends and loved ones. It is delightful and bound to be a pleasant surprise for your guests. I like to enjoy it along with a clean tasting white wine like Pinot Grigio. Actually, I found a local winery, La Belle®, that makes a Seyval Blanc wine that is perfect!

Okay, here is my not too secret recipe in abbreviated form. Use a warmed flour tortilla as the wrap. Use the Mediterranean Cucumber Salad from the recipe in Food Nirvana as the tzatziki sauce. Use shaved lean beef, grilled in a hot cast iron skillet in a small amount of peanut oil and then well seasoned with salt and pepper, as the meat. That is literally all there is to it. The only part that requires early preparation is the making of the salad.

Let's proceed ...

Ingredients: (for each gyro)

1/3 lb. (or more for meat lovers) of shaved lean beef per gyro

1, 10" diameter flour tortilla

1/3 cup (or more) of Mediterranean Cucumber Salad

2 to 3 tbsp. of peanut oil for grilling

Sea salt and ground pepper for seasoning the meat

Directions:

Make the Mediterranean Cucumber Salad per the Food Nirvana recipe. Keep it chilled in the refrigerator.

Either buy lean shaved beef, or better, do what I do and process a lean raw beef roast with a meat slicer to get pieces roughly 1/8" thick, then cut them into strips an inch and a half to two inches wide and about five to six inches long, cutting away and discarding any fatty areas.

Note that when you cut slices of beef from a raw roast remember to cut across the grain of the meat, not along the length. Otherwise your meat strips will be very tough when grilled.

Heat the peanut oil in a 12" diameter cast iron skillet until it is very hot and shimmering. Spread the oil out with a spatula to cover the interior bottom of the skillet. Then lay out six to eight strips of beef flat in the oil, not overlapping each other.

Grill for two minutes, then turn over the beef pieces with tongs and grill for another two minutes. Repeat the turning and grilling steps until the meat shows light to moderate browning on the surface.

Season the meat well with salt and pepper.

Turn off the heat under the skillet.

Put the flour tortilla on a 10" diameter paper or china plate and heat it in the microwave oven on high for 15 seconds.

Put the strips of grilled meat across the center of the tortilla in a roughly straight line, with overlapping, and then spread the cucumber salad evenly over the meat.

Fold in each side of the tortilla to enclose the meat and salad, rolling it up so it is easy to hold while eating.

Eat ... And swoon with delight! It is not possible for me to describe the exceptional combination of tastes and textures that happen when making this great gyro.

Enjoy!

The SUB - ☺♥

I kind of knew that sooner or later I would have to rise to the occasion regarding the making of a proper submarine sandwich. Yes, I know it is a tall order and only one of two mandatory items, the other being The Cheese Steak. I've tackled that one separately.

First things first. Subs originated in Chester, PA at DiCostanza's sandwich shop, I believe during the 1940's. They were called Hoagies to attract the dock workers who were known as Hoggies. The sandwiches had to be large and filled with meats and cheese to address the gargantuan appetites of the dock workers who, let's face it, had very physical jobs to do and correspondingly giant appetites.

Thus was born the Hoagie, which turns out to be simply a synonym for the submarine sandwich. It doesn't take much imagination to understand that away from the docks the word hoagie meant nothing, so the shape of the sandwich determined its name.

One thing needs to be established for all time. It was and is an Italian American creation, so the only real subs are Italian American subs made with very specific ingredients. All others are genetic mutants, even a lot of those variants found in present-day Italian sub shops. Remember that.

Having now established precedence and lineage I will proceed to define the perfect submarine sandwich, or, hoagie, whichever you prefer based on your ethnocentric upbringing. Alas, my knowledge is but partial, but I will do my best.

From my youth I recall Coe's® submarine shops in two locations in Johnstown, PA. Just entering the shop was a blast of garlic, onion and lunchmeat and pungent cheeses and some other herb and spice scents that I simply could not define. All I knew was my mouth watered with desire to sink my teeth into one of those fantastic subs.

It was just my bad luck that my parents had a hard on against anything Italian, so home life did not include Coe's® subs. I didn't even taste one until I was 17 years old. I was lucky to have tasted Harry's Pizza®, for pizza was new to Johnstown in the 1950's. It only cost a dime for a large slice so I was able to step outside the world of my parents and live ... yes, live!

Enough self-pity! Let's get on with the show. Today, in the here and now, I am a sub critic, for I have learned much about how not to make a sub from third rate businesses who advertise great subs. What fools! Virtually no one outside the greater Philadelphia area has a clue on how to make a proper sub, and I know

that to be true as I have sought subs out from high end delicatessens from California all the way to Switzerland!

Okay, enough lead in ... here we go ...

Ingredients and Directions:

Forgive me but I have to do this as a narrative. First and foremost a very large sub roll, around 18" or more in length, roughly elliptical in cross section but flat on the bottom and about 4" across the middle is mandatory if you want a jumbo sub. The interior has to be soft and moist. The crust has to be slightly crisp and the whole loaf freshly baked. Only a few commercial bakers use the perfect dough recipe and most of them are within 50 miles of the greater Philadelphia PA regional area.

A good sub roll substitute that is often available is a fresh loaf of Italian bread, typically found at supermarket bakeries. Note that the loaf of bread will be cut in half, lengthwise, from top to bottom, producing two nicely shaped long rolls that are perfect for making a sub. If you make subs at home using these rolls adjust the ingredient amounts listed below to what will properly fit into the sub roll.

But ... lo and behold! I just developed a perfect sub roll that you can make at home! No kidding, check out the Sub Rolls recipe in the Food Nirvana Breads, Buns and Donuts section. I was amazed with how I could make an excellent sub roll at home. And I did ... and so can you. Check it out. These sub rolls are perfect for use at home, of size 12" long and 3" wide ... excellent for making one generous sub for one person.

Second, the sub roll will usually have some of the interior dough ripped out at the sub shop to make room for the essential ingredients. If you buy a sub that hasn't been so processed you likely have been screwed, that is, cheated of the right amount of ingredients in the filling.

Third, there will be a liberal coating of olive oil loaded with oregano and garlic and sometimes also basil, all over the surface of the interior of the bread. The oil had a serious amount of fresh garlic minced into it to flavor it when the garlic and herb oil was made, but the garlic was never delivered directly to your sub in chunks or slices. Thus, the rich scent of fresh garlic at Coe's® without ever seeing garlic. Oh, yeah ... Nirvana!

I make my own mixture of a pint of high quality olive oil with 5 large cloves of peeled, diced fresh garlic and 3 tablespoons of dried oregano. I actually process the garlic and oregano in half of the oil using a Magic Bullet® high speed mini-mixer. I then pour that fully blended mixture into a pint canning jar and add the

remainder of the olive oil. Then I put the insert and the lid on and shake the mixture to blend all of it. Then it needs to age for about a week. Then I use it by brushing a liberal amount of the mixture on to the insides of the sub roll. The pint quantity of the oil mixture is enough to make four (or more) large subs.

Fourth, there will be an ample amount of soft but pungent Provolone cheese lining both sides of the interior of the bread, right on top of the oil and herbs. The thin cheese slices should be overlapped halfway, thus providing a total thickness of two to four slices of cheese (one to two per side, regular sub vs. jumbo sub). Then there will be a very generous supply of at least three kinds of lunchmeats. One is hot Capicola ham, which is a high quality hotly seasoned ham that has an exterior crushed black peppercorn coating, or sometimes a coating of fine red pepper. Another is thin slices of Italian hard salami, which is intense in flavor and just soft enough to eat in a sandwich (as distinguished from the small 1 ½ to 2 inch diameter hard salamis that would be too hard sliced to be used in a sandwich). It is also important to distinguish the hard salami from what is called cooked salami, which is a soft textured weakly flavored salami, often with peppercorns in it, and you do not want that meat in your sub. The third meat is a good quality lunchmeat style of ham. The slices of meat should overlap each other halfway along the length of the sub and from side to side to create a meat pocket to hold the fresh vegetables, and this will provide one to two slices (regular vs. jumbo sub) of each kind of meat on each side on the entire interior of the sub.

A very worthy optional addition to the meats is thinly sliced prosciutto ham. Very few sub shops offer that optional addition, but you can add it at home.

One of the greatest shortcomings of most sub shops today is to cheat the customer by using too little meat and cheese and too much of the fresh vegetables. You will read below how to make a fine mixture of fresh vegetables and canned/pickled vegetables to make the perfect sub.

Fifth, on top of the cheese and meat will be an ample quantity of freshly shredded lettuce, ripe fresh diced tomato and diced fresh onion. This gives very necessary moisture and flavor and texture contrasts to the other sub ingredients. Now, here is an important flavor secret. If the customer wants hot peppers then sprinkle the bland fresh vegetables with some of the juice from the jar of hot banana pepper slices. If instead the customer wants sweet peppers or pickles or both then sprinkle some juice from the sweet peppers or pickles bottle over the bland fresh vegetables. That keeps the vegetables from being too bland and really perks up the sub. Of course, some customers (like me) want both hot and sweet ... and I bet you now know how to take care of that.

Sixth, there are some optional toppings that go on top of the fresh veggies ... like sweet brined pepper slices and/or hot sliced yellow banana peppers, not that seedy wet red pepper flakes stuff used in many substandard sub shops today. Then there will be a choice of adding pickle slices that are sometimes dill and sometimes sweet but often somewhere in between. Customers sometimes ask for these topping ingredients to be served on the side in small plastic containers so they can build the final sandwich at home to the liking of each individual.

Food Nirvana has a recipe for making the sweet sliced pickled banana or Italian peppers, for those pepper slices that can't be found in supermarkets in most locales. You definitely want to make these pepper slices if you cannot buy them. Check out the Sweet Pickled Pepper Slices recipe in the Processed Vegetables menu. As a substitute you can also use the bread and butter pickles per the Food Nirvana recipe or as purchased at the supermarket. Update ... I finally did find gallon jars (used by good deli's) of bell pepper slices in sweet brine, and they are far better than the ones from my recipe. The brand is SAN-DEL®. I probably found them on a site like Amazon®, or perhaps Web Restaurant Store®. Do take the time to find them and buy them.

Now I will digress and explain how to make the perfect mixture of fresh and canned/pickled vegetables to use with your sub. First, you will chop all of the ingredients to an approximate size of 1/2" x 1/2" so they will mix easily and uniformly (by hand) in a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag. The ingredients are: diced salad tomatoes, finely diced onion, chopped iceberg lettuce, chopped hot banana pepper slices, chopped sweet brined pepper slices, hot or regular dill pickle slices diced. In general you will have larger volumes of the tomatoes, onions and lettuce, and smaller amounts of the other ingredients, due to the more intense flavors, varied according to what you like. The main thing is to mix them together, except for the lettuce, seal the bag without having a lot of air in it, and refrigerate the mixture overnight to get a dynamite blending of the tastes. Use this mixture generously on the meat layer of the sub and add the lettuce, just before closing it. The sub will be "to die for" delicious!

Now we return to the general sub information ...

Finally, the sub roll is forced to close around the substantial amount of ingredients, and it is wrapped in multiple layers of off-white delicatessen paper after having been cut in half diagonally when covered with the few first layers of paper, which keep the sandwich from opening unintentionally. When you make a sub at home you can wrap the completed sub in plastic wrap, then refrigerate it for two or three hours, and Wow! The resting period allows the many flavors to merge and blend, producing a far better tasting sub than one you eat immediately upon making it.

There you have it ... a properly made regular or jumbo Italian American submarine sandwich. Two very hungry young adults with typically good appetites can eat all of a jumbo sub, barely. Otherwise, it will feed a family of four nicely, if accompanied with some potato chips and some cold sodas.

How can I be so sure I have this right? Don't other folks' opinions matter? Well, frankly no! You see I had actual DiCostanza's subs ... the very largest jumbo Italian subs just stuffed with meat, etc. I used to pay around \$8.95 (in the 1980's) for the largest sub, and it had so much meat in it that I could remove a pound of meat and still have a very respectable sub. No, I am not pulling your leg. This is absolute truth.

All other subs were and are deficient, by definition, as they never came close to the original. Profit trumped quality everywhere. I find it so very interesting that the local Board of Health shut down the DiCostanza's location in Wilmington, DE. I will not debase you or me by using the words that flow through my brain about that crooked level of favoritism based governmental interference with the American Way. But I cannot have any respect for that kind of government, and so I don't. You simply needed to hear the ugly truth to counter charges that DiCostanza's meats were not fresh. Talk about illogical charges! "He who uses the most meat in a sub of all the sub shops will have the stalest meat?!!!"

Fortunately, DiCostanza's reopened just a few miles away, over the state line, into Pennsylvania in the Chester area. You can check them out via a search using the Internet. If you happen to be in that area be sure to visit them and get their largest Italian sub. It won't be as generous in meats as the originals like I had, but the subs are still very good.

You now know how to make a great submarine sandwich, if you can find the right quality ingredients. In some locales it is still easy. In others it is impossible. Learn to purchase hard to find foods via the Internet. Good luck trying to buy the large gallon bottles of sliced sweet pickled peppers (SAN-DEL) and hot banana peppers (DEL-SOL) made by Italian American producers, outside of the Philadelphia regional area. Use the Internet.

Cien mil! (May you live a hundred thousand years!)

Super Sandwich - ☺♥

I have to thank the cartoonist who created Dagwood©, Murat Bernard "Chic" Young (1901- 1973), for Dagwood© was famous for his giant sandwiches that contained most everything from the refrigerator. As a child and later young adult I got the basic idea from the comic strip and I did something sort of similar but not to Dagwood's© skyscraper level or unrestrained use of ingredients.

It turns out that Young's son Dean not only continued the comic strip when his father died, naming it "Blondie©," but he also opened a franchise chain of sandwich shops named Dagwood's Sandwich Shoppes® with the first one in place in 2006.

Well, this recipe is about my Super Sandwich not the ones sold anywhere else.

I started making them around 1972 from my favorite sandwich ingredients that I had used for years to make regular sandwiches. Then I embellished my creation in content and gave it the name Super Sandwich, and my young children Ray, Jr. and Patty were visually quite impressed. I was pleased and amused.

When I built one of these sandwiches it was about three inches thick and packed with stuff I really like in a particular order that accentuated flavor, moisture and texture.

Here is my recipe for the Super Sandwich:

Ingredients:

3 slices of fresh soft plain white bread

1/8th pound of dried beef (In the old days I didn't know about the superb dried beef available at Fisher's Country Store® in Cessna, PA. Google® them on the Internet ... They used to ship the dried beef to me but now you have to go there to get it. Later I bought the dried beef from their supplier, John F. Martin Meats, through their Martin's Country Market store, which you can access via a simple Google® search. Of course, they sold me an uncut dried beef roast and I shaved/cut it using my commercial meat slicer, and keep the main supply vacuum sealed and refrigerated. That was nice!) Now I have taken the meat supply issue one final step further ... I make my own dried beef! Yes, and you can too. Simply look at the Food Nirvana recipe for Dried Beef. It comes out as excellent dried beef, and considerably less expensive.

4 slices of sweet Lebanon bologna (I buy Seltzer's Double Smoked Sweet Lebanon Bologna in a 4.5 lb deli size roll online at their store and treat it

similarly to the dried beef roast. Cut what you want and then vacuum seal and refrigerate the rest.)

2, ½" thick slices of a medium large very ripe tomato

8 green Manzanilla olives stuffed with pimentos

4 small sweet gherkin pickles

Potato chips

2 slices of white American cheese

Miracle Whip®

1 or 2 small pats of soft butter (to butter both sides of one piece of bread)

Black pepper

Directions:

Slather Miracle Whip® on one slice of bread. Slice the olives in half lengthwise and place them evenly on the Miracle Whip® covered bread slice. Put the sweet Lebanon bologna slices on top of the olives. Put a handful of salty potato chips on top of the sweet Lebanon bologna and crush them gently so they are somewhat flat.

Butter both sides of one slice of bread and put it on top of the potato chips. Put half of the dried beef on top of the buttered slice of bread. Put the tomato slices, one of them cut in half, on top of the dried beef. Sprinkle pepper on the tomato slices. Put the other half of the dried beef on top of the tomatoes. Put the cheese on top of the dried beef. Slice the pickles lengthwise into three pieces each and put them evenly across the top of the cheese. Slather Miracle Whip® on the remaining slice of bread and put it face down on the cheese to complete the Super Sandwich. Cut the sandwich in half diagonally and carefully with a sharp knife. Serve.

Looking back:

I was in my 20's when I started making this sandwich and my appetite was huge. I truly enjoyed plowing through one of those delightful taste treats. As is so typical, the combination of sweet, salty, moist and multiple textures, soft through crunchy, really worked.

Do note that I did not confuse flavors by using any product like mustard, which would detract noticeably from the other flavor combinations. Every product has

its place, and that sandwich is not the place to use mustard of any type. If you like mustard on a sandwich see my recipe for the Grilled Pastrami with Swiss cheese sandwich. Or read below.

I put only a few sandwich recipes in this book for common sandwiches as I figure most folks can make a good sandwich with no help from me whatsoever. But I will suggest that mustard aficionados grill the interior sides of a buttered bun, grill some thin slices of Virginia ham, melt American cheese over the ham, form the sandwich and then slather on the mustard of your choice. That is the perfect use for mustard in a sandwich.

Your At Home Delicatessen

Processing of some varieties of meat to create lunch meats was described briefly earlier in Food Nirvana to illustrate what you can do at home if you have the right equipment. This document has been created for the Sandwich Stuff recipes and for other uses you might have for what we call cold meats or lunch meats. I provide considerable detail here for the handling and processing of each type of meat or fowl. What I don't provide in the discussion are the wonderful recipes in Food Nirvana for curing meats to make your own lunch meat. You can find those recipes under the beef or pork index entries. Do read them as they undermine the greedy stupidity of many meat processors while telling you how to make excellent foods like corned beef, pastrami and ham at home from raw beef and/or raw pork.

A good supermarket may have up to fifty different varieties of lunch meats and at least a dozen varieties of cheeses, and the essential intended use for these products is simply sandwiches or salads like a chef's salad. We do love our sandwiches, for when they are made well from good ingredients they are both tasty and convenient. Let's take a look at the practical side regarding what is available at the supermarket delicatessen.

Omitting the plethora of different seasonings and flavorings it all pretty much boils down to beef, pork and turkey. Beef subdivides into roast beef, pastrami, corned beef and dried beef. Pork subdivides into many varieties of ham, pork loin and salami. Turkey is typically simply turkey breast, roasted and sliced. The various other lunch meat products, like bologna and other formed meat products like salami, are made of beef, pork and/or turkey along with fillers and seasonings and, in the case of salami, fat. If you think about the beef product used in places like Arby's® it is obvious that the loaf of meat they slice has been formed and processed from miscellaneous pieces of meat. In other words, the scraps of beef, pork (ham) and turkey are used to create less expensive composite loaves that will slice like a whole ham or turkey breast and thus be suitable for use in a sandwich.

Now let's look at the products in terms of what you might do at home versus what you will purchase but not make. Of the beef products, you can easily roast a piece of lean beef, like eye roast, to make lunch meat. If you are adventurous (and you should be) you can buy chemicals in mix form in bags to process raw beef brisket to make pastrami and corned beef at home, similarly ham from pork loin. Morton® markets Tender Quick® curing mix to do that at home. Dried beef is generally not made at home, but purchased in high quality form at a good price from stores like Fisher's Country Store in Cessna, PA, or from their

supplier, John Martin & Sons. You can roast pork loin and slice it thinly to create a delicious roast pork sandwich. You will not normally attempt to make ham, but buying and processing the right type of ham allows you to slice it thinly to make lunch meat, or, it may already be sliced as in the case of a spiral ham. Very special ham products like Virginia country ham or the Italian Prosciutto ham are items you must purchase rather than make at home. It is quite simple to roast a turkey or a turkey breast at home and slice the breast meat thinly for sandwiches.

Given the above starting point the idea is that whether you make the product at home from raw meat or buy a ready to eat cold meat you can process what you have using vacuum sealing and refrigeration to obtain very high quality lunch meats that will have exceptionally long shelf life in your refrigerator. I am talking about shelf life time periods of a month or longer depending on the meat product, where the cured meats may last easily for six months or more. This is contrasted to the reality that when you buy sliced meats at a delicatessen you best use all of the product within a week or less or it will, without fail, spoil due to biofilm bacteria and be unfit to eat. The other major consideration is that high quality ham, roast beef and turkey breast are very expensive at the delicatessen. In 2012 the top quality brands, like Boar's Head® sell for about \$12 per pound, yet they last easily for a month in your refrigerator without spoiling. The specialty products like Prosciutto ham in the best brands, like Parma®, cost at least \$18 per pound. Careful purchase of hams and turkeys and beef roasts on sale can provide the regular lunch meat products for your use at around \$4 per pound or less, with quality every bit as good as the best Boar's Head® products.

Now I will list explicitly what I do and the results I obtain. I buy eye roasts of beef, and I will cut them in half and vacuum seal and freeze the pieces until I am ready to use them, individually. I thaw one and I remove any fat that might be present on a surface, and I bake it for 45 minutes at 350 degrees F. I then process the hot meat with my meat slicer to create thin slices. I immediately vacuum seal ¼ lb. quantities in small vacuum sealing bags and then I simply refrigerate the product. It is medium rare roast beef. It is tender and juicy and delicious. It has a proven shelf life of at least four weeks. And my cost was (in 2012) \$3.49 per pound. In other words, it is idiotic to buy roast beef at the delicatessen for \$12 per pound and have it spoil within a week. Why the ¼ lb. quantities? Because that is the amount you are likely to use to make two nice sandwiches, so I am being economical in opening a package and using all the contents while they are fresh. I do not have to worry about any amount of the product spoiling.

Periodically I will buy three to five pounds of sliced dried beef from Fisher's Country Store if I happen to be in their area. Or, I call Martin's Country Market

and place my order and they ship dried beef to me whole, unsliced. The high salt content of the dried beef allows for shipping without refrigeration during winter months. The last time I purchased it the price was \$8.99 per pound, plus shipping cost, which is very economical compared to other online sources for dried beef (up to \$18 per pound plus shipping, which is an absurd rip-off), and the quality is very superior from Martin's, the very best I have found. I vacuum seal small amounts when I decide to slice some, and I will refrigerate that. The refrigerated vacuum-sealed product has a shelf life of approximately a year but I recommend using it within three months. When I get the whole roast I vacuum seal and refrigerate that after each time I slice some for near term use.

The pork loin process is virtually identical to the roast beef process except the smaller loins, in terms of diameter, get to cook all the way through during baking, which is essential to safety when processing raw pork. Pork loins can often be purchased for \$2.50 per pound and that is contrasted to paying around \$10 to \$11 per pound at the delicatessen. It is important not to bake the pork longer than absolutely necessary or it will dry out and be far less enjoyable when used, so I highly recommend checking it for internal doneness, visually or with an instant read thermometer to a temperature of 160 degrees F, in five minute intervals after 30 minutes of baking. You can do that visually by cutting a loin in half and simply looking at it. If it is pink it needs further baking. If there is no pink or pink juices then it is done. Remove it from the oven immediately and process it with your meat slicer and vacuum sealer immediately, to retain all the internal moisture, which will keep it tender and most enjoyable when used later. If you want to be tricky about retaining moisture you can do the baking with the pork loin wrapped/sealed in aluminum foil, and/or baking it with a casserole of water in the oven to provide moisture along with the heat.

I buy hams when they are on sale, either a butt portion that will normally be baked or a spiral ham that is pre-sliced and ready to eat. Sometimes the butt portion hams are fully cooked so no baking is necessary. I try to avoid the brands that are water-logged and opt for the more expensive brands that provide the best quality for dollar spent. The better brands, like Deitz and Watson®, or Leidy® use superior curing and/or smoking processes (depending on the type of pork product) and thus they taste better. You may have to do some research in your geographic area to identify the best brands of ham. The key point is to buy these products only when they are on sale, and that is no problem because after you process and vacuum seal the slices they will have a refrigerator shelf life of up to two months and longer. Cheaper water logged hams, even after vacuum sealing, will develop a biofilm sliminess after a few weeks, which is bacteria (often Listeria) so don't keep that lower quantity ham around, even if vacuum

sealed and refrigerated, for more than two weeks, as the quality (taste) and safety degrade considerably.

Here is a new trick I figured out for getting far better value from butt portions of hams purchased from the supermarket. Cut the ham, as purchased, into 1/2" thick slices, removing all skin and any easily removed fat. Place pieces one layer thick in large vacuum sealing bags, leave them open at the end, then heat the ham pieces in each bag, individually, until they produce steam. Let each bag of ham pieces cool to the point they are not steaming, then vacuum seal the bag and refrigerate the ham pieces. They will not get slimy from the added chemicals used by the producer or from bacteria. There will be no live bacteria present to cause a safety issue. When you later open a bag there will be a small amount of fat that was rendered from the ham when you microwaved it. But the pieces of ham are perfect. So much for the stupidity of what producers do to the store bought butt portions of hams. You eliminate all the causes they allow to exist that promote the fairly quick spoilage of the hams. What a great learning experience!

I used to purchase hard salami and prosciutto ham as end cuts sold by Market Basket® in bulk vacuum sealed packs for very low prices, which means about \$2.50 per pound for the truly excellent salami and \$4.50 per pound for the prosciutto ham. I use my meat slicer to create thin slices of each product and then package the slices in vacuum sealing bags and process them as discussed above. The shelf life of these meats was always at least six months. Too bad they stopped selling the end cuts!

When I decide to roast a turkey it is a whole turkey that I have purchased on sale at less than \$1 per pound and kept frozen in the deep freeze until I decide to use it. The directions for roasting turkey are within the Fowl section of Food Nirvana. I will use all of the meat on the turkey in different ways but the breast meat is what I use for making sliced lunch meat. I process it through my meat slicer while it is hot and juicy and I immediately vacuum seal 1/4 lb. portions and then refrigerate it. It is superb as a lunch meat. It has a shelf life of about four weeks.

I have one parting thought about preparing lunch meat now that I have started using the Sous Vide method for low temperature cooking of various meats prior to finishing by grilling or frying or searing. The idea is that meat cooked only to the perfect temperature within vacuum sealed bags in a water bath, long enough to kill any bacteria, will be very juicy and tender. This applies equally well to beef (130 degrees F for medium rare), pork (145 degrees F) or turkey or chicken (148 degrees F), remembering to allow one hour for cuts one inch thick or less, or more time according to thickness to be certain the innermost meat is at the held temperature for at least 30 minutes. After that process you can further cook the

meat to achieve surface effects if you want, or, you can process it directly with a meat slicer and then vacuum seal and refrigerate it in single use portions. Note that I have just begun experimenting with this technique, so while I am confident about the safety I have yet to develop guaranteed recipes for an excellent end product suitable for inclusion into Food Nirvana. Perhaps you can beat me to that goal and tell me what you recommend.

Well, that concludes my advice about Food Nirvana techniques for having superior lunch meats, inexpensively. Overall the work to do what I do is trivial. Most of us simply never think about how much money we waste both in the initial purchase and later discarded spoiled product when we buy cold/lunch meats from a supermarket delicatessen

SEAFOOD:

A Short Seafood Cooking Primer

One might say the world of cooks is divided neatly into two categories ... those who overcook for fallacious safety reasons, and thus destroy the pleasure of eating food, not to mention nutrition values, and those who actually understand how to cook to maximize enjoyment. This simple truth applies to any cooked food ... vegetables, fruits, baked goods, meats ... you name it ... but it especially applies to the cooking of seafood.

I think you already know what I am about to say. All seafood is delicate and is easily destroyed by overcooking, whether that is boiling, steaming, frying, grilling or baking. Overcooked seafood is dry and tough. Properly cooked seafood is tender and moist.

Beyond texture, overcooking seafood changes the taste from sweet and succulent to virtually tasteless ... a bit like the cooks who overcook the seafood. Well, if you are the one dining, your opinion of the cook will not be good.

Conversely, if the person cooking your seafood is knowledgeable and talented you are in for very nice pleasure, and the cook will have your liking and respect.

With that lead-in I have to be brief so as not to make this Primer long instead of short. I have listed just a few of the most important points below.

- 1. High heat (300 degrees F or higher) is perfectly fine when baking, frying or grilling seafood. It is the cooking time that toughens flesh, typically by drying it out, ergo losing essential moisture from the flesh instead of locking it in.**
- 2. Don't cook seafood in a dry environment. Use oils or butter, batters, water, steam ... whatever will help maintain the moisture in the seafood, yet help cook it. The easiest examples are batters used when frying that lock in moisture, or butter on the surface of fish when baking.**
- 3. Minimize the cooking time. Seafood is so delicate that any effort you make to "be sure" that it is cooked is most likely to destroy it. Properly cooked seafood is barely beyond raw. If that bothers you then simply consider sushi and sashimi ... when prepared from fresh seafood they are perfectly healthy to eat.**
- 4. You typically don't want translucent flesh, as that means the seafood is still raw, unless, of course, you are having sushi or sashimi. That means you should check the interior of what you are cooking until you gain enough experience to**

time your cooking with confidence ... based on the type of cooking and on the thickness of what is being cooked and on the heat level and type of heat being used.

5. A simple example is the cooking of a fish chowder, where the entire chowder is cooked before adding the raw pieces of fish, after which the chowder temperature is maintained barely at a simmer to allow gentle cooking and a short cooking period, to keep the fish tender.

Okay ... that's it. When you see directions for cooking any individual seafood dish in Food Nirvana, follow those directions carefully. Use a timer. Use an instant read thermometer. Do these things until you become an expert and can sense what to do automatically.

Baked Haddock - 😊♥

My local supermarket had a sale on fresh skinless haddock filets at a very low cost ... \$4.99 per pound. Typically fresh haddock filets sell for \$8.99 to \$10.99 per pound. The reason for the low sale price? The filets were small, perhaps one half inch thick, two and one half inches wide, and eight or nine inches long. They were advertised as "chowder" fish. I saw this as an opportunity to lay in a nice supply of haddock for multiple end uses.

The reality is that the small haddock filets can be used for any typical haddock recipe quite successfully. About the only reservation I might have is using them for kabobs over a hot charcoal grill as the thin areas around the edges could easily overcook and become hard and dry. In any event, I bought more than three pounds of the small filets and later vacuum sealed them in roughly 12 ounce amounts and put them into the deep freeze for later use.

Later I decided to use one package to make baked haddock ... just a small amount for two of us for dinner. I did not have a recipe for baked haddock and I never had any baked haddock in the past that I truly enjoyed. Why? I have two reasons ... 1) I really like fried battered haddock best, and 2) I've never experienced baked haddock as being very tasty due to herbs used in typical recipes. Frankly I despise the use of dill or tarragon with fish, for all they do is hide or overpower whatever delicate flavor is natural to the fish.

Thus, my challenge was to create my own recipe using whatever I considered to be good ... something so unconventional that I never saw it anywhere. That was easy. The combination of butter, lemon juice, salt, smoked paprika, chopped basil and chopped parsley came to mind immediately. Both herbs would contribute to flavor while allowing the fish flavor to come through nicely.

You likely have not seen other recipes calling for frozen fresh herbs, but they process well for this type of recipe. What I often do is take fresh herbs, wash them and shake off excess water, cut off and discard the stems, then bag and vacuum seal the herbs in roughly two ounce amounts and then put them into the deep freeze for later use. Thus, when I later process them they are frozen, flat and packed tightly together and easy to cut and dice, and they then thaw quickly. You do not have to do what I do with the herbs. Simply use fresh, washed herbs and compress them after chopping to get amounts about twice what is called for in this recipe where I use compacted frozen herbs.

In short, my recipe was a complete success. Peggy and I both loved the baked haddock. The flavor was excellent and totally different from anything I ever had before. So I had another fine recipe to include in Food Nirvana.

One important note to include right up front is that the baking should be done at a lower than normal oven temperature (300 degrees F) and for a very short time, like 20 to 30 minutes maximum, as the thin filets cook through quickly. You don't want to make the fish dry ... keep it moist and tender. Actually, the fish filets I used were still partially frozen when I initially put them into the baking dish, so that impacted the necessary baking time. In short, check the fish after 15 minutes of baking and every five minutes after that and remove the fish from the oven immediately when the filets are barely cooked through.

The fish is best if served hot immediately after baking so prepare all the other items you plan to serve with the meal before baking the fish. We happened to make a lightly seasoned macaroni salad and the combination was delicious and complementary. A nice light Pinot Grigio wine is a fine beverage for the meal.

The recipe I provide below is scaled up slightly to use one pound of haddock, or, enough for two typical adult servings. You can scale up the recipe easily. For example, you might use an 9" by 13" baking dish and 1 1/2 lbs. of haddock filets, etc., and serve three adults or two adults and two children. Enough said. Be gentle and win, big time.

Ingredients: (two adult servings)

1 lb. of thin fresh haddock filets

1/4 lb. of butter, divided

Fresh lemon juice from 1/2 of a large lemon

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

3/4 tsp. of smoked paprika

2 tbsp. of frozen chopped fresh basil (or twice that amount of fresh, compacted chopped basil leaves)

2 tbsp. of frozen chopped fresh parsley (or twice that amount of fresh, compacted chopped parsley)

Directions:

Set the oven temperature to 300 degrees F.

Wash the fresh fish and then cut each filet in half crosswise.

Cut half of the butter into 1/4" thick pats and distribute them evenly into an 8" by 8" baking dish.

Fit the cut fish pieces into the baking dish on top of the butter, one layer thick.

Put the other half of the butter with the salt and the paprika into a microwave safe bowl.

Add the lemon juice and the chopped basil and chopped parsley to the bowl.

Microwave the bowl contents just until the butter has mostly melted.

Stir the bowl contents to mix the ingredients well.

Spoon the bowl contents over the fish filets as evenly as you can.

Bake the fish for 15 minutes and check a thicker filet piece for doneness by cutting through it.

Continue to bake the fish, if necessary, until there is no shiny area in the middle interior of the filet you check, but be sure to check for doneness every five minutes.

Remove the fish from the oven and serve it with whatever other items you planned for your meal.

Your guests may well want to spoon some of the liquid in the baking dish over the filets. It is very tasty. Also, the use of sea salt was very limited in this recipe so your guests may want to season the fish with sea salt.

Your guests will be highly pleased and surprised and you will get nice compliments.

Beer Batter Fried Shrimp - ☺♥

This recipe is originally from the Culinary Institute's book, *The Professional Chef*©. I tried it and it is really good (with some improvements of mine and especially those of J. Kenji Lopez-Alt), and I edited it for Food Nirvana to include missing instructions to help less experienced cooks.

The best parts are that the batter tastes really good and the fried shrimp is not in any way oily or greasy. The batter seals instantly and keeps out the cooking oil. Beyond that, any leftovers can later be put into hot cooking oil to reheat them and they come out just fine, not oily.

This is basically a Chinese food recipe that calls for the use of a dipping sauce at serving time. I made a light tasting Chinese barbecue sauce and I plan to try other sauces for variations. My sauce recipe is provided following the shrimp recipe below.

The batter quantity produced from the recipe below is more than sufficient for three pounds of butterflied extra large or jumbo shrimp so you may want to halve the batter ingredients. Alternatively, you can batter dip some small pieces of fresh vegetables, like broccoli florets, and make a version of tempura with the extra batter.

I found the taste of the fried shrimp to be delightfully mild and thus perfect for use with a dipping sauce. If you want to eat the shrimp without using a dipping sauce you might try increasing the amounts of the seasonings in the batter.

Note: Having made the fried shrimp using this batter, I found the ratio of flour to beer produced a batter that was too thick. I thus cut the flour from 1 1/2 cups to 1 cup. I also noted too much puffing of the batter so I cut the number of eggs from two to one. Overall this makes a thinner batter which I found to be superior. You should experiment with the beer/flour ratio to create a batter that pleases you.

Ingredients:

2 lbs. of extra large or jumbo raw shrimp, shelled and butterflied

1 or 2 extra large eggs

8 to 10 oz. of very cold beer

2 oz. of ice cold vodka

1 cup of all purpose flour (or 1/2 cup all purpose flour and 1/2 cup of white rice flour)

1/2 tsp. salt

1/2 tsp. white pepper

1/2 tsp. allspice

1/2 tsp. (or more) of grated fresh ginger root (Or pre-minced ginger in a jar, available at Asian markets.)

1/2 tsp. baking powder

1 cup of cornstarch in a wide bowl for dredging

2 quarts of soybean oil for frying

A frying or candy thermometer

Directions:

Chill all of the measured batter ingredients and the batter bowl in the refrigerator prior to making the batter, except for the vodka, which can be put into the freezer.

Shell, wash and butterfly the shrimp, making sure to clean out any dark waste while butter flying. Note that butter flying is a process where you cut through the inside curve of the shrimp almost all the way through so that you can spread the still connected halves out flat into a symmetric approximate butterfly shape. Put the butterflied pieces on a plate that has a paper towel on it. The shrimp pieces should not be laying in water as they should be moist before dredging but not wet.

Prewarm your oven to 200° F. Put a china plate or wide shallow bowl/serving dish into the oven to later hold the fried shrimp and help keep them warm after they are served.

Put the soybean oil into a one to two gallon pot or a wok (I like the wok) and heat it to 360° F on medium heat while you are preparing the batter. If necessary you can adjust the heat to high to get to the right temperature when you are ready to start frying, but keep an eye on the temperature so that it does not exceed 360° F. Note that the oil can be reused multiple times, until it starts to darken, for fried seafood of various types. It should be poured into a separate sealable container through a sieve after it has cooled. Discard everything except the clear oil, and that includes the last part of the oil from the bottom of the pot that has

accumulated various kinds of gunk in it from the frying process. Do not ever use oil that has been used previously to fry seafood for frying other types of food as there will be a seafood taste overtone to non-seafood items if you make that mistake.

Whisk the egg(s) well in the chilled two quart bowl. Add the beer and the vodka slowly while mixing gently. It will foam a lot.

Add all the dry ingredients except the cornstarch together and mix them with each other, if you haven't already done so, and then add that mixture to the egg and beer mixture gradually and mix gently. Adjust the consistency as required with beer if it is too thick or with flour if it is too thin. Do not mix longer than necessary. A few lumps in the batter won't hurt anything, while over mixing will ruin the batter due to gluten formation.

Moisture variations in different flours may create the need to adjust consistency. The batter should not be thick and it should not be runny. You will know you have the right consistency when a piece of dredged shrimp coated with the batter holds a coating thickness of about 1/16th of an inch or less. This is a matter of personal preference so you can vary the batter thickness to suit yourself ... in other words, experiment. But do so quickly as the longer the batter sits the more gluten that will form, and you don't want that.

Dredge each piece of shrimp in the bowl of cornstarch, shake off the excess, dip the shrimp into the batter, making sure to coat it completely. Extract the coated shrimp with tongs, let the excess batter drip off for a few seconds and then immerse the coated shrimp directly into the heated oil that is at a temperature of 360° F. In other words, you do each piece one at a time, adding each piece to the oil until you have about six pieces in the oil.

Fry each piece for three to four minutes or, if necessary, longer, turning each piece over a few times during frying, until any given piece is light to medium gold in color, then extract that piece with tongs and let any excess oil drain from it back into the wok, and place the piece of fried shrimp on a paper towel. Using a wok for frying is great as it reduces oil splatter and makes turning the pieces of shrimp easy.

Place each completed batch into a 200° F warming oven on a paper towel covered plate to maintain a desirable eating temperature while other batches are being fried. Be sure the oil temperature is monitored and the heat adjusted as necessary so that the oil is at 360° F when each batch is fried.

Serve the shrimp immediately with an appropriate sauce. They are delicious! My dipping sauce recipe follows.

Ray's Light Barbecue Dipping Sauce: (makes two cups)

1 1/2 cups of Duck Sauce (Buy it in quart jars in any Asian market or in your supermarket.)

1 tsp. of Soy Sauce

3 tbsp. of rice vinegar

1 tbsp. of honey

1/4 tsp. of grated fresh ginger root

2 tbsp. of dry sherry

1/4 cup maraschino cherry juice

Mix all the ingredients together well and serve the sauce in individual portions in shallow bowls.

Blackened Redfish - ☺♥

This recipe is another Marie original in which I had a hand creating success. The dish is to die for great.

I have included this recipe mostly as a matter of nostalgia, for I haven't seen any Louisiana Redfish for sale in supermarkets since the late 1980's. Red Snapper is not Louisiana Redfish. The Redfish was mostly fished out in the 1980's due to popularity and ultimately destroyed by pollution from the Mississippi River. That was a horrible environmental tragedy no one wants admit was caused by business greed and long term environmental stupidity in river pollution leading to Gulf of Mexico "Dead Zones", caused both by fertilizer runoff and industrial pollution far north of Louisiana. Since that time the water quality has improved and there are now some Louisiana Redfish there but mostly it is a protected species from commercial fishing ... but read on.

If you can find a suitable variety of fish instead of Louisiana Redfish you can approximate the goodness of the original dish but never quite equal it. Redfish had a fairly high fat content, which made it ideal for very hot grilling. Today you might try swordfish or a few other varieties. I suggest you search the Internet for information about the fat content of various fish and pick one that appeals to you. According to a few websites I have visited recently the Redfish is commonly caught by sport fishermen off the west coast of Florida today, but I repeat my earlier thought ... have you seen any Redfish for sale in any fish market? I doubt it. Moratoriums imposed to stop commercial fishing for the Redfish are likely still in effect.

While visiting Jackson, Mississippi in 2012 I did find a fish wholesaler who has a source of Louisiana Redfish, for it is caught off the Gulf Coast of Mississippi and Florida in small quantities commercially. I leave it to you to seek a source for yourself.

Some words about very high temperature skillet cooking are in order. Do it outdoors on a charcoal grill or smoker where the clearance between the large cast iron skillet and the outside edge of the charcoal grill is about ½ inch to ¾ inch all the way around. The typical kitchen stove, even with natural gas and a large burner, will simply not provide sufficient heat for making this dish.

Even the charcoal grill, unassisted, will not do the job regardless of how many briquettes you use. The secret is to provide a high volume of air to the underside of the briquettes via a pipe into the bottom vent of the charcoal pan that is connected to a blower of some sort. You can use a hair dryer or the blower end of

a canister vacuum cleaner taped to a length of copper or iron pipe to connect the air source to the charcoal pan vent hole. The introduction of extra air through the bottom of the charcoal pan is the secret. It will cause the briquettes to turn white hot via a continuous bellows effect. Thus, do not do this over any flammable surface like a wooden deck unless you have a large fireproof pad underneath the grill.

It sounds crazy but I used the canister vacuum cleaner approach. I simply connected/taped the vacuum cleaner hose to a $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter copper pipe, which was in the form of an elbow with one end about two feet high such that the end of the pipe entered the bottom vent of the smoker grill that I used. I had a Brinkman® Smoker with a diameter about one inch larger than the largest cast iron skillet Marie owned. The charcoal pan for the smoker had a bottom vent hole slightly larger than $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

What I achieved was a powered air bellows effect by connecting the hose end to the blower end of the vacuum cleaner. I turned the vacuum cleaner on and off as needed to maintain the very high skillet temperature required. Each time I turned it on a puff of ash would blow out from the grill. Out of curiosity I left the system on with hot charcoal and no food in the skillet, and within two minutes the bottom of the heavy cast iron skillet was cherry red. That lets you know how the bellows approach feeds so much air to the hot charcoal that it literally turns white hot. That, my friend, provides all the heat you need, and more. Yes, you can do this stuff at home if you are determined to win. You could even become a blacksmith!

You must keep safety in mind at all times and do not let any children or adults near your cooking area. Burns and/or fire from white hot charcoal briquettes will turn joy into tragedy in a heartbeat.

Ingredients:

4, 7 to 8 oz. boneless skinless Redfish fillets

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted butter to hold seasonings on the surfaces of the fillets

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted butter for basting while cooking

1 tbsp. paprika

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. each of ground red, white and black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. of dried minced onion

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. dried thyme

¼ tsp. garlic powder

Directions:

Mix the dry spices together.

Rinse the fish fillets under cold water and dry them with paper towels.

Pre-heat a large cast iron skillet over very high heat, but not high enough to turn the iron orange in color. In short, the skillet should still be black in color.

Dip both sides of each fish fillet in the melted butter and then sprinkle both sides generously with the dry spice mixture, patting it to help it adhere to the fish.

Place the seasoned fillets on a plate individually as they are seasoned.

Pour a small amount of melted butter on one side of each fillet and put the fillets butter side down into the hot cast iron skillet.

Do not be alarmed by the rapid and intense smoking of the butter and the seasoning at the beginning of the cooking. It is part of the experience, thus, do this only outdoors.

Cook for three minutes on very high heat, then pour melted butter on the top surface of each fillet and flip them over with a long handled metal spatula and cook them for an additional three minutes.

Serve the fish immediately while the blackened fillets are hot. That means the other items for your meal had best be prepared prior to cooking the fish.

Enjoy the superb flavors, texture and juiciness, for the very hot grilling seals in moisture by rapid searing, and the high fat content of the fish makes the texture perfect. Now you understand why a lean type of fish flesh won't work as well in this recipe.

Chilean Sea Bass - 😊♥

This recipe produces a "to die for" delicious dish. The ingredient amounts listed are a minimum for two adults. Scale up as necessary to feed more people or more people with large appetites. I included the other meal items (baked sweet potato and steamed broccoli) I served with the fish in the directions below.

Ingredients:

Part I: (Making the basting oil)

- 1 tbsp. of Dried thyme**
- 1 tbsp. of Dried Parsley**
- 1 tbsp. of Rice vinegar**
- 1 tbsp. of water**
- 2 tbsp. of freshly chopped rosemary**
- 3 small garlic cloves, chopped fine**
- 2 thin slices of fresh lemon**
- 2 oz. of soybean oil**
- 1 1/2 oz. of Extra Virgin Olive oil**
- 1/2 tsp. of White pepper**
- 3/4 tsp. of Sea Salt**

Part II: (Initial sauté' of the fish)

- 1 lb. fillet of Chilean Sea Bass (skin removed, cut into two fillet pieces)**
- 2 tbsp. of Extra Virgin Olive oil**
- 4 tbsp. of Flour**
- 1/2 tsp. of Black pepper**
- 1/2 tsp. of Sea Salt**

Directions:

As indicated above, make the basting oil first. The ingredient quantities shown above will make enough basting oil for two pounds of fish so you can adjust the quantities as appropriate. Put the dried herbs into a small dish and add the rice vinegar and water. Use a fork to mix everything to hydrate the dried herbs. Put both oils into a small saucepan and mix them. Add the rosemary and the garlic, the lemon slices, the hydrated herbs and the salt and pepper, then mix. Heat on medium until small bubbles indicate the water is starting to boil off. Place the pan in a 210°F oven and heat the basting oil for one hour. This will develop the flavor.

I decided to serve the Chilean Sea Bass with a large baked sweet potato, so you can wrap the potato in aluminum foil and bake at 400°F for 80 minutes. Double wall ovens are good to have so you don't have to struggle with limited equipment. The idea is that the potato is baking in one oven at the same time the basting oil is in the other oven, and the 20 minute period left after removing the basting oil is the time when the fish is cooked and the broccoli is steamed.

Once the basting oil is done you can move on to the fish and the broccoli. I served fresh broccoli steamed just enough to make it semi-tender (it retains the deep green color). It takes about 10 minutes to steam starting with a few ounces of cold water at the bottom of a steamer, on medium heat, so I started that after the initial fish sauté described below had begun.

Now to the fish. The general idea is to sauté the flour/salt/pepper coated fish on each side for four minutes to develop some crispness to the outside and to do most of the cooking inside the fish pieces. Then a second sauté is done with the basting oil for about two minutes on each side. This finishes cooking the inside and it produces a final crispness with a coating of the herbs, which is where this dish gets its wonderful flavor. Details follow.

Mix the flour, pepper and salt together. Heat the oil in a skillet on medium heat. Note that raw fish pieces of different thicknesses should be accommodated ...thinner piece(s) might be cooked for less time on each side, ergo, removed from the heat while finishing the thicker piece(s) to avoid overcooking. What I did was cut the thicker piece of raw fish into three pieces making them the same thickness (about ¾" to one inch) as the other primary piece. Thus, all pieces cooked the same amount of time and I didn't have to worry about doneness or overcooking. The four minute and later two minute sauté periods are based on having raw fish pieces ¾" to one inch thick.

Cover the fish pieces with the flour mixture. Place them in the heated oil and sauté on each side for four minutes. They should be light to medium tan on each side.

Add the butter to the skillet and let it melt. Remove the basting oil from the oven and discard the lemon slices. Then mix the basting oil and ladle it onto each piece of fish generously two times. Turn the pieces over with a spatula. Ladle the basting oil and herbs onto the top side of the fish pieces a few times. Cook for one minute on each side. Repeat this process for both sides of the fish, for a total basting cooking time of about four minutes. The herbs will become somewhat darkened during the final sauté periods ... just don't let the oil smoke ... lower the heat to low if necessary. At this point the fish is ready to serve. Place the pieces on a warmed platter (Do you remember the 210 degree F oven you used for the basting oil? It is a great place to warm all serving dishes and the plates you will use during the meal) and ladle a small amount of the basting oil over each piece.

Serve the meal quickly to keep the fish hot. The taste of the herbs and the taste, consistency and moistness of the fish will knock your socks off, guaranteed! The sweet potato and broccoli are perfect complements, each served with butter.

Oh ... lest I forget ... Chilean Sea Bass from a first class seafood market is not cheap. I paid \$13.99 per pound in 2008, and it was perfectly fresh (firm with no fish odor) and worth every cent (and now, in 2012 it costs around \$18 per pound!). Removing the skin is difficult so have a good filleting knife or fine serrated blade kitchen knife to help you remove the skin without wasting fish. You can scrape/cut directly against the skin as you remove it without cutting through the skin ... it is pretty tough.

Chinese Fried Shrimp - ☺♥

I wanted to make perfect Chinese fried shrimp as a standalone dish, so I could later add a small piece of partially fried bacon to each shrimp before frying the shrimp and then make Wor Dip Har, which is fried, butterflied shrimp with bacon, served over rice along with a light, sweet barbecue sauce.

During early planning I combined two recipes I found to make superior fried shrimp that are great as is served with sweet Thai chili sauce. I am very pleased with the results, and beholden to the great Chinese cook who provided 90% of this recipe.

Later, I smiled thinking about how a relatively simple recipe like this one can easily become a teaching recipe on batter dipped seafood frying. So it is.

The batter in this recipe fries nicely crisp outside and perfect inside so it will also be excellent to use for frying fish at 360 degrees F, or even for making shrimp or vegetable tempuras with a higher starting oil temperature of 375 degrees F (that reduces to 350 degrees F during frying).

I found that eight extra large shrimp were enough for one generous adult serving, so the recipe as given below serves two adults. Note that the given weight (1/2 lb.) is that of fresh or thawed fresh shrimp that have already been shelled and cleaned.

If you decide to include servings of steamed rice and stir fried vegetables with the fried shrimp you will have a complete, delicious meal. Also, a chilled light white wine like Sauvignon Blanc is a fine beverage to serve with the shrimp.

Ingredients: (makes two servings of 8 fried extra large shrimp)

1/2 lb. of raw, extra large, shelled, cleaned shrimp (16 shrimp)

1 tbsp. of light soy sauce (for the marinade)

1 tbsp. of Shaoxing wine (for the marinade)

1 cup of cornstarch for coating the marinated shrimp

1/2 cup of all purpose flour for the batter

1/2 cup of rice flour for the batter

1/2 cup of cornstarch for the batter

1 extra large egg

1 tsp. of baking powder

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

3 tbsp. of canola oil

A pinch of white pepper

1 cup of water

One or two quarts of peanut oil for frying the shrimp (depending on the size of the skillet)

1/2 cup of sweet Thai chili sauce (for dipping the fried shrimp at serving time)

Directions:

Make sure the shelled, cleaned shrimp are patted dry on the surface using a few paper towels.

Mix the shrimp with the light soy sauce and the Shaoxing wine in a Ziploc® quart size freezer bag, and marinate them for 30 minutes. Be sure to seal the bag without air pockets in it (expel the air by flattening the bag before sealing it). Turn the bag over once or twice while the shrimp are marinating.

Whisk the egg in a one quart bowl. Add the canola oil and the water and whisk the mixture. Add the 1/2 cup of flour, 1/2 cup of rice flour, 1/2 cup of cornstarch, and the baking powder, sea salt, garlic powder and white pepper.

Whisk the ingredients together until they are well combined. Let the batter rest in the refrigerator, covered with plastic wrap, for 30 minutes.

After 30 minutes, whisk the batter and maybe add a small amount of water (one or two tablespoons) to thin it while whisking, so it doesn't coat the shrimp with a thick layer of batter. The reason the batter may become thick is the gluten formation that happens during the 30 minutes of refrigeration.

Note: Most of the batter should drip or run off a piece of shrimp after it is dipped and then extracted from the batter using tongs. The final batter thickness on the surface of the shrimp before frying should be no more than 1/16th of an inch. That is how you know the batter has the proper viscosity.

Put 1 cup of cornstarch into a wide shallow bowl. Coat all of the marinated shrimp with the cornstarch and put them on a plate in a single layer.

Put a serving plate and individual serving saucers into a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Heat the peanut oil at a depth of 1 1/2 inches on medium high heat in a deep skillet to 350 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer to measure and to help maintain the temperature. Vary the heat as necessary during frying to maintain the temperature at or close to 350 degrees F.

Put the marinated, cornstarch coated shrimp into the bowl of batter in groups of four, then individually use each group of four batter coated shrimp for frying.

Take one marinated, cornstarch coated, battered shrimp at a time from the batter using tongs, then let the excess batter drip/run off, then carefully place the shrimp in the hot oil using the tongs, holding each shrimp half way into the oil for five seconds before totally releasing it into the oil.

Fry the shrimp for 3 minutes, then turn the shrimp over and fry for another 3 minutes. If they are pale gold they are done frying and it is time to take them out of the hot oil with the tongs. If they are not yet pale gold then turn the shrimp over again twice, frying for 1 to 2 minutes on each side.

Do not overcrowd shrimp in the skillet or they will stick together. It is best to do the frying in four batches unless you use a large (12" diameter) skillet. If you are using the large size skillet you can increase the batch size to eight battered shrimp.

After frying the first batch, remove the shrimp individually from the hot oil with tongs and put those shrimp on a paper towel for 1 minute, then put them into the 200 degrees F warming oven on a paper towel lined serving plate. Repeat the earlier battering and frying steps for the remaining batch(es) of cornstarch coated shrimp.

After the last batch of shrimp has been fried and removed from the hot oil, serve all the shrimp hot on the pre-warmed serving plate, along with a small (1/2 cup) bowl of sweet Thai chili sauce.

Your guests can take turns dipping each fried shrimp into the sweet chili sauce, then eating it, etc.

I hope you remember to serve the chilled Sauvignon Blanc wine (or other chilled beverage) to your guests.

Enjoy!

Cold Smoked Lox - ☺♥♥♥☺

Making cold smoked lox at home is something I wanted to do for a long time so I went looking on the Internet to find a good recipe. This recipe is one I modified and it uses liquid smoke flavoring to create cured cold smoked salmon (Lox), not cooked smoked salmon.

Note that lox is raw fish that has been cured with a salt and sugar mixture. And it is delicious! Use pieces of it with cream cheese, thin onion slices and maybe also capers on crackers or inside a cut bagel. Sometimes I use thinly sliced shallots instead of onion slices. Whatever way you serve it you can count on it being delicious.

Here is a quick recipe for making a fine hors d'ouvres with your lox ... Put 8 ounces of room temperature cream cheese into an electric mixer. Add 2 tbsp. of heavy cream. Mix on low speed for two minutes. Use a spatula to scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl and mix again for two minutes. Add 1/2 cup of finely diced sweet onion and 1/3 cup of capers, then mix on low speed for two minutes. Use the spatula to scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl and again mix for two minutes. Serve this spread in a bowl along with a knife for spreading it on crackers. Cut about 1 lb. of 1/8" thick lox slices into 2" long pieces and arrange the pieces on a plate, along with a fork. Serve a bowl of club crackers or the crackers of your choice. Spread the cream cheese mixture on a cracker, about 1/4" thick, then put on a piece of lox, then enjoy! These are delicious and easy to make and eat (they don't fall apart). Do not make the hors d'ouvres in advance of when you plan to eat them, for the moisture from the cream cheese mixture will make the crackers soggy/soft.

I was so impressed by the ease of making lox and the perfect quality that I decided to look for a variety of different sandwich recipes to demonstrate how this seafood has true versatility. You can look in the Food Nirvana section on Sandwich Stuff and find the Lox Sandwich Variations recipe ingredients. It is definitely worth the read.

Ingredients:

1 pound of fresh salmon fillet, skin on and any bones removed

½ cup of Kosher salt

½ cup of brown sugar (packed)

1 tbsp. of Wright's® hickory flavored liquid smoke

Directions:

Rinse the salmon fillet with water, then pat it dry with paper towels and lay it on a plate.

Wet the top and side surfaces (but not the skin) of the salmon fillet with the hickory flavored liquid smoke.

Whisk the salt and sugar together in a bowl.

Lay out an 18" long piece of 12" wide plastic wrap on a counter.

Pour half of the salt and sugar mixture onto the middle of the plastic wrap, covering an area the size of the salmon fillet, then lay the salmon fillet on top, skin side down.

Cover the top and sides of the salmon fillet with the remaining salt and sugar mixture.

Fold the plastic wrap around the salmon making it tight, then wrap a second layer of plastic wrap around it.

Vacuum seal the packaged salmon and simply refrigerate it, or alternatively, put it into a Ziploc® plastic bag and seal the bag after expelling most of the air. Then put the bag into a glass casserole and weigh it down with a second smaller casserole that has anything heavy in it, like two large cans of plum tomatoes.

Refrigerate the salmon for two days while it is curing, turning it over twice per day.

Unwrap the cold smoked salmon and rinse the cure mixture from it using cold water at your sink faucet.

You now have Cold Smoked Lox. But you need to soak it in batches of cold water for 30 minutes to eliminate the cure from the surface completely.

Put one quart of cold water into a two quart bowl.

Place the lox into the water and keep it submerged for 10 minutes. Repeat this two times with fresh cold water.

Remove the lox from the water, rinse it and pat it dry with paper towels.

Put the Lox on a wood cutting board.

The final step in preparing the lox is to cut very thin slices of it away from the skin. And then discard the skin.

Cut the lox fillet with a very sharp 10" or 12" long knife crossways starting from the thin edge (tail) and cutting toward the thick edge, on a 15 to 20 degree angle from the horizontal, keeping the slices no more than 1/8" to 3/16" thick. Do not cut into the skin. Do not remove any slices (intentionally) until the entire fillet has been cut. Then cut off individual slices by holding the knife flat against the bottom of the lox, between it and the skin, and gently slice the lox to free the individual slices of lox from the skin. Cut away and discard any edge of tan flesh from each piece, then put the lox pieces on a plate. Discard the skin.

Vacuum seal the lox (or wrap it tightly in plastic wrap and put it inside a sealable plastic bag) and refrigerate the slices in multiple packages so you can use a little at a time and keep the remainder fresh. Use the refrigerated lox within two weeks or freeze it for up to three months. Note, if you decide to freeze it, do it between sheets of parchment paper on a baking tray until it is frozen. Then vacuum seal or wrap and bag the frozen pieces of lox and put the bags back into the freezer until you want to use them.

Enjoy!

Crab Cakes - 😊♥♥♥😊

This recipe feeds two adults two large (thick) crab cakes each, or three adults two medium size crab cakes each, using pasteurized lump crabmeat, canned, and it is expensive (\$26/lb.) You can find it in the seafood section of better supermarkets and typically at discount chains like Costco®.

Note that cans of pasteurized lump crabmeat must be kept refrigerated until they are used. And that lump crabmeat is far superior to regular canned crabmeat that was cooked/boiled at a higher temperature.

Ingredients: (makes four large or six medium size crab cakes)

1, 16 oz. can of pasteurized lump crabmeat

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

1/2 cup of bread crumbs

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 cup of finely diced onion

1/2 cup of finely diced green pepper

1 extra large or jumbo egg

1/2 stick of butter, divided

Directions:

Some people like tartar sauce with crab cakes, so you might want to make that in advance with sweet relish (1/4 cup) and mayonnaise (1/2 cup), mixed. Heat aficionados can add 1/2 tsp. of Sriracha sauce to that mix. Set the tartar sauce aside.

Whisk the egg in a two quart bowl, then add the crabmeat and mix well. Add the salt, pepper, mayonnaise, diced onion and green pepper and mix well. Add the bread crumbs and mix thoroughly.

Melt 1/4 stick of butter in a large (12" diameter) non-stick skillet on medium heat. Coat the bottom of your spatula lightly with some of the melted butter.

Form four large or six medium patties with the crabmeat mixture by hand and place them well spaced from each other in the skillet. Flatten the patties slightly

with the spatula to create flat top and bottom surfaces. They should be about 1/2" to 3/4" thick, depending on whether you make six or four crab cakes.

Sauté the crab cake patties for about five minutes on the first side on medium low to medium heat or until they have a rich golden surface color. Then melt the other 1/4 stick of butter in the skillet and flip the patties over with the spatula and again sauté until the second side is golden in color.

Serve and enjoy the crab cakes, and you surely will enjoy these perfect crab cakes. They are loaded with fine crabmeat instead of too many breadcrumbs or other fillers like you find in many restaurants.

Crab cakes go well with many other dishes. I like them with French fries and coleslaw. Recipes for both are in Food Nirvana.

Ice cold beer is a fine beverage to serve with crab cakes, or sodas for the young guests.

Variations:

Crab cake sandwiches are another great choice. Put the finished crab cakes on a plate in a warm 200°F oven, then butter and grill the inside surfaces of a Big Marty's® or similar sandwich bun (the ones with sesame seeds) for each sandwich, in the same skillet you used for making the crab cakes. Grill the buns on medium heat to a light golden brown. Serve the crab cakes and grilled buns with Iceberg lettuce leaves and your favorite tartar sauce.

If you are feeding more than two adults, consider frying some Virginia country ham (not Smithfield® ham), very thinly sliced, to accompany the crab, for the different taste sensations complement each other and result in pure pleasure. But don't make crab cakes. Heat all of the crab mixture gently in a skillet in the melted 1/2 stick of butter with a small amount (1 tsp.) of sugar added. Then serve scoops of the buttery, sweetened crabmeat, sprinkled lightly with paprika, over the thin slices of hot, fried country ham. Wow! The buttery, moist and sweet seafood taste vs. the drier, saltier ham taste is superb. And you definitely want French fries and coleslaw to round out that combination.

Where's my Corona®?

Crab with Lobster Sauce - 😊♥

I developed this premium crab recipe in a manner similar to that used for making Shrimp with Lobster Sauce, with some additional ingredients to intensify the flavors. Why? My sweetheart Peggy doesn't like shrimp or lobster, but she will eat some other shellfish. I consider that to be her loss, but then, this variation is quite nice, so we both are happy.

I hope you make this Crab with Lobster Sauce as it is quite tasty ... also expensive as canned premium lump crabmeat costs about \$32/lb. in the year 2024. You can certainly substitute fresh shrimp for the crabmeat if you like, to save money. I suggest using one pound of peeled, chopped raw shrimp and one pound of peeled, unchopped raw shrimp if you decide to do the substitution.

Once you have the ingredients assembled/processed, and the rice cooked, it takes only ten minutes to prepare this Crab with Lobster Sauce in a wok.

We enjoy a chilled, crisp white wine like sauvignon blanc with this type of food.

Ingredients: (4 servings)

1 lb. of canned premium lump crabmeat

8 oz. of ground lean pork

4 tablespoons of canola oil

2 cups of Bok Choy (chopped)

2 large cloves of garlic (minced)

2 tablespoons of Shaoxing wine

2 tablespoons of light soy sauce

3 cups of chicken broth

1 teaspoon of sesame oil

1/2 teaspoon of sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of ground white pepper

1 cup of frozen peas, thawed

4 tablespoons of cornstarch

4 tablespoons of water

2 eggs (beaten slightly)

1 large Shallot (thinly sliced)

1/3 cup of chopped fresh chives

5 cups of jasmine (or basmati) rice (steamed)

Directions:

Prepare the rice by heating one quart of water to a boil in a two quart saucepan, covered. Then mix in two cups of uncooked jasmine (or basmati) rice. Cover the saucepan and put it on a very small burner on very low heat. Let the rice steam, covered, for 15 minutes, then remove it from the heat and set it aside. At serving time put the rice into a large bowl.

Boil 2 cups of water in a wok and stir in the ground pork. Break up any clumps and cook for about 1 minute, until the pork is no longer pink. Drain the pork in a mesh strainer and give it a hot tap water rinse. That last step will help produce a clearer, attractive sauce.

Clean the wok and heat it over medium high heat. Add the canola oil, thinly sliced shallot and minced garlic and stir fry for 30 seconds.

Add the pork and stir fry for one minute, then add the wine and the light soy sauce and stir fry for 30 seconds.

Add the Bok Choy and stir fry for one minute.

Add the chicken broth, sesame oil, sugar, salt, and white pepper. Stir in the peas.

Let the mixture heat to a simmer, then gently stir in the crabmeat.

Combine the cornstarch and water into a slurry, and stir most of it into the sauce in small additions.

Let the mixture bubble and thicken for a minute or two. It should be able to coat a spoon, but it shouldn't be overly thick. If it is too thick, add a little more chicken broth and stir. If it is too thin, add the rest of the slurry and stir.

Mix the chopped chives with the slightly beaten eggs.

Spread the eggs and chives mixture across the top of the crab with lobster sauce and let it simmer for 10 seconds. Then use a spatula or a large spoon to fold the egg mixture into the sauce with a few strokes.

Serve the Crab With Lobster Sauce over the rice in individual serving bowls.

A chilled crisp white wine like sauvignon blanc is a fine beverage to serve with this meal.

Enjoy!

Fried Calamari - ☺♥

Fried calamari, done really well, is superb!

I wanted to make fried calamari for a long time but I lacked a good recipe. What I show below is a hybrid recipe I created from the best ones I found on the Internet. It is excellent.

My experiences eating fried calamari in restaurants varied from fabulous to awful. Typically, the awful ones were fried too long, the coating was dark and the calamari rings tough to chew, and the provided dipping sauce was some strongly flavored red pasta sauce instead of a simple marinara sauce. That set of mistakes was an easily avoided disgrace. When I had fabulous fried calamari, they were crisp and light in color and tender inside, and sometimes tossed with moist, diced pickled hot peppers, along with a mild dipping sauce.

If you like fried calamari be sure to try this recipe. It is easy to find nice cleaned calamari tubes in the seafood section of the better supermarkets. But do make sure they are fresh, light in color and firm to the touch. There should be no fishy odor at all. If you want you can include the tentacles when you purchase the tubes, but that is not necessary.

One recipe hint is very important ... Make sure the calamari rings are not wet after they have been dredged in the flour mixture, because that will not allow for rapid frying, which is essential to have crisp yet tender calamari. Note that the frying time is only one minute per batch, and the batches are kept small to maintain the high temperature of the frying oil. I recommend using a watch with either a second hand or digital seconds counter so you can be very accurate regarding frying time, until you learn by sight alone when they are done.

About the frying ... When you first introduce a batch of raw, coated calamari into the hot oil there will quickly be a lot of bubbling and release of steam. The bubbles of oil will rise in the frying pot by a good two inches or more. For that reason, never have the heated oil surface closer than three inches from the top of the frying pot or Dutch oven. Unless, of course, you want to set your kitchen on fire! Also, when the majority of the bubbling subsides increase the heat temporarily to maintain the oil temperature during frying.

Here is an additional hint for after the frying ... The frying oil, once used, will be somewhat darkened and "cruddy" due to the flour coating on the calamari. You can reuse the cooled, room temperature oil once or twice later if you first pour it off slowly, using a fine sieve in a funnel, into a clean sealable container, leaving

the "crud" behind. Do not, however, reuse the oil for frying anything other than seafood.

Fried calamari can be enjoyed served hot "as is" or sprinkled with lemon juice or tossed with diced hot banana peppers or dipped in a variety of different condiments as shown below in the last item in ingredients. You might also try the Food Nirvana recipe for Fried Calamari II, which uses a sweet and spicy sauce for tossing or dipping. Whatever you choose I am sure you will really enjoy them.

Ingredients: (Makes two to four servings)

1/2 to 1 lb. of cleaned calamari tubes cut into rings 1/2" wide

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

3/4 cup of all purpose flour

1/2 cup of corn flour

1/2 cup of cornmeal

1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

1/2 tsp. of cayenne pepper

1/2 tsp. of paprika

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of pepper

1 or 2 cups of buttermilk (buy the real thing, "cultured" buttermilk)

2 quarts of Canola oil or peanut oil for frying

Marinara sauce, lemon wedges, diced hot banana peppers, garlic mayonnaise or an aioli (all optional)

Directions:

Cut the calamari tubes into rings about 1/2" wide and place the rings in a bowl. When all rings have been cut then rinse them in cold water twice and drain off the water.

Mix the buttermilk, cayenne pepper and lemon juice in a two quart stainless steel bowl, then mix in the calamari rings, making sure they are covered with the seasoned buttermilk. Marinate the rings in the refrigerator for 1 hour or more.

The marinating in the acidic medium will help keep the calamari tender during later frying.

Heat the oven to 200°F and arrange an oven shelf in the middle. Cover a large dinner plate or a small casserole with a paper towel and place it in the oven on the middle oven shelf.

Combine the flour, cornmeal, corn flour, paprika, garlic powder, salt and pepper in a shallow pan or a large bowl, and whisk until those ingredients are well combined.

Remove the calamari rings from the buttermilk mixture one or two at a time, then place them well spaced from each other on paper towels. Let the paper towels soak up excess liquid for a few minutes.

Toss/dredge the rings in the flour mixture four at a time to coat them completely, inside and out. Remove them from the flour mixture, shaking off any excess flour and put them on a dinner plate.

Pour the canola or peanut oil 2 inches deep in a Dutch oven or in a large, heavy-bottomed pot.

Heat the oil over high heat until the oil temperature reaches 350°F. Use an instant read thermometer to assure accuracy. Adjust the heat as necessary to maintain a temperature of 350°F before and during frying.

Fry the calamari in separate batches, six at a time, for exactly 1 minute for each batch, agitating the rings gently with a wire mesh strainer or a spider or a large slotted spoon during frying to assure even frying.

Due to the short frying time the color of the calamari rings will be a light or very light tan. That is normal. Avoid frying the calamari for a longer time or it will become tough instead of being tender.

Remove the fried calamari pieces quickly and drain off excess oil from them briefly in a paper towel-lined shallow bowl, then lightly season the fried calamari immediately with sea salt.

Transfer the fried calamari to the paper towel covered plate or casserole in the oven to keep it warm while you fry the remaining batches.

Fry the remaining batches of calamari, making sure to have the oil temperature at 350°F before frying.

When all batches are done be sure to shut off the heat under the oil. You can process the oil after it has cooled to room temperature, and use it once or twice later to fry seafood, before discarding it.

Serve the calamari hot with plain marinara sauce and/or lemon wedges and/or garlic mayonnaise and/or an aioli, or tossed with diced pickled hot banana peppers, or with no condiments at all.

Here is an easy recipe for making Lemon Aioli to serve with the fried calamari.

Aioli Ingredients:

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

1 garlic clove, minced

1 tbsp. of finely chopped fresh chives

2 to 3 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1/2 tsp. of lemon zest

A pinch of Kosher salt

A pinch of freshly ground black pepper

Aioli Directions: Simply mix all of the ingredients in a bowl and put the aioli into a small condiments serving bowl for dipping. Start with only 2 tbsp. of lemon juice, mix the ingredients and taste the aioli. Add the third tbsp. of lemon juice and mix again only if needed.

Enjoy!

Fried Calamari with Sweet & Spicy Sauce - ☺♥

This is the second fried calamari recipe I have prepared. It differs from the first one in that a sweet and spicy sauce is served for dipping the fried calamari. Optionally, the fried calamari can be tossed in the sauce along with some toasted sesame seeds. Also, in this recipe the cayenne pepper is put into the flour mixture instead of into the buttermilk mixture.

No doubt about it, these fried calamari taste great!

Ingredients: (Makes two to four servings)

Calamari

1/2 to 1 pound of calamari tubes

1 to 2 cups of cultured buttermilk

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1/2 cup of all purpose flour

1/2 cup of corn flour

1/4 cup of corn meal

1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

1/2 tsp. of paprika

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of cayenne pepper

1 to 2 quarts of peanut oil for frying

1 to 2 tbsp. of toasted sesame seeds (optional)

Sweet & Spicy Sauce

4 tablespoons of Thai (or other) chili garlic sauce

1 tablespoon of honey

1/2 teaspoon of sesame oil

Directions:

Slice the calamari tubes into rings about 1/2 inch wide.

Pour the buttermilk into a one quart bowl and add the lemon juice and stir.

Put the calamari rings into the bowl and stir until all are submerged. Let the calamari rings sit in the liquid for 30 minutes or longer.

Combine the flour, corn flour, corn meal, garlic powder, cayenne pepper and salt in a one quart bowl and whisk until combined. Set the mixture aside.

Combine the chili garlic sauce, honey and sesame oil. Mix well. Set the sauce aside.

Drain the calamari briefly in a sieve, then place them well spaced on paper towels for a few minutes to lose excess moisture.

Dredge the calamari rings, four at a time, in the flour mixture and set them on a dinner plate until you are ready to fry them.

Heat 2 inches of oil in a deep, heavy pot or 1 inch of oil in a deep skillet to 350 degrees F. Use an instant read thermometer to be accurate.

Once the oil is ready, place 6 of the calamari rings into the oil and fry them for about 1 minute or until they are very lightly golden, agitating them slightly during frying with a slotted spoon.

Remove the fried calamari from the oil with the slotted spoon, place them on a paper towel lined bowl and salt them lightly.

Put the fried calamari rings into a 200 degrees F warming oven on a paper towel covered plate.

Repeat the frying steps with the remainder of the calamari, making sure the oil is at the right temperature first.

Toss the fried calamari with the Sweet & Spicy sauce and garnish it with the toasted sesame seeds, or, simply serve the calamari with the sauce alongside it for dipping.

Enjoy!

Crispy Batter Fried Haddock - ☺♥

I found this recipe on the Internet and I liked the fact that rice flour is used along with all purpose flour so I decided to give it a try and see if it belonged in Food Nirvana. Of course, I had to take advantage of knowledge I gained from other recipes to modify what I found with this recipe ... all to the better.

The exact unqualified answer is ... this recipe is superior to any other recipe I have tried ... and I've tried quite a few, looking for the ideal batter for fried fish, shrimp, chicken, etc. This recipe has exactly the right ingredients to produce a thin and crispy and tasty coating on your fried fish, shrimp or chicken.

Note that the rice flour contains no gluten and will not form gluten so the batter will tend to be thin and that is good. Too many recipes create batter that is too thick due to gluten formation during and after the mixing. You can buy white rice flour from www.bulkfoods.com in five pound bags inexpensively. By all means do exactly that.

Even with using the rice flour in combination with all purpose flour you may need to add a bit of additional beer or some ice water to get a thin batter consistency.

A good batter should allow about 1/16" or perhaps a tiny bit more of coating to remain all over each fish piece dipped into it and briefly held with tongs above the batter bowl to allow excess batter to run off.

I have included an optional recipe for making a special tartar sauce to serve with the fried haddock. You can make that or plain tartar sauce, or serve the fish without any tartar sauce. The choice is yours.

Before making the fried fish be sure you have prepared the other items you intend to serve at your meal, like coleslaw. One exception is if you plan to make French fries. Do the preparation of the potato pieces before frying the fish, then fry the potatoes immediately after frying the fish so they will be fresh and hot when you serve them. And remember to serve a nice ice cold beer.

Ingredients: (Serves two to four adults)

2 pounds of boneless, skinless haddock fillets

Peanut oil for deep frying

For the Fish Batter:

1 cup of all-purpose flour

1 cup of rice flour plus more in a shallow bowl for dredging

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of black pepper, freshly ground

1 extra large or jumbo egg, whisked

12 oz. bottle of cold lager beer

2 oz. of ice cold vodka

For a Lime and Caper Tartar Sauce:

1 cup of mayonnaise

2 tsp. of capers, chopped

2 tsp. of sweet pickle relish

1 tsp. of honey

1 tsp. of Worcestershire sauce

1 tsp. of lime zest

The juice of 1/2 lime

A pinch of black pepper

Directions:

To Prepare the Lime and Caper Tartar Sauce:

Stir all of the ingredients together in a bowl until they are well blended.

Let the sauce sit in the refrigerator for an hour or more, covered, to let the flavors meld before serving it with the fried fish.

To Make the Crispy Fried Haddock:

Fill a deep fryer with the peanut oil to the indicated depth and preheat it to 375 degrees F. Alternatively, you can use a one gallon pot only half filled with peanut oil and heated on medium high heat, using an instant read thermometer to monitor and then control the temperature by varying the level of heat.

Combine and whisk the dry ingredients together in a one quart bowl.

Cut the fillets into 8 pieces. Season them with salt and pepper on both sides.

Dredge the haddock pieces in the bowl of additional rice flour to later help the batter stick to the fillets when they are dipped. Put the dredged pieces on a plate, not stacked.

Combine the egg and beer and vodka in a chilled two quart bowl and whisk them together.

Gradually add the dry ingredients to the liquid ingredients while slowly whisking, just until the batter is formed. Small lumps in the batter are not a problem.

If the batter is too thick you can add small amounts of more cold beer or ice water and whisk the mixture.

Dip four of the dredged pieces of haddock into the batter one at a time and carefully drop each piece into the hot peanut oil.

Fry for a few minutes, noting that 5 minutes is typically fine depending on the thickness of the fillets. Fry just until the batter is golden brown on both sides.

Remove the fried fish to a wire rack placed over a cookie sheet and salt the fish immediately.

Hold the fried batch in a 200 degrees F oven on the wire rack over the cookie sheet to provide air circulation all the way around the fried fish pieces. That keeps the fried fish hot and prevents the fried fish coating from getting soggy while you fry the second batch of haddock pieces.

Repeat the dipping and frying steps for the other four pieces of fish, remembering to salt the second batch immediately after frying.

Serve the fried haddock immediately along with whatever other meal items you have prepared.

Enjoy!

Fried Oysters - ☺♥

I've wanted to have a good recipe for delicious fried oysters in Food Nirvana. The goal is to compensate for how difficult I have found it to find decent fried oysters in almost all restaurants. Frankly, they are sadly overcooked wherever I go, with fried coating that is way too dark, with only two notable exceptions during my adult years. My goal is to create the light colored yet crispy fried oysters that remain juicy and very tasty inside. Thus, I created a hybrid recipe from five of the best recipes I found on the Internet.

Zowie! Superb! Just remember the frying time is very short ... like two minutes, one minute per side for medium size oysters, or about two minutes per side for large oysters, at a slightly lower temperature. Pale tan is your goal color. Don't worry, they will be deliciously crispy on the outside, and sufficiently cooked through, but still juicy and tasty on the inside.

How can I know they will be safe to eat? The single most important consideration is they are to be live and freshly shucked. Note that freshly shucked oysters are eaten raw ... without any problems (other than not having enough!). If the oysters you use are not freshly shucked then you must be certain you fry them long enough to be cooked all the way through, and that means increasing the frying times noted in this recipe by oyster size by an additional minute per side. That will make the fried coating somewhat darker but still okay. Just avoid overcooking by frying too long as that will degrade the quality/taste/texture of what you serve.

Note that a simple tartar sauce is excellent with fried oysters ... or, you can get fancy with the Remoulade sauce recipe shown below, one of many versions of Remoulade sauce. Most of the Remoulade recipes tend towards the hot side, but not this one, which I prefer. Note also that the fried oysters are excellent if served on top of a salad, like a lightly dressed Caesar Salad.

I used to enjoy fried oysters, French fries and coleslaw for lunch many years ago in downtown Wilmington, DE. Alas, that one excellent restaurant for fried oysters finally went out of business when the owners retired. Many years later I found very good fried oysters served on a salad at the Bayard House restaurant in South Chesapeake city, MD. But that item eventually disappeared from their menu. Drat!

All other restaurants I tried in many different towns and cities simply over fried the oysters. Yuck! Now you know why, if you want excellence, you will likely have to make the fried oysters at home.

Do make this entree and really please yourself and your friends and loved ones.

Ingredients: (2 to 3 adult servings)

For the oysters:

1 quart of freshly shucked medium to large size oysters (2 1/2" long to 4" long)

2 cups of buttermilk

1/2 cup of cornmeal

3/4 cup of corn flour

3/4 cup all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon of onion powder

1 teaspoon of garlic powder

2 tbsp. of corn starch

1 tsp. of sea salt

1 1/2 quarts of peanut oil

For the Remoulade sauce:

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

1/2 of a ripe avocado, peeled and chopped

1/3 cup of sour cream

2 tbsp. of freshly squeezed lime juice

1 tsp. of Maggi® seasoning (this stuff is pretty potent ... like a umami bomb ... use it sparingly)

1 tsp. of Dijon mustard

1/2 cup of thinly sliced scallions including the green part (or 1/2 cup of chopped fresh chives)

1/4 cup of fresh parsley leaves

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

1/4 tsp. of white pepper

Directions:

Make the Remoulade sauce:

Place all of the sauce ingredients except the sliced scallions or chives in a blender and process them until the mixture is smooth. Transfer the completed sauce to a bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the refrigerator. Put the sliced scallions or chives into a small bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and refrigerate them until serving time.

Prepare and fry the oysters:

Whisk the dry ingredients together.

Drain the oysters and put them into a bowl with the buttermilk, mix gently, then refrigerate, covered, for 30 minutes.

Remove the oysters from the buttermilk and spread them out on paper towels to absorb excess wetness.

Lay paper towels on top of the oysters and pat gently to remove excess wetness, then remove and discard the top towels.

Heat the peanut oil to 300 to 325 degrees F in a Dutch oven or high sided skillet. Note that you use the lower temperature for larger oysters because they fry for a longer time and you don't want the coating to darken.

Use an instant read thermometer and variable levels of heat to maintain but not exceed the proper frying temperature. Also, you may find it important to use a kitchen timer until you learn to tell by color alone when it is time to flip the oysters during frying or when to remove the oysters when they are done frying.

Dredge four of the oysters in the dry ingredients mixture. You limit the number of oysters to be fried at one time to have minimal effect on the oil temperature.

Fry those oysters for one minute, then flip them over and fry for one more minute. If they are large oysters repeat the flipping/frying steps one time. Remove the fried oysters to a paper towel. Salt them lightly immediately with sea salt and put them into a 200 degrees F warming oven on a rack above a paper towel covered baking sheet.

Repeat the dredging and frying, etc. for the remaining oysters in groups of four, then serve all of them hot.

Spoon the Remoulade sauce very lightly over the oysters and then sprinkle them with the sliced scallions or chives. Alternatively, simply serve a tartar sauce for guests to use.

Keep the bowl of Remoulade sauce or tartar sauce available for guests who want to add more to their portion of the oysters.

Serve a nice light chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio with the oysters.

Enjoy!

Lobster or Crab Mac and Cheese - ☺♥

This fantastic tasting version of Mac and Cheese is far beyond anything I ever tasted before. Our great friend Sue Gale prepared that dish for Janet and me and I just couldn't stop eating. I awaited her recipe, but in the meantime I found a recipe on the Internet that I modified to make it come out creamy, much like Sue Gale's dish.

Okay, Sue provided her recipe so I merged what I believe to be the best of both into one recipe. I had my version as Crab Mac and Cheese and it is fabulous! This one you don't want to miss.

Ingredients: (Serves four to six people)

1 tsp. of salt for the pot of water

1 tsp. of vegetable oil

12 ounces of uncooked macaroni or shell pasta

20 ounces of light cream

4 tbsp. of butter for making a roux

1/3 cup of all purpose flour

8 ounces of gruyere cheese, grated

8 ounces of extra sharp white cheddar cheese, grated

8 ounces of mascarpone cheese

4 ounces of pecorino Romano cheese, grated (Locatell)

1/2 teaspoon (or more) of freshly ground black pepper

2 tbsp. of butter for the Panko bread crumbs

1 teaspoon of salt for the cream sauce

1 pound of lobster meat, cooked and cut or shredded into pieces each about 2 tsp. in volume, or, 1 lb. of cooked lump crab meat

1 cup of Panko bread crumbs

Directions:

Turn on the oven to 325°F.

Put the oil into a 1 1/2 gallon pot and add one gallon of water and one tsp. salt. Bring the water to a rapid boil and add the macaroni and cook it on low to medium heat according to the directions on the package, about 9 minutes to get it to an al dente state. Drain the macaroni well in a colander. Set the macaroni aside.

Grate the gruyere, cheddar and Romano cheeses while the macaroni is cooking, putting each into a very large bowl. Cut or spoon the soft mascarpone cheese into the grated cheeses and mix gently.

Heat the cream in a small (1 1/2 qt.) saucepan on low to medium heat, but don't let it boil.

In the empty large pot used to make the macaroni, melt 4 tablespoons of butter and then add the flour to make the roux. Cook over low heat for 2 minutes, stirring the mixture rapidly with a whisk.

Add the hot cream gradually while whisking and cook for a minute or two more, until the sauce is thickened and smooth.

Remove the sauce from the heat and add the salt and pepper, and then the cheeses in small amounts, mixing well with a large wooden spoon.

Add the lobster or crab pieces and stir gently.

Add the macaroni and stir gently but thoroughly.

Place the mixture into 4 to 6 individual au gratin dishes or two to three small ovenproof casseroles.

Melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter in the saucepan used for the cream. Mix the Panko bread crumbs with the melted butter and sprinkle the mixture evenly on top of the macaroni and cheese in the au gratin dishes/casseroles.

Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the sauce is bubbly and the bread crumbs lightly browned on the top. You may need to use the broiler for an additional two minutes to brown the bread crumbs.

Serve immediately.

Marinated Baked Sea Bass - ☺♥

This recipe is an easy and very nice way to serve delicious sea bass. Just remember when you buy it to have any skin cut off, or, you can do that at home.

Plan for a carbohydrate like baked potato and a vegetable like broccoli to make this a complete meal, and make them while the fish is baking. Alternatively, you might make buttered noodles and stewed tomatoes to accompany the fish.

Serve chilled white wine, like what you use in this recipe, as a nice beverage.

Ingredients: (2 adult servings)

1 lb. of sea bass filet pieces, without skin

1 minced clove of garlic

1 diced scallion

Juice from 1 lime

Juice from 1/2 lemon

1/4 cup of orange juice

1/2 cup of Sauvignon Blanc (or other crisp) white wine

1 tiny pinch of mace or allspice

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

1/8 tsp. of ground black pepper

2 tbsp. of butter, melted

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F.

Mix all ingredients together in a bowl except the fish and the butter.

Put the fish in a 4" x 9" by 3" deep loaf size baking dish, then pour the marinade over the fish.

Marinate for 15 minutes.

Turn the fish pieces over, then spoon the marinade over the fish.

Marinate the fish for an additional 15 minutes.

Bake the fish for 10 minutes per inch of fish thickness, turning the fish over half way through the baking period.

Remove the fish from the oven, then pour the butter on top.

Serve.

Marinated Swordfish - ☺♥

My sweetheart Peggy and I were looking for a simple Winter time swordfish recipe that did not require cooking on a gas or charcoal grill. This recipe, from Food Network®, allowed the use of a very lightly oiled, very hot cast iron skillet, which worked just fine for us. The marinade looked like it would be pretty good and it turned out to be perfect.

I made minor changes to the recipe, like the use of a marinating bag instead of an open dish, and the use of some parsley as a garnish after grilling, plus the use of a small amount of olive oil in the skillet to keep the fish flesh from sticking to the hot skillet while cooking. The net result? Delicious!

The two things we liked best were: 1) This is a very easy recipe, and 2) The swordfish was nicely moist and tender inside after grilling as well as delicious.

I thought about but did not cook the marinade vegetables separately in the cast iron skillet and use them as a dressing or topping for the grilled swordfish instead of parsley. That is a recipe variation that I believe will significantly enhance the dish.

Note: The swordfish steaks should be between 1" and 1 1/2" thick.

We had buttered noodles and stewed tomatoes to accompany the swordfish. I suggest serving a nice light white wine, like Pinot Grigio, chilled, as a fine beverage for this meal.

Ingredients: (2 adult servings)

1 pound (or slightly more) of swordfish steaks (skin and dark flesh cut off and discarded)

1 lime, juiced (I used the juice from 1/2 of a lemon and 1/2 of a lime)

1 tablespoon of fresh ginger, chopped fine (or pickled ginger slices often used with sushi or sashimi)

2 medium to large cloves of garlic, minced

1/2 of a medium size onion, diced (I used a purple salad onion; you might also use shallots)

3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil (nice variation: 2 tbsp. olive oil and 1 tbsp. of toasted sesame seed oil)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper (about 1/4 tsp. of each)

A few sprigs of fresh parsley to use as a garnish after grilling the swordfish (optional)

Directions:

Put your dinner plates and serving dishes into a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Combine the juice of the lime with the ginger, the garlic and the onion in a bowl. Then add the olive oil and season the marinade with the salt and pepper and mix well.

Put the raw swordfish steaks into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag and pour the marinade over them, then seal the bag while eliminating excess air, and lay it flat on a counter. Turn the marinade bag over every five minutes for a total marinating time of 30 minutes.

Remove the swordfish pieces from the marinating bag without any vegetable pieces attached, and grill them in a lightly olive oiled, hot cast iron skillet, for about 3 to 4 minutes per side.

Serve the swordfish on a pre-warmed plate with a few sprigs of parsley on top to enhance the appearance.

Maryland Crab Cakes - 😊♥

I found this nice recipe on the Internet and it varied from my crab cake recipe enough that it was worth giving it a try. It sounded pretty good. The variations were essentially in the seasonings for both the crab cakes and the tartar sauce. I made a few changes to the recipe for alternate ingredients, like using a shallot instead of a red onion, and slight changes in cooking directions.

The results were very nice! So this recipe deserves to be in Food Nirvana. The choice of the seasonings makes these crab cakes more bold in taste than those from my recipe. Both are nice.

Worthy additions at meal time are hot French fries, chilled coleslaw and ice cold beer. Make coleslaw in advance and keep it covered and chilled. Fry French fries immediately after making the crab cakes, while keeping the crab cakes warm/hot in a 180 degrees F warming oven. Alternatively, you might skip the French fries and instead use soft buns and a few pieces of lettuce and tartar sauce to make crab cake sandwiches.

Ingredients: (makes six large or eight medium size crab cakes)

For the Crab Cakes:

1 pound of lump crab meat

2 extra large eggs

2½ tablespoons of Hellmann's® mayonnaise

1½ teaspoons of Dijon mustard

1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon of Old Bay® seasoning

¼ teaspoon of sea salt

¼ cup of finely diced celery

2 tablespoons of finely chopped fresh parsley

½ cup of Panko bread crumbs

3 tablespoons of Canola oil, for cooking

For the Tartar Sauce:

1 cup of Hellmann's® mayonnaise

1½ tablespoons of sweet pickle relish

1 teaspoon of Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon of minced red onion (or use a shallot)

2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Directions:

For the Crab Cakes:

Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil for easy clean-up later.

Combine the eggs, mayonnaise, Dijon mustard, Worcestershire sauce, Old Bay® seasoning, salt, celery, and parsley in a two or three quart bowl and whisk well to combine the ingredients.

Add the crab meat (be sure to check the crab meat first for any hard or sharp cartilage and discard it).

Add the Panko bread crumbs.

Gently fold the mixture together with a wooden spoon or a soft spatula until just combined, being careful not to shred the crab meat.

Shape the mixture into 6 or 8 crab cakes by hand and place each on the prepared baking sheet.

Cover the crab cakes with plastic wrap and refrigerate them for at least 1 hour. This helps them set so they don't fall apart during cooking. It also gives you time to prepare/use the ingredients for any other meal items.

Preheat a 12" nonstick skillet over medium heat, coated inside with the canola oil.

When the oil is hot, put half of the crab cakes into the skillet and cook/fry them until they are golden, about 3 to 5 minutes per side.

Remove the crab cakes to a paper towel lined plate, then repeat the frying for the remaining crab cakes.

Serve the crab cakes with the tartar sauce, or, you can keep the crab cakes warm/hot in a 180 degrees F warming oven on a plate for up to 30 minutes before serving them. That allows time for you to make French fries if you choose to have them.

For the Tartar Sauce:

Whisk together the mayonnaise, relish, mustard, onion (shallot), and lemon juice In a one pint bowl.

Season the mixture with salt and pepper, to taste. Cover it with plastic wrap and chill it until you are ready to serve the crab cakes.

Serve the crab cakes warm/hot and the tartar sauce cold.

Hot French fries, cold coleslaw and ice cold beer go well with these tasty crab cakes.

You might decide instead to skip the French fries and use soft buns with some pieces of lettuce and tartar sauce to make crab cake sandwiches.

Enjoy!

Mild Seafood Curry - ☺♥

At different times in my distant past I thoroughly enjoyed eating mild yellow curry dishes in Indian restaurants. The idea is that the mild curry provides a distinct and pleasant flavor without the hot nature of more spicy curries.

This recipe makes a curry that will be excellent served over basmati rice. If it isn't creamy enough to suit you, then add a few ounces of heavy or light cream after the last simmering step to get the consistency, color and taste that you want. If you do that you may need to increase the amount of mild yellow curry powder.

On making this curry Peggy and I noted we had an excess amount of creamy liquid; that is, more than expected. At first I thought I'd have to modify the recipe, but during eating I realized the liquid in combination with the rest of the curry ingredients and the rice produced a very nice effect. Thus, I'm making no recipe changes.

Ingredients: (3 to 4 servings)

2 tablespoons of peanut oil

1 medium onion, halved and sliced

1 tablespoon of minced fresh ginger root

1 tablespoon of minced garlic

1 (14 ounce) can of coconut milk

3 tablespoons of lime juice

1 to 2 tablespoons of mild yellow curry powder

1 tablespoon of brown sugar

12 medium shrimp, peeled (tails left on) and deveined

1 lb. of sea scallops, halved

1 lb. of Tilapia filets (cut lengthwise and then cut into 1/2" wide chunks)

6 ounces of fresh asparagus, cut into 2-inch pieces, fibrous bottoms discarded

2 tablespoons of chopped cilantro

1 tsp. of Sea Salt

1/4 cup of heavy or light cream (optional)

1 cup of uncooked basmati rice (cooked[simmered] for 15 minutes, covered, on very low heat, in 2 cups of chicken broth plus 1/2 tsp. of salt)

Directions:

Make the basmati rice and set it aside, well covered with plastic wrap in a bowl, in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Heat the peanut oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat.

Sauté the onion, ginger, and garlic in the hot oil until the onion starts to soften, 2 to 3 minutes.

Stir the coconut milk, lime juice, curry powder, and brown sugar into onion mixture, bring the mixture to a simmer and cook at a simmer until slightly reduced, about 5 minutes.

Stir the shrimp, scallops, tilapia, asparagus, cilantro, and salt into the onion mixture.

Simmer on medium heat until the tilapia, shrimp and scallops are no longer transparent in the center, about 5 minutes.

If you want a more creamy curry then add the optional 1/4 cup of the heavy or light cream and stir to mix.

Serve the curry over generous servings of the warm basmati rice in pre-warmed shallow and wide individual serving bowls.

A mild dish like this one couples well with a light white wine like Pinot Grigio.

You might consider making and chilling a mild cucumber salad (with some fresh dill and fresh mint and sour cream) to serve with this Seafood Curry (or especially with more spicy curries for the contrasting cooling effect) as a side dish.

Food Nirvana has a fine recipe, shown separately under Salads and Slaws, for a Mediterranean Cucumber Salad. Try it ... You will love it.

Enjoy!

Miso Fish - ?

I was looking for a new way to prepare haddock and I found an interesting and simple recipe at The Woks Of Life®. It uses the Japanese Miso paste which is fermented soybeans with a few other ingredients, some Mirin cooking wine and, well, you get the idea. This recipe is simple and I'll bet it makes very tasty seasoned haddock filets.

I have yet to make this dish. When I do I will report back with results and any needed recipe changes.

Ingredients:

6 to 8 ounce haddock fillet

1 tablespoon of white miso paste

1 tablespoon of Mirin

1/2 teaspoon of sesame oil

2 teaspoons of canola oil

Directions:

Make sure your fish is thawed. You can put it in the refrigerator the night before. The morning you want to eat the fish, whisk together the miso, Mirin, and sesame oil.

Using a paring knife make a few large hash marks in the fish so the marinade can penetrate. Swish the fillets in the marinade until fully coated. Cover and marinate the fish in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours.

Heat a skillet over medium-high heat for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the canola oil and the fish (it should lightly sizzle). If it is sizzling intensely, reduce the heat.

Cook the fish for 4 minutes. Once you get a golden burnish on one side, flip the fish, and reduce the heat to medium/medium-low to ensure that the marinade doesn't burn. A little bit of dark caramelization around the edges is okay, but the goal is to avoid burning the miso.

Cook for another 2 to 2 1/2 minutes. The middle should be just cooked and still a little juicy if you check inside the fillet with a fork or a chopstick.

Serve the fish with a grain side dish like rice, and some vegetable side dish, like bok choy stir fry, for an easy dinner! Enjoy!

Pan Seared Fish with Tomato Vinaigrette - ☺♥

I don't know where Marie got this recipe back in the 1980's but it is yummy and very easy. It is a fine way to use any common fish filets when you don't have any other special recipe to try and when/if you want a tasty meal without frying the fish. I modified the recipe slightly such that the fish is served in a casserole with the tomato vinaigrette. I also slightly increased the amounts of butter, chives, olive oil and parsley.

To have a complete meal you will want to serve some type of carbohydrate. Baked potatoes, etc., are fine. We especially enjoy a nice crisp dry white wine, like our local LaBelle® winery's Seyval Blanc, with this meal.

Ingredients:

1½ lbs. of Very ripe Italian Plum Tomatoes, chopped with juice (or 1, 28 oz. can of peeled plum tomatoes with juice)

2 tbsp. of minced shallots

1 tbsp. of minced garlic

2 tbsp. of snipped fresh chives

1 tbsp. of white balsamic vinegar

2 tbsp. of fresh flat leaf parsley

4 tbsp. of olive oil

1 tsp. of ground fennel or grind whole fennel seeds

Salt and pepper

4, 6 oz. fish filets (Many varieties of fish will do. For example, cod or haddock.)

2 tbsp. of butter

Directions:

I use a Magic Bullet® to grind fennel seeds. Do that or something similar if you have only fennel seeds.

Combine the chopped tomatoes and juice with the shallots, garlic, vinegar, chives, parsley, 2 tbsp. olive oil, and ¼ tsp. of the ground fennel seeds in a large

skillet. Mix well. Heat to a simmer, covered, and cook for ten minutes at a simmer.

In a small bowl mix $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. ground fennel seeds with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. of salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pepper. Sprinkle this seasoning on both sides of the fresh fish fillets.

Use a non stick pan, heat 2 tbsp. of olive oil, add the fish fillets and cook them over moderate heat until they are browned (around 5 minutes). Flip the fish and add the butter, then cook about 5 minutes more, making sure the fish is cooked through.

Add the fish to the tomato vinaigrette mixture and simmer for two to three minutes. Put the Mixture in a pre-warmed casserole and serve it.

Enjoy! This dish is quite tasty.

Variation:

While camping in the Florida Keys Marie would wrap/seal in all the ingredients with aluminum foil, put that into a covered skillet with a small amount of water, and proceed to poach the fish in the vegetables using our gasoline stove. It was great!

Sea Bass with Herbs/Basting Oil - ☺♥

This recipe produces another "to die for" delicious dish. The ingredient amounts listed are a minimum for two adults. Scale up as necessary to feed more people or more people with large appetites. I included the other meal items we served with the fish in the directions below. Originally I watched an Internet video to learn how the chef prepared the dish ... they were pimping basting oil sold by Wegman's® supermarket. Then I got some additional information by looking up the ingredients as displayed on a bottle of Wegmans® basting oil, did a bit of thinking and then I created the basting oil at home. It was easy.

Ingredients:

Part I: (Making the basting oil)

- 1 tbsp. of Dried Thyme (2 tbsp. fresh chopped thyme is better)
- 1 tbsp. of Dried Parsley (2 tbsp. fresh chopped parsley is better)
- 1 tbsp. of Rice vinegar
- 2 tbsp. of water
- 2 tbsp. of Fresh chopped rosemary
- 3 small garlic cloves, chopped fine
- 2 thin slices of fresh lemon
- 2 oz. of Soybean oil
- 1 1/2 oz. of Extra virgin olive oil
- ½ tsp. of White pepper
- ¾ tsp. of Salt

Part II: (Initial sauté of the fish)

- 1 lb. of Sea Bass (skin removed, cut into two fillet pieces)
- 2 tbsp. of Olive oil
- 3 tbsp. of Flour
- 1 tbsp. of Corn Meal (optional)

½ tsp. of Pepper

½ tsp. of Salt

Directions:

As indicated above, make the basting oil first. If you are using dried herbs, put them into a small dish and add the rice vinegar and water. Use a fork to mix everything to hydrate the dried herbs. If you use all fresh herbs, just put the water and vinegar in with the oils. Put both oils into a small saucepan and mix them. Add the rosemary, the garlic, the lemon slices, the hydrated (or fresh) herbs and the salt and pepper, then mix. Heat on medium until small bubbles indicate the water is starting to boil off. Place the pan in a 210°F oven and heat the basting oil for one hour. This will develop the flavor.

We decided to serve the Sea Bass with baked sweet potato, so you can wrap each potato in aluminum foil and bake at 400°F for 60 to 70 minutes. Yes, you will benefit from double wall ovens ... so you don't have to struggle with limited equipment.

Once the basting oil is done you can move on to other meal items. We served fresh broccoli steamed just enough to make it semi-tender (it retains the deep green color). It takes about 10 minutes to steam starting with a few ounces of cold water at the bottom of a steamer, on medium heat.

Now to the fish. Mix the flour, pepper and salt together. Sometimes I add a tablespoon of corn meal also for variation. Heat the oil in a skillet on medium heat. Cover the moist fish pieces with the flour mixture. Place them in the heated oil and sauté on each side for four minutes. They should be light to medium tan on each side.

Add the butter to the skillet and let it melt. Remove the basting oil from the oven and discard the lemon slices. Then mix the basting oil and ladle it (use a gravy ladle) onto each piece of fish. Ideally you will make some of the herbs stay on top of the fish. Turn the fish over and sauté while ladling basting oil and herbs onto the top side. The idea is to provide a small amount of basting oil and but lots of herbs to each side, not to soak the fish in an oil bath. After a minute or two, depending on the thickness of the fish, use a spatula to turn the fish pieces over and sauté for one to two minutes. Repeat this process for both sides of the fish. The herbs will become somewhat darkened during the final sauté ... just don't let the oil smoke ... lower the heat to low if necessary.

At this point the fish is ready to serve. Place the pieces on a warmed platter (do you remember the 210°F oven you used for the basting oil?) and ladle a very small amount of the basting oil over each piece.

Serve the meal quickly to keep the fish hot. The taste of the herbs and the taste, texture and moistness of the fish will knock your socks off, guaranteed! The sweet potato and broccoli side dishes are perfect complements, each served with butter.

Oh ... lest I forget ... Sea Bass from a first class seafood market is not cheap. We paid \$13.99 per pound in 2009, (and \$16.99 per pound in 2010! And the last I looked in 2012 it is \$19 per pound!) and it was perfectly fresh (firm with no fish odor) and worth every cent. Removing the skin is difficult so have a good filleting knife or fine serrated blade kitchen knife to help you remove the skin without wasting fish. You can scrape/cut directly against the skin as you remove it without cutting through the skin ... it is pretty tough. Do note that fresh sea bass should never smell fishy. Test that when buying the fish and do not buy it at all if it is not fresh. Does it make any sense at all to pay \$16.99 per pound for smelly old sea bass? I make this point because Hadfield's® seafood market in Wilmington, DE stung me once. Never again.

The story continues. It is now 2011 and I went to a high end supermarket that always has fresh, top quality seafood, to buy the sea bass. The seafood manager told me that the price for sea bass had increased to the point where she would have to charge me \$20 per pound. The same was true for fresh swordfish. Now, consider that the folks who patronize that supermarket are pretty well heeled ... that is to say they are well off financially. I would think they would accommodate inflation and continue to purchase products like the sea bass, even at \$20 per pound. Was I ever wrong!

The seafood manager told me in no uncertain terms that she had simply stopped buying both the sea bass and the swordfish, and that she would refuse to buy either fish until the prices reduced to what they were before. This is most interesting as it happened in a place where I thought the customer base would be immune to inflation! So, I bought live lobsters instead, at prices that haven't changed in over a year. Yes, I was disappointed, but I agreed with her logic. The way to fight inflation is to refuse to buy the products. That applies to all things other than those for which we have no choice, and for those the right strategy is to severely reduce the amount purchased.

Broiled Striper - ☺♥

My friend Steve Jaskolka is an avid fisherman and he likes nothing better than to spend evenings fishing for striper off the piers at Prescott Park in Portsmouth, NH and also across the Piscataqua River in Kittery, ME. He is quite successful and I have been the pleased recipient of many fine stripers. I say, "you catch 'em, I'll cook 'em!"

Cleaning fish was never one of my favorite chores, in fact I dislike it entirely, so early on I tried to figure out a way to process the striper that would reduce my work yet lead to a tasty treat. I got lucky. I figured out that I could gut the things, remove the head and tail, spread them open and cut the small bones down one side of the spine but not penetrating the skin, resulting in a kind of butterflied fish. What I didn't have to do was scale or filet the fish/remove the skin or fins. That really appealed to my lazy side!

But how would one cook such a strange thing? The answer was to put some aluminum foil on a broiling pan and the fish on the aluminum foil, skin side down. Then I coated the fish flesh with butter and broiled it for the minimum time, based on weight/thickness.

The result was a delicious fish that resembled crab in mildness and sweetness and it was very tender and moist. The best part was/is that removing the broiled flesh from the bones and skin was super easy. All in all it is a real winner. Thanks, Steve!

Don't let this, uh, complicated recipe put you off ... just know that this is pure serendipity. As the old saying goes ... "Even a blind pig finds an acorn sometime!"

Ingredients:

One or more fresh (as in very recently caught) striper fish.

Butter

Salt

Directions:

Clean and prepare the fish per the above recipe description. Broil it in a preheated 300°F oven for 10 to 15 minutes based on the size of the fish. The top of the fish should be four to five inches below the heating element.

Pre-warm a serving platter in the bottom part of the oven while the fish is broiling.

Test the fish for doneness at five minute intervals by cutting the flesh and seeing if there is no raw flesh left in the thickest area. If the surface of the fish is becoming too well done before the interior is cooked then move the fish further away from the heating element, cover the surface with aluminum foil, and finish the cooking using a baking cycle instead of the broiler element.

Serve the fish on the pre-warmed platter with salt and pepper. Let each guest remove the flesh to his/her plate with a serving fork.

Enjoy. This dish goes well with French fries and coleslaw and beer.

Pan Seared Scallops - ☺♥

I am pleased to add a nice recipe for pan seared scallops to Food Nirvana. Prepared this way scallops take on a very pleasant taste with a hint of sweetness, yet remain tender. This is a nice and flavorful alternative to simply cooking them in white wine and butter and herbs.

Be sure to have your other meal items ready to eat before searing the scallops, because the cooking time is very short and they should be eaten right away while warm for maximum enjoyment.

Some of the recipes I researched either serve the scallops with a vinaigrette or in a nicely seasoned sauce, so I have included recipes for both below. I made the Orange - Lime Vinaigrette sauce and it is to die for great with the scallops. I haven't tried making the Lemon Caper sauce but I'm sure it will be fine also.

Ingredients:

1 pound of dry sea scallops (about 14 to 16)

2 Tbsp. of butter

2 Tbsp. of olive oil

Kosher salt (for brining and later seasoning)

Freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Cut the small side muscle/tendon from the scallops and rinse them with cold water.

Brine the scallops in a saltwater solution (1/3 cup of salt in one cup of water, mixed) for 10 minutes.

Dry the top and bottom surfaces of the scallops by placing them on one or two paper towels and then covering them with another layer of paper towels. Let them sit this way for two minutes.

Remove the top paper towel layer and lightly salt and pepper the top surface of the scallops. They are now ready to be sautéed.

Use a 12" to 14" diameter cast iron skillet to sauté the scallops.

Add the olive oil to the skillet and heat it on high heat.

Once the oil begins to smoke, gently add the scallops, top side down, making sure they are not touching each other.

Lightly salt and pepper the top surfaces of the scallops.

Sear the scallops for 2 minutes, then add the butter to the skillet.

Turn the scallops over using a small spatula and a set of tongs, and sauté them for 2 minutes, while spooning the melted butter over the tops of the scallops.

Hint: Tilt the skillet so you can use a soup spoon to access the melted butter.

The scallops should have a nice golden crust on each side.

Remove the scallops to a pre-warmed serving bowl.

Serve immediately, or make one of the sauces below and then serve the scallops.

Orange-Lime Vinaigrette Sauce (makes about 1/2 cup) - ☺♥

2 tablespoons of orange juice

2 tablespoons of lime juice

1 small shallot, minced

1 tablespoon of minced fresh cilantro

1/8 teaspoon of red pepper flakes

2 tablespoons of canola oil

2 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil

Salt

Combine the orange juice, lime juice, shallot, cilantro, and pepper flakes in a medium bowl. Slowly whisk in the vegetable and olive oils.

Season the vinaigrette with salt to taste and serve it in a cup alongside the scallops.

Lemon Caper Sauce:

The lemon caper sauce is made in the skillet used to sear the scallops. Do not clean the skillet first. Just add the sauce ingredients per the directions below.

Aromatic garlic, white wine, chicken broth, lemon juice and capers are reduced until a thickened sauce is achieved. A little bit of Dijon mustard is whisked in for a hint of pungency to create a delicate savory citrus sauce.

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon of minced garlic

½ cup of white wine (like Pinot Grigio)

1 cup of chicken broth

1 teaspoon of lemon zest

2 tablespoon of lemon juice

2 tablespoon of capers rinsed

1 tablespoon of Dijon mustard

Sea salt for seasoning

Black pepper for seasoning

1 tablespoon of chopped fresh dill

1 teaspoon of chopped fresh chives

6 lemon wedges

Directions:

Add the garlic to the skillet and cook it on medium heat for 1 minute, until the garlic is fragrant but not browned.

Increase the heat to medium-high and add the wine. Simmer the wine, stirring as needed until the wine is reduced by half, about 3 minutes.

Turn the heat to high and add the chicken broth, lemon zest, lemon juice and capers. Cook until the sauce is reduced by half, to about ½ cup, about 6 to 8 minutes.

Turn off the heat and whisk in the Dijon mustard.

Turn the heat to medium and put the scallops into the sauce and cook them until they are warm, about 2 minutes.

Spoon some sauce over the scallops while you are warming them.

Taste the sauce and season it to taste with sea salt and pepper.

Put the sauce and the scallops into a pre-warmed serving bowl.

Garnish the scallops with the chopped dill and chives.

Serve the scallops immediately with the lemon wedges.

Enjoy!

Seafood Newburg - ☺♥

This dish has been one of my favorites since I first tasted it at an upscale wedding reception for my college buddy, Mike Tremel, and his bride Elaine, back in 1966. The mixture of shrimp, scallops and lobster was absolutely yummy in the cream sauce lightly flavored with cheese. It was served with rice. I kept returning to the buffet for more servings. I made a pig of myself, and I loved it. Well, what the heck, I was only 22 years old and I had a ravenous appetite at that age.

Some years later Marie and I would see Lobster Newburg on the menu in some good seafood restaurants, and I would order it now and then, but I was always disappointed as the restaurant versions just didn't measure up to what I had as a young man. I am surprised that Marie never made Lobster or Seafood Newburg, but that was one item she never tried.

Today I was paging through one of my favorite instructional books, The Professional Chef©, and I happened to see that dish in the index while searching for a different food. Later, when Janet asked what we would have for dinner that luscious choice immediately came to mind. Since I shop for bargains for things like great fresh seafood, and immediately vacuum seal it and freeze it, I realized I had all the seafood ingredients here at home. What a delight!

I found a recipe on the Internet that looked pretty good, so for once I thought the given recipe was worth trying without preliminary modifications on my part. All I planned to do beyond the recipe was to add scallops and use crab instead of lobster. I am reporting back with the results now, and I have made very significant changes to the Internet recipe.

I tried the Internet recipe and we served it over rice. My summary opinion is that it was significantly under seasoned and that it would be better served on grilled garlic toast points than on rice. I used a fair amount of salt and pepper at the table to bring up the flavor and while that helped it was clear that additional seasoning ingredients are necessary during cooking, in both quantity and variety. It was way too bland. So I did a fair amount of additional research into various recipes for Seafood Newburg. Thus, the recipe below has the changes I decided to make, both those found in different sources and our own successful changes and additions.

Do note that you can substitute three cups of cooked basmati rice for the toast points, or, use both to get the best of both worlds!

I know you will totally enjoy this dish. It is so good it is sinful, but if you don't tell anyone I won't either!

Ingredients: (serves 4 to 6 adults)

1 pound of large fresh or frozen raw pre-shelled shrimp, thawed if necessary, drained and chopped in half

8 ounces of lump crabmeat or lobster meat, drained and, if lobster, chopped

8 ounces of sea scallops, drained and cut into four pieces each

1/2 cup of dry sherry

2 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice

1/4 teaspoon of nutmeg

1 1/2 teaspoons of mild yellow curry powder

1/2 teaspoon of white pepper

1/4 teaspoon of cayenne (red) pepper (or more to taste, up to 1/2 tsp. total)

1/2 teaspoon of paprika

3/4 stick of butter (6 tbsp.)

1/3 cup of flour

2 cups of half and half

2/3 cup of milk

1 teaspoon of salt, or more to taste

1/2 cup of heavy cream

2 egg yolks

1 cup of grated aged Sharp White Cheddar cheese

1 cup of grated Swiss cheese or crumbled bleu cheese

10 cracked peppercorns

2 bay leaves

8 to 12, 3/4" thick slices of crusty French or Italian bread, grilled in garlic butter, then cut in half.

For the grilled bread, use three large cloves of garlic finely minced, added to 1/2 to 3/4 stick of melted butter and 1/4 tsp. salt. Heat the mixture in a microwave oven in a bowl for about 30 seconds and stir well. (The butter/garlic mixture, heated, will knock your socks off ... you will be tempted to eat just that, immediately, but try to control yourself). Set the mixture aside. Bake the plain slices of bread for 15 minutes at 250°F to make them crusty, turning them over half way through, at about 7 1/2 minutes. Let the bread slices cool and then put a very thin coating of butter on both sides of each piece. Then brush the garlic/butter/salt mixture lightly onto both sides of the bread, and grill the bread in a skillet on low heat, turning each piece over twice to get even grilling of both sides to a light golden brown ... but be careful not to burn the garlic by using too much heat or too long a grilling period. Alternatively, you can use a low setting and/or 10" distance from the heating element with your oven broiler, about three minutes per side. When done cut the pieces of grilled buttered garlic bread in half and keep them warm on a plate in a 180°F warming oven.

Optional: Cook 1 1/2 cups of raw basmati rice to serve along with the garlic toast to get the combined effect of soft and crunchy, mild and garlicky.

Directions:

Put the plates or wide shallow bowls you intend to use for each guest into a 180°F warming oven.

Grill (or broil) the bread per the instructions above and put it into the warming oven.

Melt the 3/4 stick of butter for the cream sauce in a 3 quart saucepan over low heat. We use a very heavy French copper saucepan with a tin interior designed for making cream sauces, etc. It has a thick bottom and it distributes the heat from the stove very evenly to the food being cooked.

Blend the flour with the melted butter until they are well mixed and then stir in the half-and-half. Mix thoroughly over very low heat.

Put the sherry, lemon juice, salt, white pepper, cayenne pepper, curry powder, paprika and nutmeg into the saucepan while stirring.

Add the milk and continue cooking on low heat and stirring until the sauce is thickened.

Beat the egg yolks with a whisk and combine them with the 1/2 cup of heavy cream in a small bowl and mix well.

Add the egg and cream mixture to the sauce gradually, stirring constantly.

Add the grated cheeses and continue to cook, stirring, until all the ingredients are well blended and the cheese is melted. Remove the saucepan from the heat and cover it.

Gently boil the drained raw shrimp and raw lobster in a separate saucepan with the cracked peppercorns, bay leaves, one quart of water and a pinch of salt for about three minutes. Do not boil or otherwise cook lump crabmeat if you are using that instead of lobster, or the scallop pieces, for they will cook during the final heating of the cream sauce.

Add all of the seafood items to the cream sauce and mix gently.

Heat the cream sauce and seafood on low heat until it simmers for about two minutes, while stirring gently, then remove the completed Seafood Newburg from the heat.

If the sauce appears to be too thick, you can thin it with 1/3 to 1/2 cup of warmed milk and stir it until the milk is well blended into the cream sauce.

Pour the completed Seafood Newburg into a three quart serving bowl, cover it and keep it in the warming oven until it is served.

Serve the completed Seafood Newburg on the "grilled in garlic butter" (or broiled) French or Italian bread pieces, four half pieces per guest, using the pre-warmed plates or wide shallow bowls. If you decided to make the basmati rice as well, put a small mound of it in the center of each plate or bowl and circle the rice with the grilled garlic bread pieces, then cover them with the creamy Seafood Newburg mixture.

The Complete Banquet Variation:

Janet and I discussed what we would serve before, along with the Seafood Newburg, and afterwards to create an unforgettable banquet for guests. We especially considered the balancing of colors, tastes and textures to complement the Seafood Newburg, which is a very creamy, filling entree'.

Melon (very ripe cold cantaloupe pieces) wrapped with Prosciutto Ham is served as an appetizer along with small chilled glasses of Rose' D'Anjou wine. Avoid serving crackers or other crunchy snacks so as to keep the guests' appetites piqued.

Make Ray's Oriental Salad (well in advance) to serve as the first course of the meal. Avoid serving bread or crackers as the salad has crushed Ramen noodles and toasted almond slices in it to provide crunch. Wait until the guests have completed the salad course before serving the Seafood Newburg.

For beverages serve ice water with ice cubes or crushed ice and with fresh lemon slices lightly squeezed with one placed in each glass, along with a good bottle or two of chilled Pinot Grigio or a French white burgundy wine like Louis Jadot® Pouilly Fuisse'. Allow one bottle for every three guests.

Serve the Seafood Newburg over the grilled bread pieces. Allow ten minutes after the meal for table conversation and to allow the meal to settle before serving dessert to your guests.

For dessert, keep things light to clear the palate. Serve Raspberry Sherbet (The recipe is in Food Nirvana under Frozen Desserts). Some guests may also want a cup of hot, freshly brewed coffee to accompany the sherbet.

After dinner serve small glasses of Chambord® liquor in the family or sitting room. Don't be surprised if some of your guests fade into taking a short nap after enjoying the banquet!

Seafood Newburg II - ☺♥

Food Nirvana had one recipe for Seafood Newburg that is very good, but I decided to make a second version with intentional variations in flavor. Thus, I created the recipe below.

This recipe is pure serendipity. I was remembering the delicious Lobster Newburg I enjoyed at a wedding reception way back in 1966 and I decided to try making a second version of that dish with a mixture of seafood all these years later (2022).

The recipe may look complicated but it is truly simple to make this dish. Of course, my version of Seafood Newburg is considerably different from what you might find in other recipes for the same dish. Even the other Food Nirvana recipe. One example is using dry cured hickory smoked bacon to provide a subtle but essential smoky background flavor.

My sweetheart Peggy and I were thrilled with how this dish came out. It is stunningly good. We each used two LeGrands® biscuits split open in wide bowls with a cup of Seafood Newburg ladled onto each biscuit. Then we had seconds with yet another split biscuit and a large (one cup) ladle of the Seafood Newburg.

What a pleasant, totally satisfied feeling we both had at the end of that meal!

Note that you should allow time to bake the biscuits if you use them, or time to make toast points, etc. so that the complete meal comes together all at the same time.

Note also that this dish goes very well with a dry white wine like Pinot Grigio or Sauvignon Blanc, chilled.

Ingredients: (serves 4 to 6 adults)

8 ounces of peeled raw large shrimp

4 ounces of canned crabmeat, drained

4 ounces of minced clams

8 ounces of sea scallops

8 ounces of haddock filet

3 strips of raw, dry cured, hickory smoked bacon

1/4 cup of dry sherry

2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice
1/4 teaspoon of ground nutmeg
6 tablespoons of unsalted butter
1/2 cup of all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups of 4% butterfat milk
1 1/2 cups of heavy cream
1 teaspoon of kosher salt
1/4 cup of heavy cream (for whisking with the egg yolk)
1 large egg yolk
1 cup of grated mild cheddar cheese
1/4 cup of chopped fresh chives
Two cans of LeGrands® biscuits (or other bread/roll type of base).

Directions:

Rinse the shrimp and cut them in half, and put the pieces into a 2 quart bowl.

Cut the scallops in half and add them to the bowl.

Add the minced clams and the drained 4 ounces of crabmeat to the bowl.

Cut the haddock filet into pieces about 3/4" x 3/4".

Mix the sherry, lemon juice and nutmeg in a cup and then pour it into the bowl of seafood and mix well.

Cover the bowl and refrigerate the marinating seafood for 1 hour.

Fry the bacon at a low heat in a very large (15" diameter) non-stick deep skillet (or in a 2 gallon heavy bottom pot). When done frying, put the bacon onto a paper towel. Turn off the heat under the skillet/pot.

Add the butter to the bacon fat in the skillet/pot and mix.

Break up the bacon into small pieces and put them into a small cup. Set aside.

Put the 1 1/2 cups of milk and the 1 1/2 cups of heavy cream into a saucepan and warm the mixture on low heat to 150 degrees F. Do not let the mixture boil. Turn off the heat.

After the seafood mixture has marinated for an hour proceed with the rest of the following recipe steps.

Add the flour to the skillet, adjust the heat to medium, and mix/whisk the flour with the butter and bacon fat to form a roux. Once heated to the point of bubbling, allow the roux to cook for three minutes on low heat with constant stirring.

Gradually whisk in about 1/4 cup of the warmed milk and cream mixture. Then gradually add the remaining milk and cream mixture, whisking constantly.

Adjust the heat to medium, then add the salt and continue cooking until the mixture is bubbling lightly and thickened.

Whisk the 1/4 cup of heavy cream with the egg yolk in a bowl.

Add that mixture to the thickened Newburg sauce while whisking constantly.

Stir in the grated cheese and continue cooking until the cheese has melted.

Add the chopped chives and the bacon pieces and mix briefly.

Add the marinated, raw seafood mixture to the sauce, mix well, then bring the temperature up to 190 degrees F and cook for about 10 minutes, or until the seafood is thoroughly cooked. Do not boil the Seafood Newburg.

Ladle the Seafood Newburg over toast points or puff pastry shells, or serve the Seafood Newburg over split freshly baked biscuits like LeGrands®.

Let each guest add any additional salt or pepper to taste.

Sesame Ahi - ☺♥

This recipe is a Ray original. Orientals cook many different foods using sesame oil and sesame seeds and I decided that searing fresh Ahi grade tuna with that combination in mind would make a delicious entrée. The ingredient amounts listed are for two very hungry adults. Scale up as necessary to feed more people. I included the other meal items (Fresh steamed green beans and rice cooked with leek and garlic in chicken broth) I served with the Ahi in the directions below.

Ingredients:

1 lb. of Fresh Ahi, skinless, about 3/4" to 1" thick, cut into four pieces

1 tbsp. of Corn Oil

3 tbsp. of Pure Sesame oil

4 tsp. of Toasted sesame seeds

2 tbsp. of Soy sauce

Directions:

Do not start the cooking of the Ahi until all other meal items have been prepared, for the Ahi is served at its best when seared/grilled very hot on the outside while remaining rare/cool in the center. Heat the oils in a large wok to a very high temperature, almost smoking. Sear each piece of Ahi for about one to one and one half minutes on each side depending on the thickness of the Ahi. Do only one piece at a time. Add additional corn oil and sesame oil in the proportions shown in the ingredients above as necessary to assure that each side of the raw Ahi is in contact with the hot oil. After searing the second side of a given piece, transfer it to a hot serving plate, sprinkle on one tsp. of warm toasted sesame seeds and drizzle on 1/2 tbsp. of soy sauce. After all four pieces have been prepared serve the hot Ahi with the rest of the meal.

I decided to serve the Ahi with freshly made rice simmered in chicken broth. Thus, make one cup of raw rice according to directions and during the last five minutes of simmering add one chopped leek and three diced fresh garlic cloves and one tbsp. of soy sauce and recover the saucepan. When the rice is about done then put the fresh green beans into a steamer that already has the water boiling. Now is the time to make the Ahi! Steam the beans for about ten minutes (or less ... check them once or twice during steaming to assure they do not overcook and turn olive green in color) and serve them in a heated bowl with melted butter.

A nice clean tasting white or rose' wine goes nicely with this meal.

Oh my, yes, this was a delicious balanced meal and the Ahi was excellent!

I had some leftover Ahi so the next day I made an impromptu Oriental Chef's Salad by thinly slicing the leftover Ahi and putting it on top of chopped lettuce, along with some thin slices of American cheese. I added pineapple chunks, used a sesame ginger vinaigrette salad dressing and I sprinkled additional toasted sesame seeds on top. Yummy! It was a perfect hot weather lunch. I am sure if you use your imagination (or an Oriental cookbook) you can find a variety of other ingredients that would be perfect in that salad.

Shrimp Ceviche - 😊♥

Shrimp Ceviche is a delicious dish. The word ceviche means "raw seafood" marinated in fresh lemon or lime juice. Marinating is done instead of cooking and the strong acidity of the lemon or lime juice makes the product free of live microorganisms and thus safe to eat, as well as very tasty. Think of the improved texture of the seafood by avoiding typical cooking.

You will note there is some minimal cooking time in this recipe to blanch the pound of whole shrimp, and a full hour of marinating time in fresh lemon juice for the chopped/diced pieces, which is typically used instead of cooking for small pieces of raw seafood like diced fish, diced shrimp or sliced scallops. You might consider the atypical blanching in this recipe as a safety play to sterilize the shrimp and assure all surfaces of the pieces are not raw. It is up to you to decide whether or not to blanch the shrimp in boiling water, for any exposure to boiling water will change the texture of the surface of the shrimp.

Recently I was served shrimp ceviche at an upscale Mexican restaurant and it tasted so hot due to the amount of diced habanero pepper that I could barely eat it. Thus, it was not at all enjoyable, and I am noting that fact now for your use in likely modifying this recipe to avoid too much very hot pepper. I further note that I have had shrimp and other seafood ceviche in multiple restaurants in the past and none of them had any noticeable use of hot peppers ... so feel free to omit that ingredient partially or completely in this recipe. You might, however, use a tasty mild pepper (like diced poblano) for maintaining the taste contribution of fresh pepper and the appearance and texture of the ceviche. If you want low heat use a jalapeno pepper. For medium heat use a Serrano pepper. For high heat use the habanero pepper.

Ceviche is usually served well chilled along with some crackers and butter or tortilla chips or tostados and chilled white wine. Small servings of it in chilled champagne flutes or goblets will commonly be the appetizer for an upscale lunch or dinner. It can also be served in larger quantity (1 1/2 to 2 cups) as an entree on a chilled plate.

Ingredients: (Makes more than a quart of ceviche)

1 pound of black tiger shrimp, tail-on

3/4 cup of fresh lemon juice or lime juice or a mixture of both

1 medium sweet onion, diced small

1/2 cup of fresh cilantro (finely chopped and pressed lightly into the 1/2 cup container)

3 medium size ripe tomatoes, seeded and diced small

1 medium size cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced

1/2 habanero pepper, cleaned and finely diced ...or a less hot pepper like Serrano, or even less, jalapeno, or no hot pepper at all

1/4 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

1/4 teaspoon garlic powder

1/4 teaspoon of sea salt, and maybe more, to taste, at serving time

1 tbsp. of olive oil

Crackers and butter or tortilla chips as accompaniments at serving time

Directions:

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the shrimp and blanch them just until they turn a light pink, about 1 minute. Drain immediately and place the shrimp in an ice bath to chill them and stop the cooking process.

Peel and chop/dice each piece of the shrimp into about six pieces and place the pieces in a one quart bowl. Toss the shrimp with the lemon juice and set the bowl aside, covered, for about 1 hour to marinate the shrimp, stirring occasionally to assure all surfaces are well exposed to the lemon juice.

While the shrimp is marinating, dice the onion, cilantro, tomatoes, cucumber and habanero (or Serrano or jalapeno or poblano) pepper, and put them and the olive oil into a two quart bowl. Be certain to wear nitrile or latex gloves when handling/cleaning/dicing any hot peppers, and do not touch your eyes or private parts until the gloves have been discarded and you have washed your hands. Mix the bowl contents gently with a wooden spoon and then refrigerate the mixture, covered.

After the shrimp has marinated (it should be whitish-pink and firm throughout), spoon out and drain the shrimp in a sieve or colander, reserving the bowl of lemon juice.

Cover the bowl of reserved lemon juice with plastic wrap and put it into the refrigerator.

Add the shrimp to the chilled two quart bowl. Stir in the cumin, pepper, oregano and garlic powder, and season with only one-fourth teaspoon of sea salt.

Put the ceviche into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, expelling all the air, then seal the bag and refrigerate/chill the ceviche for up to four hours prior to serving it.

Taste the ceviche, and add a small amount of the reserved lemon juice to brighten the flavors to best please your palate.

If desired, season the ceviche again with salt and/or ground black pepper.

Serve the ceviche in chilled glass goblets or champagne flutes, along with small appetizer forks. Or, you can serve the ceviche as an entree on chilled plates.

Serve a variety of crackers and butter or tortilla chips or tostados and provide a bottle of a nice, chilled Pinot Grigio wine.

Enjoy!

Shrimp Scampi - ☺♥

Only once in my life did I have shrimp scampi prepared and served perfectly in a restaurant, and that was in Little Creek, DE and I don't remember the name of the restaurant, but it was close to but was not the Log Cabin®. Never did I have great shrimp scampi in anyone's home. I am now correcting that deficiency.

What constitutes perfect? Well, it was served in an oblong dish that had about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup of basmati (or wild) rice in the center forming an oval mound. The shrimp were arranged around the mound of rice, with the tail sections pointing up towards the center. The dish was about $\frac{5}{8}$ " deep in hot melted garlic butter, which covered the bottom half of the rice, kind of like a moat around the rice. The inside perimeter of the dish had six crisp toast points dipped into the melted garlic butter arranged around the shrimp. Everything was served hot, which was great, and the garlic was notable.

The recipe below is one of the ones I found on the Internet and it seemed closest to what I think was used. I have modified it to achieve what I want. Do not be put off by the amount of butter ... it is necessary for cooking and serving but you don't have to eat all of it.

Either basmati or wild rice is suitable for this dish, but ordinary white or brown rice is definitely not good for it is too soft and absorbent for a melted butter environment. Both basmati and wild rice remain fairly firm after cooking, which is the objective, plus, they taste better.

Ingredients:

1 pound of butter (trust me, you need this much butter)

2 bunches of scallions, chopped fine

12 cloves of garlic, chopped fine

1/2 cup of chopped parsley

2 teaspoons of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of white pepper

1 cup of dry white French burgundy wine (avoid sweet or red wines)

2 pounds of large to extra large shrimp, peeled and deveined

1 sweet red bell pepper, cut into thin sticks

chopped fresh parsley, for garnish

Six slices of crisp toast cut diagonally to make toast points

3 cups of cooked basmati or wild rice (your preference, but avoid regular rice)

4 fresh lemon wedges

Use four oblong individual serving dishes, about nine to ten inches long and four inches wide and 1½ inches deep. Preheat them in a warm 200°F oven.

Preparation:

Prepare the rice per package instructions. Keep it covered and warm in a 200°F oven.

Melt the butter in a one and one half or two quart saucepan. Add the chopped scallions and chopped garlic; cook 3 minutes. Add the parsley, salt, pepper and wine; simmer 2 minutes and set aside.

Pour a small amount of the garlic butter mixture into a skillet. Sauté the shrimp in batches, adding more butter mixture as needed. Normally about two or three minutes per side will be enough, depending on the size of the shrimp and the depth of the garlic butter. Do not overcook the shrimp. The idea is you want to cook them through but you don't want to form a tough surface on the shrimp.

Put the sautéed shrimp on a plate and keep them in the pre-warmed oven.

Sauté the red pepper slices in the pan; then add the rest of the butter mixture.

Prepare four oblong dishes with oval mounds of rice in the center, about 1¼ inches high in the center. Arrange the shrimp around the rice. Pour the butter mixture into each dish slowly, first around the outside of the shrimp and then spoon a small amount gently over the shrimp and rice. Garnish the dish with fresh chopped parsley. Place the dishes in the warm oven.

Make the toast and cut each piece into four toast points.

Serve the shrimp scampi, dipping the points of the six toast points into the melted garlic butter inside the perimeter of each oblong dish. Place a lemon wedge in the top center of the rice for those who may want to use it on the shrimp.

Enjoy ... and I know you will. I recommend drinking a dry white French burgundy wine with this meal. Louis Jadot® Pouilly Fuisse is the perfect wine, though you might alternatively use/serve various brands of Pinot Grigio. Avoid

all sweet wines for they will destroy everything good about the meal. Serve some ice water too.

Beer is an alternative beverage, and a light beer will be best if you choose to drink beer as it will clear your palate best between bites of the garlicky seafood.

Variation:

For those who prefer pasta to rice, I suggest preparing a pound of angel hair pasta and serving the shrimp scampi in four large round shallow bowls, trying to keep the building of the dish similar to the recipe above. Then, after serving, some folks may want some freshly grated Parmesan or Pecorino Romano or Locatrel cheese on top of the pasta.

Shrimp Tempura - ☺♥

Yummy! Who doesn't like Shrimp Tempura? I found an authentic Japanese recipe on the Internet and I replaced the existing Food Nirvana recipes for Shrimp Tempura with this recipe. It looked just right, and much more authentic! I am now reporting back with results.

The recipe I provided in June 2014 had the typical errors provided to home chefs regarding the batter. I have changed the batter recipe below to cut the amount of flour in half. Thick batters are simply wrong. A thin batter is the only way to go if you want success. That having been said, the authentic recipe for the Tempura sauce was absolute dynamite. Of course, I ordered dried smoked Bonita fish from Japan and also got the right kind of dried seaweed to make the sauce known as Dashi. All in all the recipe failed regarding oil temperature and it was missing a double frying process. Nasty inferior Internet recipes really piss me off! Of course, that is why I fix them so you can get stellar results. You can now trust the recipe ingredients and directions provided below.

This recipe makes 20 pieces of Shrimp Tempura. You can scale up this recipe easily to feed more than three people. When making shrimp tempura it is common practice to make vegetable tempura for the meal. Some typical vegetables are listed later. You simply prepare them in size to be about two bites. The combination of the shrimp and the vegetables makes a complete meal.

I show some different dipping sauces at the end of this recipe that were not provided with what I found on the Internet. I expect they are good but the Tempura sauce recipe given below is truly excellent.

Ingredients:

20 large (Use extra large or jumbo size shrimp as the stuff sold as large in supermarkets really isn't at all large) shrimp

Corn starch for coating the shrimp before dipping it into the tempura batter

Oil for deep frying (vegetable oil : sesame oil = 10 : 1) [I suggest using soybean oil and homemade toasted sesame oil or no sesame oil at all. I actually used only fresh peanut oil and it was great.]

2" of daikon radish, grated, with the liquid squeezed out (You will find daikon radishes in Asian markets and sometimes in better domestic supermarket produce areas.)

Tempura Batter (use the ratio, egg water : flour = 2:1)

1 cup of egg water (1 cold large egg broken into a chilled one cup measuring cup + ice water to make a total volume of one cup)

1/2 cup of chilled all purpose flour (you can vary this to suit yourself, but a 1:1 ratio resulted in a batter that was way too thick.)

Tempura Sauce (See the recipes for making Dashi and Mirin below)

3/4 cup of Dashi

3 Tbsp. of soy sauce

2 Tbsp. of Mirin

2 tsp. of sugar

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees F.

To make the tempura sauce, combine the dashi, soy sauce, Mirin, and sugar in a small saucepan and bring it to a boil. Then lower the heat and let it simmer until the sugar is completely dissolved. Remove the sauce from the heat and pour it into a small serving dish and put the dish into the 180 degrees F warming oven.

To prepare the shrimp, shell them (except for the last part of the tail) and rinse them, slit the back about 1/8th of an inch deep and remove the vein, rinse again, then cut shallow crosswise slits about 1/8th of an inch deep every 1/2 inch on the "inside" curve of each shrimp. Then flatten them out on a cutting board with the inside curve on the underside. Leave them moist but not wet. The idea is to have the cornstarch used later for coating to lightly coat the shrimp, not form caked cornstarch on the surface.

Grate the daikon and squeeze the liquid out. Put the grated daikon into a small cold serving dish and set it aside.

Heat 1½" deep cooking oil to 375 degrees F using a deep fryer, or use a Dutch oven on the stovetop and a candy/frying thermometer. Allow the oil temperature to decrease during frying to 350 degrees F but not lower. Then remove the fried shrimp and bring the temperature back to 375 degrees F before starting the next batch.

Note: I watched a video of a chef doing the deep frying and it was most instructive. The batter the chef used was "thin." That infers that the batter recipe shown originally with this recipe would result in a batter that is too thick, that needs to be diluted with a small amount of additional ice water. It sure was

too thick, even with some dilution with ice water. During frying there were lots of small pieces of batter in the oil due to using the thinner batter and the chef used a screen type of spatula to collect the small pieces and put them onto the pieces of frying battered shrimp early in the frying (to make sure they will stick together). That made the final pieces of shrimp very attractive. No small pieces of fried batter are allowed to remain in the oil between batches as they will darken and be an unwelcome mess. In other words be sure to remove everything from the oil between batches.

To make the tempura batter, sift the flour into a one quart cold stainless steel bowl.

Break the egg into the cold measuring cup and add the ice water to bring the total volume to one cup. Then pour the mixture into a pre-chilled one quart mixing bowl.

Whisk the egg mixture vigorously and discard (spoon off) the foam that forms on the surface.

Slowly pour the egg mixture into the chilled flour and mix the batter with a serving spoon but do not over mix. It is okay to leave a few lumps in batter. Keep the batter cold all the time. This can be done by placing the batter bowl into ice cubes or crushed ice in a larger bowl.

Coat each piece of shrimp with cornstarch. I prefer having a bowl of cornstarch and coating each shrimp individually and completely, then shaking off excess cornstarch. Put each piece of coated shrimp onto a paper towel.

Coat each piece of shrimp individually with the batter, letting excess batter drip off, then put it into the hot oil, doing no more than five shrimp per batch.

Deep fry each shrimp until it is pale gold in color. Turn over after two minutes to assure even frying on both sides. The total frying time during the first frying will be about five minutes. Do not crowd the fryer with too many shrimp; leave at least half of the oil surface empty. This means fry no more than five jumbo shrimp at a time. That is particularly important if you use a thinner batter and want to collect the small pieces of frying batter early in the frying and put them onto the pieces of frying shrimp.

Use a slotted spoon and transfer each piece of the fried shrimp tempura to a wire rack or to a plate lined with a paper towel to drain excess oil. I like to keep finished batches in a 180 degrees F warming oven so they don't get cold during the frying of later batches. If you do that when frying three or more batches of shrimp remember to put a paper towel between each batch layer so the oil that

drains from the shrimp does not soak into the shrimp made in an earlier batch. Alternatively, you can put a wire rack on a cookie sheet in the oven and skip using the paper towels as you will have plenty of surface area on the wire rack for multiple batches of fried shrimp.

Between batches, remove and discard the leftover batter crumbs from the oil.

Now repeat the frying process again using batches, this time of once fried shrimp. The result, provided you remove the shrimp from the hot oil after about two to three minutes, will be vastly superior to a single frying process re. coating crispness.

Serve the hot shrimp tempura with the warm tempura sauce in a small serving dish and with the grated daikon on the side on the plate holding the shrimp.

Notes:

Make the batter right before deep frying to avoid activation of wheat gluten.

If you put in too many shrimp at the same time the oil temperature will drop quickly. You do not want that to happen as it will result in an oil soaked final product instead of having a crisp batter coating. Maintain the right temperature for frying at all times, ergo wait between batches until the oil temperature has risen to 375 degrees F. Also, if you are not using a deep fryer then cut the heat back temporarily when the oil reaches the right temperature so that it doesn't get too hot. You can increase the heat to maintain the right temperature once you start to put the batch of shrimp into the oil. You can also turn off the heat temporarily if necessary to lower the temperature to 375 degrees F.

For vegetable tempura, you can use vegetables such as sweet potato, kabocha squash, lotus root, king oyster mushrooms, etc. I typically use tiny carrots or carrot slices(slightly pre-cooked), raw green beans, small pieces of raw broccoli, sweet green, red or yellow pepper chunks, sliced summer squash, zucchini squash, etc. The cornstarch and batter coating and frying processes are the same as those used with the shrimp. Do not overcook as the vegetables should be barely cooked to retain their physical character and taste, i.e., not be totally limp.

To make Dashi:

Ichiban Dashi is known as First Sea Stock, which means the first use of the ingredients used to make batches of Dashi. Sometimes the ingredients are re-used to make a second batch that is weaker in flavor.

Buy the ingredients online at AsianFoodGrocer.com or Amazon or from a local Asian market. You can also buy packets of dried Dashi and use it with boiling

water to make the broth. I ordered the dried smoked Bonita fish filet through Amazon and it was shipped directly from Japan. It was definitely worth the wait and the cost. Wow! What a great authentic Tempura sauce! Do, however, note that the quantities provided in the dashi recipe below are far more than what you will need for the shrimp quantities listed above. I suggest cutting the Dashi recipe in half. Ditto the Mirin recipe.

Makes 4 cups of stock

Ingredients:

4 cups of water

16 to 20 square inches of kombu** (water soluble seaweed)

1/2 cup of loosely packed katsuobushi (bonito tuna, cleaned, filleted, cooked, smoked, dried and shaved)

Directions:

Place the water and the kombu in a pot and let the kombu soak for about 15 minutes. Place the pot over medium heat. Right before the water starts to boil (watch for bubbles starting to break around the edge of the pot), remove the pot from the heat and scatter the katsuobushi over the surface of the water.

After 3 or 4 minutes (the katsuobushi will have sunk to the bottom of the pot by this point), strain the stock through a strainer lined with a tightly woven cotton cloth, cheesecloth, or a coffee-filter.

You can refrigerate the stock in a tightly covered container for up to 4 days in the refrigerator.

** If you want to weigh out the kombu, somewhere between 0.45-ounces or 0.6 ounces (13 to 18 grams) is okay.

Alternate Dashi Recipe: (this appears to be more concentrated in the use of the dried bonito flakes and also re. the seaweed on a weight basis. I did not use this recipe.)

Ingredients:

6 cups of cold water

1 oz of kombu (dried kelp), about 20 square inches

2 (5-gram) packages of katsuo bushi (dried bonito flakes), about 1 cup

Directions:

Bring the cold water and kombu just to a boil in a large saucepan over high heat. Remove the saucepan from the heat and remove the kombu. Sprinkle the katsuo bushi over liquid; let the mixture stand 3 minutes and, if necessary, stir to make the katsuo bushi sink. Pour through a cheesecloth-lined sieve or a coffee filter into a bowl.

Homemade Mirin

Why make it at home? The answer is that most commercial products bear little resemblance to the highest quality Mirin made only in Japan and they are expensive when you consider the volume of Mirin used in different recipes for Japanese food.

Yield: generous 1/2 cup

Ingredients:

5 tablespoons of sugar, such as organic cane sugar

1/2 cup of sake (rice wine)

1 1/2 teaspoons of pure cane syrup, such as Steen's® (optional ... I did not use any cane syrup)

Directions:

Combine the ingredients in a very small saucepan, such as butter warmer/melter. Bring to a boil over medium heat, then stir to ensure the sugar has dissolved.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and set it aside to cool. Taste and add the cane syrup for depth, if you like.

Alternate Shrimp Tempura Dipping Sauces

The dipping sauces shown below each simply have the ingredients prepared as indicated and then combined and mixed to make the final sauce.

Ginger Soy Dipping Sauce (mix, bring to a boil, mix to dissolve the sugar, then remove it from the heat and serve it warm)

1/4 cup of soy sauce

3 tablespoons of rice wine

1 teaspoon of sugar

1 teaspoon of toasted sesame oil

1 garlic clove, minced

2 teaspoons of grated fresh ginger

1 scallion, finely chopped

Teppayaki Mustard Dipping Sauce (served cold)

3 tablespoons of mayonnaise

2 tablespoons of Dijon mustard

1 teaspoon of lime juice

2 teaspoons of soy sauce

1 teaspoon of grated fresh ginger

2 teaspoons of prepared horseradish

Chile Aioli Dipping Sauce (served cold)

1/2 cup of mayonnaise

2 tablespoons of Thai-style chili sauce

1 tablespoon of lime juice

1/4 teaspoon of soy sauce

1 tablespoon of grated fresh ginger

Shrimp With Lobster Sauce - ☺♥

Shrimp with lobster sauce is a tasty Chinese dish that is easy to make. As I didn't have a recipe in Food Nirvana for shrimp with lobster sauce (there is no lobster in lobster sauce) I decided to find a great one and include it. Thanks goes to the Woks Of Life® folks.

As usual, I like to tweak recipe ingredients to produce what I like best, like in this instance the size and weight of the shrimp. You are free to do whatever you want with any recipe ingredients to accommodate your preferences. You will see snow peas and scallops in the picture because I decided to add them to the recipe, giving it more delightful complexity. I also make modifications to the directions where needed to reflect differences in equipment or other determinants like the amount of available heat for cooking in a wok, any number of which may happen because our kitchens are not identical.

A light white wine like Pinot Grigio, chilled, is a nice beverage to serve with this meal. Or, you can choose most any cold beverage.

Ingredients: (2 to 3 servings)

12 oz. of fresh (or frozen) shrimp (16 to 20 size)

4 oz. of ground pork

12 oz. of sea scallops, halved (optional addition)

2 tablespoons of canola oil

1 medium clove of garlic (minced)

1 tablespoon of Shaoxing wine

1 1/2 to 2 cups of chicken broth (increase this to 3 cups if you are adding the optional ingredients)

1/2 teaspoon of sesame oil

1/4 teaspoon of sugar

1/2 teaspoon of salt

1/4 teaspoon of white pepper

1/2 cup of frozen peas (thawed)

1 cup of snow peas, membrane removed (optional addition)

2 to 3 tablespoons of cornstarch (mixed into a slurry with 1/3 cup of water)

1 extra large egg (beaten slightly)

1 scallion (cut thinly crosswise, both white and green parts)

1 cup of uncooked basmati or jasmine rice

1 3/4 to 2 cups of water for steaming the rice

Directions:

Prepare one cup of uncooked jasmine rice by steaming it in 1 3/4 cups of boiling water. Alternately, you can choose to make basmati rice using 2 cups of boiling water. Once the rice is mixed into the boiling water, steam it covered with a lid at a very low simmer for 15 minutes, then remove it from the heat and let it rest, covered, for five minutes. Then fluff the rice with two forks.

Put the rice into a one quart bowl, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and put it into a 180 degrees F warming oven. Put the individual serving dishes you plan to use into the warming oven.

Peel and devein the shrimp.

Boil 2 cups of water in a large wok on high heat and stir in the ground pork.

Break up any clumps and cook for about 1 minute, until the pork is no longer pink.

Drain the pork in a mesh strainer and give it a quick hot water rinse.

Clean the wok and put it over medium high heat.

When it is hot, add the canola oil, then the garlic, ground pork, and shrimp and (optional) scallops, and stir fry for 30 seconds.

Add the wine and stir fry for another 10 to 20 seconds.

Add the chicken broth, sesame oil, sugar, salt, and white pepper. Stir in the peas and (optional) snow peas and heat the mixture.

Once the mixture comes to a simmer, reduce the heat to medium and stir in the cornstarch slurry a little bit at a time.

Let the mixture bubble at a low boil and thicken. It should be able to coat a spoon, but it shouldn't be thick.

If it is too thick, add a little more chicken broth and stir. If it is too thin, stir in more cornstarch slurry.

Spread the slightly beaten egg and scallion pieces across the top of the wok contents and let the mixture simmer for 10 seconds.

Use a spatula to fold the egg into the sauce.

Serve the shrimp with lobster sauce over bowls of the rice. Season to taste with salt or white pepper.

Enjoy!

Spicy Seafood Curry - ☺♥

I wanted to have a good recipe for a seafood curry for a long time. I studied a lot of Internet recipes plus my own recipe for mild chicken curry. I put together a composite of what to me appeared to be the best selection of ingredients and amounts. I then created the directions for putting it all together.

I made the dish and Peggy and I are very pleased. It has a bit of zing without being spicy hot. As is typical, making and eating the curry for the first time was accompanied by analysis of results, both in progress while cooking and later when we ate the curry. The recipe below includes the few changes I made and provides for some optional ingredients and/or variable amounts of essential ingredients where indicated. I like salt so I found that using it at the table enhanced the flavor, which as cooked is slightly sweet and moderately spicy.

We were surprised with the large amount of curry produced using this recipe. It will easily feed eight people, and that means you should double the ingredients for the rice if you are serving a large group of friends or family. We were pleased with the appearance also with the many colors from the vegetables in a creamy base. You will be very pleased too if you decide to make this mild seafood curry.

Note that I recommend serving a chilled Pinot Grigio wine with this dish. We had chilled Smoking Loon® Pinot Grigio and it was excellent. Though I didn't make it this time around, a side salad is a good addition to the meal, perhaps either of the Food Nirvana oriental salads, or the creamy Mediterranean Cucumber salad. They provide taste, texture and color contrasts with the curry and that will be very attractive and enjoyable. Also, see the dessert recommendation near the end of this recipe.

Ingredients: (eight generous servings)

2 tablespoons of vegetable oil

1 tablespoon of minced fresh ginger root

3 tablespoons of lime juice

1 tablespoon of brown sugar

2 tablespoons of chopped fresh cilantro

1/2 finely diced cleaned (deseeded) jalapeno pepper

1, 13.66 oz. can of Thai® brand unsweetened coconut milk

1 tsp. of Sea Salt

1/2 tsp. of white pepper

1 cup of chopped sweet onion

3 cloves of garlic, diced

2 tbsp. of mild yellow curry powder (use 1 tbsp. for a milder curry)

1/8 teaspoon of cayenne pepper (optional)

1 teaspoon of ground cumin

2 carrots, peeled and sliced 1/8th inch thick on the diagonal

1 1/2 cups of chicken broth

1 cup of chopped fresh asparagus

3/4 cup of heavy cream

3/4 cup of frozen peas (let the peas thaw while you are making this recipe)

1/3 cup of diced roasted red sweet peppers

2 cups of uncooked basmati rice (double the rice and liquids if feeding a large group of people)

1 can of chicken broth and one can of water (for cooking the rice)

1 lb. of haddock filet cut into small pieces about 1/2" on a side

1 lb. of sea scallops, halved

1 lb. of shelled crab meat

1 lb. of shelled, cleaned small to medium size shrimp, cut in half if medium in size

3 to 4 tbsp. of cornstarch

1 tsp. of turmeric (optional to create a pale yellow color) or a few drops of yellow food coloring

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 200 degrees F.

Heat the vegetable oil in a large, deep skillet.

Put the onion pieces into the skillet, stir to coat them with oil and cook them on low heat until they are translucent.

Add the diced garlic and diced jalapeno pepper, cilantro and minced ginger, then stir, and cook for one minute.

Stir in the curry powder, cayenne pepper, white pepper, brown sugar, sea salt and cumin, and the optional turmeric if you choose to use it, and cook on very low heat while stirring, until the aromas of the spices are released, about two minutes. I like to pre-measure the spices and put them all in one small container before starting the cooking. That practice makes the cooking very easy.

Stir in the carrot pieces and toss them in the mixture to partially coat them.

Set the skillet aside while you cook the seafood in a separate skillet.

Put the 1 1/2 cups of chicken broth, the lime juice and the coconut milk in a separate skillet and bring the contents to a simmer on high heat.

Add the seafood to the skillet, then bring to a boil and then simmer on low heat, covered, for five minutes, stirring a few times during cooking.

Add the cooked seafood mixture to the skillet containing the sautéed vegetables/spices mixture.

Stir in the chopped asparagus pieces, cover the skillet, heat to a simmer and then simmer on low heat for 10 minutes.

Sprinkle one tbsp. of cornstarch on top of the curry and mix it in completely. Repeat that process for the second and third and possibly fourth tablespoons of cornstarch.

Stir in the cream, the roasted red pepper pieces and the thawed peas. If you decided to use yellow food coloring then add three to five drops to the curry. Stir well, then cover the skillet and heat the curry to a simmer and let the ingredients cook at a simmer for about three to five minutes, stirring twice during the cooking. It is not necessary to bring the curry to a full boil.

Put the completed seafood curry into a large serving bowl or casserole, cover it with plastic wrap and put it into the 200 degrees F warming oven.

Pre-warm the dinner plates or wide shallow individual serving bowls in the warming oven. Also pre-warm a bowl to hold a quart (or two) of cooked rice.

Make the rice using half chicken broth and half water, two cups of each, and 1/4 tsp. of salt. You should double the rice and liquid amounts if you are serving more than four people.

Put the rice into the pre-warmed bowl, cover it with plastic wrap and return it to the warming oven.

Make any side dishes you plan to serve with the meal, like a side salad, and maybe a light dessert. See below.

Serve the seafood curry over the basmati rice on the pre-warmed dinner plates or bowls.

As noted earlier, a good chilled Pinot Grigio wine goes very well with this meal.

Also as noted earlier, a side salad, especially an oriental side salad, is the perfect way to make this meal complete in appearance, tastes and textures.

Maybe you want to serve some red raspberry gelato and some simple sugar cookies for dessert.

Enjoy!

Sweet and Sour Shrimp - ☺♥

This is a nice Internet recipe for making sweet and sour shrimp. I made some ingredient adjustments and procedural changes, but they were minor. As you might expect, the sauce ingredients are similar but not the same as the ones used in making sweet and sour pork. Given the fruity nature of the sauce, any one of a number of popular fruit flavored seltzers can be used in making the batter.

Note that a nice beverage to serve with this meal is a chilled white wine like Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio, though most any cold beverage will be fine.

Ingredients: (makes 4 servings)

For the shrimp and the batter:

16 peeled and deveined shrimp (12 to 16 size; a bit more than a pound)

1/4 cup of all-purpose flour

1/4 cup of rice flour

1/8 teaspoon of baking powder

2 tablespoons of cornstarch

1/4 teaspoon of sea salt

1 pinch of ground turmeric (optional)

1/8 teaspoon of white pepper

1/2 teaspoon of sesame oil

2/3 cup of cold seltzer (or beer)

Peanut oil (for frying)

For the sweet and sour sauce:

1/3 cup of red salad onion (cut into 1-inch pieces)

1/3 cup of red bell pepper (cut into 1-inch pieces)

1/3 cup of green bell pepper (cut into 1-inch pieces)

2 tablespoons of ketchup

3/4 cup of canned pineapple chunks

3/4 cup of pineapple juice from can

1 cup of duck sauce (buy it in one quart quantity at an Asian market or at your supermarket)

3 tablespoons of rice vinegar

3 tablespoons of sugar

1/4 teaspoon of sea salt

1 1/2 tablespoons of cornstarch (mixed into a slurry with 3 tablespoons water)

1/2 tsp. of red food coloring

Directions:

Prepare whatever rice you plan to serve, then put it into a 180°F warming oven in a bowl, covered with plastic wrap.

Put a serving bowl for each guest into the warming oven.

Rinse the shrimp with cold water, then pat them dry with paper towels.

To make the batter, first mix together the flours, baking powder, cornstarch, sea salt, turmeric, and white pepper in a two quart bowl.

Heat peanut oil 2" deep in a one gallon pot to 325°F. Use an instant read thermometer to monitor the temperature and adjust the heat as needed.

When you are ready to fry the shrimp, add the sesame oil and the cold seltzer water (or beer) to the batter and stir the batter until it is smooth. If the batter appears to be too thick, then add more seltzer and stir it in. Note that a batter coated shrimp should have a batter thickness of no more than 1/16 of an inch. The best way to test the batter thickness is by coating one shrimp and letting any excess batter drip off.

Drop all of the shrimp into the batter. Mix gently until they are evenly coated with batter.

Carefully take eight shrimp from the batter, one at a time with tongs, and let the excess batter drip off, then put that shrimp into the hot oil.

Make sure the shrimp don't stick to each other during frying. If needed, pull ones stuck together apart with tongs and a fork.

Turn the shrimp as needed and cook each shrimp for about 2 minutes, or until they are golden in color, but not brown. Note that the shrimp will be removed from the hot oil individually with tongs, as they have been introduced into the hot oil at different times and they have a relatively short frying time.

Remove the shrimp from the hot oil individually as they complete frying using tongs, and transfer them to a cooling rack placed over a baking sheet.

Repeat the frying process for the second batch of eight shrimp. Then keep the oil in the pot heated on very low heat for the later second frying of the shrimp.

Put two teaspoons of the hot peanut oil into a wok over high heat. Then put in the onion pieces and the red and green bell pepper pieces.

Stir fry for 30 seconds, then clear a spot in the center of the wok. Add another teaspoon of hot peanut oil, and the ketchup, and fry for 20 seconds.

Mix in the pineapple chunks, pineapple juice, duck sauce, rice vinegar, sugar, red food coloring and sea salt. Heat the mixture to a low simmer, then simmer for 2 minutes, then reduce the heat to low.

Heat the peanut oil in the pot to 350 degrees F.

Refry all of the shrimp at one time. The temperature will drop to about 325°F when you add the shrimp. Continue frying at around 325°F for about 2 minutes, then remove the shrimp with a slotted spoon and put them onto the cooling rack to drain excess oil.

Stir the cornstarch slurry to remix it, then add it to the simmered sauce a little at a time with stirring until the sauce becomes thick enough to coat a spoon. Then turn off the heat.

Put the fried shrimp into the wok, and fold them into the sauce with 3 or 4 scooping motions until they are lightly coated.

Serve the sweet and sour shrimp hot in the pre-warmed serving bowls over the warm white rice. Also serve a nice cold beverage.

Enjoy!

Grilled Swordfish - ☺♥T

Swordfish can be wonderful. Most restaurants and individuals at home have no idea how to cook swordfish ... or for that matter how to prepare it prior to cooking. Most of the time it is too dry and tough, and worse, it might be served with the skin on and the dark flesh included. Yuck! Expensive, smelly, fishy tasting fish! How stupid!

I created my recipe based on how much I despised swordfish as served in typical restaurants. My results were/are perfect and I've received many rave reviews. Below is the simple and best way to prepare and cook grilled swordfish, but the directions must be followed precisely.

First, buy the steaks with a thickness of 1¼" ... not thinner and not thicker. A quality seafood market will receive swordfish in large uncut sections at least once a week so by calling ahead you can schedule pickup of your order on the day the fish arrives, and your custom thickness requirements will be easy for them to prepare. Check what they have done re. thickness before completing your purchase. Also, make certain that any swordfish that you buy is fresh and not previously frozen. The cost will be around \$12.99 per pound. One pound will serve two adults, but if you are buying one piece for only two adults and it is large in area you may have to buy more than one pound. Or, if it is the right thickness you can have the fish monger/butcher cut a one pound piece for you from a whole large steak.

An alternative is for you to buy the weight you want in one piece, particularly if you are preparing a meal for four or more people, and then cut it to proper sized pieces at home. This is actually the best way to be sure you get what you want.

Rinse the fish and remove excess moisture with paper towels. Cut the skin from the fish by slipping a sharp knife under the skin and gradually pulling the edge of the skin as you continue cutting it off. After the initial cut I hold the skin edge and lift the fish into the air and then use the knife along the opening between the flesh and the skin for easy skin removal.

Cut the steak in half exposing the dark red flesh from the center on each piece. Cut it out and discard it. All of it. When you are done you will have only the light colored flesh, yielding a 100% edible piece of swordfish. Upon cooking it will not have any oily fishy taste that would have been present if cooked with the skin. Moreover, the strong tasting red flesh will not spoil the experience of eating the delicious and mild lighter flesh.

For one pound of swordfish prepare the following coating:

½ stick butter, melted

1/3 cup Texas Pete's® hot sauce – room temperature.

½ tsp. White pepper

Mix the ingredients and coat both sides of the chilled raw fish on a plate, pouring any excess coating over the fish. As the fish will be cold the buttery hot sauce coating will gradually thicken and set on the surface, even at room temperature.

Note: Before grilling the fish make certain all other food items for the meal are ready to eat, as you want to serve and eat the fish while it is hot from the grill. You will want to serve the fish on a pre-warmed platter for maximum enjoyment.

Prepare and light a charcoal grill. Use a charcoal grill and not a gas grill and not a broiler and not a skillet. Place ample briquettes in the grill two deep tightly packed and make sure the grilling rack is exactly four inches above the top of the briquettes. Do not start grilling the fish until the briquettes are all glowing/ uniformly gray in color. You want the grill to be quite hot with even heat.

Place each piece of coated swordfish on the grill assuring even coating on the side facing the heat first. Grill for exactly nine minutes or less per side depending on the thickness of the swordfish and the intensity of the heat from your charcoal grill. Do not worry about any temporary flaming from the buttery coating hitting the hot briquettes. Put excess coating from the plate onto the top side of the swordfish immediately before turning the pieces over to grill the second side. Then carefully use a good spatula to get under the cooked side completely, and flip the pieces over. Again grill for nine minutes ... or less. Note: It is smart to lift a piece of fish partially with a spatula after the first six minutes of grilling to check the degree of doneness of the grilled surface. Respond accordingly.

Do not overcook. If necessary, cut into one of the pieces after cooking on the first side and flipping to make sure the cooking time isn't excessive (the center should still be pretty much raw). You can also test for doneness while grilling the second side after only five minutes. The fish should not be raw in the center when it is finished cooking but anything other than raw is fine, except for dry flesh anywhere except the crisp surface. A dry interior is a disaster. With practice, using your equipment, you will learn the perfect combination of heat and time, so that testing for doneness won't be necessary.

Remove the swordfish pieces and serve immediately. Any excess coating from the plate used initially to coat the swordfish can be placed on the cooked swordfish to enhance the already great flavor.

The swordfish will be crispy on the outside and exceptionally moist and tender on the inside. If it isn't perfectly moist and tender it has been overcooked. That will definitely happen if the steaks are too thin or if they are grilled too close to the hot briquettes. If they are cooked too far away from the briquettes or with too little heat from not using enough briquettes they will not be crisp on the outside and the fish, by the time it is cooked, will be too dry due to evaporation. Fast hot grilling without burning the surface is the key to success.

The taste is fabulous, and not hot or over seasoned. Note that the butter and hot sauce mixture is used to lightly season the fish and mostly to lubricate it so it doesn't stick to the grill. Thus, there is only a small effect from using the hot sauce in the coating ... just the right effect for people who don't in general like highly seasoned food. Heat aficionados can add more coating or hot sauce to the grilled fish if they prefer, but everyone I know who has tried it does not add any other seasoning, including salt.

Marinated Swordfish - ☺♥

My sweetheart Peggy and I were looking for a simple Winter time swordfish recipe that did not require cooking on a gas or charcoal grill. This recipe, from Food Network®, allowed the use of a very lightly oiled, very hot cast iron skillet, which worked just fine for us. The marinade looked like it would be pretty good and it turned out to be perfect.

I made minor changes to the recipe, like the use of a marinating bag instead of an open dish, and the use of some parsley as a garnish after grilling, plus the use of a small amount of olive oil in the skillet to keep the fish flesh from sticking to the hot skillet while cooking. The net result? Delicious!

The two things we liked best were: 1) This is a very easy recipe, and 2) The swordfish was nicely moist and tender inside after grilling as well as delicious.

I thought about but did not cook the marinade vegetables separately in the cast iron skillet and use them as a dressing or topping for the grilled swordfish instead of parsley. That is a recipe variation that I believe will significantly enhance the dish.

Note: The swordfish steaks should be between 1" and 1 1/2" thick.

We had buttered noodles and stewed tomatoes to accompany the swordfish. I suggest serving a nice light white wine, like Pinot Grigio, chilled, as a fine beverage for this meal.

Ingredients: (2 adult servings)

1 pound (or slightly more) of swordfish steaks (skin and dark flesh cut off and discarded)

1 lime, juiced (I used the juice from 1/2 of a lemon and 1/2 of a lime)

1 tablespoon of fresh ginger, chopped fine (or pickled ginger slices often used with sushi or sashimi)

2 medium to large cloves of garlic, minced

1/2 of a medium size onion, diced (I used a purple salad onion; you might also use shallots)

3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil (nice variation: 2 tbsp. olive oil and 1 tbsp. of toasted sesame seed oil)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper (about 1/4 tsp. of each)

A few sprigs of fresh parsley to use as a garnish after grilling the swordfish (optional)

Directions:

Put your dinner plates and serving dishes into a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Combine the juice of the lime with the ginger, the garlic and the onion in a bowl. Then add the olive oil and season the marinade with the salt and pepper and mix well.

Put the raw swordfish steaks into a one quart Ziploc® freezer bag and pour the marinade over them, then seal the bag while eliminating excess air, and lay it flat on a counter. Turn the marinade bag over every five minutes for a total marinating time of 30 minutes.

Remove the swordfish pieces from the marinating bag without any vegetable pieces attached, and grill them in a lightly olive oiled, hot cast iron skillet, for about 3 to 4 minutes per side.

Serve the swordfish on a pre-warmed plate with a few sprigs of parsley on top to enhance the appearance.

Wor Dip Har ☺

In the 1970's I would eat lunch at Chinese restaurants in Wilmington, DE, with my great Chinese friend, Dora Clark. I enjoyed various pork and shrimp dishes, but among them I had a favorite that was batter dipped fried butterflied shrimp with bacon served with a light, sweet barbecue sauce over white rice. The Chinese name for that dish on the menu was Wor Dip Har.

Internet recipes I found years later for Wor Dip Har did not batter dip, but simply fried and served the dish over rice with a light barbecue sauce.

The recipe below is one that I found on the Internet and modified considerably to create Wor Dip Har as I remembered it. I was pleased with the initial results but I continued to refine the recipe. I found that any frozen shrimp you may buy will not lend itself to being butterflied as the backs are cleaned before you buy them. Thus, I formed kabobs of shrimp and bacon temporarily until I could buy the right type of shrimp ... large, fresh and still in the shell.

The best way to make this dish is to buy fresh raw shrimp in the shell, of size 16 to 20 to the pound, and then shell them (except for the final tail section), butterfly them and then clean out the dark vein.

Ingredients: (makes two servings)

3 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

12 Extra large shrimp, shelled, butterflied and cleaned

2 slices of dry cured hickory smoked bacon, each slice partially fried and then cut into six pieces, crosswise

2 to 3 cups of cooked basmati or jasmine rice

12 round 2 1/2" long toothpicks

1 cup of light sweet barbecue sauce

1 quart of peanut oil for frying

An instant read thermometer

Directions:

Steam 1 cup of uncooked basmati or jasmine rice per package instructions. Let the rice rest in the covered saucepan until you are ready to make plates of Wor

Dip Har for your guests, then lightly warm individual servings of rice on plates in the microwave oven..

Soak the shelled shrimp in a bowl in the lemon juice for five minutes. Stir to mix and coat the shrimp as necessary. Then drain the juice from the shrimp on a paper towel. Then butterfly each shrimp.

Pre-fry the bacon only until it starts to become crisp, then remove it from the skillet and put it on a paper towel to drain off hot bacon fat. Then cut each piece of bacon into six pieces, crosswise.

Use a toothpick to attach a piece of partially fried bacon to a raw butterflied shrimp. Do that for all the pieces of bacon and shrimp.

Transfer the partially fried bacon and raw shrimp pieces to a paper towel covered baking sheet.

Go to the Chinese Fried Shrimp Batter Recipe below to create the batter and to flour coat the shrimp and bacon pieces.

Heat one quart of peanut oil in a wok on medium high heat to 325 degrees F.

Check the thickness of the batter. You may want to thin it with a small amount of water and whisk it so that it coats the shrimp and bacon pieces with only a thin layer of batter.

Lightly batter dip six of the floured pieces of shrimp and bacon individually and put each one into the hot oil. Fry the shrimp in batches of six, at 325 degrees F, just long enough to cook the shrimp, finish frying the bacon and to fry the batter until it is crisp and lightly tan. Turn each piece of shrimp over once during frying. Two to three minutes per side is about the right amount of frying time.

Put the batter dipped fried shrimp and bacon on a paper towel covered plate, and keep the plate in a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Repeat the above frying steps for the remainder of the floured and battered bacon wrapped shrimp, putting a paper towel between layers of the Wor Dip Har on the plate in the oven.

Serve the Wor Dip Har hot with a light, warmed BBQ sauce, over the basmati or jasmine rice. Remember to remove the toothpick before eating each piece of fried shrimp and bacon.

You can use Ray's light BBQ dipping sauce recipe shown below or find a different sauce recipe via the Internet or buy a sauce at your supermarket.

Chinese Fried Shrimp Batter Recipe

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of flour for the batter

1 extra large egg

1 tsp. of baking powder

1/2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

pinch of white pepper

1/3 cup of water (plus more later to thin the chilled batter)

1/2 cup of flour for coating the shrimp

Directions:

Whisk the egg in a large bowl. Add the 1/2 cup of flour and the baking powder, salt, garlic powder, white pepper and water.

Whisk the ingredients together until they are combined. Let the batter rest in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Put 1/2 cup of flour into a quart size Ziploc® freezer bag. Coat all of the shrimp and bacon pieces by putting six at a time into the Ziploc® freezer bag, closing the bag, and shaking it for about ten seconds to get flour all over the surface of each piece.

Now return to the Wor Dip Har recipe to batter coat and fry the floured bacon and shrimp.

Ray's Light Barbecue Dipping Sauce: (makes two cups)

1 1/2 cups of Duck Sauce (Buy it in quart jars in any Asian market or in your supermarket.)

1 tsp. of dark Soy Sauce

2 tbsp. of rice vinegar

1 tbsp. of honey

2 tbsp. of Shaoxing wine

1/4 cup of Maraschino cherry juice

Directions:

Mix all the sauce ingredients together well, warm the sauce in the microwave oven, and serve the sauce in a serving bowl with a ladle so your guests can each decide how much to use.

I hope you make and enjoy this recipe, for it is quite tasty and unique.

SEASONINGS:

Chili Powder - ☺♥T

Most people I know really enjoy a hot bowl of homemade chili con carne ... if it is well made. I believe most of we gringos pretty much use only commercial brands of chili powder that are relatively mild, the idea being that the home cook or the person eating the chili con carne can add hot seasoning ingredients like freshly cut hot peppers, Tabasco sauce, red pepper flakes or sriracha sauce as desired. While this approach works to a limited extent, I've always wondered how to use the packages of many types of dried peppers found in ethnic food stores and on the Internet, and now also in better supermarkets. I also wondered about what taste variations would happen by using different types of chili peppers in combination.

Curiosity finally led to me buying bags of different types of peppers based on their flavor variations and Scovill heat index values ... for the best complex flavors result from using multiple types of dried chili peppers, and the heat level is a matter of the ratio of each type of pepper put into the mixture.

If you buy or grow your own fresh peppers the processing steps start with cutting off the stems and slitting each pepper in half lengthwise. Then the membrane and seeds are scraped out and discarded. After those steps you still need to dehydrate the pepper halves, which can be done with a home dehydrator or by using a convection oven set no higher than 175 degrees F. The time required to dehydrate fresh pepper halves will depend on your choice of method and pepper size and thickness, and can easily vary from four to eight hours.

If you start with dried chili peppers you will likely still have to cut off the stems, slit the peppers in half lengthwise, then scrape out and discard all the seeds and any large membrane pieces present.

Note that heating the dried peppers brings out the natural oils which enhances the flavor of the final product, so in the directions below you will see two different methods to do that. I used the oven approach and it worked very quickly starting with dried chili peppers. In my case one of the pepper types (Ancho) was not completely dried so I accomplished both drying and heating to enhance flavors in one step.

I need mention that I had purchased additional types of dried chili peppers, some with higher Scovill heat ratings (10,000 to 30,000) and some insufficiently identified as to type (from India) that I was reluctant to use. Thus, I simply

reserved those peppers for some future experiments. I suggest you use the Internet to find and review a table of Scovill heat ratings for the various types of chili peppers. Heat aficionados will want to try some really hot varieties ... like habanero or Carolina reaper peppers ... along with some milder peppers for heat balance.

The chili powder resulting from using the recipe below was/is fabulous! I couldn't wait to try it so I made chili con carne using the Food Nirvana recipe and using five tablespoons of the new chili powder. The results were stunningly good, as attested to by my sweetheart Peggy. She had multiple servings and simply loved the new flavors. I did too. The overall point is that I am done buying any brand of supermarket chili powder, for I now have complete control of flavor and heat mixtures. Obviously the variations for heat and flavor combinations are almost limitless.

This recipe makes a chili powder with a light kick in the heat department that will not turn off folks who dislike hot foods. All they have to do is eat a few bites and they will be hooked. So will you, and that is a promise! Why? Well, because the very taste of the pepper combination is quite different from and far more delicious than any supermarket chili powder.

I have one final aspect to mention. Having made a relatively mild chili powder you can always amp it up in the heat department by simply adding powdered hot chili peppers of any of many varieties to your chili con carne in the amount you prefer during cooking. Thus, the base chili powder you make using this recipe has all the necessary ingredients combined, and you later vary the heat by adding powder of other chili pepper types to your chili while it is cooking. In a nutshell, you can process chili peppers independently by type, creating powdered versions, which you store in well sealed small canning jars.

Ingredients: (Makes 1 to 2 cups of chili powder)

4 ounces of dried red chili peppers in a 4:2:1 ratio by weight, after cleaning out stems, seeds and excess membranes, as follows:

Dried Ancho chilies (Scovill 1000-1500)

Dried Guajillo chilies (Scovill 3000-5000)

Dried Chile Puya chilies (Scovill 8000-10,000)

3 tablespoons of whole cumin seeds (or 1 1/2 tbsp. of ground cumin)

2 tablespoons of garlic powder

1 1/2 tablespoons of dried oregano

2 teaspoons of coriander seeds (or 1 tsp. of ground coriander)

1 teaspoon of smoked paprika

3 whole cloves (or 1/8 teaspoon of ground cloves)

2 allspice berries (or 1/4 teaspoon of ground allspice)

Directions:

Select the chilies from their individual packages in the right ratio by weight and also weigh them as a group, continuing to add more peppers until the weight is somewhat more than 4 ounces (like around 5 ounces, making an allowance for what will later be discarded as stems, seeds and excess membranes).

Cut off the stems from the dried chilies, cut the chilies in half lengthwise, then scrape out and discard the seeds and membranes. Use a kitchen scale to weigh the group of chili halves/pieces after cleaning them. That assures you will be starting with the final proper weight of 4 ounces of dried chili peppers. Clean additional chilies as needed to get the proper weight.

Completely dry the dried chili pepper halves/pieces on a 12" by 17" baking sheet for one hour in a 175 degrees F convection oven. That will make them fairly brittle and easier to process. Similarly, heat the other recipe ingredients in a bowl separately for half an hour in the oven. I strongly recommend using this method because it is foolproof. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and allow the pepper halves/pieces to cool to room temperature.

Alternatively you can heat a cast iron skillet over medium-high heat and place the chilies in the skillet in a single layer so they're not overlapping. Roast on both sides just until fragrant (a few minutes) being very careful not to scorch them or they will taste bitter. Remove them and let them cool. Repeat the process until all chilies have been roasted. Then break up the brittle peppers into large pieces and tear any that are not brittle into large pieces. That will hasten the pending grinding process. Place the whole spices (but not the powdered ones) into the pan, spread them around and roast them until they are very fragrant, being careful not to scorch them (a few minutes). Remove them and let them cool completely.

Once the chilies and spices are completely cooled, the chilies should be partially crushed using a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag and a kitchen mallet. That breaks up the dried chilies, which will make them much easier to process in a blender. Place all of the ingredients into a 2 quart blender and use the pulse

operation until the contents are a uniform powder. If necessary, use a blunt tool to further crush the pepper pieces in the blender (with the blender turned off!) to promote good mixing. This should take about one or two minutes of blending time depending on the quality of your blender. Transfer the completed chili powder to an air tight jar for storage and, for the very best flavor, use the powder within a month.

Will the amount of chili powder you made last a month? Good question ... but if you feed guests as well as family you will be making more quite soon.

Enjoy!

Chinese Five Spice Seasoning - ☺♥

This recipe is for making a quick Americanized version of Chinese five spice seasoning.

Ingredients:

2 teaspoons of black peppercorns

5 whole star anise

1/2 teaspoon of ground cloves

1 tablespoon of ground cinnamon

1 tablespoon of ground fennel seeds

Directions:

Toast the peppercorns in a small skillet by shaking it over low to medium heat until the aroma of the peppercorns is released. This will take around 3 minutes.

Grind the toasted peppercorns and the star anise in a spice grinder or in a Magic Bullet® mixer.

Shake the blended seasonings through a fine-mesh strainer to get an even consistency. Re grind any large pieces that won't go through the strainer and then put them through the strainer.

Mix in the ground cloves, ground cinnamon, and ground fennel seeds.

Place the mixture back into the spice grinder or Magic Bullet® mixer and grind the spices until they are very fine.

Store the five spice seasoning in an airtight container and keep it in a dark, cool space until you use it.

French Herbs of Provence

The freshest of thyme, savory, rosemary, bay leaf and basil make an aromatic bouquet perfect to infuse dishes with a fragrant dash of French countryside flavor. This traditional assortment of herbs is a classic to keep in stock, and it has been used for centuries in traditional Provencal dishes. The herbs can be tied together with a string or put into a small cloth bag tied at the top if you are cooking a food item where you want to remove the herbs at the end of the cooking cycle.

Italian Seasoning - ?

I often see recipes calling for Italian Seasoning as one of the ingredients. I have an aversion to having to buy pre-made mixes of herbs and spices, particularly when the typical pantry has all the necessary ingredients to make the mix. My second reason is that buying mixes leads to ignorance and taste confined to the purchased mix instead of knowledge you can employ to create new recipes and herb/spice combinations. My final reason for avoiding commercial mixes is that the potential combinations sold are huge in number without any reliable guide to help the shopper determine which mix is the best. One will never know if the gamut of mix tastes and applications are covered.

Thus, I obtained the following recipe from Food.com® and offer it as one example of taking charge in your kitchen. Now you can save money and keep your herb and spice cupboard uncluttered, and best of all, add to your knowledge and freedom to modify the recipe.

Enjoy ...

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons of dried basil**
- 3 tablespoons of dried oregano**
- 3 tablespoons of dried parsley**
- 1 tablespoon of garlic powder**
- 1 teaspoon of onion powder**
- 1 teaspoon of dried thyme**
- 1 teaspoon of dried rosemary**
- 1/4 teaspoon of black pepper**
- 1/4 teaspoon of red pepper flakes**

Directions:

The mixture of the above ingredients is enhanced by processing all of them at the same time in a small food processor like a Magic Bullet®, creating a fine and uniform mixture. When dispensed later after storage in a small spice jar the right ratio of each ingredient will be assured.

Pickling Spice - ☺♥

This recipe provides the home chef with the information needed to make a pickling spice at home. It is sometimes used for flavor when brining beef to make corned beef. It can also be used to flavor cucumbers to make pickles.

If the contents are ground in a device like a Magic Bullet® into a powder then it can be used as a rub on raw cured meat right before putting the meat inside a "boil-in" vacuum sealed bag and cooking it.

This spice mixture can also be added in small quantity to a pot of water used to cook cured but raw corned beef.

As shown, the recipe lists the minimum amounts of each ingredient to make a small batch of pickling spice. If you have a suitable sealable plastic bottle or glass jar you can easily scale up the amount you make for numerous uses in the future.

You will certainly have a nice spice combination and save a lot of money by avoiding the small jars found in supermarkets. I suggest you order each spice via the Internet in either eight ounce or one pound quantities as that is the most economical yet practical way to have and use the spices.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp. of whole allspice berries**
- 1 tbsp. of whole mustard seeds**
- 1 tbsp. of coriander seeds**
- 1 tsp. of red pepper flakes**
- 1 tbsp. of whole black peppercorns**
- 1 tsp. of whole cloves**
- 9 green cardamom pods**
- 6 large bay leaves, crumbled**
- 2 tsp. of dried ginger root**
- 1 tsp. of anise seeds**

Directions:

If you want to make a rub, simply put all ingredients into a Magic Bullet® and run it for two to three minutes. Check the state of the powdered spices. If they are not all in a fine powder then mix them for an additional minute. Bag the mixture to keep it fresh.

You can also store the ingredients as a simple mixture of what is shown in the ingredient list. That is the typical form in which pickling spices are bought and used.

Taco Seasoning Mix - ☺♥

This recipe allows you to skip buying taco seasoning at the supermarket ... and wind up with a superior product. Try it. You can experiment with the amounts of the ingredients or the amount of the mixture per pound of beef, to suit yourself, after you have made the first batch as shown below and tasted it in some tacos.

I used four tablespoons of this mix to season about 1.5 pounds of lean ground beef, and it was perfect. What great tacos!

Ingredients: (seasoning for four to five pounds of lean ground beef or other meat)

5 tablespoons of chili powder

5 teaspoons of ground cumin

5 teaspoons of garlic powder

2½ teaspoons of smoked paprika

2½ teaspoons of dried oregano

2½ teaspoons of sea salt

1¼ teaspoons of black pepper

1/4 teaspoon of cayenne pepper (optional ... only if you use mild chili powder)

Directions:

Mix all the spices together in a one quart bowl with a whisk. Use some immediately (2 to 3 tablespoons per pound of meat) and store the rest in an airtight spice jar.

Enjoy!

Tuscan Herbs - ?

I was looking on the Internet for a recipe for Tuscan Herbs and I found a nice one at Divina Cucina®, which I have edited and included below. I have yet to try it but I already know it will be excellent as I use these fresh herbs often individually or in combinations. As the recipe indicates this mixture is particularly good on meats like roast pork and on roasted vegetables. Note that I did not include specific amounts of the ingredients. Neither did the provider of the recipe. The idea is that you are to experiment a bit to come up with the combination that pleases you best. I suggest as a starting point to use equal amounts of fresh rosemary, fresh sage and fresh garlic, and only a bit of ground sea salt, and a small amount of cracked pepper corns. The remainder of the text below is that of the provider with minor editing done by me. Have fun!

Probably one of the best recipes I have learned and taught in Tuscany are my Tuscan Herbs.

Every butcher has his own blend, which is used on the fabulous prepared meats, ready to cook, which are sold in the markets here.

The base is a simple trinity of rosemary, sage and garlic, finely chopped with fine sea salt.

This makes a fabulous gift anytime of the year.

Remove the herbs from branches and place them on a cutting board with some sliced garlic and salt.

Chop the herbs with a sharp knife or a mezzaluna until the pieces are very fine.

The salt absorbs the essential oils in the herbs and helps to dry the herbs.

Once the herbs are finely chopped, you can leave them out for a day or so to dry and then put them in a jar.

Local butchers also include black pepper, fennel seeds or pollen in making their Tuscan Herbs, and sometimes they add fresh bay leaves.

I like to use the basic recipe and add things to it as the recipe for what I am cooking inspires me.

Enjoy! It is great on meats and also on roasted vegetables.

Most of my students end up adding it to a plate of good Tuscan oil and just dipping bread in it.

If you want to use it freshly made then go light on the salt.

Your Herb Supply

One of the most annoying problems for the home chef is to have a great idea for a meal, only to find certain key ingredients missing from the refrigerator, freezer or food storage room. Quite often the missing ingredients are common herbs that for the best recipes need to be fresh, not dried. This discussion is intended to help you maintain a reliable supply of the best herbs, economically.

It doesn't matter whether you grow good quantities of fresh herbs or buy them economically when they are in season. Two things you don't want to do are 1) Pay supermarket prices for fresh herbs, and 2) Use dry herbs when you need fresh herbs. If you grow or buy, economically, large quantities of fresh herbs the problem is how to preserve those herbs so that they retain all of their delicate fresh scents and flavors. Most of the time leftover fresh herbs rot in the refrigerator. No more! Now we get down to business.

The proper way to preserve all fresh herbs is to vacuum seal small quantities in individual labeled bags and freeze them. There will be no freezer burn and all of the original flavor and scent will be retained. The only thing you sacrifice is appearance. For example, thawed fresh parsley will not look like fresh parsley and should not be used where fresh parsley is needed for appearance. Conversely, rosemary looks just as good after thawing as it looked when freshly picked.

The point is pretty obvious. Your deep freeze in combination with vacuum sealing assures you a ready supply of herbs of great quality in scent and taste year round. I wonder how many readers are realizing the extensive broad benefits of owning and using a high quality vacuum sealer? Humor me ... if you have just read this material send me an email and tell me if you now use or are going to buy (and use) a vacuum sealer.

Beyond simply having herbs or spices in some form we have to consider quantity conversions when using fresh instead of dry or dry instead of fresh.

In general it is best to use the herb or spice in the exact form listed in a given recipe.

The table below will help you decide what amounts to use when substitutions are needed.

Herb	Fresh	Dried
Basil	2 tsp.	1 tsp.
Bay Leaf	1 Leaf	1 Leaf

Chervil	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Cilantro	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Cinnamon	1 cinnamon stick	1/2 tsp. ground
Cumin	4.5 tbsp. whole seed	4 tbsp. ground
Dill	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Garlic (large)	1 clove	1/2 tsp. powder
Garlic (small)	1 clove	1/8 tsp. powder
Ginger (fresh)	1 tbsp. grated	1/4 tsp. dry ground
Ginger (minced)	1 tbsp.	1/2 tsp. dry ground
Marjoram	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Onion	1 medium onion	1 tsp. powder
Oregano	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Parsley	2 tsp.	1 tsp.
Rosemary	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Sage	2 tsp.	1 tsp.
Star Anise	1 star	1/2 tsp. seed
Tarragon	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Thyme (Fresh)	3 tsp.	1 tsp.
Thyme (Dried)	1 tsp.	3/4 tsp. ground
Vanilla	1 inch of bean	1 tsp. extract

An additional general rule for using ground dried herbs in place of dried herbs:

1 teaspoon dried leaf herb = 1/2 teaspoon ground dried herb

SNACKS:

Bar Nuts - ☺♥

I really enjoy making special nut recipes like caramelized peanuts. So when I saw a recipe for spicy and salty and sweet hickory smoked mixed nuts, bar style, I just had to copy it and try it.

I tested the recipe as I found it and it was perfectly awful. So I made major changes.

I won't waste your time describing what did not work. Let's concentrate on the final results and the final, very good recipe.

For nuts you can use raw shelled blanched or unblanched peanuts, raw pecan halves, raw walnut halves, raw almonds, cashew nuts and pistachio nuts. I even tossed in some raw Pepitas (pumpkin seeds) for variety.

Note the presence of cayenne pepper in this recipe. You may want to try using less at first than the amount shown in the ingredients list below. The cayenne pepper will assure that any person who eats the nuts will drink lots of beer. Or something else wet and cold.

Note that you will add additional dry powdered sugar that you prepare after the bar nuts are made. Simply powder ordinary granulated sugar using a Magic Bullet® mixer, then put the nuts and the sugar into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, sealing it and then shaking the contents and turning the bag over a few times to coat all surfaces of the nuts with the sugar. Avoid using typical powdered sugar as that product contains cornstarch. Beyond that, if you want to add additional dry seasoning to the nuts then add it to the sugar before you powder it.

The egg whites used in this recipe act as a binding agent to coat the nuts with the seasonings. The baking, of course, cooks the egg whites and the nuts.

Ingredients:

2 large egg whites

1 1/2 pounds of mixed nuts (see the list above)

1/2 cup of granulated sugar

1/4 cup of brown sugar

2 teaspoons of cinnamon

1 tsp. of ground cayenne pepper

1 tbsp. of powdered sea salt

1 tbsp. of Hoosier Hill Farm® Hickory Smoke Powder

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F using a convection setting if you have that available. Otherwise use the regular setting.

Whisk the egg whites in an electric mixer bowl on medium high speed, or better, by using a Magic Bullet® mixer. Whisk them until they are foamy. Set them aside.

Process the brown and granulated white sugars and the sea salt in a Magic Bullet® mixer to create a powdered mixture.

Mix the other dry seasonings together in a separate 3 quart bowl, then add the powdered sugars and salt mixture and mix well.

Put the mixed nuts into the dry seasonings bowl and mix well to coat the nuts.

Add the egg whites, tossing gently to make sure all the nuts are coated.

Put parchment paper on two 11"x17" baking trays with raised edges.

Spread the coated nuts evenly over the parchment paper covered trays.

Bake the trays of nuts in the convection oven for 15 minutes or for 20 minutes at the conventional heat setting.

Turn the baking trays around.

Bake for an additional 15 minutes using convection heating, or 20 minutes with the conventional heat setting.

Remove the trays of nuts from the oven and let them cool completely to room temperature.

Separate (break apart) any clumps of nuts into individual nuts or into small clusters.

Put the nuts into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag to keep them fresh.

Serve the bar nuts along with lots of cold beer or other thirst quenching beverages.

Enjoy!

Barbecue Potato Chips - ☺♥

Way back in the year 1958 I tasted barbecue potato chips for the first time. They were very different as back then, prior to the introduction of barbecue flavor, potato chips came in only one flavor ... plain with salt. Now, the plain ones were delicious, especially if you got the ones fried in lard and dusted with powdered salt. There were only two excellent brands in my opinion ... Snyder's of Berlin® and Lance®. All other brands paled by comparison, either in being over-fried (too dark) or lacking enough salt or in the use of an inferior tasting frying oil. Well, the new barbecue flavored chips I tasted were superb! The first brand I tasted were made by Wise® and they were both sweet and spicy. My memory fails at this point regarding the gradual introduction of other brands, but that doesn't matter a lot because I now have a recipe for you to be able to make delicious barbecue chips at home ... in either of two ways ... simply flavoring regular potato chips, or, both making the chips and flavoring them.

When I first thought about making barbecue chips at home I doubted that any Internet recipe would have a good spice combination to match the commercial brands. I was wrong. In fact, my displeasure with a common commercial brand being too weak in flavor was what caused me to seek out an alternative ... following the Food Nirvana philosophy, which is to match or better commercial products at home, easily and inexpensively, on behalf of you having a better quality of life and more power over your existence. Knowledge is power ... also pleasure.

Okay, all I had to do was look at two Internet recipes to see one that looked quite promising. All I did to modify it was to add some liquid hickory smoke flavoring and to increase the amount of brown sugar. The result is close to perfect in only two attempts. I expect to play more with this recipe, as given below, but know that this one in its present form is really good. Note also that I decided to simply dust commercial potato chips with the barbecue powder created via this recipe. My, that was fast and easy, though not as inexpensive as making chips at home.

I have now perfected an at home recipe for making potato chips. It is in Food Nirvana under Snacks and named, simply, Potato Chips. Try it. You will be quite pleased.

Ingredients for making the dusting powder:

1 1/2 tsp. of paprika or smoked paprika

1 tsp. of onion powder

2 tsp. of brown sugar

1/2 tsp. of garlic powder

1/2 tsp. of sea salt (or more if you plan to fry your own chips from raw potato slices)

1/4 tsp. of chili powder

3 or 4 drops of Wright's® Hickory Seasoning Liquid Smoke

Directions for making and using the dusting powder:

Put all of the dusting ingredients, including the Liquid Smoke, into a small Magic Bullet® high speed mixer container.

Blend the ingredients at high speed for two to three minutes. Remove and shake the container to get all the ingredients down into the blade area.

Blend the ingredients at high speed for an additional three minutes. At this point the dusting powder is ready to be used.

Put about four to six ounces of regular commercial product potato chips or your home made chips into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag. Do not use pre-flavored chips, and if you are making the chips do not salt them prior to using the dusting powder in this recipe.

Add all of the dusting powder to the bag and seal the bag with plenty of air inside.

Shake the bag gently to distribute the dusting powder evenly, about two minutes of shaking, turning the bag upside down a few times to assure even mixing of the dusting powder over the potato chips.

Serve the chips with the beverage of your choice and be very pleased.

Enjoy!

Caramel Nut Popcorn - ☺♥

This is one of my favorite types of recipes, where I provide a really useful recipe for something simple and delicious that few people try to make, and where I examine retail costs for a product to show how silly it is to buy it, and where I provide cooking tips and techniques to help make you look like (and become) an expert. It is all good. Well, at least I think so. ☺

Who wants to pay the very high price for products like Poppycock® when you can make them quickly and cheaply and of very high quality at home? Early in 2018 I checked the prices for this product as found on Amazon® and, depending on the type of Poppycock® as well as the seller, the price per ounce varied from around 90 cents to \$1.90! Think about it. If you pay \$1.90 per ounce (for the cashew lovers variety) you are paying 16 times that much per pound, or, \$30.40 per pound. Does that seem a bit odd to you, as it does to me, when you can buy filet mignon at \$13 per pound? I like popped corn and butter and sugar and nuts, but I am not willing to pay an absurd price of \$30.40 per pound to anyone for that simple and easy to make and cheap to make (and ship) product.

I found a nice Internet recipe for crunchy caramel nut popcorn, tried it and modified it to create a crunchy caramel nut popcorn similar to the Poppycock® product. Okay, that is a little white lie, for I use a bit more salt to get some salted caramel taste. You can choose to vary the salt amount to suit yourself. But the big secret is to make the caramel part crunchy, and that is done via the combination of raising the right kind of caramel sauce to the right temperature, and by later baking the caramel nut popcorn at a low baking temperature for over an hour to create the perfect crunch.

You will love this stuff. Make it. I bet it won't be around for long.

If you can't find bags of raw white popcorn kernels you can use the yellow kernel variety, or better, you can buy the white variety cheaply online at places like Brandmeyer® in Iowa. That is what I do (did until they changed ... you can find what you want online) in 20 lb. quantities (10, 2 lb. bags) with free shipping, rather than pay the ridiculous price for the Orville Redenbacher's® brand of white popcorn kernels in the supermarket. I remember when supermarkets sold the white variety, cheaply, under their own brand names. They still sell the less desirable yellow kernels. I wonder what happened (not really)? You might ask ConAgra® if you don't figure it out.

Once you make this recipe you can decide if you want to make variations in the amounts of the different sugar types or by adding additional ingredients, like spices (cayenne pepper or curry, etc.), to change the overall taste. You might also

decide to decrease the amount of corn popped but keep the caramel amount the same to get more candy crunch. That is one of the tricks that make the commercial Poppycock® so darned yummy. But try this recipe first, for it is really good. Variations can follow, after you become an "expert."

Ingredients:

1/2 cup (or more) of raw white popcorn kernels (about 12 cups popped)

2 tablespoons of corn or other vegetable oil

1 1/2, quarter pound sticks of butter

2 cups of chopped pecans or cashews or chopped lightly roasted blanched almonds or simply roasted peanuts ... or a mixture of nuts

1 cup of white sugar

1/4 cup of packed brown sugar

1/2 cup of light corn syrup

1 tbsp. of pure vanilla extract

1 teaspoon of fine crystal sea salt

1/2 teaspoon of baking soda

Directions:

Arrange two oven racks in the top and bottom third of the oven and preheat the oven to 250°F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper. I use ones with low sides all around to keep stuff from falling off. Set them aside.

Make the popcorn. I figure you know how to combine the oil and the raw popcorn kernels in a covered pan using high heat to make the popped corn. If you can't make all that you need for this recipe in one batch then do it in two batches. Empty the popped corn into a very large heat-proof (like a wide stainless steel) bowl. Add the nuts and mix gently. Note: Sometimes it is easier to use two large bowls and two sets of long handle wooden spoons, and thus two people, to make the later mixing in of the caramel sauce easier.

Make the caramel sauce. Melt the butter in a 2 or 3 quart heavy bottom saucepan over medium heat. Never use thin bottom saucepans when making sauces or candies that might burn or overheat and darken on the inside of the saucepan while cooking. Thick bottom saucepans, ideally of multiple clad metals,

distribute the heat evenly and thus avoid localized hot spots on the bottom of the saucepan directly above the flame or (yuck!) electric heating elements.

Add the corn syrup and stir. Mix in the sugars until they are completely moistened. Increase the heat to medium high and bring the mixture to a boil. You may then want to reduce the heat to medium to best control the rate of boiling/formation of bubbling sauce.

Use a candy thermometer for accurate measurement of temperature and increase the temperature via boiling, gradually, to 290°F. Note that you will reduce the heat to low as the temperature climbs above 250°F because you want to approach the final temperature slowly and not exceed it. Be patient.

Check the temperature often, like every minute, or better yet hover over the saucepan/thermometer, as the temperature increases above 270°F. Why? Well, the elimination of most of the residual water happens quickly at higher temperatures, and that in turn accelerates the rate of temperature increase. The last five degrees of temperature increase will happen within one or two minutes. Now you understand. Remove the saucepan from the heat when the caramel sauce temperature reaches 290°F.

Add the vanilla, salt and baking soda, and mix thoroughly and quickly with a long handle wooden spoon for about half a minute to at most a minute to form a thick, glossy sauce. I like to have the vanilla pre-measured and waiting for immediate use in a small cup. Similarly, I pre-measure and mix the baking soda and the salt and put that mixture in a small saucer or cup. As you can easily guess, it takes less than ten seconds to add all of these ingredients to the hot caramel sauce. That is good because it is very fast, ergo little loss of temperature of the caramel sauce, keeping it easy to pour after mixing.

Combine the caramel sauce with the popcorn and nuts. Gradually pour the caramel sauce over the popcorn and nuts (or roughly half of it in each of two bowls of popcorn and nuts) while mixing with two long handle wooden spoons (it helps if you have a partner for this step — one person pouring while the other mixes). Continue mixing the sauce with the popcorn and nuts until all of it is coated evenly. Most important, don't do the pouring part of this step too slowly or the caramel sauce will start to set in the saucepan as it cools, making it very difficult to use. Aim for no more than half a minute of pouring time (per bowl if you use two bowls), accompanied by fairly quick mixing, to keep the caramel sauce from forming a clump in the bowl instead of readily coating the popcorn evenly.

Divide the coated popcorn/nuts between the two baking sheets, spreading the popcorn out into a basically even layer on each sheet. Bake for one hour and fifteen minutes at 250°F. Then turn off the oven and partially or completely open the oven door.

Let the caramel nut popcorn cool completely. Break it up as necessary and store it in air tight containers. I find one gallon Ziploc® freezer bags to be perfect for that purpose.

Enjoy!

Fried Pickle Slices - ☺♥

This is a very easy snack to make, and it is delicious. Also inexpensive.

You do want to make fried pickle slices. Serve them with a cold beverage.

Ingredients: (Two generous servings)

1 cup of all purpose flour

2 large eggs, beaten with a whisk

1 cup of finely ground Cornmeal

1 tbsp. of Kosher salt

1/2 tsp. of Cayenne pepper

3 cups of Peanut or Canola oil

2 large dill pickles sliced lengthwise into 1/4" thick slices, then put on a plate

Directions:

Prepare the pickle slices.

Preheat peanut or canola oil in a deep, large saucepan to 350 degrees F and maintain that temperature on low to medium heat. Use an instant read thermometer.

Put the flour into a wide shallow bowl.

Beat the eggs in a medium deep cereal bowl.

Mix the cornmeal and salt and pepper by shaking them in a Ziploc® bag.

Put the cornmeal mixture into another wide shallow bowl.

Coat a pickle slice with flour.

Dip the pickle slice into the beaten eggs to coat it.

Put the pickle slice into the cornmeal mixture and coat it.

Put the coated pickle slice into the hot 350 degrees F oil.

Repeat the coating steps and placement into the oil with four more pickle slices.

Monitor the oil temperature and increase or decrease the heat to maintain a temperature of 350 degrees F.

When each slice has fried to a light gold color remove it with tongs and place it on a paper towel lined plate.

When the first batch of pickle slices has been processed, repeat the above coating and frying steps for the next and subsequent batches until all the pickle slices have been fried.

Keep the fried pickle slices warm in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Serve the fried pickle slices along with a cold beverage.

Enjoy!

Malaysian Pork Jerky - ☺♥♥♥☺ T

I decided to try making jerky with pork instead of beef. I found a recipe for Malaysian Pork Jerky and I modified it with a few additional/different marinade ingredients. I also changed the directions. One example is the use of vacuum seal bags, but Ziploc® freezer bags will also work if the air is expelled from them before they are sealed. Another example is using a convection oven to shorten the dehydrating time. Yet another is the optional use of a curing agent so the jerky, after sealing, does not need to be refrigerated.

I combined some of the Malaysian recipe ingredients with Chinese cooking ingredients in this recipe to create the marinade. You can easily buy the few Chinese cooking ingredients (identified below) via the Internet at sites like Amazon®. And those ingredients are most useful in making a lot of different Oriental dishes, and not expensive given how many meals you get from using them as primary seasoning ingredients.

It is a lot of fun experimenting with new recipes, if the cook is experienced and also a good (hopefully better than good!) cook. The changed recipe I developed produces a combination of sweet and smoky flavors with a very small amount of heat (or more if you keep more of the marinade on the surface of the meat while it is dehydrating).

Note that there is no curing agent shown/used below in this recipe. That means the finished jerky must be kept refrigerated in sealed Ziploc® freezer bags (or in vacuum sealed bags) until it is used (stored for up to two weeks), and this should happen within a week once a bag is opened. This will avoid unwanted mold formation and bacterial contamination on the surface of the jerky. But, read on ...

You can decide to use Prague Powder #1 as a curing agent if you want to travel, with your jerky well sealed (vacuum sealing is best but Ziploc® freezer bags will work too) but not refrigerated. Curing agents like Prague Powder #1 can be purchased inexpensively via online sites like Amazon®. Using the combined weight of the marinade and the meat, use 1/2 teaspoon of Prague Powder #1 per pound of total weight (in this recipe assume 3 pounds of total weight, so use 1 1/2 teaspoons of Prague Powder #1 added as a marinade ingredient). You can then cure the sliced meat in the marinade for 24 hours as part of the marinating process, refrigerated and vacuum sealed or sealed [air expelled] in a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag.

Now let's consider how to get mild, medium or intense jerky flavor. Put simply, it is a matter of how much marinade you retain on the surface of the meat before

dehydrating. If you want mild yet yummy tasting jerky, scrape excess marinade from the meat slices on both sides after marinating, lightly with a table knife, on a wood cutting board. Or, and this is very important, don't scrape off any excess marinade, or else scrape marinade from only one side of the meat instead of both sides. Why? Answer: The amount of marinade that dries onto the surface of the meat when it is dehydrating determines the intensity of the flavor and the heat.

The remaining tasks after marinating the meat are to impale the slices of marinated meat with a few shish kabob spears, hang the slices so they slip through the rungs of the top oven rack, and then drying/dehydrating the meat in a 180 degrees F oven to turn it into jerky.

Cured vacuum sealed jerky will remain safe for a least a month, not refrigerated, but once the bag is opened the jerky should be eaten within a week. This is similar in utility to the commercial brands of jerky you find in convenience stores, bagged, with antioxidants, but not vacuum sealed and not refrigerated.

Moving on ...

I refer to the somewhat oval shaped cross cuts of pork loin in this recipe as discs. After marinating they relax and look more like wide strips, which you can leave as wide strips after marinating, or cut them in half lengthwise for thinner strips.

And now, the results! Superb! This is very delicious jerky ... and comparatively inexpensive compared to beef jerky, for suitable lean beef costs twice as much per pound as pork loin. But you can choose to use beef with this recipe instead of pork if you prefer. Also, you can have whatever flavor intensity you like simply by varying the amount of marinade you leave on the surface of the meat when you dehydrate it.

Finally, compare your costs for meat and marinade ingredients to make a pound of jerky, to what you pay buying jerky from virtually any source. You will find it hard to believe how much money you save by making the jerky ... and it is very easy to make excellent quality jerky. For example, two pounds of raw pork loin will yield one half pound to one pound of jerky due to the combination of adding marinade weight and losing combined marinade moisture and meat moisture weight. Buy pork jerky and it will cost anywhere from \$1.25/ounce to \$4.00/ounce ... or, \$20/lb. to \$64/lb. So ... if you pay even \$3/lb. for the pork loin, and \$3 for the marinade ingredients to process 10 lbs. of pork loin, and even lose 3/4 of the weight as moisture loss during dehydrating, then your total cost of \$33 yields 40 (or more) ounces of pork jerky, which translates to less than 84 cents/ounce! Or, \$13.20/lb. So, let's see ... what will you choose to do? Starting

with 10 pounds of raw meat, your yield will be up to 80 ounces (5 pounds) if you dehydrate the marinated meat without removing any marinade.

Ingredients: (makes 18 or more discs/or 36 or more thinner slices of jerky)

2 lb. piece of pork loin (surface fat cut off and discarded, meat partially frozen, then cut into 1/4" thick discs, perpendicular to the direction of the grain [long muscle fibers])

2/3 cup of light soy sauce (Kimlan® brand)

2 tablespoons of oyster sauce (Lee Kum Kee® brand)

2 tablespoons of spicy chili crisp (Loganma® brand)

2 tablespoons of brown sugar

2 tablespoons of honey

2 tablespoons of toasted sesame oil

2 tablespoons of Wright's Liquid Smoke®

1/2 teaspoon of red food coloring

2 teaspoons of garlic powder

2 teaspoons of onion powder

2 teaspoons of black pepper

2 teaspoons of sea salt

Directions:

Trim all visible surface fat from the piece of pork loin, discard the fat, and place the loin in the freezer for an hour or two to partially freeze it.

While the meat is in the freezer, combine all of the marinade ingredients in a two quart bowl. Mix well.

Remove the meat from the freezer and slice it into 1/4" thick discs, perpendicular to the grain. Cutting the meat perpendicular to the grain will make it easier to chew later than typical jerky that is cut along the grain. Cut away and discard any residual areas of fat.

Add the sliced meat to the marinade in the bowl and mix well by hand (but if you used a curing agent in the marinade, then wear latex or nitrile gloves to keep it

away from your skin). Note that the sodium nitrite in the curing agent, if you use it, can be absorbed through your skin, and you don't want that to happen as it is poisonous if too much is absorbed.

Transfer the meat and the marinade to a 10" by 16" vacuum seal bag (or to a one gallon size Ziploc® freezer bag).

Vacuum seal the marinating meat (or expel the air if you used a Ziploc® freezer bag and then seal it). Spread the meat out inside the bag and make it roughly flat to avoid uneven areas of thickness.

Marinate the meat for 24 hours in the refrigerator, laying the bag flat on a shelf, and turning the bag over every four hours. It is useful to squeeze and bend the bag a few times to guarantee that all slices of meat are evenly coated with the marinade, which won't happen if two pieces of meat are tight together before being coated with marinade.

Remove the meat from the refrigerator and (maybe, if you want mild jerky) scrape excess marinade from it one piece at a time on a wood cutting board with a table knife. I prefer to let all of the marinade remain on the meat surface as that yields the best, most intense flavor after dehydrating the meat.

Dry/dehydrate the meat to create jerky in a 180 degrees F convection oven (if you have one), with the discs hanging vertically from bamboo or steel shish kabob spears, not touching each other, on a high oven shelf, over an aluminum foil covered baking sheet on the low shelf that will catch any drippings from the meat. Note that you do not have to have a convection oven but the drying time will be considerably longer in a conventional oven, likely closer to 6 hours instead of 4 hours.

Hints: The discs/strips are each impaled 1/2" to 3/4" from one end and put on the spears with an inch of separation from each other. Once a full spear of meat slices is slipped through the rungs of the top oven shelf, a second spear (optional) may be used to impale the discs underneath the shelf, 1/2" or more as necessary from the bottom edge of each disc/strip of meat. That will keep the pieces of meat from touching each other as they dry and become jerky. Repeat this step until all of the marinated meat slices have been put on shish kabob spears and hung from the top oven shelf (in rows).

Note: You should crack a conventional oven door open about one inch to help eliminate moisture from the oven/drying meat. Use a wood utensil or something similar to keep the oven door propped slightly open. Convection ovens may not continue to heat if you partially open the oven door. In that instance the oven will

typically exhaust the moisture via an internal exhaust fan with the oven door kept closed.

The jerky will probably be done in 4 hours using a convection oven, but allow as much time as needed, noting the jerky is finished when it bends and cracks at the surface, but does not break in half. Part of the time requirement is determined by how much marinade you left on the surface of the meat before dehydrating. Check the jerky after 3 hours of drying and every 30 minutes after that, if necessary, until it is finished. Simply hold one piece and bend it to see if it cracks at the surface. Don't be surprised if you cheat and cut off a small piece and taste it during the drying. It is delicious.

Once the dehydrating/drying is done, turn off the oven, then slide out the top shelf for easy access, and remove the (optional) bottom shish kabob spears from the rows of jerky.

Remove the top shish kabob spears holding the jerky from the oven, slide the jerky from the spears, and place the pieces of jerky next to each other, flat, on a large wood cutting board to cool.

Discard the aluminum foil and, if needed, wash the baking sheet. Also, wipe/clean the rung surfaces of the top oven rack to remove any marinade residue.

Cool the jerky to room temperature, then if you want you can cut each piece in two crossways, then store snack size amounts in three, quart size Ziploc® freezer bags or vacuum seal bags, seal them and refrigerate them until the jerky is used. If you used a curing agent and plan to travel with the jerky not refrigerated then do not cut the pieces in half before storing them.

If you used a curing agent then limit your daily portion of jerky to one ounce, as that will guarantee you will not consume too much sodium nitrite. If you didn't use a curing agent you can eat as much as you want.

Eat the jerky within two weeks unless you used a curing agent and want to keep it for a longer period of time. I bet the first bag of it will be gone the day you make it!

Enjoy!

Poppycock® Clone - ☺♥

This is one of my favorite types of recipes, where I provide a really useful recipe for something simple and delicious that few people try to make, and where I examine retail costs for a product to show how silly it is to buy it, and where I provide cooking tips and techniques to help make you look like (and become) an expert. It is all good. Well, at least I think so. ☺

Who wants to pay the very high price for commercial products like Poppycock® when you can make them quickly and cheaply and of very high quality at home? Early in 2018 I checked the prices for this product as found on Amazon® and, depending on the type of Poppycock® as well as the seller, the price per ounce varied from around 90 cents to \$1.90! Well, I did find one online store, Blairs, that sells the original for 50 cents per ounce. But I don't remember what they may charge for shipping the product.

Think about it. If you pay \$1.90 per ounce (for the cashew lovers variety) you are paying 16 times that much per pound, or, \$30.40 per pound. Does that seem a bit odd to you, as it does to me, when you can buy filet mignon at \$13 per pound? I like popped corn and butter and sugar and nuts, but I am not willing to pay an absurd price of \$30.40 per pound to anyone for that simple and easy to make and cheap to make (and ship) product.

I found a nice Internet recipe for crunchy caramel nut popcorn, tried it and modified it to create a crunchy caramel nut popcorn similar to the Poppycock® product. Okay, that is a little white lie, or maybe a big black one! The truth is the one I tried and modified just didn't make it. I then looked at lots of different recipes online claiming to make a product like Poppycock®. Having already experimented, and having very recently eaten the real Poppycock® product, I recognized what recipes to discard and picked the one that by my opinion had all the right stuff.

Even then the final directions for a baking step were flat out stupid, which I learned by trying the recipe verbatim. Specifically, the oven temperature and time listed to complete making the Poppycock® were ridiculous ... too high for too long, resulting in darkened crystallized sugar instead of pale crunchy caramel coating on the popcorn. Ultimately I now have the recipe I want and the right procedure, but I use some salt to get some salted caramel taste. You can choose to vary the salt amount to suit yourself. But the big secret is to make the caramel part crunchy and keeping the caramel itself very light in color, and that is done via the combination of raising the right kind of caramel sauce to the right temperature, and by later baking the caramel nut popcorn at a low baking temperature briefly to create the perfect crunch.

Making certain the heat from the bottom of the oven is forced to be indirect when it contacts the cookie sheet with the coated popcorn is essential to avoid having too much drying and subsequent sugar recrystallization, and this is accomplished by using an empty cookie tray on the lowest oven shelf, or by use of putting the cookie sheet with the product on a stone surface on a shelf well above the heat source. The idea is that thin cookie sheets too close to point sources of high heat will destroy the caramel sauce during the drying process. Similarly, an oven temperature even as high as that used to make the caramel sauce is too high to use during the drying process. Knowing the accurate temperature of your oven is thus essential. Use a good quality oven thermometer to measure and then to control this possible problem by modifying your set temperature for your oven as necessary.

Here is an important variation to using raw nuts ... either roast raw pecan halves at 300°F for five minutes on a cookie tray, stirring to heat evenly on all sides after three minutes, or, lightly fry raw pecan halves in butter in a small skillet, then drain them and wipe them on a paper towel to eliminate most of the butter and any unwanted overcooked small particles. Having used either roasting or frying, chop the nut halves in half and use them directly as the nuts in this recipe. That will provide crunchy nuts mixed and attached to the crunchy slightly salty delicious caramel and popcorn. Yes, these are very nice ideas if you are using pecans.

You will love this (improved) clone of Poppycock®. Make it. I bet it won't be around for long.

If you can't find bags of raw white popcorn kernels you can use the yellow kernel variety, or better, you can buy the white variety cheaply online at places like Brandmeyer® in Iowa. That is what I do in 20 lb. quantities (10, 2 lb. bags) with free shipping, rather than pay the ridiculous price for the Orville Redenbacher's® brand of white popcorn kernels in the supermarket. I remember when supermarkets sold the white variety, cheaply, under their own brand names. They still sell the less desirable yellow kernels. I wonder what happened (not really)? You might ask ConAgra® if you don't figure it out.

Okay, I may be harsh on commercial producers of many products, especially the greedy *&%\$ who make potato chips, but I am also fair to the extent I will now provide your cost to make the Poppycock Clone at home with this recipe. I am using ingredient prices from various places, but overall this averages out. You, of course, are paying retail prices for all ingredients, at your local supermarket. Let's begin ...

The retail ingredient cost for this recipe is \$8.50, of which \$5.00 is for the pecans. The weight of the completed Poppycock® Clone is 29 ounces. That means my cost per ounce to make it is 850 cents/29 ounces which is a bit over 29 cents/ounce. I can't know for certain at this point what weight of pecans or cashews might be found in a container of commercial Poppycock® but I doubt they use as much nut product in the weight of the total product. In short, without nuts, my cost per ounce would be \$3.50 for 23 ounces, for the 2 cups of pecans weighed 6 ounces. Thus, without nuts, my cost per ounce is 350 cents/23 ounces which is a bit over 15 cents per ounce. Finally, that means the true cost per ounce for you will vary from 15 cents to 29 cents, depending on how many nuts you use, and for that matter what kind of nut, and the cost for up to two cups of that type of nut. What I am saying is that pecans are most likely the most expensive of the nuts you might use, like almonds, cashews or peanuts.

I believe I have now established that making this product at home is most sensible. 29 cents per ounce is quite favorable compared to the commercial prices on Amazon® or Ebay® of 90 cents per ounce up to \$1.90 per ounce. And that doesn't factor in whether or not you are using more nuts per ounce than the commercial product.

Once you make this recipe you can decide if you want to make variations in amounts of different sugar types (like maybe just a bit of brown sugar) or by adding additional ingredients, like maple syrup, or spices (cayenne pepper or curry, etc.), to change the overall taste. You might also decide to decrease the amount of corn popped but keep the caramel sauce amount the same to get more candy crunch. That is one of the tricks that make the commercial Poppycock® so darned yummy. But try this recipe first, for it is really good. Variations can follow, after you become an "expert."

Ingredients:

1/3 to 1/2 cup of raw white popcorn kernels (about 8 to 10 cups popped)

2 tablespoons of corn oil or other vegetable oil

1 quarter pound stick of butter

2 cups of chopped pecans (lightly roasted or fried in butter to make them crunchy) or cashews or chopped lightly roasted blanched almonds or simply roasted peanuts ... or a mixture of nuts

1 1/3 cups of white sugar

1/2 cup of light corn syrup

1/2 tsp. of cream of tartar

1/2 tsp. of pure vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon of fine crystal sea salt (optional)

1/2 teaspoon of baking soda

Directions:

Arrange three oven racks in the top and middle and bottom thirds of the oven, and preheat the oven to 250°F. Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper. I use ones with low sides all around to keep stuff from falling off. Set them aside. Put a third baking sheet on the bottom shelf to disperse the heat from the oven heating element.

If you plan to roast or lightly fry pecans in butter then do that now. Roasting is very simple as described earlier. If you decided to fry the pecans then use a small thick bottom skillet and three tablespoons of butter and two cups of raw pecan halves. Heat the butter on medium heat to melt it, add the pecans and mix well to coat them with butter, then reduce the heat to low or very low. Let the pecans fry for about a minute or two until the butter is noticeably bubbling and then mix them gently so they fry evenly. Repeat that step up to two more times and then remove the skillet from the heat, but make sure the pecans are not getting dark in color while they are frying. Also make sure the butter is not turning dark. The idea is you do not want to burn the pecans, just fry them lightly ... so they are crunchy after being cooled. Drain the butter from the pecans. I suggest removing them from the skillet with a slotted spoon. Dump the pecans onto two paper towels, spread them out to a single thickness and roll them up in the towel to remove excess butter and small nut particles from the frying process. Whether you roasted or fried the pecans, put the halves onto a wooden cutting board. Use a large sharp knife and gently cut the pecan halves in half. Let the pieces cool to room temperature and lose residual moisture for about ten minutes. Put the pecan pieces into a bowl and mix them gently. Set the bowl aside.

Make the popcorn. I figure you know how to combine the oil and the raw popcorn kernels in a covered pan using high heat to make the popped corn. If you can't make all that you need for this recipe in one batch then do it in two batches. Empty the popped corn into a very large heat-proof (like a wide stainless steel) bowl. Add the nuts and mix gently. Note: Sometimes it is easier to use two large bowls and two sets of long handle wooden spoons, and thus two people, to make the later mixing in of the caramel sauce easier.

Make the caramel sauce. Melt the butter in a 2 or 3 quart heavy bottom saucepan over medium heat. Never use thin bottom saucepans when making sauces or candies that might burn or overheat and darken on the inside of the saucepan while cooking. Thick bottom saucepans, ideally of multiple clad metals, distribute the heat evenly and thus avoid localized hot spots on the bottom of the saucepan directly above the flame or (yuck!) electric heating elements.

Add the corn syrup and the cream of tartar and stir. Mix in the sugar until it is completely moistened. Increase the heat to medium high and bring the mixture to a boil. You then want to reduce the heat to medium or even low to best control the rate of boiling/formation of bubbling sauce.

Use a candy thermometer for accurate measurement of temperature and increase the temperature via boiling, gradually, to 260°F. Note that you will definitely reduce the heat to low as the temperature climbs above 240°F because you want to approach the final temperature slowly and not exceed it. Be patient.

Check the temperature often, like every minute, or better yet hover over the saucepan/thermometer, as the temperature increases above 250°F. Why? Well, the elimination of most of the residual water happens quickly at higher temperatures, and that in turn accelerates the rate of temperature increase. The last five degrees of temperature increase will happen within about two to three minutes. And it is smart to move the thermometer to different locations in the boiling sauce as you may get different temperature readings. Now you understand. Remove the saucepan from the heat in the first instance where the caramel sauce temperature reaches 260°F.

Add the vanilla, salt and baking soda, and mix thoroughly and quickly with a long handle wooden spoon for about half a minute to at most a minute to form a thick, glossy sauce. I like to have the vanilla pre-measured and waiting for immediate use in a small cup. Similarly, I pre-measure and mix the baking soda and the salt and put that mixture in a small saucer or cup. As you can easily guess, it takes less than ten seconds to add all of these ingredients to the hot caramel sauce. That is good because it is very fast, ergo little loss of temperature of the caramel sauce, keeping it easy to pour after mixing.

Combine the caramel sauce with the popcorn and nuts. Gradually pour the caramel sauce over the popcorn and nuts (or roughly half of it in each of two bowls of popcorn and nuts) while mixing with two long handle wooden spoons (it helps if you have a partner for this step — one person pouring while the other mixes). Continue mixing the sauce with the popcorn and nuts until all of it is coated evenly. Most important, don't do the pouring part of this step too slowly or the caramel sauce will start to set in the saucepan as it cools, making it very

difficult to use. Aim for no more than half a minute of pouring time (per bowl if you use two bowls), accompanied by fairly quick mixing, to keep the caramel sauce from forming a clump in the bowl instead of readily coating the popcorn evenly.

Divide the coated popcorn/nuts between the two parchment lined baking sheets, spreading the popcorn out into a basically even layer on each sheet. Bake for 15 minutes at 250°F, turning the tray(s) around after ten minutes, and exchanging the trays on the two higher oven shelves if you made two trays of Poppycock® Clone. Then turn off the oven and partially or completely open the oven door. Note that you could decide to use a cooler temperature if you prefer, like 240°F, most likely for a longer time. Overall the idea of the baking step is to dry the product partially without recrystallizing the sugar into the consistency of that found in a sugar bowl, which will happen with either too high a temperature (along with darkening) or too long a baking time.

Let the Poppycock® Clone cool completely. If it is crunchy or chewy the way you prefer then it is time to package it. Realize that it will become more crunchy naturally as it cools and dries if you let it complete that process before packaging it. Break it up as necessary and store it in air tight containers. I find one gallon Ziploc® freezer bags to be perfect for that purpose.

Enjoy!

Potato Chips - 😊♥

This recipe as found came from www.serious-eats.com and it is the only one I found that has vinegar and water processing prior to potato slice frying. As you might expect, this is very similar to J. Kenji Lopez-Alt's method for making French Fries, which is fabulous, and a most effective clone of McDonald's® French Fries.

Without prior intent what I have created in this Food Nirvana recipe is a full training session for home cooks on the making of potato chips, from raw potato to delicious salty chips. Some lessons learned here apply to frying in general. Just know that you will learn a lot simply from reading this recipe. Better, you will shout with joy if/when you make the potato chips. Even better, you will save a whole lot of money by not buying commercial potato chips, for the better brands now typically cost almost \$6 per pound (and a lot more for "specialty" chips, like Kettle Cooked) ... so at best, the better quality commercial chips cost a bit less per pound than a rib-eye steak!

Wholesale club prices (like Costco® or Sam's Club®) for 20 pounds of very large russet potatoes are as low as \$6. That 20:1 price difference between raw potatoes and potato chips, even allowing for expected product and moisture loss due to peeling and frying, tells the whole greedy story. You can bet commercial producers of potato chips pay a whole lot less than 30 cents per pound when they buy russet potatoes by the truckload, yet they expect you to pay \$6 per pound (and more) at the grocery store for their potato chips. I will update this recipe with quantitative data about product and moisture loss from raw potato to potato chips soon, along with frying oil consumed, such that you will know the materials component of the manufacturing cost for potato chips. I think you will be surprised with the results.

I have modified the potato chip recipe as found to include my preferred ways of processing, similar though certainly not identical to those of [serious-eats.com](http://www.serious-eats.com), and I've provided my slight modifications for the form of the ingredients also. Do note that the folks at [serious-eats.com](http://www.serious-eats.com) will create recipes that will be relatively simple for people with very limited equipment to use. I do not take that approach. A key goal of Food Nirvana is to be competitive with commercial producers at home by whatever means are necessary yet practical. I want home cooks to acquire essential equipment and to use that equipment often to their advantage and joy. Thus, the divergence in methods between myself and [serious-eats.com](http://www.serious-eats.com).

I do not like the provided idea of slicing the potatoes 1/8th inch thick, for potato slices that thick will produce a thick chip, perhaps too dark or not entirely crisp,

and what I want is a very light colored thin crispy chip. Thus, I cut the potato slices thinner, roughly 1/16th inch thick, but otherwise I generally follow the recipe.

The recipe from seriouseats.com calls for the use of a mandolin to slice the potatoes. While that can work okay, and even better if the mandolin has adjustable thickness settings, the be all and end all for slicing the potatoes is simply an electric meat/vegetable slicer. It took some research into different types of vegetable slicers online before it finally dawned on me that I already owned the perfect device ... my commercial meat slicer, with infinite thickness variations available. And believe me, it is very fast as well as totally safe.

A mandolin is thus not at all what you want to use. Nor do you want electric salad shooters that create slices of non-uniform thickness (very bad). You can buy versatile electric meat/vegetable slicers that look similar to what you see in your local delicatessen, but smaller and of cost range \$50 to \$150. To get an idea, check out the offerings on [Amazon®](http://Amazon.com). The key parts of the slicers are the circular cutting blade with the adjustable depth traveling piece that holds what you want to cut and causes that to pass by the blade and be cut. That is the way for the home cook to get great results, easily, and also to have versatile equipment for different end uses. By the way, my first meat slicer came from Harbor Freight® and cost me the princely sum of \$29.95. That was about 18 years ago and it served me well for 15 years before I gave it away, still working perfectly, to a friend. I had moved on to bigger and better things.

If a peeled potato is processed for slicing with a flat (wide) side down for cutting, cutting along the length instead of how we might typically slice a raw potato from end to end across the width, the resulting potato slices will look exactly like what you want to have your chips look like the commercial potato chips in shape after they are fried. These processing "secrets" are really pretty simple to figure out, and simple to accommodate as well if you have the right equipment.

Okay, I conducted a full experiment to determine optimum raw potato slice thickness. The answer is 1/16th of an inch. That thickness produced the most uniform color in the fried chips and exactly the right taste and crunch. The thicker raw slices resulted in somewhat mottled appearance and a bit too much darkness in the finished fried chips ... not the light taste of commercial potato chips. So it is now settled. Make your raw potato slices 1/16th of an inch thick. For later reference, the frying time for the 1/16th inch thick slices is approximately 3 minutes and 30 seconds, which will always depend on different factors described below.

I note that the seriouseats.com recipe has the lowest frying temperature (325°F) of all the potato chip recipes that I found, a full 25°F cooler than the closest higher frying temperature recipe. Kenji long ago debunked the belief that higher frying temperatures would result in less oil absorption by the food being fried. So I very much like this lower temperature approach as it provides the home cook far superior control over the rate of frying, such that chips can be removed when ready more easily without darkening. Of course, what the lower frying temperature also means is that using canola or peanut oil, both of which have very high smoke point temperatures, may be nice for taste but is not essential. Still, I did use canola oil for my slice thickness experiment, and I know I will use peanut oil also in the future. The idea is that whatever frying oil you have will probably be fine since the frying temperature is only 325°F. Like me you can experiment and then decide what you prefer, the goal being not to over flavor the chips with the flavor of the oil.

Commercial producers of potato chips typically use the following oils, singly or in combination: sunflower, corn, cottonseed, canola. Of course, some makers of kettle fried chips use lard, and that is quite tasty if done properly, followed by generous salting. I've not seen a brand where peanut oil is used, undoubtedly because it will be the most expensive choice.

The use of Kosher salt (or sea salt) is fine provided it is not coarse. What I do is process various types of salt in a Magic Bullet® high speed miniature blender and thereby convert the salt to a powdered form, which is highly desirable and used sparingly on the fried potato chips. I use salt of that form when making fried nuts also, for the taste and texture are much nicer than with larger salt crystals. Note this is similar in approach to using the product known as popcorn salt, for once again, a finer salt dust is much more enjoyable on crunchy/crispy snacks than salt in larger crystal form. The reason? A given weight of salt will provide more salty taste sensation on your tongue when the surface area of the salt has been increased by powdering it.

Ingredients:

2 very large russet potatoes, peeled and then sliced on a wide side along the length to about 1/16th of an inch thick using an electric meat/vegetable slicer, followed by rinsing the slices multiple times under cold running water to rinse away starch, and then storing the slices in/under cold water for 30 minutes or up to a day longer until you are ready to use them.

3 tablespoons of distilled white vinegar

1 or 2 quarts of canola or peanut (or other) frying oil depending on your cooking vessel

Kosher salt or sea salt - powdered using a Magic Bullet® or a mortar and pestle

Optional: Some other flavoring mixture instead of powdered salt, like barbecue flavoring

Directions:

Drain the potato slices. Combine the vinegar and 1 1/2 quarts of water in a large saucepan. Bring that to a boil over high heat. Add the potato slices to the boiling water in two separate batches, gradually, to maintain a high simmering/low boiling temperature, and cook each batch at a low boil for five minutes. For each batch, keep the heat high and the saucepan covered with a lid until the water returns to a boil, then lower the heat to low, partially remove the lid, and start the five minute countdown. I use a simple kitchen timer to do that.

Use a wire mesh spider or a slotted spoon to remove the potato slices from the simmering/low boiling water gently as each batch is done and let the slices drain water briefly back into the simmering water, then spread the warm/wet slices from each batch one layer thick on paper towels or dish towels (I think dish towels are the way to go). You can hasten the drying process by applying dry paper towels to the top side of the potato slices to absorb moisture and then removing those paper towels. Also, flipping the slices over periodically exposes moistness than you can remove easily by blotting with paper towels. Allow the slices to air dry for five to ten minutes or longer. Note that they do not have to be really dry because the frying will quickly eliminate residual moisture. The goal of this step is simply to remove wetness.

If you want to try something really different you might use an electric hair dryer to hasten drying the potato slices. I have not yet tried that offbeat drying method with food (though I have in non-food projects with stains and paints), but it appeals to me as I am basically impatient to complete boring tasks.

What is important in the procedural context is for the home cook to learn how to think "outside the box." For example, suppose you were making potato chips in larger quantities. Might it help your speed of processing if you had a high velocity fan blowing dry air over the moist potato slices? Can you imagine a large commercial processing plant having a large volume of heated air blowing over thousands of moist potato slices prior to frying? Let's get really smart in our commercial plant ... Why not process moist potato slices on a screen conveyor with hot dry air blowing from the underside? That will make the chips elevate as

they dry and readily expose both sides to the hot dry air, minimizing the drying time. Easy, wasn't it?

If you've ever watched the conveyor process where Krispy Kreme® donuts are made you can use your memory and your imagination to figure out how you would take conveyor semi-dried potato slices into a continuous frying and then draining and salting and cooling and packaging process, via baskets and conveyors.

Heat one quart of frying oil in a large wok or two quarts of frying oil in a Dutch oven, to 350°F. Use a candy or frying thermometer to assure the correct temperature, adjusting the heat as necessary to maintain 350°F, prior to the next frying step. Note that putting the potato slices into the oil will reduce the temperature, temporarily, by as much as 40°F, so you want to keep the heat high enough return the oil temperature back to roughly 325°F. Just remember to lower the heat at that point so you don't exceed 325°F as the potato slices fry.

Add 6 of the potato slices if you are using a wok, or 12 of the potato slices if you are using a Dutch oven, and fry them, stirring and flipping once a minute with a wire mesh spider or a slotted spoon until individual potato slices release no more bubbles (or very few), about 3 to 4 minutes (this time will vary a lot based on potato slice thickness, actual oil temperature, weight of the potato slices vs. oil weight, chip distribution in the oil, etc.).

For various reasons related to chip crowding and variable oil temperature within the cooking vessel the chips will reach the desired degree of doneness at different times, so remove them individually with tongs or with the spider or a slotted spoon, individually or in small groups as they are done. In short, don't wait for all the chips to stop releasing bubbles or the ones done earliest will be over-fried and darker than desired. The frying chips will not look done when in actuality you want to remove them quickly ... and as soon as they drain on the paper towels you will be surprised to see they are completely fried to a perfect color.

Transfer the removed chip(s) to paper towels on a flat surface, to drain and absorb excess frying oil. (You do not want oily chips after doing all of this work, do you? In actually making the chips I was surprised and pleased that they drained so well that they were perfectly crisp with no noticeable oily residue whatever). Note, however, that the oil you use will impart flavor to the chips, so try different oils to achieve the taste you like best.

If you aren't planning to use special flavoring, sprinkle (dust) the chips with the powdered salt, and toss them in a large bowl to coat them with the salt (or dust the chips with powdered salt in a zipper-lock bag and then seal it and shake the

bag gently to distribute the salt evenly). I much prefer the zipper-lock plastic bag method. If you are using optional special flavoring, like barbecue, use that flavoring mixture instead of the powdered salt.

Transfer the seasoned chips to a serving bowl or plate and repeat the frying, draining and salting/seasoning steps for the remaining batches of potato slices. Serve immediately or allow the chips to cool completely and then store them sealed in a zipper-lock bag to maintain freshness.

Teriyaki Pork Jerky - ☺♥

I decided to try making jerky with pork instead of beef. I found a recipe for Teriyaki Pork Jerky and I modified it with a few additional/different marinade ingredients. I also changed the directions. One example is the use of vacuum seal bags, but Ziploc® freezer bags will also work if the air is expelled from them before they are sealed. Another example is using a convection oven to shorten the dehydrating time. Yet another is the optional use of a curing agent so the jerky, after sealing, does not need to be refrigerated.

Jerky can be made with or without a curing agent. The recipe below shows the use of curing agent as optional. The point is you must keep the jerky refrigerated if you do not use a curing agent, to avoid mold formation and unwanted bacteria that will happen if you store it without refrigeration. With refrigeration the jerky, kept in well sealed packs, will remain fresh for a few weeks, and you are most likely to eat all of it within a week or two.

You can decide to use Prague Powder #1 as a curing agent if you want to travel, with your jerky well sealed (vacuum sealing is best but Ziploc® freezer bags will work too) but not refrigerated. Curing agents like Prague Powder #1 can be purchased inexpensively via online sites like Amazon®. Using the combined weight of the marinade and the meat, use 1/2 teaspoon of Prague Powder #1 per pound of total weight (in this recipe assume 3 pounds of total weight, so use 1 1/2 teaspoons of Prague Powder #1 added as a marinade ingredient). You can then cure the sliced meat in the marinade for 24 hours as part of the marinating process, refrigerated and vacuum sealed or sealed [air expelled] in a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag.

Now let's consider how to get mild, medium or intense jerky flavor. Put simply, it is a matter of how much marinade you retain on the surface of the meat before dehydrating. If you want mild yet yummy tasting jerky, scrape excess marinade from the meat slices on both sides after marinating, lightly with a table knife, on a wood cutting board. Or, and this is very important, don't scrape off any excess marinade, or else scrape marinade from only one side of the meat instead of both sides. Why? Answer: The amount of marinade that dries onto the surface of the meat when it is dehydrating determines the intensity of the flavor and the heat.

The remaining tasks after marinating the meat are to impale the slices of marinated meat with a few shish kabob spears, hang the slices so they slip through the rungs of the top oven rack, and then drying/dehydrating the meat in a 180 degrees F oven to turn it into jerky.

Cured vacuum sealed jerky will remain safe for a least a month, not refrigerated, but once the bag is opened the jerky should be eaten within a week. This is similar in utility to the commercial brands of jerky you find in convenience stores, bagged, with antioxidants, but not vacuum sealed and not refrigerated.

Ingredients: (makes 18 or more strips or 36 or more smaller pieces of cut jerky)

2 lbs. of pork loin (cut cross grain into 1/4" thick slices)

1/4 cup of Worcestershire sauce

2/3 cup of teriyaki sauce

1/4 cup of light soy sauce

1 tablespoon of Wrights® liquid smoke

1/4 cup of apple cider vinegar

2 teaspoons of onion powder

1 teaspoon of garlic powder

2 teaspoons of black pepper

1 tablespoon of sea salt

1/4 teaspoon of red pepper flakes

2 tablespoons of brown sugar

1 tablespoon of honey

2 teaspoons of maple syrup

1 1/2 teaspoons of Prague Powder #1 (optional)

Directions:

Trim all visible surface fat from the piece of pork loin, discard the fat, and place the loin in the freezer for an hour or two to partially freeze it.

While the meat is in the freezer, combine all of the marinade ingredients in a three quart bowl. Mix well.

Remove the meat from the freezer and slice it into 1/4" thick discs, perpendicular to the grain. Cutting the meat perpendicular to the grain will make it easier to

chew later than typical jerky that is cut along the grain. Cut away and discard any residual areas of fat.

Add the sliced meat to the marinade in the bowl a few slices at a time and mix well by hand (but if you used a curing agent in the marinade, then wear latex or nitrile gloves to keep it away from your skin). Note that the sodium nitrite in the curing agent, if you use it, can be absorbed through your skin, and you don't want that to happen as it is poisonous if too much is absorbed.

Transfer the meat and the marinade to a 10" by 16" vacuum seal bag (or to a one gallon size Ziploc® freezer bag).

Vacuum seal the marinating meat (or expel the air if you used a Ziploc® freezer bag and then seal it). Spread the meat out inside the bag and make it mostly flat to avoid uneven areas of thickness.

Marinate the meat for 24 hours in the refrigerator, laying the bag flat on a shelf, and turning the bag over every four to six hours. It is useful to squeeze and bend the bag a few times to guarantee that all slices of meat are evenly coated with the marinade, which won't happen if two pieces of meat are tight together before being well coated with marinade. This is especially important if you are using a curing agent, which you want to penetrate all of the meat pieces evenly.

Remove the meat from the refrigerator and (maybe, if you want mild jerky) scrape excess marinade from it one piece at a time on a wood cutting board with a table knife. I prefer to let either half or all of the marinade remain on the meat surface as that yields the best, intense flavors after dehydrating the meat.

Dry/dehydrate the meat to create jerky in a 180 degrees F convection oven (if you have one), with the discs hanging vertically from bamboo or steel shish kabob spears, not touching each other, on a high oven shelf, over an aluminum foil covered baking sheet on the low shelf that will catch any drippings from the meat. Note that you do not have to have a convection oven but the drying time will be considerably longer in a conventional oven, likely closer to 6 hours instead of about 4 hours.

Hints: The discs/strips are each impaled 1/2" to 3/4" from one end and put on the spears with an inch of separation from each other. Once a full spear of meat slices is slipped through the rungs of the top oven shelf, a second spear (optional) may be used to impale the discs underneath the shelf, 1/2" or more as necessary from the bottom edge of each disc/strip of meat. That will keep the pieces of meat from touching each other as they dry and become jerky. Repeat this step until all of the marinated meat slices have been put on shish kabob spears and hung from the top oven shelf (in rows).

Note: You should crack a conventional oven door open about one inch to help eliminate moisture from the oven/drying meat. Use a wood utensil or something similar to keep the oven door propped slightly open. Convection ovens may not continue to heat if you partially open the oven door. In that instance the oven will typically exhaust the moisture via an internal exhaust fan with the oven door kept closed.

The jerky will probably be done in 4 hours using a convection oven, but allow as much time as needed, noting the jerky is finished when it bends and cracks at the surface, but does not break in half. Part of the time requirement is determined by how much marinade you left on the surface of the meat before dehydrating. Check the jerky after 3 hours of drying and every 30 minutes after that, if necessary, until it is finished. Simply hold one piece and bend it to see if it cracks at the surface. Don't be surprised if you cheat and cut off a small piece and taste it during the drying. It is delicious.

Once the dehydrating/drying is done, turn off the oven, then slide out the top shelf for easy access, and remove the (optional) bottom shish kabob spears from the rows of jerky.

Remove the top shish kabob spears holding the jerky from the oven, slide the jerky from the spears, and place the pieces of jerky next to each other, flat, on a large wood cutting board to cool.

Discard the aluminum foil and, if needed, wash the baking sheet. Also, wipe/clean the rung surfaces of the top oven rack to remove any marinade residue.

Cool the jerky to room temperature, then if you want you can cut each piece in two crossways, then store snack size amounts in three, quart size Ziploc® freezer bags or vacuum seal bags, seal them and refrigerate them until the jerky is used. If you used a curing agent and plan to travel with the jerky not refrigerated then do not cut the pieces in half before storing them.

If you used a curing agent then limit your daily portion of jerky to one ounce, as that will guarantee you will not consume too much sodium nitrite. If you didn't use a curing agent you can eat as much as you want.

Eat the jerky within two weeks unless you used a curing agent and want to keep it for a longer period of time. I bet the first bag of it will be gone the day you make it!

Enjoy!

Venison Pepperoni - 😊♥

Making Venison Pepperoni is a surprisingly simple process with a delicious product that has many uses and stores refrigerated for months. You can stuff the pepperoni into collagen or natural casings, edible or inedible, of any size.

Smaller diameter casings are used when making snack sticks and larger diameter casings when making pepperoni chubs.

Ingredients:

- 4 Pounds of trimmed Venison**
- 1 Pound of Pork Fat**
- 1 Teaspoon of Pink Curing Salt #1 (see Notes at the end of this recipe)**
- 3 Tablespoons of Kosher Salt**
- 2 Tablespoons of smoked Paprika**
- 2 Tablespoons of Dextrose if you have it, otherwise White Sugar**
- 1 Tablespoon of freshly ground Black Pepper**
- 1 Tablespoon of Cayenne Pepper**
- 3 Tablespoons of Red Pepper Flakes**
- 2 Teaspoons of Fennel seeds**
- 2 Teaspoons of ground Cumin**
- 2 Teaspoons of dried Oregano**
- 2 Teaspoons of dried Thyme leaves**
- 1 Cup of non-fat dry milk powder**
- 1/4 cup of medium dry Red Wine like Pinot Noir, chilled**
- 2 Tablespoons of Wrights® hickory flavored liquid smoke**
- Collagen casings (sizes from 1/2" diameter to 1 1/4" diameter)**

Directions:

Place the stand mixer grinder accessory in the freezer along with the stand mixer bowl for 20 minutes.

Put the venison and the pork fat into the freezer for 20 minutes.

Chop the venison into 1" cubes and mix in the salt. Cut the pork fat into 1/2" cubes. Grind the venison and the pork fat separately using a 1/4" die. Immediately place both in the freezer for 15-20 minutes.

Put all of the remaining dry ingredients except the red pepper flakes and the dry milk into a Magic Bullet® mixer and mix them for two minutes.

While the ground meat and ground fat are in the freezer, make a paste with the red wine, liquid smoke, dry milk, and the powdered mixture from the Magic Bullet® mixer.

Place the venison and the pork fat in the stand mixer, mix for 4 minutes to blend them, and then mix in the red pepper flakes and then the Paste mixture a little at a time then mix for three minutes on medium speed, scraping down the inside of the bowl as necessary with a soft spatula to guarantee good mixing.

Mix the pepperoni by hand kneading on a wood cutting board to assure perfect mixing (wear latex or nitrile gloves).

Stuff the casings with the pepperoni mixture using a sausage stuffer, and form links about 8" long by twisting/turning the casings a few times periodically. Fold links together after the twisting to keep the twisted collagen or casing from untwisting.

Put the links into one gallon Ziploc® freezer bags, seal them and put them in the refrigerator to cure the pepperoni for 24 hours.

Place the links on raised racks on 12" x 17" baking sheets.

Bake the pepperoni links at 180 degrees F (in a convection oven if you have one) until the internal temperature of 160 degrees F has been reached. Use an instant read thermometer to check the temperature about once an hour. Expect six or seven hours of baking time.

Remove the baking sheets from the oven and let the links cool to room temperature. If necessary wipe the links with paper towels to remove excess liquefied fat.

The Pepperoni may be stored in the refrigerator for a few months in Ziploc® bags or it can be vacuum sealed and refrigerated or frozen for longer storage. Simply cut the links from each other using scissors where the casing was twisted before packaging them.

After opening and cutting the casing of a pepperoni sausage to eat some, any remaining section is best stored in the refrigerator with the cut end wrapped in plastic wrap.

Enjoy!

Notes:

Processing considerations:

The reason you cut up the pork fat before grinding it and chill the venison and pork fat before mixing them together is because the two will bind better this way. This is an important part of the process. Also, if you mix the Kosher salt (not the pink salt) in with the venison before grinding it that will assure very good binding later between the meat and the fat (myosin protein weakening from exposure to salt increases the water-holding capacity of raw meat and that influences its juiciness and tenderness).

Pink Curing Salt #1 description:

All pink tinted crystals of meat curing agents have the same sodium nitrite concentration, which is 6.25%.

They are sold under various names like Prague Powder # 1, Insta-Cure, and Modern Cure. They are all the same.

The pink color is not what gives the meat a reddish hue - that is done by the curing process and by seasoning ingredients like paprika.

After the meat has been cured and cooked, it will have a longer shelf life than uncured cooked meat.

Use one teaspoon of pink curing salt #1 per 5 pounds of meat and fat combined.

Wear latex or nitrile gloves when handling pink curing salt #1 or any product containing sodium nitrite as it can be absorbed through skin and it is quite poisonous when used improperly. Also, putting too much of it into the meat to be cured creates a poisonous product that can kill humans when the cured meat eaten.

Venison Salami - ?

True Italian type salamis are typically made with pork and beef combinations, with a multiple month drying period in a hog casing at a temperature of about 65 degrees F and humidity about 80 to 85 percent. Seasonings and bacterial starter cultures are used along with a curing agent containing sodium nitrite to avoid botulism. About one third of the starting weight is intentionally lost, resulting in a firm but not hard texture.

Most of us do not have facilities at home to control both temperature and humidity so any version of salami we make at home will likely be of the cooked variety.

I found what looked like a pretty good recipe for making a fast version of venison salami on the Internet, noting that it was missing pork fat and wine. It used an oven temperature for cooking that was too high (250 degrees F). I corrected those deficiencies and a few other ones, like seasonings, and I created the recipe below.

Actually, by the time I was done, my recipe was not at all like the one from the Internet!

I hope you make this salami ... I am sure it will be excellent, but I won't know for certain until I make it.

Ingredients:

4 pounds of coarsely ground (1/4" die) venison

1 pound of coarsely ground pork fat

1 tsp. of Pink curing salt #1 (Prague powder), which is 6.25% sodium nitrite and 93.75% sodium chloride

2 tablespoons of dextrose if you have it, otherwise use white sugar

3 tablespoons of cracked peppercorns

1 teaspoon of coriander seed

1 teaspoon of ground mace

1 teaspoon of ground allspice

1 teaspoon of fennel seeds

1 teaspoon of dried thyme leaves

2 teaspoons of ground white pepper

2 teaspoons of garlic powder

2 tablespoons of Wrights® hickory-flavored liquid smoke

3 tablespoons of Kosher salt

1/4 cup of medium dry red wine like Pinot Noir

Large Hog casings or collagen casings

Directions:

Regrind half of the venison using a 1/8" die in the meat grinder.

Place all of the ground venison and the ground fat in a large stand mixer bowl. Mix on medium speed for four minutes.

Put the dry ingredients except for the cracked pepper corns into a Magic Bullet® mixer and mix for two minutes. Add that powdered mixture to a one quart bowl, then add the cracked peppercorns, the liquid smoke and the wine and mix well with a spoon to form a paste.

Add the curing/seasoning paste to the stand mixer bowl gradually while running the mixer on medium speed. Mix for three minutes, scrape down the inside of the mixer bowl with a soft spatula, mix for two minutes, then knead the mixture (always wear latex or nitrile gloves when you are exposed to sodium nitrite) on a wood cutting board for two minutes. Put the mixture into a one gallon Ziploc® freezer bag. Expel all the air in the bag and seal it. Refrigerate the mixture for 24 hours.

On the second day, mix the freezer bag contents thoroughly, kneading for 2 to 3 minutes on a wood cutting board. Re-use and re-seal the freezer bag, expelling all the air, and refrigerate the mixture for another 24 hours.

On the third day, knead the mixture again for another 2 to 3 minutes.

Fill a large hog or collagen casing with the mixture using your sausage stuffer to make salami chubs. Twist (alternately clockwise then counterclockwise) the end of each chub a few turns at the end of the filling tube when it is about 8" long. Tie the ends, the first before filling the casing and the last after the last casing has been formed into a salami chub. Note that after twisting a chub that folding it to lay alongside the previous chub will avoid having the chub untwist.

Refrigerate the salami chubs for 1 hour on a parchment paper lined baking sheet.

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees F.

Let the salami chubs bake for five to seven hours, until their internal temperature reaches 160 degrees F. Turn the chubs over once every hour, changing their positions on the baking sheet. Use an instant read thermometer every hour to check the temperature of one of the chubs in the center of the baking sheet.

Cool the salami chubs to room temperature and then refrigerate them overnight. Vacuum seal them and keep them refrigerated and they will last for months.

Serve the venison salami sliced thin (1/16th inch to 1/8th inch) along with thinly sliced cheeses and crackers and some olives ... and a nice chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio wine. Cold beer is also a good beverage for this treat.

Enjoy!

SOUPS, STEWS AND CHOWDERS:

Air Transport Command® Beer Cheese Soup - ?

Back in the day (1970's and 1980's) the Air Transport Command® restaurant next to the Wilmington DE airport made delicious Beer Cheese soup. The recipe I found for that soup is supposed to be accurate, but I have some doubt as the ratio of milk to other ingredients seems to be a quite high. Also, I note no salt addition, which may be okay as the bacon and the cheese provide some salt. I have an additional problem with the handling of the bacon and the bacon fat after frying, so I have simply changed the instructions to make sense! I typically find Internet recipes for well known dishes from well known restaurants or hotels to be woefully deficient and often dead wrong. In this case the onion called for in the directions was missing from the list of required ingredients!

I will test this recipe with the changes I have made and modify it as necessary. Made right this soup belongs on your table. It wasn't thin and it wasn't thick, so this recipe may change as I work with it. My initial recommendation is to hold back one quart of the milk, make the soup and then add as much milk to it as necessary to get the right concentration of flavor and good consistency. The milk addition/adjustment can be done immediately prior to adding the beer and then the soup is heated to a simmer before the beer is added. Following the beer addition the seasonings are adjusted to suit your preferences. This approach is the safest way to guarantee a great final result.

Ingredients: (makes five quarts or 12 to 16 servings of soup)

4 quarts of milk, divided (with one quart reserved for use near the end of the soup preparation)

1½ tsp. of Tabasco sauce

4½ tsp. of Worcestershire sauce

¼ lb. of bacon

1 cup of diced fresh sweet onion

1, 14 oz. can of chicken broth

1/3 cup of cornstarch

2 lbs. of sharp white cheddar cheese, grated

1½ cups of beer, room temperature (one bottle)

A few sprigs of fresh parsley as garnish

Directions:

Combine 2 quarts of the milk with the two sauces in a soup pot. Heat to simmering on medium heat, but at no time should this soup come to a boil.

Sauté the bacon slices in a skillet until crisp, then remove them and reserve the bacon. Break it up into small pieces when it is cool.

Drain all but two tablespoons of the hot bacon fat from the skillet. Add the onion to the skillet and sauté it until it is translucent. Turn off the heat. Put the bacon pieces in with the onion. Set the skillet aside.

When the milk has come to a simmer (or a scald temperature, steaming but not boiling) add the chicken broth.

Mix the cornstarch with the remaining one quart of cold milk. Gradually add the cornstarch mixture to the hot milk using as much as is needed for the desired consistency. This will take some time on medium heat, with frequent stirring, because cornstarch thickens best at a full boil and you do not want to boil this soup. Keep it at a simmer on low to very low heat.

Gradually add the grated cheese, continuing to stir well until the cheese melts and the soup is smooth, then add the reserved bacon and onion and mix well.

This is the point where I recommend the addition of the reserved milk, accompanied by stirring to mix all ingredients well, but only the amount of milk necessary to achieve great taste and consistency. Do heat the soup back to a simmer after the milk addition.

Remove the pot from the heat and pour in the beer, foam and all, and mix well.

At this point you may choose to adjust the seasonings, perhaps with the addition of ground white pepper and some sea salt. Remember to mix the soup well after any additional seasoning is added.

Serve the beer cheese soup hot, garnished with a sprig of fresh parsley. Also, serve some saltine crackers and butter on the side.

A Jewish Variation Of Italian Wedding Soup - ☺♥T

I had this crazy notion to make matzo ball soup dressed up as Italian Wedding Soup, figuring careful selection and combining of ingredients might result in a very tasty soup, seasoned Middle Eastern Jewish style, not Italian style, and using cured (corned) beef (it is easy to make, see the Food Nirvana recipe) for making meatballs. My resulting recipe is a scratch recipe where you make the matzo meal, the matzo balls, the meatballs, the chicken, the Hawaii (huh-wah'-age) seasoning and finally the wedding soup. As it turns out, this is clearly a teaching recipe, given the detail provided. You can, of course, cheat a bit and buy some of the ingredients, like matzo meal and Hawaii seasoning, and perhaps use regular ground beef instead of ground corned beef for the meatballs, though I strongly recommend using ground corned beef for the flavor it imparts to the soup.

I decided to check the Internet to see if possibly anyone else had the same crazy notion as me ... only to discover that, yes, some other folks do make it ... each in their own way and none like mine. That suits me fine. No two recipes are even remotely alike, and I include some ingredients that are clearly unique in my version of this soup.

My version combines the flavors of corned beef and (deli) pastrami with a Middle Eastern spice mixture (Hawaii) in a chicken broth base, using small matzo balls instead of Acini de Pepe, which is the tiny type of pasta pieces used in conventional Italian Wedding Soup. I did notice that none of the recipe creators decided to use Parmesan or any other cheese. But we all use chopped escarole.

This recipe is fairly complex due to the multiple steps, and you have to allow for three to four hours of preparation time to be certain you have enough time to make the soup. But don't be daunted by the detail or the required time. The detailed recipe procedure teaches less experienced cooks a lot about food processing and flavoring that will be very useful in making or creating a lot of other recipes. Be patient, learn the techniques, and smile for many years as you apply them creatively to making many great dishes.

First make the matzo crackers/meal, then the matzo balls, then make the corned beef meatballs, then the Hawaii seasoning, then the cubed chicken breast, and finally the wedding soup. Put the extra unused portion of the Hawaii seasoning into an 8 ounce canning jar and close the lid tightly, label it, then store it in a dark, cool place. That way you won't have to make Hawaii the next time you make this soup or various other Middle Eastern dishes.

For the record, some of the directions I found for making matzo crackers, etc., from the Internet, were simply wrong. They had to be put there by ugly intent. Follow my directions and all will be well. Due to oven differences it is smart to keep focused on the goal of having crisp but not burnt matzo crackers. In short, stop the baking process when you have crisp crackers that can readily be turned into meal. The directions I provide address only the results using my oven, and I varied baking conditions and times to find what worked best.

Okay, let's start by making matzo crackers and then the matzo meal ...

Matzo Meal:

This simple and easy recipe will save you time and money, rather than you having to buy overpriced Matzo Meal at the supermarket. But, the price of the electricity to make this matzo meal is higher than the cost of the food ingredients! And, to be candid, this step in the recipe is the most laborious, so if you are going to cheat then this is where to do it.

Ingredients:

4 cups of all purpose flour (or the flour, or flour blend/mixture, of your choice)

2 cups of room temperature water

1 tsp. of sea salt or kosher salt

Directions:

Set your oven temperature to 500 degrees F. Move an oven shelf to the middle of the oven. Put flat baking stones together on that shelf. Pre-heat the oven for 30 minutes to allow the baking stones time to get close to the right temperature. Change the setting to convection 500 degrees F and continue heating for ten minutes.

If you don't have baking stones then bake the crackers on an 11" x 17" baking sheet. Also, you can choose to use two oven shelves and bake two batches on baking sheets at the same time, which will save a lot of time.

Mix the water and salt, then mix that with the flour in an electric mixer bowl, on medium speed for three or four minutes. Divide the dough in half and do each half separately using the next instructions. Let the dough rest for two minutes then knead it using the electric mixer with the regular beater on medium speed for two additional minutes. If the dough is sticky then add one tbsp. of flour and mix for two minutes and let the dough rest for two minutes. If necessary, repeat adding flour and mixing and letting the dough rest. Why did we let the dough

rest? So the gluten in the flour would develop and act as a binder and make the dough workable instead of crumbly.

Put the dough pieces on an 11" x 17" sheet of parchment paper on a wood cutting board and make two 12" long tubes of dough. Use a pastry cutter and each tube into 12 roughly equal size pieces. Set the dough pieces and parchment paper aside and let the dough rest for five minutes. Then put three of the dough pieces on a different sheet of parchment paper, equidistant from each other and from the edges of the parchment paper.

Press down with the heel of your hand to flatten the dough pieces to about 1/4" thick, dust them lightly with flour, then roll out the three flattened pieces of the dough using a rolling pin, until they are very thin, no more than 1/16th of an inch thick.

Open the oven and put the parchment paper with the rolled out dough pieces on to the oven stones, by hand.

Bake the dough for three minutes on the flat stones, then open the oven and turn the dough pieces over with tongs, and bake for an additional three minutes. Then remove the parchment paper and matzo crackers from the oven and let them cool on a wood cutting board. If you have crispy crackers then the baking time is good. If the crackers aren't crispy everywhere then return them to the oven for an additional baking time of two minutes for each side. Repeat as necessary until you know exactly what total baking time to use for the rest of the batches of crackers.

Reuse the parchment paper for the next batch of dough pieces.

Repeat the rolling, baking and cooling steps for the remaining pieces of dough.

Turn off the oven.

Break up/tear the 24 crackers into small (about 1") size pieces and spread them on the baking sheet. You might notice that some of the pieces are semi-soft instead of crispy, so read on ...

Put the baking sheet back into the oven while the oven is cooling, for thirty minutes. Then remove it, let the crackers pieces cool and then smash the (finally) dry pieces of matzo crackers in a gallon Ziploc® freezer bag, about a third of the total amount each time, using the flat side of a kitchen mallet. Note that you want meal consistency, not powder. Alternatively, you can try using a food processor to make the meal, and that may or may not work depending on the unit you own.

Also, grinding machines that turn grains into flour at home can be used on a coarse setting.

So, what about the fact you have everything from powder and every size in between, up to pieces about 1/4" on a side? Is this a problem? Commercial matzo meal is fairly uniform in size. Answer: For this recipe your results are just fine.

Put the matzo meal into a one quart canning jar and put a lid on it.

Proceed to the next recipe step now to make the matzo balls.

Matzo Balls:

Ingredients:

2 cups of matzo meal

1/3 cup of water

3 jumbo eggs, whisked

4 tbsp. of chopped fresh parsley

2 large shallots, ends cut off, peeled and very thinly sliced, 1/16th inch thick

8 ounces of deli pastrami lunch meat slices, diced into 1/2" squares (buy Boar's Head® black pastrami if you can find it)

2 tsp. of kosher salt or sea salt

2 tbsp. of canola oil

Directions:

Sauté the thin shallot slices in the canola oil in a small skillet on medium heat until they are translucent, then remove the skillet from the heat.

Beat the eggs in the electric mixer bowl on medium low speed for two minutes.

Add the matzo meal, salt, chopped parsley, pastrami pieces and sautéed shallot pieces to the bowl and mix those ingredients together on medium speed using the electric mixer for three minutes. Use a spatula to scrape down the inside surface of the mixing bowl.

Add the 1/3 cup of the water to the mixture in the bowl. Mix well on medium low speed for three minutes. You now have a thick, chunky batter.

Dispense the batter into a large soup or cereal bowl.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the batter for 4 hours or up to overnight to stiffen the batter.

Dust your hands with flour, as needed, to keep the matzo ball batter from sticking to them while you are making the balls in the next step.

Form small matzo balls (5/8" diameter) using roughly two teaspoons of batter per ball. The mixture will be very dense, and that is okay. Roll each one in between the palms of your hands. Put them on parchment paper on a large cutting board.

Add all of the matzo balls to two quarts of lightly boiling chicken broth in a two gallon pot, in small groups, keeping the matzo balls separated from each other until they are made wet by the broth so they don't stick together.

Cook the matzo balls for 20 minutes at a low boil.

Remove the matzo balls using a slotted spoon and put them on a wood cutting board.

Cut the matzo balls in half with a sharp knife and return them to the chicken broth.

Set the pot of chicken broth and halved matzo balls aside for later use in the wedding soup portion of this recipe.

Now proceed to make the corned beef meatballs:

Corned Beef Meatballs:

Ingredients:

1 lb. of raw lean corned beef, cut into 1" cubes and ground fine using an electric meat grinder or stand mixer with a grinder attachment, and the 1/8" diameter holes die

1 cup of matzo meal

2 jumbo eggs, beaten

3 tbsp. of chopped parsley

1 tsp. of kosher or sea salt

2 tbsp. of olive oil for the meatballs

1 tbsp. of canola oil or olive oil to be spread on an 11 x 17 inch baking sheet

Directions:

Set the oven temperature to 325 degrees F.

Lightly grease an 11" x 17" baking sheet with the one tbsp. of canola oil or olive oil.

Beat the eggs using an electric mixer on medium low speed for one minute, then add the salt, the parsley and the olive oil and mix on medium speed for three minutes.

Add the ground corned beef gradually and then mix for three minutes on medium speed. Scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl with a spatula and continue mixing for two minutes.

Add the matzo meal to the mixing bowl gradually while mixing. Then mix for three minutes and scrape down the inside of the mixing bowl with a spatula and mix for two more minutes.

Dispense the meatball mixture into a soup bowl.

Form the meatball mixture by hand (as you did with the matzo balls) into small meatballs about 5/8" to 3/4" in diameter.

Place each meatball on the baking sheet in rows (7 rows by 9 columns), spread evenly and not touching. When done you should have about 63 meatballs.

Bake the meatballs for 20 minutes, then remove the baking sheet from the oven.

Turn off the oven.

Set the meatballs/baking sheet aside.

Now make the Hawaij seasoning:

Hawaij:

Ingredients: (this recipe makes enough Hawaij for multiple uses)

1 1/2 tbsp. of black peppercorns

1 tbsp. of cumin seed or 2 tsp. of ground cumin

1 1/2 tsp. of coriander seeds or 1 tsp. of ground coriander

1/2 tsp. of ground cardamom

4 whole cloves

1 tbsp. of ground turmeric

Directions:

Put all of the Hawaii ingredients except the turmeric and any other ground spices into a small frying pan & dry fry (no oil required) with stirring for three minutes on medium heat, but do not let the spices burn or turn dark. Also, do not inhale the potent scent of the hot spices as it makes breathing difficult.

Dispense and then allow the mixture from the frying pan to cool on a saucer, then grind it to a powder using a Magic Bullet® mixer. This will take about one minute. Per the last step, do not inhale the dust from the grinding and mixing operation.

Add the turmeric and any other ground spices and mix well, again using the Magic Bullet® mixer briefly, then label and store the Hawaii in a sealed container like an 8 ounce canning jar, and store it in a cool, dark place.

It is finally time to make the wedding soup:

A Jewish Variation of Italian Wedding Soup:

Ingredients:

4 quarts of chicken broth (use the broth set aside from making the matzo balls, plus two additional quarts of chicken broth)

4 large heads of escarole, bottoms cut off and discarded, and the leaves separated, washed in cold water, drained and then chopped roughly into 2" by 2" pieces

4 large cloves of garlic, ends cut off, peeled and minced

The baked corned beef meatballs

The boiled, halved matzo balls

1 1/2 pounds of cooked boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cut into 1/2" cubes (see the directions below)

1 tbsp. of sea salt or kosher salt

3 tbsp. of Better Than Bullion® Roast Chicken flavor seasoning

4 bay leaves

2 large red (sweet) bell peppers, cleaned and diced roughly into 1/2" squares

3 large carrots, ends cut off, surface peeled, and that waste discarded, then the carrots are shaved into 4" strips, and then cut into 2" long very thin slices, using a potato peeler and then a sharp knife

1 tbsp. of Hawaij seasoning (More can be added later if wanted.)

3 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

Directions:

Pre-cook the chicken breast halves in two quarts of lightly boiling water for 20 to 30 minutes, then rinse them in cold water and rub off any gunky white albumin, then dice the chicken into roughly 1/2" cubes on a cutting board. Set the chicken cubes aside.

Reheat the saved chicken broth and halved matzo balls in the 2 gallon pot, along with the two additional quarts of chicken broth, to a low boil on high heat.

Add the minced garlic, sea salt, Better than Bullion® Roast Chicken seasoning, bay leaves, diced red bell pepper, shaved carrot pieces and the Hawaij, then stir briefly and cook for ten minutes at a low boil on low to medium heat.

Meanwhile, cut the baked corned beef meatballs in half on a wood cutting board.

Add the halved corned beef meatballs and the cubed chicken breast pieces to the soup pot, then stir the soup and cook at a low boil for ten minutes.

Add the chopped escarole gradually, pressing it down into the broth gently with a large spoon, bring the soup to a boil on high heat, and then cook the mixture for ten minutes on medium low heat, covered with a lid. Then turn the heat to low.

Stir the soup briefly and ladle a small amount of broth into a cup, then let it cool enough so you can taste it. Taste the broth and add more Hawaij seasoning (one or two teaspoons) to the soup pot if needed/wanted and stir the soup.

Add the lemon juice, then stir briefly.

Turn off the heat and cover the pot with a lid.

Before serving the soup you may want to remove and discard the bay leaves. (Good luck finding them!)

Pre-warm your soup bowls in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Serve the soup hot along with glasses of a chilled white wine like Pinot Grigio or Sauvignon Blanc, plus glasses of ice water. Some crusty bread or rolls, with butter, might be enjoyed.

You may want to have a small bowl of Hawajj on the table for guests who want additional seasoning. Also provide either kosher or sea salt, though I doubt you will need it.

Enjoy! Amehaye, Paisano! Yes, you will truly enjoy this Jewish Variation of Italian Wedding Soup with complex flavors and unique ingredients.

Beef Vegetable Soup - ☺♥

Beef vegetable soup is one of the wonderful soups to serve on a cold day. It is very tasty and after eating it you will feel warm and satisfied. This recipe is presented in narrative form instead of the typical Food Nirvana format as the narrative form is better for describing the reasons why I choose particular ingredients and specific procedures.

I do not have a truly standardized recipe for beef vegetable soup. I make it from memory. What I can do is tell you in general what I do and the ingredients and amounts I typically use. Oh, yes, the soup is quite good, but the exact contents and precise amounts vary from time to time.

I start with good beef for soups, which means I avoid raw lean beef as it will be comparatively tough and tasteless if boiled. So I will make a roast beef with a chuck or sirloin roast, skillet seared and roasted to a well done point per the Food Nirvana recipe, enjoy that at dinner and use the leftovers a day or two later to make beef vegetable soup. Similarly, any leftovers from a standing rib roast or charcoal grilled steaks will be perfect. Those types of beef additions give the soup a very tasty beefy flavor and tender pieces of beef. I suggest having a minimum of one pound of leftover beef when making a gallon of soup. Two pounds is better.

I also use canned beef broth ... College Inn® brand ... typically two or three 14.5 oz. cans. Water is something I add after putting in the beef, the vegetables and the beef broth, and then only to make sure the vegetables are barely covered in liquid. For a gallon of soup I also use a teaspoon of sea salt and one half teaspoon of pepper, figuring that people like to season their vegetable soup at the time they eat it. Thus, this soup is intentionally under seasoned relative to salt and pepper.

Start with a two gallon soup pot and put in the meat after it has been cut/diced into small pieces. Add two cans of beef broth and the salt and pepper.

Now let's add the vegetables ... I start with a 28 oz. can of peeled plum tomatoes in juice and I cut them into quarters and add the pieces and the juice to the two gallon pot. I then dice a medium size onion and add it to the pot. Also three diced cloves of garlic. I then add a can of corn (with liquid), a can of green beans (with liquid), two or three diced fresh carrots, two or three diced stalks of celery and a cup of fresh or frozen (never canned) peas. Peeled and diced russet potato pieces and a can of kidney beans will be added later.

I season the soup with a tablespoon of dried oregano. Other herbs can also be used, like sage or thyme, along with a bay leaf. The amount of any particular herb can obviously be varied. It is a matter of personal preference.

I do not put in the potato until the last fifteen minutes of simmering ... I peel and dice the potato but avoid overcooking it which will make it mealy and too soft. I often use only one very large russet potato and supplement it with the other main carbohydrate ... the can of kidney beans. At some times in the past I've thrown in small amounts of chopped broccoli and/or cauliflower but they are not essential. I've also added a small can of sliced mushrooms (with liquid) to add texture variety.

If necessary, I add the third can of beef broth and possibly a small amount of water to assure that the vegetables are covered in liquid. I bring the soup to a full boil on high heat and then put the pot on a small burner on very low heat, and cover the pot, and let it simmer for an hour ... then I add the diced potato and the can of kidney beans and simmer the soup for an additional fifteen minutes. It is done and ready to eat, with the following caveat ... soups of this sort will always taste better the second day, after the various flavors have had time to mix.

Thus, I do something many people fear, unnecessarily ... I cover the very hot soup with a lid and simply let the pot sit on the unheated stove overnight. I do not refrigerate it. After heating and serving some of the soup the next day I do refrigerate the leftover soup or process it with my vacuum sealer and freeze it.

I serve hot beef vegetable soup with a side of Keebler® Club Crackers and butter.

Enjoy!

Bouillabaisse - ?

This recipe from simplyrecipes.com is one I decided to include after Marie's bouillabaisse recipe as this one appears to have more of the standard ingredients with which I am familiar.

Ingredients: (Serves 6)

3 pounds of at least 3 different kinds of fish fillets, fresh or quick frozen (thaw first)

1/2 cup Olive oil

1-2 pounds of Oysters, clams, or mussels

1 cup cooked shrimp, crab, or lobster meat, or rock lobster tails

1 cup thinly sliced onions

4 Shallots, thinly sliced OR the white parts of 2 or 3 leeks, thinly sliced

2 cloves garlic, crushed

1 large tomato, chopped, or 1/2 cup canned tomatoes

1 sweet red pepper, chopped

4 stalks celery, thinly sliced

2-inch slice of fennel or 1 teaspoon of fennel seed

3 sprigs fresh thyme or 3/4 teaspoon dried thyme

1 bay leaf

2-3 whole cloves

Zest of half an orange

1/2 teaspoon powdered saffron

2 teaspoons salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 cup clam juice or fish broth

2 Tbsp lemon juice

2/3 cup white wine

Sliced French bread

Directions:

Heat 1/4 cup of the olive oil in a large (6-qt) saucepan. When it is hot, add the onions and shallots (or leeks). Sauté for a minute, then add the crushed garlic (more or less to taste), and the sweet red pepper. Add the tomato, celery, and fennel. Stir the vegetables into the oil with a wooden spoon until they are well coated. Then add another 1/4 cup of olive oil and the thyme, bay leaf, cloves and orange zest. Cook until the onion is soft and golden but not brown.

Cut the fish fillets into 2-inch pieces. Add the pieces of fish and 2 cups of water to the vegetable mixture. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for about 10 minutes. Add the oysters, clams or mussels (though these may be omitted if desired) and the shrimp, crabmeat or lobster tails, cut into pieces or left whole.

Add the saffron, salt and pepper. Add the clam juice, lemon juice and white wine. Bring to a simmer again and cook about 5 minutes longer.

At serving time taste and correct the seasoning of the broth, adding a little more salt or pepper if need be, and maybe a touch of lemon juice. Into each soup bowl place a thick slice of crusty French bread, plain or slightly toasted. Spoon the bouillabaisse over the bread. If desired, serve it with Sauce Rouille.

Sauce Rouille:

1 tbsp. hot fish stock or clam broth.

2 cloves peeled garlic

1 small red hot pepper

1/2 tsp. salt

1/4 cup soft white bread, pulled into bits

1/2 cup olive oil

Put the hot fish stock or clam broth into the bottom of a blender. Add the garlic and red hot pepper, salt and bread. Blend until very smooth. With the blender still running, add the olive oil slowly and stop the blending as soon as the oil disappears.

At serving time pass the Rouille in a little bowl along with the bouillabaisse. Each serving is about 1/2 teaspoon that you stir into your soup. Use it gingerly like you would hot pepper sauce.

Brunswick Stew - ☺♥

I heard the name, Brunswick Stew, many times in the past without ever knowing anything about it ... origin or taste or composition or how to make it. Then I saw a recipe in a magazine that looked rather tasty. I figured that at least now I know how it should look and what ingredients are used. Beyond that, the name Brunswick made me think of New Brunswick, so I associated the food with Canada. Okay, I was wrong. The Brunswick of the stew world refers to the city of Brunswick, GA.

Some readers of the magazine article commented about recipe variations they tried and loved, so I got the benefit of that input as well for my pending attempt to make this dish. Per usual I checked out a half dozen or so additional recipes for Brunswick Stew on the Internet ... and I got a most unpleasant surprise. No two recipes are alike in ingredients, let alone cooking directions.

It looked like Brunswick Stew is typically a way to use miscellaneous meat/fowl leftovers in combination ... and quite frankly I wasn't very impressed with most of what I read, for a number of the recipes will produce a dish that is lacking in carbohydrates to balance with the protein. Others appear, in contrast to the more robust recipes, to be sadly deficient in general ingredients and seasonings.

I upgraded the original magazine recipe with some additional ingredients that should be present in most any stew ... like garlic. I also eliminated ketchup as a seasoning in favor of obviously better choices, like barbecue sauces. Also, given the very limited amount of carbohydrates in the magazine recipe and other recipes I recommend serving crusty rolls or bread for balance in the meal.

The recipe that I tried initially is shown below, though I confess I cheated by using raw ground beef, which turned out fine. My recipe is one that already incorporates enhancements suggested by readers who experimented successfully with the magazine recipe, and it contains yet other ingredients based on what I found on the Internet or from my own experience that made sense to me.

I hope you make this stew as it is hearty and quite tasty ... just the thing for cool to cold days of Fall and Winter. I think the barbecue sauces and the bourbon combine to make it deliciously unique in taste. The stew pairs well with crusty rolls or bread, with butter, and a bottle of a good red wine, like Merlot or Pinot Noir or even Shiraz. I actually made some homemade garlic bread and that was fine also.

I tried my recipe and made very minor modifications and serendipitously wound up with a winner. Oh, like many stews, this one will taste best the day after it is made, for the flavors will have time to blend to perfection.

Note that shredded meats/fowl can be created from small roasts or leftover pieces of meat/fowl. You will need to simmer raw meat (chicken breast is fine after one hour) for three hours in a quart or more of chicken broth, or chicken broth mixed with water.

Simply use forks after simmering to shred the meat/fowl, for it will be falling apart tender after the long period of simmering. If it is not totally tender you can use a sharp knife to cut it and your fingers to shred the meat. As necessary, remove and discard any fat or bone or other waste products during shredding of the meats/fowl. Remember to use very low heat and cover the pot with a lid during simmering to minimize evaporation.

Note also that broth left over from simmering can/should be used in place of the chicken broth listed in the recipe below. Simply skim and discard any material from the surface of the simmering broth, and if necessary, defat it.

Ingredients: (4 to 6 Servings)

3/4 to 1 lb. of cooked shredded (or ground) beef

3/4 to 1 lb. of cooked shredded pork

3/4 to 1 lb. of cooked shredded chicken breast

1 qt. of chicken broth (or broth from simmering the meat/fowl for shredding, defatted if necessary)

1 large stalk of celery, chopped

1 large green bell pepper, cleaned and chopped

1, 1/4 lb. stick of butter

1 large sweet onion, diced

3 large cloves of garlic, diced

1, 15 oz. can of cream style corn

1, 28 oz. can of whole peeled plum tomatoes in juice, chopped

1 cup of frozen baby lima beans or petite peas

2 Tbsp. of Worcestershire sauce

1/4 cup of the commercial brand of sweet hickory flavored barbecue sauce that you like best

1/4 cup of Kansas City Classic barbecue sauce (see the BBQ sauce note in the directions)

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 cup of sour mash bourbon, like Jack Daniels®

2 Tbsp. of cornstarch mixed in 1/2 cup of water for thickening the stew

Hot sauce like Sriracha served on the side with the meal

Directions:

Pre-warm individual wide serving bowls for your guests in a 200 degrees F warming oven.

Melt the butter in a large, deep skillet or a Dutch oven on medium high heat, and add the celery, green bell pepper and sweet onion, then stir to mix the ingredients well. Sauté on medium heat, covered with a lid, for the first five minutes, and then uncovered with stirring until the onions are translucent, about five additional minutes.

Add the diced garlic and sauté, stirring, for two additional minutes.

Add the Worcestershire sauce, both barbecue sauces, the pepper and the salt and mix well.

Note about the barbecue sauces: You want a blend of the sweet with the more pungent. Thus, you use whatever common commercial brand you like for the sweet hickory sauce, and you make/use the Kansas City Classic barbecue sauce (recipe in Food Nirvana) or locate some commercial brand of pungent sauce that is not sweet. If necessary you can try to buy a small amount of a pungent sauce from a local BBQ restaurant. They typically offer multiple types of sauces for barbecued meats.

Add the corn, the chopped plum tomatoes and juice, and the baby lima beans or petite peas and mix well.

Add the shredded meats/fowl, the chicken broth (or meat simmering broth) and the bourbon and mix well.

Bring the mixture to a boil on high heat while stirring.

Cover the skillet or Dutch oven and simmer on a very low temperature for one hour, stirring every 15 minutes.

Remove the lid and let the stew simmer for an additional 30 to 60 minutes to evaporate excess liquid to help the stew thicken. Stir the stew every five minutes to keep ingredients from sticking to the bottom of the skillet or Dutch oven.

If the stew has the consistency you like the cooking is done. Otherwise, to have a thicker stew, mix/stir two tablespoons of corn starch into a half cup of water and add that gradually to the stew while stirring. Make sure the corn starch mixture is thoroughly mixed into the stew, then let the stew simmer for an additional five minutes while stirring.

Serve the stew hot with crusty rolls or bread with butter. Better yet, wait until the next day to serve it and the flavors will be even better due to natural blending overnight.

Remember to serve some hot sauce on the side, like Sriracha, for those guests who want to kick up the seasoning a notch or two. Your guests may also want to adjust the seasoning by adding salt or pepper.

Did you remember the wine? Get some wine, or, you can also serve this stew with beer as the beverage.

Enjoy!

Cabbage Soup - ☺♥

I saw a recipe for this soup while looking for a different recipe and this one looked to be very tasty and healthy. I decided to make a copy and modify it to suit my preference for soups with meat or seafood, plus other additions. I already know it will be a winner even before making it, and I love the fact it uses cabbage, for often I have leftover uncooked cabbage when making Chinese stir fry dishes, or coleslaw.

There is a list of likely additions at the end of this recipe. Use your imagination. I used 1 1/2 lbs. of roasted pork pieces and it was fine. You definitely want some type of meat in this soup unless you are a vegetarian.

Take the time to taste the soup after making it to be sure you have enough of the listed seasonings. I know I added sea salt and I think next time I will double the basil and the oregano.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons of olive oil

1 medium onion, diced

1 large carrot, diced

2 celery stalks, diced

3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

1 teaspoon (or more) of dried oregano

1 teaspoon (or more) of dried basil

2 teaspoons of sea salt

1/4 tsp. of cayenne pepper

1/2 of a large head of cabbage, chopped

1, 15 ounce can of white kidney beans

24 snow pea pods, fiber strip removed, or 1/2 cup of frozen peas

1, 28 ounce can of peeled plum tomatoes, chopped, plus the juice

6 cups of chicken broth or vegetable broth (or more if needed)

1 cup of uncooked basmati rice

1/4 cup of cornstarch mixed with 1/2 cup of water

2 tablespoons of lemon juice

1/2 cup of roughly chopped fresh parsley

sea salt and cracked black pepper, to taste

Directions:

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat, and add the diced onions, carrot, snow peas or regular frozen peas and the celery. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes, covered, with stirring once a minute.

Add the garlic slices and the spices and stir, then cook for another minute.

Add the cabbage and let it cook for 5 minutes, covered, stirring frequently.

Pour in the vegetable broth, the rice, the kidney beans, and the chopped plum tomatoes and juice and heat the soup to a low boil, and boil it for 12 minutes, covered.

Add the cornstarch and water mixture. Stir well and let the soup boil gently for three minutes.

Remove the soup from the heat and add the lemon juice and cracked black pepper, then stir it.

Add sea salt to taste and serve the soup hot, with the parsley on top, along with some crackers and butter.

Enjoy!

Ingredient Variations:

Add meat. You can add shredded chicken, diced baked chicken breast, pulled pork, beef chunks, ground turkey, etc.

Add a vegetable protein. You can add white kidney beans, chickpeas, or lentils (but add extra broth for cooking).

Add other vegetables, like bell peppers, zucchini slices, or leafy greens like kale or escarole.

Add rice or some other carbohydrate to make this soup a complete meal.

Add sliced mushrooms to add flavor and to make the soup more complex.

Add a dash of cayenne pepper or red pepper flakes.

Yes, enjoy this soup using the ingredient variations!

Chicken and Rice Soup - ☺♥♥♥☺

I have fond memories of the chicken and rice soup my mother made when I was quite young. It was a fairly light soup without much chicken fat but plenty of chicken and rice, and a noticeable amount of parsley, which helped to make a nice broth. Her generous use of fresh parsley gave her soup a unique taste not found in other versions of that type of soup that I experienced then and later. I really enjoyed her version the best.

Lately I found myself experimenting with chicken and rice soup recipe variations ... said experiments of my own design, not Internet selections. I started with a few notions of what I wanted that would make a robust and attractive soup with more variety of ingredients, but still using a fair amount of fresh parsley ... and later also (optionally) using fresh chives. The choice of basil or oregano in this recipe makes a noticeable taste difference, basil being milder and oregano stronger.

To cut to the chase my different experiments were all quite tasty and the approximate gallon of soup made each time didn't last long. I made each successive batch of soup with more variety of fresh ingredients, aiming for a colorful presentation as well as a great taste. And I did want more chicken fat for flavor and a soup not overpowered with rice.

I decided that the base flavor of the soup would be best if I used chicken thighs as they combine light and dark flesh and an ample amount of chicken fat. Six large thighs provided for exactly what I wanted to make ... roughly 1 gallon of soup ... with plenty of taste and just the right amount of chicken in the final soup. I also improved the chicken flavor intensity of the soup broth with a bit of chicken flavored Better Than Bullion®.

Now you get the pleasure of making and enjoying this very fine soup. You will be quite happy, as will your guests. This is genuine comfort food.

Ingredients: (makes approximately one gallon of soup)

6 large chicken thighs, skin on

2 quarts (or more if needed) of water

1 tbsp. of salt (or less ... vary the amount to suit yourself)

1 tsp. of black pepper

3 large celery stalks, diced

1 large fresh carrot, shaved with a potato peeler, and shavings cut into 1" long slices

1 cup of diced sweet onion (Variation: use onion and shallot mixture)

6 sun dried tomatoes, each chopped into four pieces

2 large fresh garlic cloves, sliced thinly

1 red bell pepper cut into 1" long 1/2" wide strips

1 lightly packed cup of chopped fresh parsley

1/2 cup of chopped fresh chives (Optional)

1 tbsp. of dried oregano or dried basil but not both

1 quart of packaged chicken broth (like College Inn® or Swansons®)

1 or 2 tbsp. of chicken flavored Better Than Bullion®

3/4 cup of uncooked basmati rice

Directions:

Simmer the chicken thighs in two quarts of lightly boiling water in a two gallon soup pot with the salt and the pepper for one half hour. Add additional water if necessary to allow all of the thighs to be submersed.

Remove the cooked thighs to a wood cutting board keeping them separated and allow them to cool for 15 minutes.

Add the quart of chicken broth and the Better Than Bullion® chicken flavoring to the soup pot.

Add the processed vegetables/herbs to the soup pot, along with the cup of basmati rice.

Stir the soup and bring it to a low boil on medium high heat. Boil on low heat for 15 minutes to cook the rice, stirring every five minutes. Then turn off the heat.

While the rice is cooking you can process the chicken thighs by hand with a sharp paring knife, eliminating the skin, bone, gristle and fat and any very dark flesh. If you have a dog, put the discarded items, aside from the bones and gristle, into a storage container to feed to your dog later. It will love the snack and you for providing it! Discard the bones and gristle.

Use the knife to cut up the pieces of light and dark flesh into roughly 1" long pieces and then slightly shred them with two forks, then add all of it back into the soup pot and stir well.

Serve the soup hot. It is delicious right away. Or, as described below, you can choose to store the soup.

Put a lid on the pot and let the soup cool slowly to room temperature. Note that the rice in the soup will gradually absorb broth so it is best to serve the soup when made or to freeze it for later use as soon as it is cool to avoid having the rice absorb too much of the broth. If you wait too long and get caught in the rice/broth absorption trap simply add some extra chicken broth to the soup.

Dispense the chicken with rice soup into storage containers and refrigerate them. This soup also freezes well. I vacuum seal some right after it cools to room temperature, put it into the deep freeze, and enjoy it later after thawing/heating it in the microwave oven. Thaw it in the vacuum seal bag, then heat it after dispensing it into the serving bowl.

Whenever, serve the soup hot.

Optionally, use some freshly chopped parsley as a decorative topping.

Each guest can further add salt and pepper as desired.

It is nice to serve this soup with a warmed loaf of sourdough bread or rolls or saltine crackers, and butter.

Enjoy! This is great comfort food.

Chicken and Rice Soup II - ☺♥♥♥☺

This recipe is an alternate version of the Food Nirvana recipe for Chicken and Rice Soup. I happened to use some additional and very different vegetables and seasonings and the results were delightful.

I decided this time around to use boneless, skinless chicken breasts and not have chicken fat in the soup. I was looking for a lighter broth and this one came out to be perfect. It accentuates the many flavors of the vegetables, and the special seasonings are umami bombs that make the soup outstanding.

Now you get the pleasure of making and enjoying this very fine soup. You will be quite happy, as will your guests. This is genuine comfort food.

Ingredients: (makes approximately one and one quarter gallons of soup [not counting the separate rice])

3 large boneless, skinless chicken breasts (2 1/2 to 3 pounds), precooked

2 quarts of chicken broth

1 quart of water

2 or 3 tbsp. of roast chicken flavored Better Than Bullion®

1 tbsp. of salt (or less ... vary the amount to suit yourself)

1 tsp. of black pepper

3 large celery stalks, diced

2 cups of chopped bok choy

1 cup of frozen peas

2 large fresh carrots, shaved with a potato peeler, and shavings cut into 1" long slices

1/2 cup of diced sweet onion

6 scallions cut into 1/4" pieces including the green parts

3 large fresh garlic cloves, sliced thinly

1 red bell pepper cut into 1/2" long by 1/2" wide pieces

1 well packed cup of chopped fresh parsley

15 small salad tomatoes, halved

1, 14 ounce can of cannellini (white kidney) beans

1 tbsp. of dried oregano

1 tbsp. of soy sauce

2 teaspoons of sriracha sauce

2 cups of uncooked basmati rice (prepared separately from the soup, in one quart of chicken broth and then put into a separate storage container)

Directions:

Simmer the chicken breasts in two quarts of lightly salted, lightly boiling water in a two gallon soup pot for one half hour. Add additional water if necessary to keep the breasts submerged.

Remove the cooked breasts and rinse them under a hot water spray to remove albumin, then put them on a wood cutting board, keeping them separated, and allow them to cool for 15 minutes. Slice the breasts crosswise into 1/3" thick slices, discarding any fat or hard parts. Tear or cut the slices into two to four pieces each.

Empty and clean the soup pot and then add the two quarts of chicken broth, the quart of water, and the Better Than Bullion® roast chicken flavoring. Stir the contents and then add the chicken breast pieces to the pot.

Add all of the processed vegetables/herbs to the soup pot, along with the soy sauce, the sriracha sauce and the beans from the can of cannellini.

Stir the soup and bring it to a low boil on medium high heat. Simmer the soup, covered, on very low heat for 1 hour, then turn off the heat.

Steam the rice separately in one quart of hot chicken broth (for 15 minutes), then put it into a storage container.

Serve the soup hot, letting each guest combine the rice with the soup in individual bowls. This customizes the ratio of the soup to the rice according to the preferences of each guest.

Each guest can further add salt and pepper as desired.

It is nice to serve this soup with a warmed loaf of sourdough bread or rolls or saltine crackers, and butter.

**I suggest serving cold, mild beverages like iced tea or lemonade.
Enjoy! This is great comfort food.**

Chicken Cordon Bleu Soup - ☺

This is a new twist on using leftover baked ham that I would never have thought of ... but some other people did.

Having made this soup a few times I was not pleased with the lack of a carbohydrate like potato, yet I didn't want to vary very far from the cordon bleu idea. I also did not care for the amount of onion flavor. I considered it to be excessive and negative in the effect of not allowing ham, chicken and cheese flavors to come through. Ergo, strong onion flavor did not belong. Rather than eliminate it entirely I cut back the amount of onion, and even suggest using a single shallot. I also found that allowing the flavors to blend for a day or two after making the soup eliminated the onion flavor issue.

The crumb exterior of traditional chicken cordon bleu provides the needed carbohydrate to that dish. In turn, this soup needs a substantial amount of relatively small croutons at serving time to create the needed balance. An alternative would be to serve the soup over toast points, more like a creamy meat sauce, which can easily be done by limiting the amount of chicken broth to one cup instead of two cups.

You might try this soup as part of a soup and salad lunch, along with some chilled Pinot Grigio wine.

You also might decide to serve some stone ground wheat crackers, with butter on the side.

Remember to buy/chill the wine and get crackers and make and chill the salad first. Use a vinaigrette dressing for the salad to contrast with and complement the mild creamy soup.

Receive compliments graciously, with a gentle, pleased smile.

Ingredients: (Four servings)

3 tbsp. of butter

1/2 of a small sweet onion, diced (or one shallot, sliced thinly)

1 large clove of garlic, minced

1/4 cup of flour

2 cups of whole milk

1 cup of heavy cream

1 or 2 cups of chicken broth

2 medium size boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cooked, albumin rinsed/rubbed off, and then cut into 1/4" to 1/3" cubes

6 ounces of leftover baked ham, all fat removed, cut into 1/4" cubes

4 teaspoons of stone ground mustard

6 ounces of sliced Swiss cheese, cut into 1" x 1" pieces

A pinch of cayenne pepper

3/4 tsp. of sea salt

1/4 tsp. of ground black pepper

1/4 cup of fresh parsley sprigs (as a garnish)

Croutons at serving time

Directions:

Pour the milk, cream and chicken broth into a 2 quart bowl. Stir briefly.

Melt the butter in a three quart saucepan or small soup pot. Add the diced onion and cook over medium heat with some stirring until it is soft, about 8 to 10 minutes. You can cover the saucepan/pot to make the onion cook faster.

Add the minced garlic and cook for two minutes with stirring.

Sprinkle in the flour and whisk the mixture to create a roux. Whisk the roux until it is smooth. Cook for one to two minutes.

Pour in half of the liquids from the bowl, then whisk the mixture on medium heat until it starts to thicken and is smooth.

Gradually add the rest of the liquids. Bring the soup to a low boil, stirring often with a wooden spoon, then stir for one minute.

Turn off the heat and add the chicken cubes, ham cubes, cayenne pepper, mustard and Swiss cheese pieces.

Stir the soup until the Swiss cheese is completely melted. If needed, heat the soup briefly on low heat, with stirring, until the Swiss cheese is melted.

Taste the soup and add additional salt and pepper to taste, with stirring. Your guests can also add additional salt and/or pepper as desired at serving time.

Serve the soup hot immediately with a large bowl of croutons at the table for your guests, and with a parsley sprig on the top of each serving as a garnish.

Yes, this creamy soup will be fine in a soup and salad lunch, along with crackers and butter and glasses of chilled Pinot Grigio wine.

Enjoy!

Chicken Corn Chowder - ☺

Once in my life I ate Chicken Corn Chowder and I found it to be too bland to be interesting. Years have passed and now I believe it is time to make this dish properly, and that means delicious. As usual I researched the Internet and a few cookbooks and I developed my own version ... One that attempts to bring together the best of all that I found.

So, what is the best? To begin, bacon is a must, though many recipes do not call for bacon. So it is with various other ingredients, and what I decided was to put all the ones together that made sense, i.e., complementary tastes, and exclude the so-called outliers, like squash.

The bottom line is my first attempt at making this dish was quite successful. I am pleased. I have no changes to make. Even better, fall will be here soon and this chowder is a great dish on a cold day.

Ingredients:

6 slices of bacon, fried then broken into pieces

2 tbsp. butter

1/2 large onion, chopped

1 sweet red or orange or green pepper, or a mixture, cleaned and diced

2 cloves of fresh garlic, diced

1/4 cup of flour

2, 14 oz. cans of chicken broth

1 1/2 lbs. of diced pre-boiled chicken breast

1 large russet potato cut into small slices or 1/2 inch cubes

4 large ears of corn, blanched with the kernels cut off and chopped, or two, 15 oz. cans of creamed corn

1 cup of heavy cream

1/2 cup of milk

2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves (just use a few sprigs during cooking, then remove them)

2 tsp. fresh cilantro for garnish (optional)

1 tsp. ground cumin

2 cups of shredded pepper jack cheese

½ tsp. sea salt

½ tsp. black pepper

1 tsp. of Tabasco sauce (optional)

Directions:

Pre-boil the boneless, skinless chicken breasts for ten minutes on medium heat. Rinse the partially cooked chicken breasts in cold water to remove cooking scum and then chop them into ½" cubes or thin slices and set them aside.

Cook the bacon in a large pot over medium-high heat until crisp. Transfer the bacon to a paper towel to drain. Break up the bacon after it is cool enough to handle into small pieces.

Keep the bacon fat in the pot. Add the butter to the pot and melt it on medium high heat.

Add the chopped onion and the chopped sweet pepper and sauté on low heat until the onions are soft, about ten minutes.

Add the salt, the pepper, the garlic and the flour and stir to mix well and continue to sauté for 2 minutes.

Add the chicken broth, the diced potato, the thyme, and the cumin and bring the pot contents to a boil on high heat. Then reduce the heat to low and simmer for ten minutes.

Add the corn, the cream, the shredded cheese and the milk and bring the pot contents back to a simmer.

Add the chicken and the bacon pieces. Simmer for fifteen minutes.

If you used sprigs of thyme remove and discard them.

Add the Tabasco sauce if wanted and mix well.

Serve hot, garnished with fresh cilantro.

This chowder is a complete and very satisfying meal except for possibly adding a light side salad.

Serve it with oyster crackers or Keebler® Club Crackers and butter.

Enjoy!

Chicken Bok Choy Soup - ?

Chicken Bok Choy Soup is one I haven't tried but I am about to make it.

Ingredients: (makes about one gallon of soup)

1/2 ounce (about 1/2 cup) dried shiitake or mixed dried mushrooms

3 cups boiling water

1 tablespoon peanut oil or canola oil

2 cups diced onion

3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced

6 1/8-inch-thick slices peeled fresh ginger

6 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth

1/4 cup reduced-sodium soy sauce

1 2-to-3-inch cinnamon stick

1 whole star anise

1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces

1 bulb fennel, cored and cut into 1-inch pieces

8 scallions, whites cut into 2-inch pieces and greens chopped, divided

1 pound bok choy, preferably baby bok choy, white stems sliced lengthwise and greens chopped, divided

2 cups (4 ounces) mung bean sprouts

1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro

2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil

Lime wedges for garnish

Directions:

Place mushrooms in a heatproof measuring cup and cover with boiling water. Soak for at least 30 minutes or up to several hours.

Remove the mushrooms from the water, remove and discard the stems (if any) and cut into 1/8-inch slices; set aside. Strain the soaking liquid and reserve.

Heat oil in a large soup pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onion, garlic and ginger and cook, stirring, for 5 minutes.

Pour in the reserved mushroom liquid, broth, soy sauce, cinnamon stick, star anise and pepper. Bring to a boil.

Reduce to a simmer and stir in chicken. Simmer for 20 minutes.

Stir in fennel, scallion whites and the reserved mushrooms and cook for 5 minutes.

Add bok choy stems, return to a simmer and cook for 3 minutes more.

Stir in bok choy greens and bean sprouts. Cook until the greens are just wilted, about 2 minutes more.

Discard the cinnamon stick and star anise.

Ladle the soup into bowls. Garnish each bowl with scallion greens, cilantro and a 1/4-teaspoon drizzle of sesame oil. Serve with lime wedges, if desired.

Enjoy!

Chicken Vegetable Soup - ☺♥

This recipe is a combination of the best of ingredients Peggy and I found from Internet recipes or added based on our own knowledge of soups. It is a sure winner. Peggy made it and we loved it. You will too.

You will notice the ingredients list calls for cooked chicken. The reason is that boiling raw chicken breasts, etc., will yield a cruddy white muck on top of whatever liquid is used. You don't want that stuff in your soup.

Thus, I recommend simmering two hefty boneless, skinless chicken breasts in lightly salted boiling water for half an hour, then rinsing the breasts in cold water and then dicing them into 1/2" cubes or shredding them with two forks on a wooden cutting board. At that point you are ready to proceed making great Chicken Vegetable Soup.

Ingredients:

3, 14 oz. cans of chicken broth

1 cup of fresh or frozen corn

1, 14 oz. can of kidney beans

1, 14 oz. can of sliced potatoes, drained (or slice a raw one)

2 large celery ribs, diced

2 summer squash, quartered lengthwise and sliced into 1/2 thick pieces

2 large carrots, sliced into 1/4" thick circles

1 sweet red bell pepper, diced

2 cloves of garlic, diced

1 medium to large onion, chopped

1 tsp. of dried basil

1/2 tsp. of dried oregano

1 tsp. of salt

1/2 tsp. of pepper

1, 28 oz. can of diced tomatoes

4 cups of cubed or shredded cooked chicken

3 sprigs of fresh parsley, chopped

Directions:

In a soup pot, combine all of the ingredients except for the tomatoes, chicken and parsley.

Bring the mixture to a boil on high heat.

Reduce the heat to low.

Cover the soup pot with a lid and simmer for 25 minutes.

Stir in the chicken and the tomatoes and simmer for 3 minutes.

Serve the soup using the parsley as a decorative topping.

Each guest can further add salt and pepper as desired.

It is nice to serve this soup with a warmed loaf of sourdough bread or rolls and butter.

Cream of Broccoli Soup - ☺♥

I had a nice large broccoli crown with a medium large stem that we hadn't used and it was starting to develop a yellow color on a few florets. I like vegetables and fruits to be fresh so I had to figure out how to use the broccoli, for simply throwing it away would be wasteful, and I wasn't about to lightly steam it as I normally do as the quality would be less than we require. By coincidence, I had recently eaten an excellent cream of broccoli soup while vacationing in Florida, so I decided to try my hand at making that soup.

As usual I sought a variety of recipes from the Internet, thought about the ingredient differences between them, and came up with my own composite recipe. I am very pleased with the result, so this recipe belongs in Food Nirvana. I hope you enjoy it as I do. Typically, foods that contain cream and are served hot are not candidates for preservation by freezing, but according to the recipes I read a few indicated that this soup freezes well. I tried that and it worked pretty well. But pretty well isn't good enough! I want perfect soup so I have included instructions in the recipe below to freeze the soup, and vacuum seal it if you can, prior to adding the cream. That will guarantee that when you later thaw the frozen soup and heat it to thicken it and then add the cream that it will be perfect.

Note that you can make cream of cauliflower soup with this recipe by simple substitution, or, you can mix a combination of broccoli and cauliflower and have a unique and very tasty cream soup. Go for it!

Ingredients:

One large broccoli crown, about 5 to 6 inches in diameter

2, 14.5 ounce cans of chicken broth

3 tablespoons of butter

½ cup of diced sweet onion

½ cup of diced celery

1 large fresh clove of garlic, diced

¾ teaspoon of white pepper

1 teaspoon of sea salt

2 sprigs of fresh thyme

10 ounces of heavy cream

2 tablespoons of corn starch

Directions:

Put the chicken broth into a three quart saucepan.

Break up or cut up the broccoli into florets and stem pieces, after cutting off the bottom of the stem, and add all of the broccoli to the chicken stock.

Add the sprigs of fresh thyme to the chicken stock.

Bring the chicken stock mixture to a boil on medium high heat, covered, then reduce the heat to a very low simmer and simmer the contents for 30 minutes.

While the broccoli is simmering, sauté' the onion and celery in the butter in a small skillet on very low heat until the onion is transparent. Then add the garlic and continue to sauté' for two minutes.

Remove the skillet from the heat and set it aside.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and set it aside for 30 minutes, uncovered, to allow the contents to cool.

Remove and discard the thyme sprigs.

Put some of the broccoli and chicken broth into a blender and blend on medium speed until the mixture is completely uniform with a thick sauce consistency. Process/blend the sautéed onion, celery, garlic, butter and the remainder of the broccoli and chicken broth the same way.

Return all of the well blended soup mixture to the saucepan.

Add the salt, the pepper and the corn starch, mixing the cornstarch into the soup mixture completely.

If you plan to eat the soup right away then proceed with the remainder of the recipe instructions below. If instead you want to freeze the soup and use it at a later time then follow the instructions in the remainder of this paragraph. Chill the soup, then vacuum seal it and freeze it. When you are ready to make the final soup then thaw the frozen soup and put it into the three quart saucepan. Proceed as indicated next.

Bring the saucepan contents to a 200+ degrees F simmer/low boil on low to medium heat, stirring often to avoid having the soup mixture stick to the bottom of the saucepan. That will cause the cornstarch to thicken the soup. I recommend

using a candy thermometer to approach and then hold the temperature well below 210 degrees F, to avoid boiling the soup.

Once the soup has thickened, turn off the heat, let the soup cool to around 190 degrees F and then add the heavy cream and stir until the soup is well mixed.

Serve the soup and let each guest adjust the seasoning to taste with sea salt and white pepper.

Enjoy! This stuff is really good ... Far better than you might imagine. Serve it with some crackers and butter. You will get nice compliments.

Cream of Mushroom Soup - ☺♥

A nice bowl of this rich tasting creamy soup goes well with some Keebler Club® crackers and butter on a cold winter day, so I decided to make a really good batch, enjoy it and add it to Food Nirvana. I created this recipe and I'm proud of it, for it is very simple to make and delicious. My stimulus for making the soup was total annoyance with the Campbell Soup Company® for being so cheap in providing mushrooms in their soup. But I use their soup as a base for mine. Why not? Enjoy!

Note: Due to the simplicity of this recipe I did not originally include any directions for freezing this cream soup, the point being that total preparation time is only about ten minutes. My great friend, Den, asked what the cook could do to use fresh mushrooms and also make the soup in quantity for later use, and then vacuum seal and freeze portions of the soup, without destroying the creamy character during later reheating of thawed packs of the soup. Look at the variation to this recipe provided at the end of this recipe's directions to address that method.

Ingredients: (makes about a quart of soup)

1, 10 1/4 oz. can of Campbell's® Cream of Mushroom Soup

2, 4 oz. drained weight cans of sliced mushrooms, drained

4 oz. of heavy cream

1 pint of milk

1 tbsp. of butter

1/4 tsp. of white pepper

1/4 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of corn starch

Directions:

Simply mix all of the ingredients in a large saucepan (I like to use a wooden spoon) and heat the mixture to a simmer on medium heat while stirring.

When the soup thickens and barely starts to boil it is done. Remove the saucepan from the heat.

Serve. You will be very pleased.

Variation: If you want to make the soup in quantity for vacuum sealing and freezing, and in particular use fresh mushrooms instead of canned mushrooms then follow the alternative directions/ingredients shown next.

This is a two part recipe, in which the mushrooms are washed, cleaned and sliced and are then pre-cooked in chicken broth during the first part. The recommended steps for cleaning vary by type of mushroom used. For example, the stems of shitake mushrooms should be cut off and discarded (the stems are rubbery). The gills of portabella mushrooms should be scraped off with a spoon and discarded (they create a muddy taste). In all cases, no matter what type of fresh mushrooms are used, the tough base of the stems should be cut off and discarded.

After cleaning and slicing vertically into 1/4" thick slices, simmer the mushrooms in just enough chicken broth to barely cover them. As they will float you have to press them down to determine the right amount of chicken broth to use, and cover the saucepan while they are cooking so the steam cooks the pieces floating on top of the liquid. After they are cooked, about ten minutes at a 200+ degrees F simmer/low boil, remove the mushrooms to a bowl and put the broth on low heat to evaporate half of the liquid, then remove the remaining concentrated broth from the heat, allowing it to cool to room temperature.

Add the appropriate amount of white pepper, sea salt and corn starch, per the above recipe, to the cooled concentrated broth, based on the expected number of quarts of mushroom soup that will eventually be made. Mix well and add the cooked mushroom slices. Mix again and then vacuum seal and freeze the partially made soup in packets that will each yield one quart of soup when all other ingredients have been added. Thus, I suggest using a quantity of seasoned broth and mushrooms in each vacuum sealed pack that are amenable to the ingredient proportions shown above in the original recipe, or at least some recorded multiple thereof.

When it is time to make a quart of the soup, simply thaw a frozen packet and proceed with the above recipe, but do not discard the chicken broth. Instead, increase the cream to 6 ounces and eliminate as much milk as necessary to compensate for the volume of chicken broth. Make the soup and if it is not sufficiently thick then add a small amount of cornstarch that has been mixed with milk, and heat the soup to a simmer to thicken it, but do not let it boil.

It is clear that this second recipe differs materially from the first one, yet the final result should be quite delicious. In effect, the flavor of the concentrated

chicken broth and the extracted flavor of the sliced mushrooms in that broth, will provide a most tasty improvement to, (ugh!), Campbell's® Cream of Mushroom Soup, in flavor, consistency and, when all ingredients are combined, mushroom content.

The given method assures that milk and cream never hit the freezer, which is the optimal way to make and later use a cream soup.

Enjoy!

Dashi - ☺♥

This is the broth used in making Miso Soup. It is an easy recipe, provided you have the required ingredients. For the record, I bought both the kombu and a dried filet of bonito directly from a company in Japan. Use the Internet. Japan is your best source for the ingredients.,

Ingredients:

1 piece kombu (dried kelp) (10 g; 4 x 4 inches, 10 x 10 cm per piece)

1 cup katsuobushi (dried bonito flakes) (packed; 10 g)

4 cups water

Directions:

Most Japanese recipes would say to gently clean the kombu with a damp cloth. However, these days, kombu is quite clean, so just make sure it doesn't have any mold spots and it's ready to use. Do not wash or wipe off the white powdery substance, as it has lots of umami.

Make several slits in 1 piece kombu (dried kelp) to release more flavor. Add the kombu and water to a medium saucepan.

Turn on the heat to medium low and slowly bring to almost boiling, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, clean the dashi by skimming and discarding the foam and debris from the surface.

Just before the dashi starts boiling gently, remove the kombu from the saucepan. If you leave the kombu in the saucepan, the dashi will become slimy and bitter.

Add 1 cup katsuobushi (dried bonito flakes) and bring it back to a boil again.

Once the dashi is boiling, reduce the heat, simmer for just 30 seconds, and turn off the heat. Let the katsuobushi sink to the bottom, about 10 minutes.

Strain the dashi through a fine-mesh sieve over a bowl or measuring cup.

The Awase Dashi is ready to use.

If you are not using the dashi right away, store the dashi in a bottle or mason jar and keep it in the refrigerator for 3 to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 2 weeks.

Enjoy!

Fish Chowder - ☺♥

This delicious creamy chowder is a fine food to serve to close friends and loved ones for they will be most pleased. My sweetheart, Peggy, has a Christmas Eve party every year and this one in 2014 was memorable for me in the food department as I made a number of my favorite foods and pleased a lot of people. That was my contribution to holiday happiness and I surely enjoyed the compliments. In any event this was the first time I made fish chowder and it certainly was a crowd pleaser, so without further ado I now provide the recipe to you. Enjoy!!!

The basic recipe is similar to that of New England Clam Chowder. The differences in ingredients are the generous use of fresh haddock instead of clams, powdered thyme as an additional welcome herb, and a larger volume of liquid using heavy cream and milk, and finally the use of corn starch to provide some thickening beyond that provided by the flour/roux in the clam chowder recipe. Thus, this chowder was pretty much guaranteed to be a winner, and making it for a crowd turned out to be easy. I made a gallon of chowder to serve along with baby back ribs, shrimp cocktail and baked ham, potato salad, lemon sugar cookies and many other light foods in the vegetable category that were purchased, as well as some of the varieties of pickles that I make. Peggy supplemented all of that with her chicken salad and tuna salad cocktail sandwiches using snowflake rolls. Yummy!

Ingredients: (Makes one gallon, which serves eight to twelve people)

2 lbs. of fresh haddock filets cut into 1" cubes

28 oz. of canned clam juice (I buy it at Sam's Club®)

1 quart of heavy cream

1 quart of Lactaid®: milk

1 very large sweet onion, diced

3 very large russet potatoes, diced

6 strips of good quality thick sliced bacon

2 tsp. White pepper

2 tsp. of sea salt

4 tbsp. of butter

1/4 cup of flour

2 tbsp. of corn starch

1 tbsp. of powdered thyme

Directions:

Note: You can make powdered thyme using dried thyme and a small high speed blender, like a Magic Bullet®. Also, due to the high cream and milk content of this chowder, do not freeze any leftovers, for freezing will destroy the creamy composition of the chowder, which will be sadly evident upon reheating.

Wash the fresh fish and then cut it into approximately 1" cubes and whatever thinner cuts result where the filets are less than one inch thick.

Fry the bacon on low to medium heat until there is no uncooked fat, but do not make the bacon overly crisp and do not burn it or overheat the bacon fat. Turn off the heat. Remove the bacon to a paper towel. Crumble/break it into small pieces when it has cooled. Set the bacon aside.

Pour the hot bacon grease into a cup, avoiding the transfer of any solid particles, and then clean the skillet to remove any solid particles. Pour the hot bacon grease back into the skillet and put it on the stove burner with no heat.

Dice the onion into ½" or smaller pieces. Put them into the skillet with the hot bacon grease. Add the butter and white pepper. Sauté the onion on low heat until it is translucent. Turn off the heat and add the flour to the skillet and mix well.

Peel and dice the potatoes into cubes 3/8" on a side. Put the clam juice and the potatoes into a 1 1/2 gallon soup pot and heat on medium high heat until just boiling. Reduce the heat to medium or medium low and allow the potatoes to simmer for 8 minutes, adding a very small amount of extra clam juice if necessary to barely cover the potato pieces.

Add the skillet contents to the soup pot while stirring, and increase the heat to medium and stir to mix well. Add a pint of the milk while stirring and also the quart of heavy cream and the salt and the thyme. Add the crumbled bacon pieces. Mix the cornstarch well with a pint of the milk and add it to the pot while stirring. At this point add the haddock pieces and bring the chowder to a simmer and hold at that temperature, stirring every few minutes for 15 minutes. Do not boil the chowder, but the occasional bubble coming to the surface is perfectly okay. If the chowder is thick enough to suit you then cover the soup pot with a lid and turn off the heat. The chowder is done. If instead you want thicker chowder then mix another tablespoon of cornstarch with some clam juice and slowly add

it to the chowder while stirring and continuing to heat the chowder to thicken it. Then turn off the heat and cover the chowder with a lid to keep it warm.

Sample the chowder and adjust the seasoning by adding white pepper or sea salt as needed.

Serve the chowder in pre-warmed crocks along with oyster crackers.

Adding a small tossed salad with a non-creamy dressing makes this a complete meal, and it is a nice accompaniment with texture and flavor contrasts. Yes, a light fresh tasting French white burgundy wine is a fine beverage with that meal.

You will get many compliments.

Gazpacho Recipes - ?

Not all soups are served hot. Gazpacho is a great example of a delicious soup served chilled, and I have fine memories of it served to me in a Spanish restaurant in the town of Bad Homburg, Germany. I searched for a variety of recipes and the ones below are the best I found. I will try them, or some composite of them, and report back with results.

Enjoy ... Gazpacho is easy to make and wonderful to eat on a hot day.

Recipe #1

Ingredients:

1 hothouse cucumber, halved and seeded, but not peeled

2 red bell peppers, cored and seeded

4 plum tomatoes

1 red onion

3 garlic cloves, minced

3 cups of tomato juice

1/4 cup of white wine vinegar

1/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil

1/2 tablespoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Roughly chop the cucumbers, bell peppers, tomatoes, and red onions into 1-inch cubes.

Put each vegetable separately into a food processor fitted with a steel blade and pulse until it is coarsely chopped. Do not over process.

After each vegetable is processed, combine them in a large bowl and add the garlic, tomato juice, vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper.

Mix well and chill before serving.

The longer the gazpacho sits, the more the flavors develop.

Serve the gazpacho in chilled bowls.

Recipe #2

Ingredients:

1 1/2 pounds of vine-ripened tomatoes, peeled, seeded and chopped

Tomato juice

1 cup of cucumber, peeled, seeded and chopped

1/2 cup of chopped red bell pepper

1/2 cup of chopped red onion

1 small jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced

1 garlic clove, minced

1/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil

1 lime, juiced

2 teaspoons of balsamic vinegar

2 teaspoons of Worcestershire sauce

1/2 teaspoon of toasted, ground cumin

1 teaspoon of kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons of fresh basil leaves, chiffonade

Directions:

Fill a 6-quart pot halfway with water, and heat it on high heat until it boils.

Make an X with a paring knife on the bottom of each tomato.

Drop the tomatoes into the boiling water for 15 seconds, remove and transfer them to an ice bath and allow them to cool until they can be handled comfortably, approximately 1 minute.

Remove the tomatoes and pat them dry. Peel, core and seed the tomatoes. When seeding the tomatoes, place the seeds and pulp into a fine mesh strainer set over a bowl to catch the juice.

Press as much of the juice through as possible and then add enough bottled tomato juice to bring the total liquid volume to 1 cup.

Place the tomatoes and juice into a large mixing bowl.

Add the cucumber, bell pepper, red onion, jalapeno, garlic clove, olive oil, lime juice, balsamic vinegar, Worcestershire, cumin, salt and pepper and stir to combine.

Transfer 1 1/2 cups of the mixture to a blender and puree for 15 to 20 seconds on high speed.

Return the pureed mixture to the bowl and stir to combine.

Cover and chill the gazpacho for at least 2 hours and up to overnight.

Serve the gazpacho in chilled bowls with chiffonade of basil.

Recipe #3

Ingredients:

4 cups of tomato juice

1 medium onion, minced

1 green bell pepper, minced

1 cucumber, chopped

2 cups of chopped tomatoes

2 green onions, chopped

1 clove of garlic, minced

3 tablespoons of fresh lemon juice

2 tablespoons of red wine vinegar

1 teaspoon of dried tarragon

1 teaspoon of dried basil

1/4 cup of chopped fresh parsley

1 teaspoon of white sugar

salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

In a blender or food processor, combine the tomato juice, onion, bell pepper, cucumber, tomatoes, green onions, garlic, lemon juice, red wine vinegar, tarragon, basil, parsley, sugar, salt, and pepper.

Blend until the mixture is well-combined but still slightly chunky.

Chill at least 2 hours before serving.

Serve the gazpacho in chilled bowls.

Recipe #4

Ingredients:

6 ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped

1 purple onion, finely chopped

1 cucumber, peeled, seeded, chopped

1 sweet red (or green) bell pepper, seeded and chopped

2 stalks of celery, chopped

1-2 Tbsp. of chopped fresh parsley

2 Tbsp. of chopped fresh chives

1 clove of garlic, minced

1/4 cup of red wine vinegar

1/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil

2 Tbsp. of freshly squeezed lemon juice

2 tsp. of sugar

Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

6 or more drops of Tabasco sauce to taste

1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce

4 cups of tomato juice

Directions:

Combine all ingredients.

Blend slightly, to desired consistency, using a blender or food processor.

Place the soup in a non-metal, non-reactive storage container.

Cover it tightly and refrigerate overnight, allowing the flavors to blend.

Serve the gazpacho chilled bowls.

Ham and Bean Soup - ☺♥

I've had many versions of ham and beans, varying from the old "saw mill" beans my father used to eat, which were thick in consistency, all the way to lighter soup versions like Senate Bean Soup® that were delicious. This recipe is similar to the latter; soup that I made recently from a leftover ham bone with ham still attached. I know you will enjoy it, for it is delicious.

Due to the overnight softening of the dried beans in this recipe you will want to start preparation of this soup at least one day in advance of when you plan to eat it.

Serves four to six people.

Ingredients:

1 large ham bone with meat attached

1 lb. bag of great northern dried beans, softened overnight in water

1 medium to medium large sweet onion, chopped

6 large or eight medium cloves of fresh garlic, diced

2 large carrots, diced

1 1/2 tsp. of black pepper

1 tsp. of dried thyme

2 14 oz. cans of chicken broth

2 14 oz. cans of water

½ stick of butter (optional)

Sea salt (May be added after cooking. Amount will vary based on ham saltiness.)

Directions:

Wash and rinse the beans and let them soak in cold water overnight to soften them. Drain them in a colander.

Put the chicken broth and the water into a non-stick heavy soup pot along with the ham bone. Cover the pot and heat on high until boiling. Put the pot on a small burner and very low heat to simmer for one hour. Remove the ham and bone and cut the usable meat from the bone. De-fat the meat with a sharp knife

and cut it into small pieces, roughly ½" cubes or smaller, and return them to the pot. Discard the bone and the fat.

Add all the other soup ingredients into the pot except the sea salt. Adjust the liquid level so that the beans are covered by at least one inch of liquid. Bring the soup to a boil on high heat and then reduce the heat to a simmer on a small burner and cover the pot.

Simmer the soup for one hour, stirring every ten minutes. Check the softness of the beans. Continue simmering the soup covered for up to two additional hours until the beans are soft with a few of them disintegrating into the rest of the soup. Stir every fifteen minutes to make sure the beans do not stick to the bottom of the pot, especially near the end of the cooking cycle. If necessary, thin the soup with a small amount of water at the end of the cooking cycle, but only if the soup is too thick. This soup should be thinner than a chowder but not have much excess liquid. It should be a hearty soup.

Taste the finished soup and adjust the seasonings. You may or may not want more pepper. You may or may not want to add sea salt, but if you do limit it to no more than one teaspoon. Each guest can make seasoning adjustments to suit themselves later, and too much salt is simply bad as it can ruin an otherwise perfect soup.

Serve with saltine crackers and butter. Beer is a great beverage choice, though sodas or iced tea are fine also. Your guests will feel pleasantly full after eating this delightful soup.

Ham and Cabbage and Green Beans and Potatoes - 😊♥

One of my pleasant and very old childhood memories is of my mom making a boiled dinner with the ingredients listed in the name of this recipe.

Leftover baked ham with the bone was perfect to flavor the broth, along with the cabbage. The green beans and potatoes added color and taste variety and substance.

The only other ingredients she used were water, salt and pepper (but you can use some chicken broth to enhance the flavor). Also, I highly recommend using the optional ham hocks to ramp up the smoky flavor. Note also the salt amount in this recipe is small as hams vary a lot in salt content and you don't want to create a dish that is too salty.

How very simple yet satisfying!

Yes, it was a one dish meal with a lot of flavor and excellent to serve on a cold day.

As a young adult my wife Pat and I made this dish using a roasting pan on a two burner gasoline stove, when camping in cool weather, and serving multiple families.

I decided to put this simple recipe into Food Nirvana so all readers can, if they so choose, make this very nice comfort food.

Ingredients: (serves four to six adults)

3 lbs. of ham plus the ham bone

2 ham hocks (optional but highly recommended)

1 medium size head of cabbage, coarsely chopped

3, 16 ounce cans of green beans including the liquid

4 large russet potatoes, peeled and chopped

1 tsp. of salt

1 tsp. of black pepper

3 quarts of water or chicken broth or a 50:50 mixture

Directions:

Remove any excess fat from the ham and discard it.

Put all of the ingredients into a 2 gallon pot and make sure the ham bone is submerged under the other ingredients/liquids.

Adjust the liquid level if necessary to come within an inch of the top of the other ingredients.

Cover the pot with a lid and bring the contents to a boil on high heat.

Reduce the heat to very low and keep the pot covered with the lid.

Simmer the contents on very low heat for two hours.

Remove the ham bone and cut any meat away from it, cut any fat or gristle away from the meat, then put the meat back into the pot.

Discard the bone and any pieces of fat or gristle. Leave the (optional) ham hocks in the pot as they will continue to provide nice smoky flavor.

Serve the meal hot in soup bowls, along with some crusty bread and butter.

Let each guest season their portion with salt and pepper to taste.

Enjoy!

Hungarian Potato Soup with Kielbasa - ☺♥

This soup is one of my all time favorites. It is easy to make and delicious. My wife Marie made the soup many years ago (early 1980's) and it was a great hit with family and friends. After eating it you get the feeling that the world is a pretty good place. The anecdote that accompanies this story is both funny and scary.

My parents came to visit Marie and me for a few days. Their normal diet denied ever using garlic or foods like Kielbasa, and that was for reasons of preference only. So, here is Marie making this potato soup that surely has garlic and Kielbasa in it, and I found myself wondering what would happen when she served it, especially with my Dad who was very picky and negative about trying new foods ... particularly anything that might contain garlic.

Lo and behold! He loved the soup so much that he couldn't stop eating it, bowl after bowl. I was amazed. Finally, he could hold no more. Then Marie served his all time favorite dessert, homemade coconut cream pie, made as Marie made all her cream pies, with very rich pudding filling and freshly made whipped cream as the topping. Well, he just had to have some of that pie too. Oh, boy! Then he had to have a second piece because it was so good.

At that point he was way too full, so he excused himself and went into the living room to stretch out on the sofa and rest. And he proceeded to fibrillate! Fortunately he recovered without a trip to the hospital, but now you understand just how this soup can really get to you. It sure got to him!

After Thanksgiving this year (2010) Janet and I had lots of leftover mashed potatoes and two, very large leftover baked russet potatoes. We wondered how to use the leftovers and POW, I thought about Marie's soup. Sooo ... the recipe below is the one I just used as I do not have the original recipe Marie used, but this one is right on target.

There is one essential thing you have to know and do in this recipe, and that is to stir the soup while the liquid is reducing during final simmering. Failure to stir will allow the potato to stick to the bottom of the soup pot, even if it is a non-stick pot, and that would not be good.

Done right the soup is the consistency of a chowder, thick and rich but not pasty. The directions below tell you when to stop the cooking. And note that you can adjust thickness with extra chicken broth.

Ingredients:

2 quarts of chicken broth

1 lb. of Smoked Kielbasa cut into rounds about ¼ inch thick, skin removed

1 qt. of leftover mashed potatoes or three very large russet potatoes, peeled and diced, or simply make a quart of instant mashed potatoes

2 very large russet potatoes peeled and chopped into pieces about ¾"x3/4"x1/2"

6 cloves of fresh garlic, chopped fine

1 tbsp. of Wright's Liquid Smoke® (optional)

1 pint of sour cream

1 large sweet onion chopped fine

1 tsp. of white pepper

2 tsp. of fresh rosemary, chopped

Salt to taste (the Kielbasa has salt so I wait until the end of the cooking, taste the soup and add salt as appropriate)

Directions:

Put the chicken broth, white pepper, chopped rosemary, chopped onion, (optional) liquid smoke, chopped potatoes and chopped garlic into an eight quart soup kettle or pot. Bring to a rapid boil on high heat and then reduce the heat to very low and let the contents simmer for fifteen minutes.

Add the cut pieces of Kielbasa and simmer the soup covered for about 30 minutes to make the potatoes totally cooked and soft.

If you are using a quart of leftover mashed potatoes or instant mashed potatoes, add them now and stir the soup thoroughly to mix the contents well. If you are not using mashed potatoes you have already added five very large chopped russet potatoes and that is enough. You decide how to balance the number of chopped potatoes with your leftover mashed potatoes if you have less than one quart of mashed potatoes.

If you didn't use mashed potatoes then remove about three fourths of the cooked potatoes after 30 minutes of simmering and mash them with a hand masher and put those mashed potatoes back into the soup.

Add one pint of sour cream and stir well to mix completely. Continue simmering the soup while stirring every two minutes to loosen any potato that sticks to the bottom of the soup pot. When the liquid level in the soup pot has lowered by one half inch the soup is done.

Taste it and adjust the seasoning (salt and pepper) and the thickness (chicken broth) to please yourself.

Serve it and you will get rave reviews. Crusty bread and butter will be enjoyed too. This soup goes well with a small salad and perhaps something light and fruity for dessert. Similarly, serve a light beverage like lemonade or iced tea, or simply ice water.

Enjoy!

Italian Wedding Soup - ☺♥♥♥☺

(Zuppa di Scarola)

This soup is delicious and it brings back a very funny and great memory for me every time I think about it. I couldn't find Marie's recipe for Italian Wedding Soup, and I remembered some but not all of the ingredients and amounts, so I decided to copy one from Giada de Laurentis of the Food Network® and modify it a fair amount to recreate the wonderful soup Marie made for many of us back in the 1980's. I make it a few times every year and it is fabulous!

The funny and great memory that I associate with this soup begins after lunch of the day I first tasted it as a first course at dinner with Marie's family and friends at a great Wilmington, DE restaurant named for the owner, Vincente's. Marie and I had been dating for about a month and we were in my office after lunch. We kissed and I told her that I loved her. Her reply? "I love you too, Ray, but I won't just live with you. If we are going to be together then we will be married." My reply? "I understand."

So, here we are at dinner that evening at the fine Italian restaurant with family and friends, nothing else having been said about matrimony, and there I am eating my first bowl ever of Italian Wedding Soup. As I raised the spoon to my mouth and began sipping the broth Marie leaned over to me and whispered in my ear ... "Is it alright if I tell some of the people here that we are getting married?" I damn near choked on my soup ... and my brain went into overdrive, for I had to reply in an acceptable manner or risk real trouble. You see, I had not proposed to Marie ... I had simply said, "I understand." She took my statement to mean that I had just agreed to marriage, i.e., that I had just proposed to her.

Well, I had to temporize to pull my thoughts together, so I said, "Let's wait for a few days before we say anything." She agreed, but with some disappointment, for she was excited. Whew! You might say I was kind of excited too, but for a different reason! In any event, I loved Marie and I would have proposed anytime, anywhere to her, but that event really caught me by surprise. How appropriate for me to be eating Italian Wedding Soup!

In later years I would tease Marie now and then telling her that she proposed to me ... and she would smile and rub her eye with the fickle finger of fate as her reply! What a hoot!

Ingredients:

Meatballs:

1/2 cup of diced onion

1/3 cup of chopped fresh Italian parsley

1 extra large or jumbo egg

3 large cloves of fresh garlic, diced

1 1/2 tsp. of dried Oregano

1 1/2 tsp. of dried Basil

1 teaspoon of sea salt

1/3 cup of regular or gluten free bread crumbs

1/2 cup of grated Parmesan cheese

12 ounces of 90% lean ground beef

12 ounces of 90% lean ground pork (you may have to make this yourself using pork loin as supermarkets typically put in too much fat)

1 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper

1/2 tsp. of crushed red pepper flakes

3 tbsp. of Extra Virgin Olive oil (or use parchment paper instead of olive oil)

Soup:

3 quarts of chicken broth plus one quart in reserve to adjust liquids to solids ratio near the end of making the soup, as needed

12 oz. of pre-cooked (boiled) boneless chicken breast or one and one half pounds of drumsticks or thighs pre-cooked (I recommend using drumsticks and thighs instead of chicken breasts for better flavor and more tender texture)

2 tbsp. of Better Than Bullion® Roast Chicken flavor

1½ lbs. (or more) of fresh bunches of escarole, base cut off and leaves separated and washed in cold water and drained in a colander, then chopped in half or thirds crosswise

2 extra large or jumbo eggs

1/3 cup of uncooked Acini di Pepe, or if needed, other small pieces of gluten free pasta

1/4 tsp. of Red pepper flakes

2 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1/3 to 1/2 cup of freshly grated Parmegiano Reggiano or Pecorino Romano cheese, plus extra for garnish at serving time

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste at serving time

Directions:

Precook the chicken in lightly boiling water for 20 to 30 minutes, then separate (cut away) the flesh from any skin, bones, veins and gristle and discard those latter items. Also rinse off any white scum on the surface of the chicken breasts.

Cut the chicken on a wood cutting board into random shaped pieces roughly 1/4 of a cubic inch each (1" x 1" x 1/4"), and set them aside.

To make the meatballs:

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

Mix the first 8 ingredients in an electric mixer bowl on low to medium low speed to blend for three minutes.

Gradually add in the cheese, beef and pork, the black pepper and the red pepper flakes and continue mixing on medium speed for three minutes.

Process the mixture through your meat grinder with the 1/8" die holes. That will give you a perfect texture and uniform mixture for making perfect meatballs.

Using 2 to 3 teaspoons of the ground mixture for each meatball, shape the meat mixture into meatballs about 5/8" to 3/4" in diameter. Temporarily place them on a sheet of plastic wrap as you make them.

Oil a raised sides 11" x 17" baking sheet lightly with the olive oil and put the meatballs on top evenly spaced.

Alternatively, skip the olive oil and instead line the baking sheet with a sheet of parchment paper.

Bake the meatballs for ten minutes, then roll or turn them over and bake for ten more minutes.

Remove the baking sheet from the oven and set it and the meatballs aside.

To make the soup:

Bring the chicken broth to a boil in a large pot over medium-high heat.

Add the Better Than Bullion® flavoring and stir.

Add the Acini di Pepe and stir.

Add the meatballs and the escarole, then lightly stir and simmer the mixture until the escarole is tender, about 8 minutes.

Add the chicken pieces and stir the soup.

As needed (your choice) add up to one quart of the reserved container of chicken broth to the soup.

Add the lemon juice and stir the soup.

Whisk the eggs and the freshly grated cheese in a medium bowl to blend. Start stirring the soup slowly in a circular motion.

Gradually drizzle the egg and cheese mixture into the moving broth, stirring gently, and cook for two minutes.

Ladle the soup into bowls and serve it along with some crackers or with warmed Italian bread and butter.

Season the soup to taste with salt and pepper.

Finish seasoning the soup with the additional freshly grated cheese garnish if desired.

Enjoy! Yes, you are guaranteed to truly enjoy this Italian Wedding Soup with its complex flavors and multiple unique ingredients.

Kapusta - ☺

Kapusta is a type of cabbage stew made with sauerkraut as well as regular cabbage. There are many different recipes for Kapusta and they vary widely in content. Sue Gale gave a quart of her Kapusta to Janet and me and we were quite impressed. Neither of us had eaten it before. In a word, it is Yummy!

I decided to add Kapusta to Food Nirvana as it is so different from the other soups/stews in Food Nirvana in character and taste. The recipe below is a composite of different recipes from the Internet that I put together, tried and adjusted. I like it just the way it is shown below ... So be it. Kapusta is at its best the day following making it as the various ingredient flavors have had time to develop and combine.

One of the missing pieces of information in the Internet recipes is the need to skim melted fat from the surface of the Kapusta after the two hour simmering process. The kielbasa and the bacon contribute the fat, and about 3/4 of a cup of fat can be removed, leaving just a bit for flavor.

Ingredients:

1 large onion, chopped into pieces about 1/2" by 1/2"

1 large or extra large head of cabbage, chopped into pieces about 1 1/2" by 1 1/2"

1 large can or package of sauerkraut

8 slices of bacon

2 pounds of smoked kielbasa

1 teaspoon of caraway seeds

1 teaspoon of salt

1 1/2 teaspoons of pepper

6 large cloves of garlic, chopped

Directions:

Steam the chopped cabbage in one pint of water in a large six quart pot, covered, until it has softened. Do that by heating on high heat until the steaming starts and then reduce the heat to very low and let the cabbage soften for about ten to

fifteen minutes, checking the water after ten minutes to assure the pot isn't going dry. Add water if necessary during the steaming.

While the steaming is happening fry the bacon in a skillet, remove it, crumble it and set it aside.

Sauté the chopped onion in the bacon drippings on medium high heat for about five minutes. When the onion is becoming translucent, add the chopped garlic and continue the sauté for about two minutes on low heat. Turn off the heat and remove the sautéed onions and garlic to a bowl.

Save the remaining bacon drippings in the skillet to use later to lightly fry the smoked kielbasa.

At this point the cabbage steaming should be complete. The softened cabbage is now ready to have the other ingredients added.

Put the onion, sauerkraut, garlic, crumbled bacon, caraway seed, salt and pepper into the large pot with the steamed cabbage. Press down and then add enough water to barely cover the contents. Mix well.

Bring the contents of the pot to a boil on high heat and then to a simmer on very low heat, covered.

While the other ingredients are heating for simmering, cut the smoked kielbasa to remove the casing. Cut it lengthwise in half, remove the casing by pulling it off and discarding it, and then cut each kielbasa half into small pieces about 1/2" wide.

Take approximately 1/3 of the kielbasa chunks and process them through a meat grinder. Set the ground kielbasa aside.

Lightly fry the smoked kielbasa chunks in the bacon drippings on medium heat, moving them around with a spatula during frying until they are lightly browned over some of the exterior. Remove the fried kielbasa chunks to a plate. Now lightly fry the ground kielbasa.

Add all of the fried smoked kielbasa to the Kapusta, mix well, cover and simmer for two hours.

After the two hour period of simmering is done, remove the pot from the heat to begin to cool the Kapusta to room temperature.

Use a ladle to skim the melted fat from the top of the Kapusta. Press the ladle down into the Kapusta just far enough to have it fill slowly with liquid, then empty the ladle into a two cup measuring cup. Repeat the process of pressing the

ladle into the Kapusta but always in different locations so as to cover the entire top surface of the Kapusta. When about 1 1/2 cups of melted fat and broth have been collected in the measuring cup then skim the fat from the measuring cup and pour the remaining liquid back into the pot of Kapusta. Stir the Kapusta and let it rest for about five minutes. Then repeat the skimming process. That will eliminate almost all of the melted fat.

Taste the Kapusta while it is cooling after the melted fat has been removed, and if necessary add more salt and/or more pepper and mix it well into the Kapusta. Taste again and adjust if necessary.

After the Kapusta has cooled to room temperature, refrigerate it overnight in the pot, covered.

Reheat the Kapusta the next day and serve it along with a hearty bread, like pumpernickel or seeded rye.

Leftover Kapusta freezes well for later use. I vacuum seal mine before freezing.

Lentil Soup - ☺♥

I added this recipe for lentil soup to Food Nirvana because it is such a pleasant comfort food during cold months. Note that it is essentially a one dish meal, though some folks like to serve it with hot, freshly made garlic bread.

Lentil soup is easy to make and it is quite delicious. It is also quite filling. Serve it with the beverage of your choice.

I've used various meats when making this soup. Most often I sear small cubes of beef or simply use cut up leftover beef roast. Recently I used corned beef that I had cured and cooked. It was delicious! Surprisingly even cut up hot dogs are tasty. Overall, note that you can use multiple types of meat, ergo new meat and leftovers together.

Ingredients: (Makes 4 to 6 servings)

2 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1 medium to large yellow onion, chopped

1 large russet potato, diced

4 cloves of garlic, minced

1 large carrot, chopped

1 large stalk of celery, chopped

1 lb. of chopped or cubed meat of your choice (raw or cooked)

1, 1 lb. bag of brown lentils

1, 28 oz. can of peeled plum tomatoes, chopped, including the juice

2 quarts of chicken or beef broth

2 tsp. of beef or chicken flavored Better Than Bullion® soup base

1 tbsp. of Wright's® Liquid Smoke hickory flavoring (optional)

1 tsp. of mild paprika

1 tsp. of ground cumin

1 tbsp. of fresh chopped thyme (or one teaspoon of dried thyme)

1/4 cup of fresh parsley, plus extra to garnish

1 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

Directions:

Put the lentils into a colander and rinse them well with cold water. Remove and discard any foreign matter.

Heat the olive oil in a one gallon pot over medium heat until it is shimmering. Add the meat and brown it if it is raw. If the meat is already cooked do not add it to the pot until after the raw vegetables have been sautéed as described next.

Add the onion to the pot and sauté it until it is transparent. Add the garlic and continue sautéing until the garlic is fragrant, about one minute. Add the carrot and celery and potato and cook until they are slightly softened, about 5 minutes.

Stir the lentils into the contents of the pot, allowing them to cook for a few minutes, while stirring occasionally. Add 1 tbsp. of extra olive oil if needed to avoid having the vegetables stick to the bottom of the pot.

Add all remaining ingredients and stir well. Increase the heat to high, bringing the soup to a boil while stirring occasionally.

When the soup has been boiling for 2 to 3 minutes, reduce the heat to low, cover the pot with a lid and allow the soup to simmer for 50 to 60 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are soft.

Season the soup with additional salt and pepper, to taste. Garnish it with a little extra parsley when you serve it.

Enjoy!

Crab or Lobster Bisque - ☺♥T

This recipe is (more like was) from the Internet (Food.com®). It is shown as a five star recipe and the reviewers were full of compliments but also some complaints about the sherry overpowering the overall taste of the bisque. I made the bisque and made some improvements as I cooked it and now the recipe is superb. Actually, I made one hell of a lot of improvements and later added ingredient and processing suggestions and variations.

Most of the complaining reviewers simply didn't realize that the perfect sherry for cooking is an extra dry sherry, sold in quality liquor stores, not the cooking sherry junk in supermarkets and not the stuff you drink that is too strong in flavor and made to be medium sweet or very sweet. The point is that you have to take reviewers comments with a grain of salt because you can't know precisely what they used or what in fact they did during preparation. Similarly, the recipe, as presented, didn't specify what type of sherry to use and that is unacceptable. All they indicated was cooking sherry. Ugh! But all's well that ends well, and if you follow the recipe below your company will definitely rave about the bisque being wonderfully delicious.

After making this bisque per the recipe shown you may want to try one or more of the variations noted at the end of the recipe, which describe the use of shrimp and also a proper process of making and freezing partially prepared bisque for later use.

The recipe serves six people between one to one and one half cups each as an appetizer course or it can feed four people a generous bowl of about two cups of bisque as part of a soup and salad lunch or dinner entrée.

Ingredients:

1 cup of minced sweet onion

1 cup of minced carrot

1, 14 oz. can of chicken broth

1, 8 oz. bottle of clam juice

5 tbsp. of flour

4 tbsp. of butter

1 cup of heavy cream

½ cup of whole milk or half-and-half

1/2 cup of extra dry sherry (or more, depending on your preference)

1 tbsp. of fresh lemon juice

1 tsp. of Worcestershire sauce

½ tsp. of Cayenne pepper

½ tsp. of Sea salt (this is too little, but guests can add more later)

1 lb. of raw lobster meat or canned lump crab meat

A pinch of paprika to add pink color

Fresh chives, finely diced, as a garnish

Directions:

If you plan to serve the bisque very soon after preparation then put the individual serving cups, bowls or crocks into a 180°F oven.

First, chop/dice the onion and carrot ingredients to make about 1 1/4 cups of each. Then put the diced vegetables into a small food processor with ¼ cup of water and mince at high speed. Stop and stir and then resume processing until the carrots are finely minced. Set the minced vegetables aside. (This was one of my improvements to the provided recipe as it saves a lot of labor.) Note also that one might cook the carrot(s) first to make it softer for easy processing.

Melt 4 tbsp. of butter in a heavy three quart saucepan, (like a French heavy copper saucepan with a tin interior coating used especially for cream dishes) on low heat and add the flour, whisking constantly to create a roux. Increase the heat to medium and whisk until the roux becomes a very pale brown or tan in color. This may take up to five minutes. Do not burn the roux. Adjust the heat as necessary (lower it) to avoid burning the roux. Note: I seldom cook the roux as long as most recipes suggest as it works just as well without risking burning it. It doesn't have to be brown or tan in color. Simply use it when you first notice a color change. Also, if you intend to freeze the bisque for later use do not make the roux at all.

Slowly add the chicken broth and the clam juice to the roux, whisking constantly to create a smooth mixture.

Add the minced onions and carrot, mix well and simmer on very low heat for 30 minutes.

Add the cream (unless you plan to freeze the bisque for later use), milk or half-and-half, sherry, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, cayenne pepper, sea salt, paprika and lobster, diced, or crab. Mix and simmer for 5 to 10 minutes. Do not boil.

Remove about half of the bisque, shellfish included, to a blender and blend at high speed until totally pureed. Note: I learned the hard way that starting to blend hot soup produces steam pressure inside the blender that can blow the lid off and spray hot soup out, making a supreme mess of your kitchen. To avoid this you can start with a small volume of soup in the blender, like one cup, and gradually add the rest while blending. You might also let the product in the blender cool to about 160 degrees F and then start the blender on a very low speed, increasing the speed to high gradually. And do keep the vent cap on the lid open (or at least not sealed) to allow any steam pressure to escape without blowing off the blender lid.

Pour the pureed bisque from the blender into a two quart bowl. Then puree the other half of the bisque in the blender.

Put all of the puree back into the saucepan. Re-warm the bisque by simmering for one or two minutes on very low heat. Do not let the temperature exceed about 170 degrees F.

Serve warmed individual bowls of the bisque garnished with the diced chives floating on the top.

A crusty French baguette or a warm crusty roll with butter is a nice accompaniment. Simple buttered saltines are also nice. Add a small salad with a vinaigrette type of dressing (don't use a creamy dressing as that will compete with the bisque and thus be boring) and a nice chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio wine and you have a complete, balanced, delicious meal that will really please your guests. The idea is that a good chef creates a meal with contrasting and complementary foods in terms of tastes, textures and colors. Visualize the simple meal I just suggested in terms of shapes and colors, and then think about the different tastes and textures. Get it?

Variations: Shrimp can be substituted for the lobster or crab provided it is thoroughly cleaned, i.e., the dark vein is removed. The shrimp should also be diced prior to other processing.

If you want to make the bisque in advance and vacuum seal and freeze it for later use then do not make the roux at all and do not add the cream until it is needed, just prior to serving the bisque. Freezing soups or bisques containing cream can result in separation of the cream when the product is reheated. Also, roux used to

thicken the bisque becomes useless upon reheating, resulting in a thin, runny soup. In other words, thaw the frozen, partially made bisque to room temperature, whisk in about 3 tbsp. of cornstarch and 4 tbsp. of melted butter, heat it while whisking to near boiling to thicken it and then let it cool to about 190 degrees F (use a thermometer). Then add room temperature heavy cream and mix gently but thoroughly using a whisk. Then serve the bisque in the pre-warmed cups, bowls or crocks.

Manhattan Clam Chowder - ☺♥♥♥☺

I thought about this chowder for a long time and I finally decided to make it. The recipe below is originally from the Internet, and I substantially modified it.

One thing I really like about Manhattan Clam Chowder is that it is a tomato based broth type of chowder. I contrast that with creamy New England Clam Chowder, which I love. Both types of chowder are great and completely different from each other. One is creamy and rich, the other savory and spicy.

I decided to add a wild card ingredient ... a 2 oz. can of anchovy filets, drained (optional). It is a Umami bomb, to quote the great chef J. Kenji Lopez-Alt, which means it will impart great flavor to the chowder without being an identifiable ingredient at serving time.

I hope you make this chowder. You will be certain to please your friends and family, not to mention yourself. As is often the case, soups and chowders like this one are better the second day, after the flavors have had time to blend.

Ingredients: (makes about six quarts of chowder, enough for twelve adult servings)

4 thick slices of dry cured hickory smoked bacon (or 6 slices of regular bacon)

2 oz. can of anchovy filets, drained (optional)

1 medium size onion, diced

2 medium size carrots, peeled and diced

2 large stalks of celery, diced

2 large cloves of garlic, minced

1/2 teaspoon of black pepper

1 teaspoon of sea salt

2 teaspoons of Sriracha Sauce

1, 15 ounce can of tomato sauce

1 teaspoon of dried thyme

1 tablespoon of dried oregano

2 bay leaves

2 large Russet potatoes, peeled, quartered lengthwise and cut into 1/8 inch thick slices, then rinsed with cold water and drained in a colander

All of the clam broth from a 51 ounce can of chopped ocean clams and broth (about 3 cups)

1 quart of chicken broth

28 ounce can of peeled plum tomatoes with juice, chopped

All of the chopped clams from a 51 ounce can of chopped ocean clams and broth

1/4 cup of chopped fresh parsley

A box of oyster crackers

Directions:

If you plan to serve the chowder immediately after making it, put a large soup tureen and the individual serving bowls you plan to use into a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Pour the broth from the can of chopped clams and broth into a one quart measuring cup. Put the chopped clams into a two quart bowl. If the clam pieces are larger than 1/2" long, then process all of them in a blender, along with a cup of the clam broth, for one minute. Then process them through a sieve, collecting the clam juice. Put that back into the one quart measuring cup. Put the chopped, blended clam pieces into the two quart bowl. Set them aside.

Let the broth settle for five minutes, then decant the broth into a one quart bowl, leaving the last ounce (with any sand or other material) in the measuring cup. Discard that last ounce. Set the bowl of clam broth aside.

Heat a two gallon pot over medium heat. Add the bacon and fry it, turning each slice over about once a minute, just until it is crisp.

Remove the bacon slices from the pot and place them on a paper towel.

Add the anchovy filets to the pot and stir to break them up and combine them with the melted bacon fat.

When the bacon is cool break it up into small pieces and set them aside.

Add the diced onions, carrots and celery to the pot. Add one half teaspoon of black pepper. Add one teaspoon of sea salt. Stir to mix well with the anchovies and bacon fat.

Cover the pot with a lid and cook on medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 6 to 8 minutes or until the vegetables are tender/translucent.

Add the minced garlic, the thyme, the oregano and the bay leaves and stir to mix them in with the diced vegetables, then cook for two minutes.

Put the tomato sauce, Sriracha sauce, clam broth, chicken broth and sliced potatoes into the pot. Stir to combine all of the ingredients. Put the lid on the pot and bring the mixture to a low boil on medium high heat.

Cook for 10 to 15 minutes on low heat or just until the potatoes are tender.

Stir in the chopped plum tomatoes and juice, and the chopped clams.

Cover the pot with the lid and heat the chowder on medium high heat to a low boil and then simmer it on low heat for 10 more minutes. Stir in the reserved bacon pieces.

Remove the pot of Manhattan clam chowder from the heat, keeping the lid on the pot.

If you plan to eat right away then follow the remainder of these directions now. Otherwise, keep the lid on the pot and let the contents cool and rest overnight, then reheat the chowder the next day when you are ready to eat.

Pour the chowder into the pre-warmed soup tureen and top it with the chopped parsley. Remove and discard the bay leaves.

Serve the chowder, dispensing it into the pre-warmed individual serving bowls.

Let each guest season their individual serving of the Manhattan clam chowder with salt and pepper and perhaps some additional Sriracha sauce, to taste.

Provide a serving bowl of oyster crackers.

Enjoy!

Miso Soup - ?

I decided to make some fine Japanese foods to contrast that cooking with Chinese cooking, both of which are excellent if done right.

This recipe for Miso Soup includes at the bottom the recipe for making Awase Dashi (the broth), which is obviously essential and not trivial as it requires dried Bonita fish and dried kelp.

Well, if you want the best you have to make the investment and do the labor. I hope you decide to make this Miso Soup.

Ingredients: (makes four servings)

1 quart of Awase Dashi

1 pound of Tofu (soft or firm), diced into 1/2" cubes

4 Tbsp. (or more) of White or Yellow Miso paste

4 scallions, green and white parts, sliced thin crosswise

1 cup of Daikon radish, sliced thin and then cut into quarters

General Directions:

Use one tablespoon of miso paste per cup of miso soup, and add more if you want later, after tasting it.

How to Dissolve Miso:

Make sure to turn off the stove's heat so you don't accidentally boil the miso soup. Always dissolve miso paste first in a ladle, a separate bowl, or a strainer, and never add miso paste directly to the soup! Otherwise, you may find miso clumps while drinking the soup!

Add miso paste to dashi right before serving. Why? It's to savor miso's best flavor and aroma! Miso will lose its flavor and aroma if you keep reheating the miso soup.

Before adding miso, make sure to bring dashi to a slow boil (205°F). This temperature is considered the most fragrant stage for miso soup. By the time you are ready to enjoy the soup, it will be at an ideal temperature (167°F).

When to add the diced Tofu:

Add the tofu after dissolving the miso. That way, you won't accidentally break up the tofu while mixing in the miso paste. Then add the daikon radish and thinly sliced scallions and stir gently.

After adding the tofu, daikon radish and sliced scallions, serve the miso soup in pre-warmed bowls immediately while it's warm. By the time you are ready to enjoy the soup, it will be at the ideal temperature (167°F) for drinking.

Okay ... first make the Dashi (Awase type) per the recipe below.

Directions:

Put four individual serving bowls into a 180 degrees F warming oven to prewarm them.

Prepare the daikon radish and scallions.

Prepare the tofu and set the pieces aside on a plate.

Heat the Dashi to a low boil.

Weigh the white Miso paste and follow the above directions for adding it to the Dashi.

Add the tofu, daikon radish pieces and sliced scallions to the Dashi and Miso paste mixture.

Serve the hot Miso Soup in the prewarmed bowls.

Enjoy!

Awase Dashi Recipe:

This is the broth used in making Miso Soup.

Ingredients:

1 piece of kombu (dried kelp) (10 g; 4 x 4 inches, 10 x 10 cm per piece)

1 cup of katsuobushi (dried bonito flakes) (packed; 10 g)

4 cups of water

Directions:

Most Japanese recipes will tell you to gently clean the kombu with a damp cloth. Just make sure it doesn't have any mold spots and it's ready to use. Do not wash or wipe off the white powdery substance, as it has lots of umami.

Make several slits in 1 piece kombu (dried kelp) to release more flavor.

Add the kombu and water to a medium saucepan.

Turn on the heat to medium low and slowly bring to almost boiling (205 degrees F), about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, clean the dashi by skimming any foam or debris from the surface.

Just before the dashi starts boiling gently, remove the kombu from the saucepan. If you leave the kombu in the saucepan, the dashi will become slimy and bitter.

Add 1 cup katsuobushi (dried bonito flakes) and bring it back to a boil again.

Once the dashi is boiling, reduce the heat, simmer for just 30 seconds, and turn off the heat.

Let the katsuobushi sink to the bottom, about 10 minutes.

Strain the dashi through a fine-mesh sieve over a bowl or measuring cup.

The Awase Dashi is ready to use. Now you can return to the Miso Soup recipe directions.

If you are not using the Dashi right away, store the dashi in a bottle or mason jar and keep it in the refrigerator for 3 to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 2 weeks.

Enjoy!

New England Clam Chowder - ☺♥♥♥☺ T

This wonderful creamy chowder is my favorite. I first made it back in the latter 1970's when I was trying to impress a new and very lovely lady in my life, Carol Suzanne Landsinger. As is so typical of me, I glanced at a recipe in some lesser cookbook and decided then and there how I was going to improve it, before making it even one time. So I did. Carol was quite impressed, and I was shocked by my own success, and we had a delightful time eating it from warmed soup bowls with crackers and butter and a salad and enjoying a rose' wine that she liked best, Rosé d'Anjou®. It is funny how some of the finer details in life are never forgotten, for that was a bit more than half my life ago. What is even funnier is that I was so head over heels in love with her and focused on her beauty and her exciting wit/intelligence and her personality that it is a marvel that I even tasted the food.

Overall, this story calls attention to the fact we humans can be impressed, sometimes deeply, when we are served excellent food. Whatever your personal goal, if you take the time to please someone important in your life or potentially to your life, you have made a wise decision, for our subliminal judgments cause us to associate the quality of the pleasure with the person who provided it. This is no small consideration, and I am the voice of experience.

Speaking of experience, let's segue to the present. Today I buy the 51 ounce large cans of SeaWatch® chopped clams and clam broth in a two can pack at Sams Club® or online. One can of that product provides one quart of clam juice and an ample amount of clams to make roughly a gallon of new England clam chowder. This way of buying clams is vastly superior to what you get in those runty little 6.5 ounce cans that are 80% clam juice. Thus, I double the recipe shown below (and add one additional cup of cream) except for the clams and clam juice, and WOW, what a great result! More clams/higher solids content equals more enjoyment. I also homed in on the perfect amount of sea salt to use for that quantity of clam chowder ... one teaspoon. I served that more robust clam chowder last evening to friends Julie and Bill Bentley. All three of us had ample servings and then we had seconds, and they provided a great Caesar salad and we had both Mouton Cadet® Bordeaux (red) and Louis Jadot® Pouilly Fuisse' (white) wines. Yeah! I served my homemade triple chocolate pudding with whipped cream for dessert. What a fine time!

Ingredients: (Serves four people 1½ cups of chowder)

2, 6.5 oz. cans of chopped clams in clam juice (but see alternative above)

1, 8 oz. bottle of clam juice (ditto)

1, pint of heavy cream
1, medium onion, diced
1, very large russet potato, peeled and diced
2, strips of good quality bacon
½ tsp. of White pepper
Sea salt to taste
1 tbsp. of butter
1 to 2 tbsp. of flour
1 tbsp. of chopped fresh parsley

Directions:

Use a small slotted spoon to remove the clam pieces from each can of clams and put the pieces in a bowl. Drain the clam juice from the cans of chopped clams into a one quart bowl, avoiding any sand or other material that may be in the bottom of each can. Add the 8 oz. bottle of clam juice to the bowl, again avoiding any material in the bottom of the bottle. Set the clams aside. Set the clam juice aside.

Fry the two strips of bacon on low to medium heat until there is no uncooked fat, but do not make the bacon overly crisp and do not burn it or overheat the bacon fat. Remove the bacon to a paper towel. Break it into small pieces when it has cooled. Set the bacon aside.

Dice the onion into ½" or smaller pieces. Put them into the skillet with the hot bacon grease. Add the butter and ½ tsp. white pepper. Sauté the onion on low heat until it is translucent. Turn off the heat and add 1 tbsp. of the flour to the skillet and mix well.

Dice the potato into cubes 3/8" on a side. Put the reserved clam juice and the potatoes into a two quart covered saucepan (or one gallon pot) and heat on medium high heat until just boiling. Reduce the heat to medium or medium low and allow the potatoes to simmer for 8 minutes, adding a very small amount of water if necessary to barely cover the potato pieces.

Add the skillet contents to the saucepan/pot while stirring, increase the heat to medium and stir to mix well and thicken the chowder as it starts to boil. Add the clams and continue to cook on medium heat for one minute. If the chowder has

thickened enough proceed to the next step, else use a second tbsp. of flour mixed in ¼ cup of water, add it to the chowder and heat on medium high to barely boiling while stirring. Reduce the heat to medium.

Add the heavy cream and the small pieces of bacon, mix well and heat the chowder only up to a simmer. Do not boil.

Note: I know of no recipes where the bacon pieces are added back into the chowder, and frankly I think they miss the mark in terms of flavor and texture contrasts.

Sample the chowder and adjust the seasoning by adding white pepper or sea salt as needed. We did not use any sea salt earlier until we could tell at the end of the cooking just how much salt the bacon contributed.

Serve the chowder in pre-warmed crocks garnished with the freshly chopped parsley, and also serve saltine crackers and butter.

Adding a small tossed salad with a non-creamy dressing makes this a complete meal, and it is a nice accompaniment with texture and flavor contrasts. Yes, a light fresh tasting French white burgundy wine is a fine beverage with that meal, or, Carol's favorite Rosé.

You may be in love.

New England Scallop Chowder - ☺♥

This chowder is another version of New England Clam Chowder where the only significant change is using diced sea scallops instead of chopped clams. I find this dish to be a good way to use extra clam broth (up to 32 ounces) from large 52 ounce cans of chopped clams. And it is an excellent alternative for folks who do not like clam chowder, ergo the chopped clams.

Yet another variant is mixing the diced scallops with small pieces of haddock, creating a simple seafood chowder, guaranteed to make you happy.

Consider serving a small tossed salad and a non-creamy dressing with the chowder to make a complete meal. Also consider serving a light semi-dry white wine like Pinot Grigio, chilled. I like a Greek salad with a lemon vinaigrette dressing for colors and taste contrasts with the chowder. Both of those recipes are in Food Nirvana.

Ingredients: (makes 4 [or more] adult servings of chowder)

1 lb. of diced sea scallops (or a mixture of 1/2 lb. of small haddock pieces and 3/4 lb. of sea scallops)

16 oz. (or more) of clam broth

1 pint of heavy cream

1 medium onion, diced

1 very large russet potato, peeled and diced

2 strips of dry cured hickory smoked bacon (I buy it at Burger's Smokehouse® or Broadbent Hams® via the Internet)

½ tsp. of White pepper

Sea salt to taste

1 tbsp. of butter

2 tbsp. of flour (1 tbsp. more if extra clam broth is used)

1 tbsp. of cornstarch if extra clam broth is used

2 tbsp. of chopped fresh parsley as a garnish

Saltine crackers and butter or oyster crackers

Directions:

Fry the two strips of bacon on low to medium heat until there is no uncooked fat, but do not make the bacon overly crisp and do not burn it or overheat the bacon fat.

Remove the bacon to a paper towel. Break it into small pieces when it has cooled. Set the bacon aside.

Dice the onion into ½" or smaller pieces. Put the pieces into the skillet with the hot bacon grease. Add the butter and the ½ tsp. of white pepper. Sauté the onion on low heat until it is translucent.

Turn off the heat and add the 2 tbsp. of the flour to the skillet and mix well.

Dice the potato into cubes about 3/8" on a side. Put the clam juice and the potato pieces into a three quart covered saucepan and heat on medium high heat until just boiling.

Reduce the heat to medium or medium low and allow the potatoes to simmer for 8 minutes, adding a very small amount of water if necessary to barely cover the potato pieces.

Add the skillet contents to the saucepan while stirring, increase the heat to medium and stir to mix well and thicken the chowder as it starts to boil.

Add the scallop pieces and continue to cook on medium heat for two to three minutes with stirring. If the chowder has thickened enough proceed to the next step, else use an additional tbsp. of flour and the tbsp. of cornstarch, mixed in ¼ cup of water, add it to the chowder and heat on medium high to barely boiling while stirring.

Reduce the heat to medium. Add the heavy cream and the small pieces of bacon, mix well and heat the chowder only up to a simmer, with gently stirring. Do not boil it.

Serve the chowder in pre-warmed crocks or bowls. Garnish it with the freshly chopped parsley. Serve saltine crackers and butter or oyster crackers.

Let each guest decide whether or not to add sea salt and/or pepper to further season the chowder. It is intentionally under seasoned in this recipe to support personal preferences at serving time.

Including small tossed salads (in chilled bowls) with a non-creamy dressing makes this a complete meal, and it is a nice accompaniment with texture and flavor contrasts.

Yes, a light fresh tasting semi-dry white wine, like Pinot Grigio, is a fine beverage to serve with this meal.

Enjoy!

Split Pea with Ham Soup - ☺♥

What better way is there to use a leftover ham bone with chunks of leftover meat on it after the holidays? Oh, yeah, I like smoky bean soup too, and sometimes I make that with leftover ham, but good old split pea soup with smoky ham flavor is a real winner on a cold winter day. It "sticks to the ribs!" The recipe for this soup is very simple. So is the procedure for making it. Allow about one hour from start to finish. This recipe serves four people generously, or six people with moderate appetites.

Ingredients:

1 large ham bone with meat attached

1 lb. Bag of dried split green peas, rinsed

2 14 oz. cans of chicken broth

1 14 oz. can of water

1 tsp. of white pepper

¼ tsp. of ground cloves

1 medium onion diced fine

2 large carrots diced fine

3 cloves of fresh garlic minced

Sea salt (variable amount; add after cooking when you adjust the seasoning)

Directions:

Rinse the split peas in cold water and remove any foreign matter. Put them into a soup pot with the ham bone, the chicken broth and the water and heat on high until the water starts to boil. Add the diced carrot and minced garlic and white pepper and mix well.

Reduce the heat to a simmer and cover the pot. Let it simmer for 30 minutes. Then extract the ham bone and remove all meat from it, de-fat it and dice the meat and return it to the pot. Discard the bone and the fat.

Continue to simmer the soup, stirring about every five minutes while the peas finish cooking and start to disintegrate into the soup. At this point, stir the soup slowly but at least once every two to three minutes, checking for doneness. The

soup is done when the peas have broken down and become part of the soup broth and when the consistency of the soup is medium thick. You don't want thin soup but you also don't want paste, so keep stirring until you have a medium consistency. The soup will thicken more when it cools so don't overdo the cooking time.

Adjust the seasoning. This means be ready to add sea salt, but not before tasting the soup to determine how much salt the ham contributed. You may need none or up to one teaspoon of salt depending on the ham.

Serve the soup with crackers and butter and something light to drink, like a light medium dry white wine or a lemon/lime soda. I promise your family and/or guests will be very happy and satisfied. No one walks away hungry.

Note that this soup, indeed most soups except those containing milk or cream, will process nicely for vacuum sealing when they are cold. They freeze well, so you can make large amounts or save leftovers with no loss of quality by vacuum sealing and freezing amounts of one to two servings. A short time in a microwave oven later restores the soup to its original goodness. Just remember not to do that with most cream soups as freezing breaks down the cream soup emulsion and you can never get it back to the right consistency upon reheating.

Polish White Borscht - ☺♥

This version of borscht (pronounced borsch ... the "t" is silent) has no red beet as an ingredient, nor does it have the typical wide variety of vegetables and beef found in Russian or Ukrainian borscht, so it seems to be somewhat odd to call it borscht. Yet it is a long established Polish soup tradition served at Easter, made after the cloth covered basket of raw ingredients is blessed at Easter morning Mass.

This borscht is similar to Hungarian Potato Soup, but it is interestingly different due to the use of freshly made ground/processed horseradish. I like to make/eat freshly ground/processed horseradish so I looked forward to making this version of borscht. After making it one time, I decided to double the amount of horseradish used. Also, one other answer was clear ... eliminate the dill used as a garnish! Dill has no proper place in this soup as it clashes with the other flavors. If anything, use two teaspoons of freshly chopped rosemary leaves, not dill, while cooking, and not as a garnish.

If you haven't tasted freshly made processed horseradish you are missing out on a real treat. It has some serious "Zing" if you make it correctly. It is easy to make and your supermarket will most likely sell the horseradish root in the produce section. See the Food Nirvana recipe for making Processed Horseradish.

I modified the Polish White Borscht recipe I found on the Internet by substituting one quart of chicken broth for half of the water listed. That enhanced the flavor intensity of the borscht. Thickened, puréed soups can at times be too thick, so to be on the safe side I added milk as an optional ingredient in the recipe to be used at the end of the cooking, but only to the extent needed. I eliminated the two sprigs of marjoram and the bay leaf as they added nothing to the flavor. Finally, I added suggestions for beverages and some crackers or rolls or bread to serve with the borscht.

Ingredients: (4 to 6 servings)

2 lbs. of smoked kielbasa

2 tbsp. of butter

1 quart of chicken broth

1 quart of water

4 cloves of garlic, diced

2 leeks, trimmed and cut into 1/4" thick slices

1 small yellow onion, cut in half vertically, peeled and then cut into 1/4" thick slices

2 medium (or one large) russet potatoes, peeled, halved lengthwise and cut into 1/4" thick slices

1 1/2 cups of sour cream

1/4 cup of all purpose flour

Milk to thin the borscht only if needed (optional and limit it to up to one cup)

1/3 cup of freshly made processed horseradish

2 tsp. of freshly chopped rosemary leaves (optional)

2 tbsp. of freshly chopped parsley

4 hard boiled eggs, cut into quarters lengthwise or thinly sliced crosswise

2 tsp. of Sea salt and 1 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper, and more added later, to taste

Club/saltine crackers, crusty dinner rolls or dark bread like pumpernickel (optional)

Directions:

Put individual serving size wide soup bowls into a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Put the kielbasa and the quart of water and quart of chicken broth into a 6 quart pot.

Cook over high heat until the water boils, then reduce the heat to very low, put a lid on, and simmer to have the meat flavor the broth, about 25 minutes.

Pour the broth into a gallon size bowl. Put the kielbasa on a wooden cutting board. De-fat the bowl of broth, if necessary, and set it aside. Set the kielbasa aside.

Return the pot to the stove and heat it on medium heat. Add the butter, garlic, leeks, onion and rosemary (optional), then cook until the vegetables are soft, stirring occasionally, for about 10 minutes.

Add the broth that was set aside, plus the sliced potatoes, salt and pepper, then bring the mixture to a boil.

Reduce the heat to low and cook at a low boil until the potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.

While waiting for the potatoes to cook, cut the kielbasa into 1/4" thick slices and set them aside on the cutting board.

Allow the soup to cool, uncovered, to 120 degrees F or cooler, then purée the cooled soup in a blender, in two batches depending on the size of your blender. Splitting it into two batches allows things to proceed faster as split batches cool faster. I put batch one into the blender, put the top on loosely, blended the soup, then added batch two and blended them both for about two minutes.

Note: Never attempt to process hot soup mixtures in a covered blender as they will rapidly expand and blow the top off of your blender, and make a mess of your kitchen. You need a pressure free environment for steam to escape.

Return the puréed soup to the pot and heat it to a simmer on medium heat.

Whisk the sour cream and the flour in a one quart bowl, then add 1/2 cup of the soup and whisk until the mixture is smooth.

Pour that mixture into the soup and cook on medium heat, stirring, until the soup is thickened, about 5 minutes.

Reduce the heat to very low and let the soup rest for five minutes to finish thickening.

If and only if the soup is too thick, you can add up to one additional cup of milk and stir, but do not add more liquid.

Stir the pieces of kielbasa into the soup along with the horseradish. You now have White Polish Borscht (modified).

Season the borscht with additional sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste.

Ladle the borscht into the pre-warmed individual serving soup bowls.

Garnish each bowl of borscht with the parsley and egg quarters/slices.

Serve the borscht hot, along with some club/saltine crackers, crusty dinner rolls or a dark bread like pumpernickel.

A chilled semi-dry white wine like Pinot Grigio or a chilled sparkling wine like Prosecco will go well as the beverage, along with a glass of ice water.

Enjoy!

Pork Stew - ☺♥

Pork Stew is not something commonly found on menus. Pork is kind of a lost child when it comes to stew type dishes as beef is usually preferred for its more robust taste. Yet I thought something nice could be done with pork, though I had no ready ideas. Well, I found what appeared to be a nice recipe online that used a slow cooker. Why not? Slow cooking some meats is a good idea, pork being one, as I simmer it for four hours in broth when I use pork shoulder to make Mexican Pulled Pork. But read on ...

I made some changes to the recipe in seasoning and other ingredient amounts and in adding kidney beans and chopped plum tomatoes. But the big change was to forget the slow cooker approach and simply do this one stovetop in a large pot. I did save slow cooker directions below for the 9 to 5 slaves, but you can cut the time in half via stovetop. Simply substitute the words large pot for slow cooker.

This stew is the same as other stews when it comes to optimum timing for taste. That means the flavors are well blended, and the stew is at its very best, the day after the stew is made. I also found that I like to break apart the cubes of pork with a fork before eating the stew. Whatever you do, you are bound to enjoy this fine pork stew.

Ingredients:

3 pounds of pork (pork loin, Boston Butt Roast, or sirloin roast, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1" cubes)

2 teaspoons of sea salt (divided)

1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper (divided)

1/3 cup of all-purpose flour

4 tablespoons of canola oil

1 cup of red wine (do not use a sweet wine ... use a wine like Merlot)

3 tablespoons of butter

1 large sweet onion, peeled and chopped

5 large cloves of garlic minced

1 tablespoon of ground sage

5 cups of beef broth

4 medium large carrots, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch thick slices

1 cup of celery, diced

1 large fresh jalapeno pepper, cleaned of seeds and membrane, and diced

1 1/2 pounds red skin potatoes, washed and cut into quarters lengthwise, then cut into slices 1/4" thick

1 cup of frozen peas

1, 15 to 19 ounce can of kidney beans

1, 28 ounce can of peeled plum tomatoes and juice (chop the tomatoes into 4 pieces each)

3 bay leaves

1/4 cup of chopped fresh parsley (lightly pressed) as a garnish

Cornstarch Mix:

3 tablespoons of cornstarch

4 tablespoons of water

Directions: (These slow cooker directions can easily be done stovetop in a large pot, saving three to four hours of cooking time.)

Place the pork cubes into a large bowl, and sprinkle them with the flour, half of the salt, and half of the black pepper. Toss using two meat forks and coat them evenly.

Place a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat and add the 4 tablespoons of canola oil. Once the oil is hot, add the meat in one layer, and work in batches if needed.

Brown the meat on all sides, for about 5 minutes per batch. Once it is done cooking, transfer the meat to the slow cooker (or pot).

Add the wine to the skillet to deglaze it, then scrape any bits from the bottom and add the wine to the slow cooker (or pot).

Reduce the heat to medium and add the butter to the skillet. Once it is melted add the onion and cook for 2 minutes with stirring, or until the onion is translucent, then add the garlic and cook for two minutes with stirring. Put the contents into the slow cooker or pot.

Add 1 cup of the beef broth to deglaze the skillet, stirring with a wooden spoon to scrape any bits of onion or garlic that are stuck to it.

Transfer the broth mixture to the slow cooker or pot on top of the meat.

Add the carrots, celery, potatoes, kidney beans, diced jalapeno pepper, chopped tomatoes and juice, and frozen peas.

Pour the remaining beef broth on top.

Add the bay leaves and season the stew with the sage, the remaining half of the salt and the remaining half of the pepper.

Cover the slow cooker and cook on LOW for 7 hours (or on very low heat, stovetop in the pot, for 4 hours, stirring once every half hour, scraping the bottom with the spoon or a spatula, to keep any ingredients from sticking to the inside bottom of the pot).

Taste and then adjust the stew with additional salt and pepper (I added 1 tsp. of sea salt and 1/2 tsp. of ground black pepper).

If you prefer the stew to be thicker (you likely will), make and add the cornstarch mix as described next; otherwise simply cook the stew for an additional 30 minutes if using a slow cooker.

Mix the cornstarch and water in a small bowl until fully combined. Add the mixture to the cooker or the pot and stir it in for a minute, then put the lid on for a final 15 minutes of cooking.

Garnish the stew with the freshly chopped parsley and serve it hot in wide pre-warmed soup bowls.

Enjoy!

Puerto Rican Shrimp Stew - ?

Back in 1984 on a business trip to Puerto Rico I happened to stay at a resort along the north coast. While there I had a shrimp dish that I found particularly nice. It was a shrimp stew that was seasoned perfectly and served over white rice. Many years have gone by and I've never come across that dish in the USA mainland. Recently I thought about the stew and I decided to find a recipe and try making it. Thus, the recipe below is my first attempt and I will report back with results ... and likely a few changes as well.

Two of the ingredients listed below, Sofrito and sazón, are common items found in Hispanic grocery stores or ethnic foods sections of some supermarkets. Sofrito is a nice salsa used as a base in many Hispanic dishes. It is easy to find at the supermarket though you can also make it easily if you want to look up a recipe on the Internet and acquire the various ingredients. Sazón is a seasoning composed of dry spices and typically sold in packets, boxes or plastic spice bottles. I have included the recipe for sazón below so you can make it instead of searching for it at the supermarket. All other listed ingredients are commonly found in any supermarket.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons of olive oil

4 tablespoons of Sofrito

2 bay leaves

5 to 10 pimento stuffed green olives

1/4 pound of smoked ham (diced)

1 1/2 teaspoons of sazón

1 cup of tomato sauce

1 can (14 1/2 ounces) of stewed tomatoes

1 pound of raw shrimp (medium size, peeled and cleaned)

salt to taste

pepper to taste

4 cups of cooked white rice

Sazón Ingredients: (makes five tablespoons of sazón)

1 tablespoon of ground coriander

1 tablespoon of ground cumin

1 tablespoon of ground annatto seeds (or paprika)

1 tablespoon of garlic powder

1 tablespoon of salt

Directions:

Make four cups of cooked white rice. Follow the directions for the type of rice you purchased. Keep the cooked rice covered and warm in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Heat the olive oil in a soup pot. Add the Sofrito, bay leaves, olives and ham. Sauté over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes.

Add the sazón, tomato sauce, and stewed tomatoes. Bring to a boil and then immediately reduce heat and simmer for about 5 minutes.

Add the shrimp and cook it at a simmer until it just turns pink, about 5 minutes.

Add the salt and pepper to taste and allow to simmer for 1 more minute.

Serve hot with the cooked white rice.

Enjoy ...

Pumpkin Curry Soup - ☺♥

My son, Ray, Jr., made this soup with his sons, Matthew and Andrew, for our Thanksgiving dinner this year (2012). It was delicious so I decided to put the recipe into Food Nirvana. All the other folks at that dinner agreed the soup is great. So it is ... Thanks, guys!

This soup is relatively easy to make. The hardest part is using a colander to eliminate the vegetable skins after simmering, and that isn't very hard to do.

I hope you make this soup. You will enjoy it, guaranteed.

Ingredients:

1 medium onion, chopped

2 medium leeks, white part only, chopped

1 clove of garlic, chopped

1, 15 oz. can of pureed pumpkin

4 cups of chicken broth

1 cup of half and half

2 tsp. of curry powder

½ tsp. of cumin

¼ tsp. of ground ginger

¼ tsp. of cayenne pepper

1 bay leaf

2 tbsp. of butter

2 tbsp. of olive oil

salt and pepper, to taste

fresh cilantro as a garnish

Directions:

Heat the butter and the olive oil in a skillet and sauté the onions, leeks and garlic on medium heat for five minutes.

Add the curry powder, cumin, cayenne pepper and some salt and black pepper and stir/mix well.

Add the pumpkin puree, the chicken broth and the bay leaf and mix well.

Simmer the soup for 15 to 20 minutes.

Use a colander to extract the softened onion, leeks and garlic for the soup while leaving any vegetable skins behind.

Return the soup to the stove and add the half and half.

Adjust the seasonings and simmer for five minutes and then serve the soup hot.

Use the cilantro as a garnish.

Expect compliments!

Tomato Bisque - _ ☺ ♥

This recipe is terrific. I combined what I figured was the best of two different Internet recipes, and I even changed it during making it as I thought about better methods to achieve the desired results. I am reporting back with great success. This bisque has a very rich flavor and smooth creamy consistency, offset perfectly with the addition of the small crisp bacon pieces added at serving time. You don't want to miss this one.

Ingredients: (makes four generous servings)

4 tbsp. of butter

1 slice of bacon

1 small sweet onion, diced

1 medium carrot, diced

1 stalk of celery, diced

4 cloves of garlic, minced or diced very fine

5 tbsp. of all-purpose flour

2, 14 ounce cans of chicken broth

1 (28-ounce) can of whole, peeled plum tomatoes (with liquid) roughly chopped, or equivalent or slightly more fresh ripe tomatoes

3 tbsp. of tomato paste

3 fresh parsley sprigs

3 fresh thyme sprigs or 1 tsp. of ground or powdered dried thyme

1 bay leaf

1 1/2 cups of heavy cream

1 tsp. of sugar

1 1/4 tsp. of kosher salt

3/4 tsp. of white pepper

1 tbsp. of corn starch

Directions:

Fry the bacon in a one gallon pot on low to medium heat and until it is crisp and most of the fat has been rendered. Transfer the bacon to a paper towel and set it aside. Crumble it when it is cool and put the pieces into a small serving dish. You will later add bits of the crisp bacon to the bisque at serving time, in fact I reheat the bacon pieces in the microwave oven immediately before serving so they are hot and crisp when added to the bisque.

Add the butter to the rendered bacon fat in the pot and heat the mixture on medium heat until the butter is melted and mixed with the rendered bacon fat.

Lower the heat to medium low, add the diced onion, carrots, celery, and garlic and cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is soft and fragrant, about 8 minutes.

Whisk in the flour gradually and cook on low heat, stirring, for 3 minutes. The idea is that you are making a type of roux to thicken the bisque.

I used fresh tomatoes from my garden instead of canned tomatoes, so I quartered and partially crushed them in a separate pot and heated it to low boiling for about ten minutes. Then I processed the tomatoes using a colander to remove the skins and seeds, yielding a nice juice with a lot of tomato puree in it. If you are using canned tomatoes they are already cooked so simply process them through a colander to eliminate the seeds.

Pour in the broth, tomato juice/puree, tomato paste, salt, pepper and sugar and bring the bisque base to a low boil on medium high heat while whisking constantly.

Tie the parsley sprigs, thyme, and bay leaf together with a piece of kitchen twine and add them to the pot. Lower the heat to very low and simmer the bisque base for 30 minutes, covered. I did not have sprigs of thyme so I used a teaspoon of dried thyme processed into a powder using a Magic Bullet® mixer/blender. I also just added the loose sprigs of parsley to the bisque base and later removed them and the bay leaf prior to the high speed blending step.

Remove the bisque base from the heat and allow it to cool to room temperature, covered.

When the bisque base is cool, remove and discard the herb bundle. I used a type of large spoon with holes in it to capture the parsley pieces and the bay leaf and then I discarded them.

Working in batches, transfer the bisque base to a blender and puree it until smooth, storing each batch temporarily in a large mixing bowl.

Return the pureed bisque from the mixing bowl to the pot and reheat it over medium heat.

Whisk the cornstarch into the heavy cream and then whisk that mixture into the bisque while it is heating. Heat almost to a simmer but do not let the bisque boil.

Serve the bisque garnished with the crumbled bacon pieces and with oyster crackers or Keebler® Club Crackers and butter.

Yummy!

➔ If you want to preserve the bisque then vacuum seal and freeze two or three cup amounts of the pureed bisque base, prior to adding the cream. When you later use it, mix or blend the pureed bisque base with the appropriate amount of heavy cream/cornstarch and heat only to serving temperature. That will guarantee perfect creamy consistency.

Ray's Cream of Tomato Soup - ☺♥

We had a bumper crop of tomatoes this year (2010) both at the house and at camp. I made tomato juice, stewed tomatoes and today for the first time ever I decided to make a homemade cream of tomato soup. It was a very good decision.

I read four different recipes from cookbooks that I trust and as usual I created my own combination of ingredients and procedures to obtain what seemed best to me. Thus, this recipe resulted. It came out really good but it also took some work.

Be sure to read the variations at the end of this recipe before making the soup as the timing of adding milk or cream can depend on how you plan to store the soup.

Ingredients: (makes one gallon of soup)

20 medium to large vine ripened tomatoes (We grew Big Boy® and Better Boy® varieties)

2 cans of evaporated milk or 28 ounces of regular milk

1 14 oz. can of chicken broth

½ cup of chopped fresh cilantro

1 tsp. of Sea salt

¾ tsp. of Black pepper

2 oz. of Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce

4 tbsp. of Cornstarch

5 cloves of fresh garlic finely diced

½ very large russet potato, diced

1 cup of celery, diced

1 ½ cups of diced sweet onion

½ cup of diced sweet red pepper

2 tbsp. of sugar

4 tbsp. of Extra Virgin Olive Oil

1 pint of Ray's homemade tomato juice (or a 12 oz. can of tomato or V8 juice)

½ tsp. of Red pepper flakes

Oyster crackers or saltine crackers

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet on medium heat. Add the celery, potato, sweet red pepper and onion, mix with the oil and cover the skillet. Stir every few minutes until the onion is translucent. Add the finely diced garlic, mix well and continue sautéing for two minutes. Turn off the heat and leave the skillet covered.

Cut the tomatoes into quarters and put them into a large soup pot. Add the tomato juice and the chicken broth. Add the salt, pepper, sugar, hot sauce, cilantro and red pepper flakes. Add the sautéed vegetables. Mix and heat to a boil, covered, on high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer the mixture for 30 minutes.

Use a conical colander to extract the juice and the pulp from the simmered mixture, transferring the extract to a large bowl. Discard the seeds, skins and any ingredient that does not process through the colander. When finished, rinse the soup pot.

Empty the large bowl contents into the soup pot.

Heat the soup pot contents on medium heat. Add one can of evaporated or regular milk and mix well. Use the other can of evaporated milk or regular milk and mix it with the cornstarch in a separate bowl, then add the mixture to the soup pot and mix very well. Increase the heat to high and stir the soup slowly but continuously until it comes to a boil. Boil on low for two minutes while continuing to mix the soup.

Turn the heat off and cover the soup pot with a lid and allow it to cool for fifteen minutes. Mix the contents and eat whatever you want and refrigerate the remainder in a large covered bowl. The next day you can process the chilled soup in whatever manner you like. I vacuum seal bags of the soup in two to three cup quantities and freeze them for later use.

My best recommendation is to make this soup without milk of any kind or cream, then vacuum seal cold amounts of one to three cups and freeze it for later use. When it is time to use it, thaw it in the microwave oven, put it into a saucepan and then add the cream and/or milk. Blend well and then heat to a simmer and then serve the soup. It will be perfect.

The flavors that come through in this soup are stunningly good, as is the consistency. I guarantee you will enjoy it far better than any commercial product and rate it at the top with any high quality restaurant offering of cream of tomato soup. The spices "kick it up a notch," as Emeril would say. Serve the soup with oyster crackers or saltine crackers.

What a delightful way to use excess very ripe tomatoes!

Variation:

You will note that my original recipe contained no cream, merely evaporated or regular milk. Feel free to substitute light or heavy cream for one or both cans of the evaporated or regular milk, but do not boil the soup after you add cream except for the final thickening with the cornstarch. After tasting the soup my way, you may decide to add additional cream anyway as the soup flavor per the above recipe is robust and some added cream won't hurt it at all. Do note that soups containing cream typically do not fare very well in the freezer. In short, if you use cream then try to consume the soup quickly, or, don't add the cream until you are heating the soup just before serving it. Oh, yes ... that works very well.

Marie's Cream of Tomato Soup - ☺

While searching for more of Marie's best recipes I found the one included here that is different from my cream of tomato soup recipe. I've included it because I remember now how excellent her soup was ... and can be again when you make it.

Marie used a flour based white sauce to get the right consistency for a cream of tomato soup instead of cornstarch as I used in my recipe. Both methods work. Enjoy!

Ingredients:

Soup base:

Quarter enough ripe tomatoes to make six cups.

One cup of diced celery

½ cup of diced sweet onion

2 tablespoons of sugar

White sauce:

Put four tablespoons of butter into a saucepan.

Melt the butter on low heat.

Add four tablespoons of flour.

Make a roux (i.e., stir it into a paste).

Add ½ teaspoon of salt and ¼ teaspoon of white pepper.

Add two cups of milk gradually while stirring.

Stir over low heat until the mixture thickens (about ten minutes).

Directions:

Put the soup base ingredients into a one gallon pot.

Bring the mixture to a boil on medium high heat and then simmer it for twenty minutes on very low heat.

Process the simmered tomato mixture in a blender in small batches.

Strain each blended batch into the white sauce using a sieve or a colander.

Stir and adjust seasoning to taste.

Serve.

Seafood Chowder - ☺♥♥♥☺

This delicious creamy chowder is a fine food to serve to close friends and loved ones for they will be most pleased. It is similar in concept to New England Clam Chowder but it contains numerous types of shellfish as well as haddock. Note that made as shown it is rather expensive (\$140 for two gallons as of 11/25/2015) so it is definitely a dish for special occasions. You can, of course, vary from this recipe to reduce the cost. For example, the lobster tails cost \$43. The premium lump crab cost \$22. The fresh sea scallops cost \$20. Thus, \$85 of the total cost of \$140 was in those three ingredients, so you might use less of each while using more haddock.

As noted, the basic recipe is similar to that of New England Clam Chowder. The differences in ingredients are the generous use of fresh haddock, clam flesh and other shellfish, powdered thyme or a fresh thyme bouquet garni as an additional welcome herb, and a larger volume of liquid using heavy cream and milk, and finally the use of corn starch to provide some thickening beyond that provided by the flour/roux in the Food Nirvana New England Clam Chowder recipe. Oh, due to some people having lactose intolerance I use Lactaid® milk in this recipe. Also, potato flour can be used if any of your guests have a gluten allergy (Celiac disease).

Some people are squeamish about eating oysters so I did not include them in this recipe. But if your family or guests enjoy foods like oyster stew or even chilled raw oysters on the half shell, then by all means add some "small" but fresh stewing oysters to this recipe, late in the cooking process along with the scallops, but limit the amount of oysters to one pound or less.

This seafood chowder is guaranteed to be a winner, and making it for a crowd turns out to be fairly easy. My daughter-in-law, Jane (one "stellar" cook in her own right!), and I made almost two gallons of it to serve to family during the Thanksgiving holidays in 2015. Yummy! My son, Ray, Jr., described it as "Incredible!"

The day after Thanksgiving in 2018, my grandson, Michael, made the chowder, with a bit of procedural and preparation help from his dad, from me and others. I really enjoyed having him learn how to make it, for that knowledge will serve him well for many years. Also, for 2018 we used a 2 1/2 gallon pot and I increased the amounts of haddock and lobster. In short, we wound up with almost 2 1/2 gallons of seafood chowder that was superior to that made in earlier years due to the high seafood content used while holding the liquid ingredients almost constant. Talk about decadent! The chowder was fabulous.

Ingredients: (Makes two gallons, which serves sixteen people, one pint per person)

2 lbs. of fresh haddock filets cut into 1" cubes

51 oz. can of chopped sea clams in clam broth (I buy it at Sam's Club®)

1 lb. of raw, fresh medium size shrimp, shelled and cleaned

12 ounces (or more) of raw (or cooked) lobster flesh, cut into pieces (Maine lobsters are preferred for tenderness, though South African lobster tails are easier to process.)

1 lb. of large fresh sea scallops, cut into halves or quarters

1 lb. of premium lump crabmeat (no shell particles)

1 1/2 quarts of heavy cream

Up to 2 quarts of 4% butterfat Lactaid® milk

2 large sweet onions, diced

5 very large russet potatoes, peeled and diced

6 strips of good quality thick sliced hickory smoked bacon (I use dry cured bacon. See the discussion below.)

2 tsp. of white pepper

1 tbsp. of sea salt

1/4 lb. of butter (one stick)

1/2 cup of flour (or potato flour)

4 tbsp. (or more) of corn starch

1 tbsp. of powdered (see note below) thyme (or to taste) or a fresh thyme sprigs bouquet garni

A box of oyster crackers

Fresh parsley sprigs for garnish

Directions:

Note: You can powder dried thyme and many other types of herbs using a small high speed blender like a Magic Bullet®. My preferred thyme for this recipe is

roughly 20 fresh thyme sprigs tied together with a string, which is one example of the French term, bouquet garni. Typically, a bouquet garni will have multiple herbs wrapped in cheesecloth and tied with a string. That makes the herbs easy to remove after their flavor has been extracted during cooking of the food. But I only needed the thyme for the seafood chowder, so using only string to hold the sprigs together was fine.

Note that this type of chowder, with high content of cream and milk, is not a suitable candidate for freezing of leftovers, as freezing will ruin the creamy composition of the chowder, which will become sadly evident when it is reheated.

If you use whole live lobsters then flash boil each lobster for one minute and then cut or saw off the claws and tails for processing. Regardless of lobster type used, then use shears to cut through shell and membrane to help manual separation of the flesh from the shell. Then chop/cut the lobster flesh into pieces roughly 3/4" inch long and wide and whatever thickness is present for the part you are processing. If you used whole live lobsters and you want to process the shells for stock then clean the entire lobster bodies and put all the shell pieces into the clam broth from the can of chopped clams, and use a small amount of water, and simmer for 30 minutes to create a fine stock, after which you discard the shells and strain the stock through a fine mesh strainer, then use the stock as indicated below to cook the diced potatoes.

In 2018 I got very lucky regarding the lobster. My supermarket had a sale on freshly cooked lobster flesh, for \$20 per pound. Normally that product sells for \$45 to \$50 per pound. I bought a 1 1/2 pound package for the seafood chowder, and I was quite pleased!

Wash the fresh haddock in cold water and then cut it into approximately 1" cubes and whatever thinner cuts result where the filets are less than one inch thick.

Now let's discuss bacon for a minute. Bacon brands sold in supermarkets are almost always water cured and the water content is now so high that the bacon shrinks to almost nothing when fried. That is a disgrace! Frying six slices of that bacon yields too little bacon and too little bacon grease to be adequate in this recipe. I buy dry cured hickory smoked bacon online from Broadbent Hams® in Kentucky or from Burgers Smokehouse® in Missouri. You can buy it presliced or in slab form. If you can't find or use dry cured bacon then increase the amount of supermarket bacon you fry to twelve slices. Let's continue.

Fry the bacon on low to medium heat until there is no uncooked fat, but do not make the bacon overly crisp and do not burn it or overheat the bacon fat. Turn

off the heat. Remove the bacon to a paper towel. Crumble/break it into small pieces when it has cooled. Set the bacon aside.

Pour the hot bacon grease into a cup, avoiding the transfer of any solid particles, and then clean the skillet to remove any solid particles. Pour the hot bacon grease back into the skillet and put it on the stove burner with no heat.

Dice the onions into ½" or smaller pieces. Put them into the skillet with the hot bacon grease. Add the butter and white pepper. Sauté the onion on medium heat, stirring every few minutes, until it is translucent. I like to use a glass lid on the skillet initially to get the contents heated faster. Then I remove the lid and sauté normally with stirring. Turn off the heat and add the flour to the skillet and mix well.

Peel and dice the potatoes into cubes 3/8" on a side. Put the chopped sea clams and clam broth and the diced potatoes into a 2 to 3 gallon soup pot and heat on medium high heat until just boiling. If you are using a thyme bouquet garni then add it to the clam broth. Reduce the heat to medium or medium low and allow the potatoes to simmer for 8 minutes, adding a small amount of water if necessary to barely cover the potato pieces.

Add the skillet contents to the soup pot while stirring, and increase the heat to medium high and stir to mix well. Add a quart of the milk while stirring and also all of the heavy cream, the salt and the thyme if you are using powdered thyme. Add the crumbled bacon pieces. Mix the cornstarch well with a pint of the second quart of the milk and add it to the pot while stirring.

At this point add the haddock pieces and bring the chowder to a simmer and hold it at that temperature, stirring every few minutes for 15 minutes. Adjust the heat level as necessary. Do not boil the chowder, but the occasional bubble coming to the surface is perfectly okay. Then add the shrimp and the crabmeat and simmer for five more minutes. Then add the lobster pieces and the scallop pieces and simmer for five more minutes.

If you used a thyme bouquet garni then remove and discard it. The chowder is now done except for two possible actions items, adjusting the total volume of chowder and the thickness of the chowder.

If necessary, bring the total volume up to two gallons by adding the other pint of milk. Then simmer the chowder just long enough to adjust the temperature for the added milk.

If the chowder is thick enough to suit you then cover the soup pot with a lid and turn off the heat. The chowder is done. If instead you want thicker chowder then

mix another tablespoon or two of cornstarch with a cup of cream or milk and slowly add it to the chowder while stirring and continuing to heat the chowder to thicken it. Then turn off the heat and cover the chowder with a lid to keep it warm.

Sample the chowder and adjust the seasoning by adding white pepper or sea salt or powdered thyme as needed. Alternatively, you can let each person season their portion as desired.

Serve the chowder in pre-warmed crocks along with oyster crackers. Fresh parsley sprigs make a nice garnish.

Adding a small tossed salad with a non-creamy dressing makes this a complete meal, and it is a nice accompaniment with appearance, texture and flavor contrasts. Yes, a light fresh tasting French white burgundy wine, like Louis Jadot Pouilly Fuisse, or a Pinot Grigio, chilled, is a fine beverage to serve with this meal. You might also want to have some warm French bread, sliced thick, and served with butter.

You will get many compliments.

Tortellini and Linguica Soup - ☺♥

I made a nice recipe for Tortellini and Italian Sweet Sausage Soup, which is mild tasting, and that is fine. Later I saw a sealed package of Linguica Portuguese sausage at the supermarket, with the sausage pre-cooked, and I decided to make a hotter or more spicy version of the Tortellini soup. The idea is fairly obvious ... if the basic recipe is good then try variations that will have their own character. Well, based on what I read online, Linguica certainly has personality ... kind of on the hot and spicy side. So now you understand what this soup is all about.

As is typical, soups of this type taste best the day after they are made, as the flavors of the various ingredients have time to combine. Unfortunately, letting the pasta sit in the soup broth for longer than necessary to cook it results in soggy pasta and too little remaining broth. One answer is to process any leftovers right after the first meal and freeze them. See the directions at the end of this recipe. Alternatively, if you separate the cooked tortellini from the broth and combine those items only at serving time, there will be no broth absorption problem.

It is nice to have a good crusty bread and some butter to serve with the soup, or even hot bread sticks, as well as a bowl of freshly grated Italian sharp cheese, like Pecorino Romano.

Adding a small side salad to this meal makes it complete, but be sure to serve some chilled Pinot Grigio wine too.

Ingredients: (makes about a gallon and a half of soup)

1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1 medium size sweet onion, diced

2 stalks of celery thinly sliced

2 large carrots peeled and diced

3 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced

1 tbsp. of dried oregano

1 tbsp. of dried basil

1 1/2 pounds of ground Linguica sausage (or link sausage cut crosswise into 1/2" long pieces)

2 quarts of chicken broth

1, 28 ounce can of peeled Italian plum tomatoes and juice, chopped

1, 15 ounce can of tomato sauce

2, 15 ounce cans of white kidney beans

12 ounce package of dried three cheese tortellini (or a 20 ounce container of refrigerated three cheese tortellini)

3 cups of chopped fresh kale

2 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

A pinch of cayenne pepper

1 cup of freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese (at serving time)

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a 2 gallon pot over medium heat.

Add the onion, celery and carrots to the pot, stir well, and cook covered with a lid for 5 minutes.

Add the sliced garlic, stir the mixture, and cook covered with a lid for two minutes.

Season the vegetables with the oregano, basil, cayenne pepper, salt and black pepper and stir well. Keep the mixture covered and warm on very low heat.

Linguica is usually sold already cooked, so the directions when using Italian sausage do not apply in this recipe. You simply cut 1/4" thick slices of Linguica and add them to the soup pot.

Add the Linguica pieces to the pot, stir it into the other ingredients, and cook covered on medium heat for 5 minutes.

Add the chicken broth and chopped tomatoes (with the juice) and tomato sauce to the pot, then bring to a low boil.

Add the tortellini, chopped kale and white kidney beans to the pot and cook for 15 minutes at a low boil on low heat.

Taste the soup and if needed adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper.

Serve the soup (it is best the next day) hot along with a bowl of freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese and some Tuscan Pane or other Italian bread, with butter, on the side.

Like other pasta dishes that have liquid content, the tortellini in this soup will absorb the broth considerably if leftover soup isn't processed and frozen immediately. Failure to do that results in having soggy pasta and too little broth. Thus, to maximize soup quality later for the leftovers, if any, I vacuum seal two to three cup amounts per bag and put the bags into the deep freeze. That avoids the absorption problem completely. I take similar steps with dishes like linguine with white clam sauce ... making individual portions of pasta and sauce, vacuum sealing them, and storing them in the deep freeze.

Enjoy!

Tortellini and Sausage Soup - ☺♥

I've enjoyed soups of this general variety in various Italian restaurants but I never made any at home. Most likely it was because I don't like most preparations using tortellini, for the advertised ingredients inside were there in ridiculously small amounts, if at all. That meant the tortellini were nothing more than pinched pasta.

There is nothing wrong with pasta. It is great in soups, etc. So if we think of tortellini as just another form of pasta there is no disappointment. With that in mind I decided to find a good soup recipe using tortellini via the Internet, one with a decent quantity of meat.

What I found was so bland (no Italian seasonings, no garlic, etc.) I was tempted to scrap it, but instead I treated it as a partial recipe that simply needed a lot of help. The recipe below is almost all of the ingredients listed in the Internet recipe, modified with substantial changes and additions by me.

As is typical, soups of this type taste best the day after they are made, as the flavors of the various ingredients have time to combine. Unfortunately, letting the pasta sit in the soup broth for longer than necessary to cook it results in soggy pasta and too little remaining broth. One answer is to process any leftovers right after the first meal and freeze them. See the directions at the end of this recipe. Alternatively, if you separate the cooked tortellini from the broth and combine those items only at serving time, there will be no broth absorption problem.

It is nice to have a good crusty bread and some butter to serve with the soup, or even hot bread sticks, as well as a bowl of freshly grated Italian sharp cheese, like Pecorino Romano.

Adding a small side salad to this meal makes it complete, but be sure to serve some chilled Pinot Grigio wine too.

Ingredients: (makes about a gallon and a half of soup)

1 tbsp. of extra virgin olive oil

1 medium size sweet onion, diced

2 stalks of celery thinly sliced

2 large carrots peeled and diced

3 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced

1 tbsp. of dried oregano

1 tbsp. of dried basil

1 1/2 pounds of ground sweet Italian sausage (or link sausage cut crosswise into 1/2" long pieces)

2 quarts of chicken broth

1, 28 ounce can of peeled Italian plum tomatoes and juice, chopped

1, 15 ounce can of tomato sauce

2, 15 ounce cans of white kidney beans

12 ounce package of dried three cheese tortellini (or a 20 ounce container of refrigerated three cheese tortellini)

3 cups of chopped fresh kale

2 tsp. of sea salt

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

A pinch of cayenne pepper

1 cup of freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese (at serving time)

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a 2 gallon pot over medium heat.

Add the onion, celery and carrots to the pot, stir well, and cook covered with a lid for 5 minutes.

Add the sliced garlic, stir the mixture, and cook covered with a lid for two minutes.

Season the vegetables with the oregano, basil, cayenne pepper, salt and black pepper and stir well. Keep the mixture covered and warm on very low heat.

Brown the ground (or cut up links of) sweet Italian sausage in a large skillet on medium heat, drain off any melted fat, and break up the sausage into small pieces if you used ground sausage.

Add the sausage pieces to the pot, stir it into the other ingredients, and cook covered on medium heat for 5 minutes.

Add the chicken broth and chopped tomatoes (with the juice) and tomato sauce to the pot, then bring to a low boil.

Add the tortellini, chopped kale and white kidney beans to the pot and cook for 15 minutes at a low boil on low heat.

Taste the soup and if needed adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper.

Serve the soup (it is best the next day) hot along with a bowl of freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese and some Tuscan Pane or other Italian bread, with butter, on the side.

Like other pasta dishes that have liquid content, the tortellini in this soup will absorb the broth considerably if leftover soup isn't processed and frozen immediately. Failure to do that results in having soggy pasta and too little broth. Thus, to maximize soup quality later for the leftovers, if any, I vacuum seal two to three cup amounts per bag and put the bags into the deep freeze. That avoids the absorption problem completely. I take similar steps with dishes like linguine with white clam sauce ... making individual portions of pasta and sauce, vacuum sealing them, and storing them in the deep freeze.

Enjoy!

Turkey and Rice Soup - ☺♥

I've made a lot of delicious turkey and rice soup using leftover Thanksgiving turkey carcasses. It is a robustly flavored soup with a normal amount of turkey and broth and rice, and a noticeably large amount of celery, onion and some garlic, and also some frozen peas and leftover broccoli, which all help to make a nice broth with complex flavors. Of course, I cheat by also using some chicken broth and some Better Than Bullion® roasted chicken flavoring, and a bit of salt and pepper. It is the resulting complex turkey broth flavors that set this soup apart from a typical milder chicken and rice soup.

I decided that the base flavor of the soup would be best if I used all of the leftover turkey, including meat, skin, fat and bone, as that produces the richest broth when those items are cooked together. It is then a simple matter later to discard the fat, bones and skin, and any cartilage, and retain only the meat and broth. I shred the turkey meat to have it later blend easily with all the other ingredients I put into the soup. When you chill that mixture you will notice the high gelatin content from the turkey is obvious, and that also is nice later for lightly thickening the soup broth.

Now you can have the pleasure of making and enjoying this very fine soup. You will be quite happy. This is genuine comfort food.

Ingredients: (makes about one gallon of soup, on three or four different occasions)

To process the turkey carcass:

Leftover Thanksgiving turkey carcass (from a 15 pound or larger turkey, with leftover drumsticks, thighs, wings, etc. and some breast meat)

3 quarts of water

1 tbsp. of sea salt (or less ... vary the amount to suit yourself)

1 tsp. of ground black pepper

To later make about a gallon of soup using one quart of the processed broth and turkey meat:

3 large celery stalks, diced

1 cup of frozen peas

1 medium size diced sweet onion

2 large fresh garlic cloves, sliced thinly

1 cup of diced cooked broccoli crown

1 1/2 quarts of packaged chicken broth (like College Inn® or Swansons®)

2 tbsp. of Roasted Chicken Flavor Better Than Bullion®

2 tsp. of sea salt

1/2 tsp. of ground black pepper

1 cup of uncooked basmati rice

Directions:

Process the turkey carcass:

Break up the turkey carcass bones and skin and meat into pieces small enough to fit easily into a two gallon pot, then simmer them in three quarts of lightly boiling water with the salt and the pepper for one hour, covered. Add additional water if necessary to allow all of the carcass parts to be fully submersed. Then let the pot contents cool to room temperature, covered.

Remove and discard the bones, skin, cartilage and fat.

Remove the turkey meat to a wood cutting board.

Shred the turkey meat with two forks and put it back into the soup pot.

Vacuum seal the turkey and broth in three or four one quart vacuum seal bags or three or four one quart Ziploc® freezer bags.

Put the sealed bags into the deep freeze until you are ready to use one of them.

That concludes the processing of the turkey carcass.

Now let's proceed to make one batch of the turkey and rice soup.

Thaw one frozen bag of shredded turkey and broth in the microwave oven and add that to a one gallon soup pot

Add the quart and one half of chicken broth and the Better Than Bullion® Roast Chicken flavoring to the soup pot.

Add all of the processed vegetables to the soup pot, along with the sea salt and pepper.

Stir the soup and bring it to a low boil on medium high heat. Boil on low heat for 15 minutes, then add the rice, and cook for another 15 minutes, stirring every five minutes.

Turn off the heat, cover the pot with a lid, and let the soup rest for 15 minutes.

Serve the soup hot. It is delicious right away.

Each guest can further add salt and pepper as desired.

It is nice to serve this soup with a warmed loaf of bread or rolls or saltine crackers, and butter.

Enjoy! This is great comfort food.

Virginia Peanut Soup - ☺♥

(The Jefferson Restaurant®, Williamsburg, VA)

Janet and I were celebrating a wedding anniversary and we happened to pick the Jefferson Restaurant® for our dinner. What a fortunate choice, for all the food was delicious. We had never eaten peanut soup but I decided to try it and Janet chose the tomato bisque. Both were superb. The waiter gave us the recipe for the peanut soup but not the tomato bisque. I want you to try the peanut soup as it very likely will taste far different to you than you might first think. It is yummy! Meanwhile, I will try to clone the tomato bisque.

Ingredients: (12 to 14 one cup servings)

- 1 medium onion chopped fine
- 1 stalk of celery chopped fine
- ½ cup of butter (1 stick or ¼ lb.)
- 1 cup of flour
- 2 quarts of chicken stock (broth)
- 2 cups of creamy peanut butter
- 2 cups of light or heavy cream
- ½ cup of chopped roasted peanuts

Directions:

Sauté the onion and celery in butter. Do not brown. Add the flour and stir until well blended. Add the chicken stock, stir continually and bring to a boil. Remove soup from the heat and rub the contents through a sieve. Add the peanut butter and the cream. Stir and blend well. Return the soup to low heat and stir while heating but do not bring it to a boil. Serve the soup immediately, garnished with the chopped peanuts.

This soup may also be served ice cold.

Wonton Soup - ☺♥♥♥☺

This is a fine recipe that I made for the first time in February 2011. Peggy and I are enjoying Chinese food more often now, either by going to a high-end restaurant that is superb or by cooking at home. The general ideas are to eat a more healthy diet for weight control and to enjoy the taste and texture and appearance of foods that are made to perfection, and thus expand our enjoyment, our meal variety and our knowledge. Of course, the real benefit is in learning to do Chinese cooking very well at home, and certainly better than I did in the distant past.

Good grief! I remember when all we had to choose from when I was young in western PA were canned products like Chun King® Chicken Chow Mein in the supermarket along with dry crunchy things that were sold as noodles. Those excuses for Chinese food were disgusting as they tasted bad and they contained almost no chicken. Thank God I escaped that limited environment! Now back to the present story.

I did some reasonable Chinese cooking in the past, but my repertoire was dismally limited. It was limited to Egg Foo Yung, Sweet and Sour Pork and Shrimp Toast.

A final historical note is appropriate before getting to the wonton soup recipe. Back in the early 1970's I had a great work friend who was Chinese, Dora (Lin) Clark. We often ate lunch in local Chinese restaurants in Wilmington, Delaware. On being invited to Dora's and her husband Dick's home for dinner I learned just how unique top quality Chinese cooking can be. Along with a variety of other wonderful dishes Dora served to my wife Pat and me was her own homemade wonton soup. It was delicious! It was vastly better than any wonton soup I ever ate in a restaurant and I never forgot about Dora's soup. Or Dora!

As you can see, my memory of great food and a great friend translated yet again into me deciding to make wonton soup. The results to my great happiness were wonderful. Peggy is really impressed. I am delighted. If you make this soup you too will be delighted.

I begin by providing you a recipe for making the wonton wrappers. You may choose to make them or to buy them in a supermarket for about \$3 for 50 wrappers. My advice? Buy them to save the time/labor of making them.

Wonton Wrapper Ingredients: (Makes a lot of wonton wrappers)

4 cups of flour

2 jumbo or four large eggs

1 1/2 tsp. of salt

1 cup of water

Cornstarch for surface dusting during rolling and cutting

Wonton Wrapper Directions:

Sift the flour into a large electric mixer bowl.

Whisk together the eggs, salt and water.

Start the mixer on low speed and gradually pour in the egg mixture. Then increase the speed to medium.

Mix for about a minute. If the dough is too dry it will not form into a ball of dough. If that happens then add one tablespoon of water and mix for an additional minute. Repeat if necessary but do not add too much water overall or the dough will be sticky, and that is not good.

Remove the mixer beater and replace it with a dough hook.

Run the mixer for one to two minutes to knead the dough. The dough should not be at all sticky. If it is then add a small amount of flour, like one tablespoon, and knead the dough for half a minute longer. Be sure the flour is well mixed into the dough. Repeat the flour addition if necessary.

Remove the dough and separate it into eight pieces. Flatten the pieces to a thickness of about 1/2" and a width of about 1" and wrap them individually in plastic wrap. Let the dough rest for one hour at room temperature. NOTE: I use that hour to make the wonton filling that I will use later, which saves a lot time overall in the making of wonton soup.

I use a pasta maker attachment with my Kitchen Aid® mixer to convert each dough piece into one about two feet long and four inches wide, and about 1/32nd of an inch thick. You may have to roll out each piece of dough with a rolling pin. I recommend doing that using a long piece of plastic wrap on a hard counter surface that has been liberally dusted with cornstarch. You may also want to lightly dust the top surface of the dough while you are rolling it to a thickness of about 1/16th of an inch or less, to facilitate rolling.

Use a sharp knife to cut squares of dough roughly four inches to a side and place each square in a pile, remembering to dust the top of each piece lightly with cornstarch before adding the next piece to the stack.

You are now ready to proceed with making the wonton soup.

Ingredients: (Makes six generous or eight regular adult servings)

Wonton ingredients:

12 ounces of lean, finely ground pork

1 cup of minced cabbage

2 tablespoons of minced ginger

1 tablespoon of minced garlic

1 tablespoon of Chinese rice wine (Shaoxing) or Japanese Saki or Mirin

6 scallions, sliced thinly crosswise, then chopped

2 tablespoons of soy sauce

50 wonton wrappers (one typical package)

1 egg, lightly beaten in a bowl

1/4 cup of water

Soup base ingredients:

9 cups of chicken broth

1 tsp. of sea salt

3 scallions, finely cut into 1/8" wide slices crosswise, including most of the green part

1 tbsp. of soy sauce

1 tbsp. of toasted sesame oil

24 frozen pre-cooked small to medium size shrimp, shelled and deveined. (You can use anything that appeals to you for taste and appearance in the soup. Some folks use slivers of roasted pork).

2 cups (packed) of shredded Chinese cabbage (I use regular cabbage or sometimes Napa. Baby Bok Choy can also be used.)

Directions:

Make an egg wash by whisking the raw egg in a shallow bowl, then adding 1 teaspoon of water, and then whisk again for one minute.

Make the wontons. Combine the ground pork, minced cabbage, ginger, garlic, scallions, rice wine and 2 tablespoons of soy sauce in a bowl with the 1/4 cup of water. Mix well.

Open the package of wonton wrappers (which are really just very thinly rolled dough slices cut into 3" x 3" squares, and lightly dusted with cornstarch to keep them from sticking together), about 50 per package.

Put a wonton wrapper in the palm of your hand and put about 2 tsp. of the filling into the center. Then use one finger of your other hand to dip into the egg wash and put a thin coating of egg wash along the perimeter of two adjacent sides of the wrapper about ½ inch wide. Fold the wonton into a triangle shape, squeezing the air out as you press the wrapper edges together going from one end to the other. Set the wonton on a dinner plate and repeat the process until all the filling mixture is used.

It is your choice how much or how little filling you use for each wonton. Note that anything more than 2 tsp. of filling per wrapper will make the proper closing and sealing more difficult, and perhaps not possible. Note also that the amount of filling per wrapper determines how many wrappers you will need to use, so the number 50 shown in the ingredient list is variable.

Now make the soup base. Put all the soup base ingredients except the scallion pieces into a 6 quart soup pot. Bring the mixture up to a low boil on high heat, then reduce the heat to low.

Put all of the wontons into the soup base a few at a time with light stirring.

Bring the soup base with wontons to a gentle boil and cook for five minutes. Add the sliced scallions and cook for one additional minute.

Ladle the soup into wide soup bowls, making sure each bowl has an even/equal mixture of soup base ingredients and wontons, and serve it. You and your guests will be delighted. It is very attractive and a great tasting soup.

Enjoy!

STARCHES:

Baked Potato - ☺♥

The baked potato is an unlikely entry in Food Nirvana as it is common and most folks know how to bake a potato. Some do not. A grilled steak with a baked potato and a tossed salad is so American that I decided to cover the bases and provide what most of the Internet experts agree to be the best baked potato, with my upgrades and explanations.

A word about potatoes is in order. Use fresh Russet potatoes and do not refrigerate them as that will change the sugar and starch balance. Do not use any potato that has green color anywhere on the surface. Cut out any bad sections from the potato prior to baking. You should not have to remove any eyes as that infers you do not have a fresh potato, but in any case remove any eyes. Wash the potato in a spray of cool water to remove any dirt and then dry the potato with a dish towel or paper towel.

The goal is to make a baked potato that has a crisp skin and a flaky interior, such that you want to eat the skin as well as the interior of the potato. Follow the directions below and that is exactly what you will get.

Ingredients:

1 medium large or large fresh Russet potato

1 tsp. of peanut oil

1 tsp. of flaky Kosher salt

Directions:

Set the oven to 425° F.

Use a fork to create 1/2" deep punctures in 12 different evenly spaced areas of the potato.

Lightly coat the potato with the peanut oil, wiping off any excess with a paper towel.

Rub the Kosher salt into the oiled potato skin surface.

Bake the potato for (depending on size) one hour (see explanations below) on the middle shelf of the oven, turning it over after the first 30 minutes.

Check for doneness by pushing a fork into the side of the potato. If it goes in easily the potato is done baking. If not, bake an additional 10 minutes, and repeat if necessary.

Remove the potato from the oven, slit the top of it down the middle, lengthwise, and serve it with butter, sour cream, etc.

Explanations:

My recommended baking temperature is anywhere from 20° F to 70° F hotter than what some experts recommend. Why? Well, they all coat the potato with oil and then inform you that if you do that the skin will not be crispy. Thus, I know that the higher baking temperature will produce a crisp and not burned surface. I also know that the higher temperature will assure that enough moisture is lost from the interior of the potato to make it flaky inside.

The length of time necessary to bake a potato depends on the size of the potato. The main goal is to lose enough moisture from the interior of the potato so that it is flaky when opened, not dense and wet. A small potato will be done in 40 minutes maximum. A medium potato will take about 50 minutes. A medium large potato will take an hour. A large potato will take an hour and 10 minutes. An extra large potato will take an hour and 20 minutes.

What about Sweet Potatoes? Well, we typically don't eat the skins of sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes have to cook longer than a regular potato to become soft inside. They are punctured to avoid any possibility of them exploding due to internal steam pressure. They are best baked inside an aluminum foil wrap, which is something you never want to do with a regular potato. The idea is that all the moisture of the sweet potato is desirable to keep inside the foil wrap, helping cook it to become soft, and the aluminum foil seals in the moisture. That is just the opposite of the goal and the method used for baking a regular potato. The baking temperature used for regular potatoes is fine for sweet potatoes, but give the sweet potatoes an extra 20 minutes of baking time for each given size.

Enjoy!

French Fries with Batter Coating - ☺♥

I hope your membership in Weight Watchers® is active. You will need it because you will eat too many of the fries you will make with this recipe. They are really good.

Ingredients:

2 1/2 pounds russet potatoes, peeled

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon garlic salt

1 teaspoon onion salt

1 teaspoon sea salt

1 teaspoon paprika

1/2 cup water or more as needed

3 cups vegetable or peanut oil for frying

Directions:

Batter Method:

Slice potatoes into French fries, 1/4" x 1/4" by whatever length and parboil them and dry them as described in the basic French Fries recipe.

Heat oil to 350°F in a large skillet over medium-high heat.

While the oil is heating, sift the flour, garlic salt, onion salt, sea salt, and paprika into a large bowl. Gradually stir in enough water so that the mixture can be drizzled from a spoon. The truth is that many different dry spices can be combined for the batter. Use your imagination.

Do the initial frying in small batches for up to three minutes each and remove the fries to a paper towel to cool. Allow the fries to cool completely. Be sure to let the oil reheat to 350°F between batches. The fries should be very light in color after the initial frying.

Dip the cooled fries into the batter one at a time, and place in the 350°F oil so they are not touching at first. The fries must be placed into the skillet one at a time, or they will clump together. Fry until they are light golden brown in color and crispy, about three to four minutes. But you decide when to remove each fry

based on your preference. Remove individually with tongs and drain on paper towels. Keep them on a platter in a 200°F oven until all batches are done.

Variation: (dry seasoning instead of batter coating)

After the first fry, when the fries cool, mix some dry seasonings in with the fries to coat them all and they will come out with a nice flavor. Use different combinations of herbs and seasonings depending on what you want at the time. For example use salt, pepper, onion and garlic powders, and perhaps some Cajun seasoning. Rub that all over the fries and then fry them the second time. They will come out nicely seasoned and flavored, but if you want even more intense taste then dust the fries with dry spice(s) after the second frying.

Superb French Fries - ☺♥T

The quality of French Fries made at home is typically inferior to that found in places like McDonalds® or a few good restaurants. Even typical restaurants often make inferior fries. The home cook usually encounters two problems ... the outside of the fries is too dark by the time the interior is cooked, and, the fries tend to become limp and greasy instead of crisp as they cool. Both of these problems can be eliminated by using some of the tricks used by McDonald's® and other savvy frying experts. There is a special recipe and research article in the New Recipes and Research section of Food Nirvana, which is the last Food Nirvana section of the web page. Within that area you will see a link for making so-called Perfect French Fries. Give it a look and you may decide to follow that recipe. It is similar to the recipe below but uses higher starting frying temperatures and less oil vs. the amount of potato being fried. Best of all, I tried it and it is better than my (now old) recipe was before. I didn't trash my recipe but the new one below has useful improvements to my old recipe, so I have made this version my official recipe. I do disagree with the recommendation in the research article to heat the oil to 400°F, for I prefer processing less potato pieces in more, lower temperature oil, to enhance control of the frying process and thus help the cook see when to remove the fries from the oil, at the optimal time(s).

First, use fresh Russet potatoes. Peel them and cut them into strips no more than 1/4" thick ... they can be wider than 1/4" if you want but not thicker, and of whatever length you have based on the size of the potatoes. Many of the better recipes recommend strips 1/4" by 1/4" to assure quick frying and crisp results, which I prefer. That is also exactly what is done by McDonald's®. Rinse the strips in cold water.

Recently I decided to find a machine to process whole russet potatoes to make raw French fries of the perfect size in large quantities so that I could vacuum seal and freeze the fries after the initial frying, and have them available any time I wanted them, quickly. I found exactly what I was looking for at www.kegworks.com and a picture of the machine that I bought from them is shown below. It cost \$68 plus \$12 shipping and it is excellent. I determined that the machine pays for itself after making 50 medium size individual serving bags of French Fries at home vs. buying them at McDonald's®. You definitely will want to consider purchasing the machine as a labor and time saving device that creates many cut raw fries of the perfect size, quickly, if you scale up your production as I have. Yes, uniformity is important for consistent perfection, and reducing your labor is very important to making cooking fun.

Do note that the picture shows only the machine and not the 1' by 2' by 3/4" board and the 3, 1 1/2" by 1' by 3/4" slats in three places under the board to receive screws and keep the board level, that I used to mount it. Why mount it? The force you apply with the long lever when you push a potato through the cutter requires something to hold the machine in place. Each leg/foot has a mounting hole so I suggest mounting it as I did and later using two, 4" "C" clamps and a 1 1/2" by 12" by 3/4" piece of wood and fastening the back end of the machine board, temporarily, to a counter top, before using it. The machine board and the slat are used in combination to sandwich the countertop so that the "C" clamp does not touch the countertop directly, which potentially could damage it. The machine directions recommend that it be mounted directly to a counter in a restaurant kitchen, but my temporary attachment method makes more sense in the home environment.

Second, use peanut oil if you want the best fries. Corn oil and soybean oil will work okay as long as you keep the oil temperature at or below 380°F, but the best taste comes from using peanut oil. I buy peanut oil in bulk at Costco® and thus I keep the price low. In addition, the peanut oil can be reused many times provided you use it only for the fries and avoid saving anything but the clean oil after it cools. Avoid the gunk in the bottom of the frying pot. I put my used oil in labeled quart canning jars, and I typically use it three or four times and then throw it away. Thus, you save money both by buying peanut oil in bulk (about four gallons) and by judicious use of the oil.

Third, parboil the potato strips before attempting to fry them. This will remove excess starch, which tends to burn in hot oil, and, parboiling gently for only up to ten minutes will not hurt the potatoes ... provided you use vinegar, for without it the potatoes will turn into mush. They will still be firm and flexible when cooled and dried after parboiling when you parboil them with some vinegar and salt in the water, but they will no longer be raw, so they will fry quickly.

To parboil, cover the rinsed strips from two extra large cut potatoes with fresh water in a two quart saucepan. Add one tablespoon of sea salt and three tablespoons (1 1/2 tbsp. per extra large potato) of rice vinegar or distilled white vinegar. Cover the pan and bring the water to a boil on high heat, then immediately reduce the heat to simmer and partially remove the lid. After ten minutes, remove the cut potatoes to a strainer or remove them with a wide scoop utensil with holes in the bottom, to eliminate excess water, and then let them dry on paper towels or on clean dish towels, with the individual pieces separated from each other to facilitate even and sufficient drying. The parboiled potato strips are now ready for frying. Note: If you are preparing a large quantity of French Fries then put small batches of raw cut fries into an already

boiling/simmering large pot of water, vinegar (scale the amount up to 1/3 cup per quart of water) and salt and remove them after ten minutes of simmering to a dry paper towel to absorb the water, or, to a drying rack. As before, give the hot potatoes about ten minutes to evaporate water and become dry. You may add a small additional amount of vinegar (one tbsp.) to the boiling water after each two batches of potato strips have been parboiled if you are using the saucepan method instead of the pot and also doing more than four extra large potatoes.

Heat the oil to 380°F in a deep fat fryer or to about 385°F and a depth of 5" less than the top of a large pot. Use a frying or candy thermometer if you are using the large pot method. It is best to fry smaller amounts of cut potatoes as that will avoid cooling the hot oil below optimum frying temperature (about 350°F). I suggest heating one quart of oil minimum for each serving of parboiled potato strips you want to fry in one batch. Your deep fat fryer or pot size will be the limiting factor, so you will know how to limit your batch size.

Fry each batch for one minute and check the color of the fries. They do not have to be tan in color. Actually, it is best if they are light blond in color. If your oil cooled below 340°F you may have to extend the frying time by another minute. Remove the fries from the oil with a slotted spoon or similar tool, allowing excess oil to run/drip into the pot, and then cool the fries on a paper towel or on a cookie cooling rack over a cookie tray, separated from each other. You can recapture excess oil with the second method, and that becomes important when you are frying many batches. Remember to heat the oil back up to 385°F, if using a pot, before starting the next batch. If the temperature tends to go too high then reduce the heat under your pot. Deep fat fryers typically have automatic temperature control. When all your batches of parboiled potato strips have been fried and cooled, then freeze the fries.

I freeze the fries in a deep freeze, in layers, on paper towels on cookie trays and then I later vacuum seal individual portions for long term freezer storage. It sure makes life easy going to the freezer any time I want and taking out as many single portion packages of frozen fries as I need for the occasion. If, like me, you vacuum seal the fries you can expect them to be perfect if kept in a deep freeze for easily a year or longer. That basically means you will likely learn to bulk process potatoes from peeling through the first frying, which is a great labor saver, and then you can eat fries many times without having to do anything more than drop the frozen fries into hot oil for the second frying. You can also skip the second frying by defrosting the fries in your microwave oven and then baking them, separated from each other, on a cookie cooling rack above a sheet of aluminum foil in a 350°F convection oven for 15 minutes. There is some sacrifice in flavor using the baking method, but also lower fat content in the finished fries.

When you are ready to use the frozen fries, heat the oil to 380°F and put each batch into the hot oil for a second frying. This time remove the fries when they have a light tan appearance, after about three minutes, and drain excess oil from them with paper towels. Salt them lightly. Place each batch into a 200°F warming oven on a drying rack or on layered paper towels on a plate until the last batch is made.

Note that the second frying is also started at a high temperature. This provides for the reheating of the frozen fries and you have the opportunity to observe the frying so that you can remove the fries before they become too dark. The second time around the oil temperature will go below 350°F because the fries were frozen when immersed in the hot oil. This is fine, for your control of the frying is much easier at lower temperatures, such that you can see exactly when the time is right to remove the completed French fries from the hot oil. Do try, however, to keep the oil temperature at 325°F or more during the second frying.

There is a very different frying procedure you can use when you are making only one or two servings of fries that is very convenient and which works well. Starting with the frozen fries simply open the pack(s) and put them into a skillet, separating the frozen fries from each other and aligning them in one direction and spreading them out to minimize the height of the group of frozen fries in the skillet. Then add enough room temperature peanut oil to barely cover the fries (but make sure you have at least one inch of skillet height above the top of the fries and oil mixture). Don't be surprised to see some of the oil partially solidify around some of the fries, due to the cold temperature. Now heat the oil and fries over high heat until they begin to bubble actively, then reduce the heat to medium and allow the fries to finish frying without any consideration of frying temperature. Simply observe the fries and when they are a light or pale tan color remove them from the oil, let them drain in a pre-warmed bowl on a paper towel or towels, salt them lightly and turn off the heat. You will be amazed. The fries come out crisp and excellent using this method and it is much easier to do than the high temperature method that uses an abundance of oil, but it is suitable only when making a few servings, else you have to do multiple frying batches. In other words, if you are making more than four servings use the standard high temperature frying method described earlier.

When you are done frying and ready to eat the fries, again salt them lightly and serve them hot. Let each person decide if they want more salt or ketchup or vinegar to enjoy with the fries. Some people even use mayonnaise or pepper. You will have happy guests as your French Fries will be attractive, uniform in color and crisp and not burned, and, they will taste great.

You have likely guessed that it is the second frying that results in the fries staying crisp instead of becoming limp. And by now you know that the parboiling allowed you to limit the frying time for finishing the cooking of the interior of the French Fries, so they do not come out too dark. The insides of the fries should be fluffy. The freezing process helped break down the interior of each fry to support more rapid loss of water in the second frying, thus the fluffy interior.

Note: The flavor of the fries can be enhanced even further if you use a seasoned batter coating prior to the second frying or a dry spice application after the second frying. See the seasoned coatings recipes below.

French Fries with a batter coating:

Prepare the following batter using any one or more of a number of spices in the amount shown below: (Old Bay® Seasoning, Cajun, Mrs. Dash®, Blackened seasoning, crushed peppercorns, etc. ... Whatever you want to try is fine ... So try multiple batters and pick out the one(s) you like best).

½ cup of water

½ cup of flour

1 tsp. Salt

½ tsp. Pepper

2 tsp. Spice

Mix the batter. If it is too thick then add a tablespoon of water and mix again. Repeat as necessary to develop a fairly thin batter that will mostly drip/run off a fry quickly.

The time to use the batter is just before the second frying. Dip each fry individually and let excess batter run off, then put the fry into 350°F hot oil. Note the lower starting temperature. The lower temperature keeps the batter from burning or becoming too dark. Do this for each fry to avoid having a bunch of them clump together during frying. Remove fries individually when the color indicates that they are done (light to medium tan). Keep a close eye on the oil temperature as frying fewer fries has less of a cooling effect and the oil temperature can become way too high very quickly. If that happens then turn the heat off and continue to do the fries and then turn the heat to a low setting once the oil temperature is back to 350°F. Drain excess oil off using paper towels, and then keep the fries crisp and warm on a heated platter in your oven until they are all done.

Another variation is to sprinkle seasoning on the fries after frying. That method will produce a more intense spice flavor. Some restaurants offer fries dusted with Old Bay® Seasoning. Use your imagination.

Enjoy ... Join Weight Watchers®!!!

Gnocchi with Gorgonzola Cheese Sauce - ☺♥♥♥☺

This dish is one of my all time favorites. It is simple to make and delicious. Due to the pungent nature of the Gorgonzola (Italian bleu) cheese, meal accompaniments should be complementary. For example, very ripe sweet bite size cantaloupe pieces wrapped with very thin Prosciutto ham is a great appetizer, or perhaps a robust salad-like (more vegetable varieties and less cheeses) antipasto, in which case no other salad is necessary with the meal.

Alternatively, a tossed salad with Italian dressing provides a nice acidic taste counterpart to the cheese sauce. A well peppered charcoal grilled steak or pork chop, or other meat that is not bland (like grilled Italian sweet or hot sausages) goes well, much better than chicken or fish. Crusty hot rolls with butter are a nice addition. I recommend a clean tasting white wine with this meal, semi-dry, like an Italian Pinot Grigio or French White Burgundy, or a buttery California Chardonnay. Red wines are not appropriate as their taste/aftertaste interferes/clashes with that of the cheese sauce. As usual, a side glass of ice water is a must. Dessert should be light and cold, like a small dish of spumoni ice cream.

I have not made the gnocchi from scratch and I suspect I never will. I have found it too easy to buy really good gnocchi cheaply! So you can read below for your amusement about how to make gnocchi and then forget about it. The remainder of this recipe is mostly as I got it from the Internet, along with a few of my hints.

Gnocchi are a potato based soft pasta, with enough flour used to allow workable dough to be formed. When you use less flour, you end up with lighter gnocchi, which is good. The trick is to not overwork the dough, and to use only as much flour as is needed to create soft, workable dough. By using the yolk of the egg alone the dough is more tender than it will be with the whole egg. When you want to cook the gnocchi, drop small amounts (ten pieces per batch) into two quarts of salted boiling water. When they rise to the surface they are complete. That only takes about two to three minutes per batch.

If you want to make this dish in the easiest way simply buy packages of gnocchi at your supermarket or via the Internet. You will save a lot of time and effort.

Ingredients: (Serves four to six people)

For the Gnocchi: (or buy a one pound package of gnocchi)

4 medium sized russet potatoes (about 2 lbs.)

1 large egg yolk

1-2 cups of flour

Salt (No quantity given, so I suggest 1/2 tsp. of sea salt)

For the Gorgonzola Sauce:

4 oz of Gorgonzola (or any good quality bleu) cheese (room temperature)

1 oz of butter (one fourth of one stick)

8 oz of heavy cream (or more, read below)

For the Garnish:

Freshly chopped parsley (about ½ cup)

Grated Parmegiano cheese (Buy a chunk of Locatell and use a hand operated grater. Don't use pre-grated cheese.)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Wash and dry the potatoes.

Bake the potatoes until they are fork tender, about 45 minutes. Adjust the baking time up or down based on the size of the potatoes.

While the potatoes are baking prepare the sauce. Slice the cheese into thin slices. Heat the cream and butter in a good quality (thick bottom) large non-stick skillet over low heat until the butter is melted. Then add the cheese gradually while stirring. Continue until all the cheese has been completely mixed into the sauce. I then let the mixture boil gently for a few minutes, stirring constantly, to slightly reduce the liquid content, which causes desirable slight thickening. Set the sauce aside in the skillet in which it was prepared. You will use it later.

Note that if you limit the cream to 8 ounces as shown in this recipe then any leftover gnocchi and gorgonzola cream sauce will not rewarm to make a smooth sauce. It will separate and not be all that good. However, if you increase the amount of cream used originally to 10 to 12 ounces you get a lighter sauce but one that rewarms nicely if you have leftovers.

When the potatoes are cool enough to handle, peel them and put them through a potato ricer. If you are impatient like me you can save time by cutting the potatoes in half lengthwise while hot and scooping out the contents with a soup spoon while holding each hot half with a dish towel, and discarding the skins.

You can also use an electric mixer on low speed to create the same effect as a potato ricer.

While still warm, place the prepared potatoes on a large wooden cutting board forming a mound with a hole in the center.

Add the egg yolk and the ½ tsp. salt into the center.

Slowly start adding the flour a little at a time, mixing well with your hands and continue until you have created soft workable dough.

Knead gently only briefly until you have achieved a smooth, pliable if slightly sticky dough.

To shape the gnocchi, first break the dough into pieces about the size of a tennis ball, and roll each piece into a log about 1/2 to 5/8ths of an inch in diameter.

Cut the log into inch long pieces.

To finish, take a fork and place it against your work board.

With the fork back towards you, press each piece of dough with your index finger firmly up the length of the fork tines.

Let the gnocchi fall back onto the board and continue with the remaining pieces in this manner. This process gives the gnocchi the characteristic fluted design on one side and somewhat flattens the gnocchi from tube shape to slightly oval.

Place the prepared gnocchi on a lightly floured baking sheet and either cook immediately, or keep refrigerated until ready to use, preferably not more than 3 hours.

To cook, drop about ten pieces per batch into two quarts of salted boiling water and remove individual pieces as they float to the surface. Drain the gnocchi and set them aside.

Now is the time to grill the meat, so that it can be served hot on a warmed serving platter.

During the grilling of the second side of the meat, mix the gnocchi a few pieces at a time gently with the Gorgonzola sauce, over low heat, in the same skillet used to make the sauce. When it starts to boil (bubble gently) it is done.

Serve the gnocchi and Gorgonzola cheese sauce hot in a pre-warmed serving dish, and sprinkle it with the fresh, chopped parsley.

Sprinkle individual servings with freshly grated Parmegiano cheese at the table. Note it is well worth buying a small drum type hand crank grater to do harder better quality grating cheeses at the table. You can find them in stores that specialize in Italian foods.

I like to season the dish with a small amount of finely cracked black peppercorn. Salt is not needed as the Gorgonzola cheese provides plenty of salt.

Hash Brown Potato Patties - ☺

Most hash brown potatoes found in restaurants or private homes are loosely mixed combinations of potato cubes or grated/shredded potatoes and chopped onion with salt and pepper, fried in rendered bacon fat or soybean or equivalent vegetable oils. The type of hash brown patties found at fast food restaurants and freezer sections of supermarkets are a definite improvement over most of the home made and typical restaurant style hash brown potatoes. Why? The primary reason is that the water contained in the potato cubes or grated/shredded potatoes is fried from the surface of the potato but the interior is typically mushy soft after cooking. In other words, water is the problem.

Removing enough water from cubed potato pieces before frying is impractical for the home cook, so the best idea is to grate or shred the potatoes, rinse the pieces in water to remove excess starch, and then drain the pieces well in a colander and then press the potato pieces in a thin layer between dish towels, and then paper towels, to remove most of the moisture. You can be more sophisticated and follow the Food Nirvana recipe for preparing potatoes for French Fries by parboiling the potato pieces briefly, one to two minutes, in water that contains a small amount of white distilled vinegar and a bit of kosher salt. In that case the parboiled pieces are drained in a colander and then distributed in a very thin layer on a dish towel and allowed to air dry at room temperature for half an hour prior to frying. The pieces should look and feel fairly dry on all surfaces. They will not oxidize and turn brown due to the vinegar used in parboiling.

Ingredients:

1 pound of Yukon Gold or Russet potatoes, washed, peeled and grated/shredded

1 shallot, peeled (or a small onion) and then grated (or finely diced)

1/2 cup of shredded Cheddar Cheese

1/3 cup of all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley (optional)

1 extra large egg, lightly whisked

1/2 tsp. of Kosher salt and 1/2 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper

Peanut oil, or rendered bacon fat, for frying

Directions:

Grate/shred the potatoes and finely dice or grate the shallot/onion using your food processor or a manual grater and/or a paring knife. Add the pieces to a colander, rinse well with cold water, and squeeze dry using a clean dish towel, making sure to get rid of all of the surface moisture.

Place the potato and shallot/onion pieces into a two quart bowl along with the cheese, flour, parsley, whisked egg and one half teaspoon of Kosher salt and one half teaspoon of ground pepper. Mix well using your hands or a large wooden spoon.

Heat about 1/4 cup of peanut oil (or a 1/8 inch thick layer of melted bacon fat) in a large cast-iron (or non-stick heavy bottom) skillet until hot (roughly 360 degrees F, which you can check easily with an instant read thermometer by tipping the skillet slightly and pooling the oil/melted fat on one side of the skillet).

Scoop 1/4 to 1/3 cup of the potato mixture into the skillet and flatten it with a spatula until the patty is 1/2 inch thick in the middle. --> TIP: If the underside of the spatula is slippery with a bit of the cooking oil/fat then the patty surface will not stick to the spatula during flattening. Repeat for the remaining patties leaving an inch of space on all sides to allow later easy use of the spatula to flip the patties.

Fry the patties on medium to medium high heat until they are golden and crisp, 2 to 3 minutes on the first side, and then flip and fry them for another 2 minutes on the second side. Remove the fried hash brown patties to a paper towel lined baking sheet to absorb excess cooking oil/fat. Repeat in batches.

Keep the hash brown potato patties warm and fairly crisp before serving by placing them in a single layer on a wire rack set over a baking sheet, and put the baking sheet into a 200 degree F warming oven. The patties are best in terms of crispness when served immediately after frying, so you may want to prepare other meal items before frying the hash brown patties.

Enjoy!

Macaroni and Cheese - ☺♥

Food Nirvana has a boss recipe for Lobster Mac and Cheese. But sometimes we want the dish without the seafood so I decided to make a menu entry for plain Mac and Cheese ... except it surely isn't plain! Actually, it is almost the same as the recipe for Lobster Mac and Cheese, simply excluding the seafood and a modifying/changing a few other ingredients and slightly bumping up a few ingredient amounts so that you will fill a 9" by 13" by 2" oven proof casserole.

In short, this "plain" version of macaroni and cheese will knock your socks off. It is really delicious, as attested to by my sweetheart, Peggy!

Ingredients: (Serves six to eight people)

1 tsp. of salt for the pot of water

1 pound of uncooked elbow macaroni

20 ounces of light cream (or a 50:50 mixture of heavy cream and milk)

4 tbsp. of butter for making a roux

1/3 cup of all purpose flour

8 ounces of gruyere cheese, grated

4 ounces of Swiss cheese, grated

2 ounces of soft provolone cheese, chopped

8 ounces of extra sharp white cheddar cheese, grated

1/2 teaspoon (or more) of freshly ground black pepper

2 tbsp. of butter for the Panko bread crumbs

1 teaspoon of salt for the cream sauce

1 cup of Panko bread crumbs

Directions:

Turn on the oven to 325°F.

Put one gallon of water and one tsp. salt into a 2 gallon pot. Bring the water to a rapid boil and add the macaroni and cook it on low to medium heat according to the directions on the package, about six to eight minutes to get it to an al dente state. Drain the macaroni well in a colander. Set the macaroni aside.

Grate the gruyere, cheddar and Swiss cheeses and chop the provolone cheese while the macaroni is cooking, putting the mixture into a large bowl.

Heat the cream or cream and milk mixture in a small (1 1/2 qt.) saucepan on low heat to a low simmer, but don't let it boil.

In the empty pot used to make the macaroni, melt 4 tablespoons of butter and then add the flour to make the roux. Cook over low heat for 2 minutes, stirring the mixture continuously with a whisk.

Add the hot cream or cream/milk mixture gradually while whisking and cook for a minute or two more, until the sauce is thickened and smooth.

Turn the heat to very low then add the salt and pepper, and then the cheeses in small amounts, mixing well with a large wooden spoon.

Add the macaroni gradually and stir gently but thoroughly.

Place the mixture into a 9" by 13" by 2" oven casserole dish.

Melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter in the saucepan used for the cream. Mix the Panko bread crumbs with the melted butter until the crumbs are coated evenly and then sprinkle the mixture evenly on top of the macaroni and cheese.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, or until the sauce is bubbly and the bread crumbs lightly browned on the top.

Serve immediately or keep the casserole covered and warm until the meal is served.

You will get very nice compliments.

Marie's Fried Potato Dumplings - ☺♥

I've no idea where Marie got this recipe, but it is a sneaky way to put on fifty pounds without even trying. The dumplings are so good it is easy to forget how many you can eat. Trust me, you will eat a lot. They are excellent.

The recipe as shown is kept simple, the way Marie made them, without the addition of extra flavoring or seasoning ingredients, but note that you could consider mixing in small amounts (1/4 to 1/3 cup) of grated (Parmesan) cheese or perhaps a teaspoon or two of an herb like dried basil to the dumpling mixture, prior to forming the dumplings.

The picture shown with this recipe is of whole dumplings but we improved that a lot by cutting them in half prior to frying (sautéing) in butter.

Ingredients: (makes 20 to 24 dumplings for the boiling step and after cutting 40 to 48 half dumpling pieces ready to sauté)

2 very large russet potatoes

1 1/2 cups of diced onion

1 quarter pound stick of butter

1/2 cup of all purpose flour (more if needed)

1 jumbo egg or two large eggs

Flour to coat your hands for forming the potato mixture into dumplings

Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Peel and then grate the potatoes on to a wood cutting board. Put them into a colander and press them to remove excess water, then lightly salt them.

Whisk the egg(s) in a two quart bowl and then gradually add the grated potatoes while mixing them with a serving spoon. It is at this point that you might (optionally) add in other flavoring or seasoning ingredients during the mixing.

Add half of the flour to the potato/egg mixture and mix well. Continue adding flour and mixing with the spoon until the mixture is not totally sticky. You may need somewhat more flour than the indicated 1/2 cup.

Note that the mixture should remain somewhat sticky, which is necessary for the dumplings to later hold their shape and not fall apart before boiling. You want potato dumplings, not grated potatoes lost in flour dumplings.

Coat your dry hands with flour. This will keep the dumpling mixture from sticking to your hands.

Form the potato/egg/flour mixture into about 20 to 24 dumpling balls 1 1/4 inches in diameter by rolling small portions of the mixture between the palms of your hands. Put the dumplings on to a plate as you make them.

Heat two quarts of lightly salted water to boiling in a 3 quart pot or large saucepan.

Put the half of the dumplings into the boiling water individually so they don't stick to each other (you cook them in two separate batches). Cook them for ten minutes or until the dumplings float. Note that the dumplings are so heavy they will sink to the bottom of the pot or saucepan and likely stick to it during cooking unless the pot or pan is non-stick.

You may have to use a serving spoon to gently disconnect each of them from the bottom of the pot or saucepan. Otherwise they may be cooked and ready to float but you won't know that. Drain the boiled dumplings in a strainer or colander. Repeat the boiling procedure for the other half of the dumplings.

Cut the drained dumplings in half and sauté the pieces in the butter in a large skillet on medium heat. Mix them while sautéing so the entire surface starts to change color. After the dumplings have started to turn light tan all over the surfaces, add the chopped onion to the butter and dumplings as part of the sauté process. It is a nice addition. Continue sautéing until the onions turn color into tan, then put the fried potato dumplings and onion pieces into a pre-warmed serving dish.

Note that you can keep the fried dumplings warm in a 180 degrees F warming oven while you complete making/serving other meal items.

Serve the fried potato dumplings with the onions hot, and add pepper and salt to your own taste.

Marie's Oven Browned Potatoes - ☺

I am grateful that Marie did not go on a healthy food kick early in our marriage, for then I would have missed many tasty dishes she made. This recipe is simple and very good as an accompaniment to many meat, fowl and fish entrees.

Ingredients:

4 medium russet potatoes

½ to ¾ stick of butter (your preference)

1 to 2 tsp. of kosher salt

1 to 2 tsp. of cracked peppercorns

½ tsp. of Sea salt

Directions:

Set your oven temperature to 325°F.

Peel the potatoes and cut them into bite size chunks. Put the potatoes into a four quart saucepan with enough water to cover them, add the sea salt, cover the saucepan and set the heat on high to bring the water to a boil. Remove the lid when the water boils. Reduce the heat to low and cook the potatoes for only five minutes.

Put the butter into a 9"x13"x2" ovenproof glass baking dish and put it into the oven to melt the butter. Then remove it from the oven and put it on a wooden cutting board.

Drain the potatoes and transfer them to the 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish. Mix the potatoes with the butter, coating them evenly.

Sprinkle the kosher salt and the cracked peppercorns evenly over the potatoes, then put the glass dish back into the oven.

Roast the potatoes for ten minutes and then turn them over with a spatula to cause all sides to brown evenly. Repeat this process until the potatoes have a light golden brown color. Do not over bake. The potatoes are done when the outside is barely crisp.

Remove the dish from the oven and serve the potatoes.

Mashed Potatoes - ☺♥T

Recipes for mashed potatoes number in the dozens, based on the addition of ingredients other than the potato, salt, pepper, milk and butter. This recipe is for making really good regular mashed potatoes. The idea is that starting with the right potatoes and using good techniques will lead to wonderful mashed potatoes every time. Other than choosing russet potatoes (my favorite) the real point of this recipe is learning the best techniques to guarantee success in taste and consistency.

A word about potatoes is in order. Use fresh Russet or Idaho potatoes and do not refrigerate them as that will screw up the sugar and starch balance. Cut out any bad sections from the potato prior to cooking. You should not have to remove any eyes as that infers you do not have a fresh potato, but in any case remove any eyes. Wash each potato in cold water under a faucet to remove any dirt and set it aside.

The goal is to make mashed potatoes that are light and moist, not gummy or lumpy or too dry. You will quickly see that there are two parts of the process that matter the most ... the boiling/simmering period and the control of milk addition to get perfect consistency while whipping the potatoes using an electric mixer.

Ingredients: (makes four very generous to six large servings)

3 very large fresh Russet potatoes (about 2 1/2 lbs.)

1/2 stick of room temperature butter

1 tsp. of sea salt plus 1/4 tsp. of sea salt to be added to the saucepan for cooking the potatoes

1/2 tsp. of black pepper

1/2 to 1 cup of milk

1 quart of water or two 14 ounce cans of chicken broth

1/2 tsp. of distilled white vinegar (optional)

Directions:

Turn on the oven to 160°F.

Wash and peel the potatoes, keeping in mind the general information given earlier in this recipe about potato quality.

Cut each potato into pieces no more than 1/2 inch thick and roughly 3/4" by 3/4". The idea is that you want the pieces to cook through quickly while simmering so the outer surface does not become mealy. Immerse the cut pieces in a large bowl of cold water.

Put one quart of water or two 14 ounce cans of chicken broth into a three quart saucepan. If you use the chicken broth then add 1/2 cup of water to the saucepan.

Add the vinegar (optional) and the 1/4 tsp. of sea salt to the saucepan. Mix the contents.

Drain the water from the potato pieces and add them to the saucepan. The liquid should just cover the potato pieces. If not, add additional liquid. Cover the saucepan with a lid.

Heat the saucepan contents over high heat until the liquid boils gently, checking frequently to avoid boil over. Then reduce the heat to low and simmer the potatoes for ten minutes, with the lid partially covering the saucepan. Fully covering the saucepan with the lid will result in boil over, and that isn't fun to clean up later.

After ten minutes of simmering use a spoon to extract one piece of potato and puncture it with a fork. If the fork goes through fairly easily the potatoes are done cooking and they should be captured in a strainer and set aside. If the potatoes are not done cooking (raw in the center) it will be difficult to penetrate them with the fork, so let them simmer for an additional minute and test for doneness again. Repeat as necessary. It is important to avoid overcooking the potatoes. If they start to disintegrate while simmering or look mealy they have been cooked too long. They should not fall apart, in fact they should look pretty much the same as when they were first put into the saucepan.

If you are making gravy with your meal then the cooking liquid remaining from the saucepan should be saved and set aside in a bowl to be used in making the gravy.

Put the drained potato pieces into a large mixing bowl and use your electric mixer to process them to eliminate all lumps. Start on low speed and increase the speed to medium for about two minutes. Check the consistency and if necessary mix for an additional minute.

Add the butter, the one teaspoon of sea salt and the 1/2 teaspoon of black pepper and mix for a minute on medium speed.

Stop the mixer and add 1/2 cup of milk. Start the mixer on low speed and operate it at that speed for a minute to get the milk well blended with the mashed potatoes. Then increase the mixer speed to medium high to whip the potatoes. Whip them for one minute at that speed and then increase the speed to high for one minute.

Stop the mixer and test the consistency of the mashed potatoes. If they are too stiff or too dry then add 1/4 cup of milk and repeat the whipping process of the previous step. Repeat this step only if necessary.

Check the final consistency of the mashed potatoes. They should be light and moist, not clumpy and not gooey or gummy. If they are clumpy or too dry then make one final addition of 1/8 cup of milk and repeat the whipping process.

Put the mashed potatoes into a serving bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and place the bowl into a 160°F warming oven.

Serve the mashed potatoes when all other parts of the meal have been placed on the table.

Have each guest add gravy or butter to their individual portion of mashed potatoes according to their wishes.

Enjoy!

Patty Cakes - 😊♥

I needed to add a recipe to Food Nirvana for a fried potato dish my mother used to make that she called Patty Cakes. So I have. Now you get to make and enjoy these treats. The recipe/directions may or may not be identical to what she did but the result is very tasty fried potato patties, and my recipe is very simple/easy to do, provided you have the right tool to shred a potato.

My main challenge in making patty cakes was the lack of a proper tool to create very long, thin pieces of shredded potato ... roughly 1/16" thick and 2" to 3" long. Recently I saw a mandolin advertised on Amazon® that looked perfect for doing the shredding just the way I wanted it to be. And so it was.

The brand of the mandolin is Zerla®, and it is mostly plastic with a container underneath to catch whatever you happen to be slicing, shredding or making into a julienne. It is depth adjustable and it has multiple, different interchangeable processing surfaces. I give it a thumbs up for quality, versatility, safety and ease of use, and it certainly is not expensive at \$15.99.

A peeled raw potato is shredded along its length into 2" to 4" (or more) long thin pieces using the Zerla® mandolin (or equivalent), and the shredded pieces are washed very well in a large bowl of water and put into a large sieve or colander to drain away starch. More water is used to rinse away any remaining surface starch. Then the potato pieces are removed by hand all at once and squeezed to drain off excess water. The idea is to reduce excess moisture prior to frying. You may have to do the squeezing for half of the shredded potato twice if you have small hands.

I'm sure you will enjoy eating these patty cakes. They are crunchy outside and soft in the middle, and they are very different from French Fries or Hash Brown patties in consistency and taste. They are unique.

If you are making more patties than specified in this recipe (a good idea!) be sure to keep the completed fried patties from each batch on a paper towel lined plate in a 180 degrees F warming oven until all the patties are made.

If the patty cakes are the carbohydrate dish for a complete meal you should make the other food items first, depending on what protein item you are planning to serve.

Mom used to make fried ham slices and a side of buttered steamed broccoli. Yummy! Thus, the ham slices and the broccoli could share a warming oven with the patty cakes until the whole meal was ready.

Ingredients: (serves two adults three medium size patties each)

One jumbo size or two large size Russet potatoes, washed, peeled, shredded, with the shredded pieces washed and rinsed to eliminate starch, then squeezed to remove excess moisture

Sea Salt to taste after frying

Approximately 1 to 2 cups of peanut oil or canola oil for frying in a large skillet

Directions:

Divide the shredded potato into six compact mounds on a paper towel.

Heat 1/4" deep peanut or canola oil in a 12" diameter skillet on a large stovetop burner on medium high heat to approximately 350 degrees F.

Use an instant read thermometer to get an approximate idea of the oil temperature. Tip the skillet slightly to form a pool of hot oil on one side and stick the tip of the thermometer into that pool of oil to get a fairly accurate temperature measurement.

Note that the oil temperature will continue to increase while you form and place potato patty mounds into the oil ... but the addition of the cold patties will quickly reduce the oil temperature to the desired 350 degrees F or even lower.

Note also that the temperature will tend to vary a lot because there is very little oil used for frying patty cakes. Using more oil than indicated will cause the mounds to separate into a skillet full of unconnected pieces, hence no patty cakes. You want to avoid that problem.

Make a compacted ball of a shredded potato mound by hand, then place it into the hot oil gently to avoid having the potato pieces separate.

There will be a lot of bubbling initially as water is converted into steam by the hot oil.

Put two more compacted balls of shredded potato into the skillet, then increase the heat to high.

Let the shredded potato mounds fry on the first side for about two minutes.

Press on the top of each mound of shredded potato with a spatula to flatten it and start to form the patty.

Fry the first side for approximately one more minute, then gently flip the patties over. Flatten each one right after flipping it with the spatula to a thickness of 1/2". Fry the patties on the second side for three minutes.

Be sure to check the oil temperature during frying and adjust the heat as necessary to maintain a temperature of around 350 degrees F.

If the patties are golden in color around the edges they are done. If not, fry them for one additional minute on each side. The top and bottom center surfaces will be crisp but not necessarily golden in color like the edges, and that is okay.

Remove the patties to a paper towel individually using a slotted spoon or spider or even tongs to first drain excess oil from each patty back into the skillet, then put it onto the paper towel. Then salt that patty immediately.

Be sure to put the completed patty cakes on a paper towel lined plate in a 180 degrees F warming oven.

Repeat the above steps to make and fry patties from the three remaining shredded potato mounds. Typically one jumbo size russet potato will make only two batches of three medium size patties. If you process two or more jumbo size potatoes you may have to add a small amount of additional oil to the skillet to maintain an oil depth close to 1/4".

Serve the patty cakes hot with additional sea salt available if wanted. I enjoy cold beer as a fine beverage when I eat patty cakes.

Enjoy!

Quinoa Rice - ?

This recipe came from The Woks of Life® web site. It combines quinoa and rice to make a more interesting carbohydrate to serve with dinner, plus the quinoa provides additional protein.

I have yet to make this food item. I will report back after doing it.

Ingredients:

1/2 cup of quinoa

1 1/2 cups of jasmine rice

2 1/2 cups of water

1 teaspoon of Sea salt

Directions:

Toast the quinoa in a dry pan over medium-high heat for 5-8 minutes, or until it is a couple of shades darker and you start to hear a light crackling/popping sound.

Add the rice and quinoa and salt to a medium pot with a tight-fitting lid. Add 2 1/2 cups of water (some extra water will help avoid accidental burning), bring to a boil, and immediately cover the pot.

Reduce the heat to the lowest setting, and cook for 15-20 minutes. Take a peek at the 15-minute mark by stirring the mixture to make sure the bottom of the pan isn't getting scorched. If necessary, add 1/4 cup of water and stir, then put the lid on and complete the cooking.

When the grains are fluffy and cooked through, fluff them with a rice paddle and serve hot.

Enjoy!

Ray's Corn Pudding - ☺♥

This recipe is of my own making based on memories of Marie's corn pudding, what I found across various Internet recipes, and my own ideas. It is great, and different from other corn puddings due to my inclusion of bacon and small pieces of bell peppers.

I'm getting hungry just thinking about this dish. I am anxious to make it again.

Ingredients:

4 strips of bacon

1 cup of finely chopped sweet onion

1/2 cup of freshly diced green bell pepper

1/2 cup of freshly diced sweet red bell pepper

1 teaspoon of salt

3/4 teaspoon of black pepper

1 cup of grated extra sharp cheddar cheese

5 extra large eggs

1/3 cup of butter, melted

1/4 cup of sugar

1/2 cup of milk

1 cup of light cream

4 tablespoons of cornstarch

3, 15 oz. cans of corn kernels, drained

Directions:

Put the corn in an electric mixer bowl and mix it for five minutes, first on slow speed, then medium, then medium high. That will break up the kernels and make them soft for use in the casserole.

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Fry the bacon in a skillet on medium heat until it is crisp but not burned or overcooked.

Remove the bacon from the skillet and set it aside on a paper towel to drain.

When it is cool break up the bacon into small pieces and set them aside.

Sauté the chopped sweet onion in the hot bacon fat for about five minutes on medium heat, or until it is translucent.

Remove the skillet from the heat and put the onion pieces on a folded paper towel on a saucer to drain excess bacon fat.

Lightly butter a 9" by 13" by 2" glass baking dish.

Whisk the eggs until they are well mixed in a large, 3 quart bowl.

Add the melted butter, sugar, cream and milk to the bowl gradually while continuing to whisk.

Whisk in the cornstarch, the salt and the pepper.

Stir in the onion pieces, the bacon pieces, the diced raw green and red pepper pieces and the corn.

Stir in the grated cheddar cheese and mix well.

Pour the mixture into the prepared baking dish.

Bake for 1 hour, but check after 45 minutes to make certain the top is not becoming too dark. If it is already a golden or light brown color then cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and continue baking for the last 15 minutes.

Serve the corn pudding or keep it in a 160°F warming oven until the meal is served.

Rice Pilaf Recipes - ?

A variety of meals are enhanced by serving a rice pilaf instead of plain rice. I decided to add a few recipes for rice pilaf to Food Nirvana simply to provide some variety to the starch food items. Even the best foods can become boring if we eat them too often, so make some rice now and then for variety. It also tastes fine and it is very easy to prepare.

Almond Rice Pilaf:

Ingredients:

3/4 cup of chopped onion

1/2 cup of slivered almonds

2 tablespoons of butter

1½ cups of chicken broth

½ cup of orange juice

2 cloves of garlic, sliced

½ tsp. of black pepper

¼ tsp. of sea salt

1 cup of raw/uncooked basmati rice

Directions:

In a saucepan, sauté onion, garlic and almonds in butter until the onion is tender and the almonds are lightly browned. Add the pepper and mix.

Cook the basmati rice in the chicken broth and orange juice with ¼ tsp. sea salt ... then add that to the sautéed onions, garlic and almonds done in the butter.

Serve hot.

Fragrant Rice Pilaf:

Ingredients:

1/2 teaspoon of ground cumin

1/4 teaspoon of crumbled saffron threads

1/4 teaspoon of salt
1 tablespoon of butter
1 tablespoon of olive oil
1 cup of finely diced onion
2 tablespoons of finely minced garlic
4 carrots, cut into 1/4" by 1/4" diced pieces
1 1/2 cups of long-grain rice
3 1/2 cups of chicken broth
1/2 to 3/4 cup of dried cherries

Directions:

Combine the cumin, saffron and salt. Set aside.

Heat the butter and oil in a pot over low heat. Add the onion and wilt, stirring, for 5 minutes.

Add garlic and carrots; cook 5 minutes more, sprinkling with the spice mixture.

Add the rice and cook for 1 minute, stirring to mix well. Add the broth and cherries.

Bring the mixture to a boil, reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, covered, until all the liquid is absorbed, about 20 minutes.

Fluff the rice with a fork. Serve hot.

Scalloped Potatoes with Cheese - ☺♥

This recipe got five stars from virtually all reviewers on the Internet. It is from Food.com®. That was good enough for me so I tried the recipe and I'm reporting back to you. I wondered why they didn't make this dish to be Potatoes au Gratin? You can check out the Potatoes au Gratin variation below this recipe.

Bottom line: This is a very nice recipe. I amped it up using more cheese and a variety of cheeses. I had equal amounts of Swiss cheese, Parmegiano Reggiano and extra sharp hard provolone, all grated. The typical recipe uses only cheddar cheese, which is perfectly fine, but no match for my chosen cheese combination, which is "Wow!" in the taste department.

I make raw potato slices 1/16th to 1/8th of an inch thick using my commercial meat slicer because it is very fast, but you can easily use a mandolin or even a high quality food processor with a variable thickness slicing option. I then rinse the excess starch from the slices and let them drain.

Ingredients:

4 cups (or a bit more) of thinly sliced potatoes (about 1/16th inch to 1/8th inch thick ... about 3 large russet baking potatoes)

3 tablespoons of butter

3 tablespoons of flour

3 cups of milk, divided

1 teaspoon of salt

1 dash of cayenne pepper

1 cup (or a bit more) of grated sharp cheddar or other cheese(s) (white and/or yellow, your choice)

1 cup of grated cheese(s), to sprinkle on top

A light sprinkling of paprika as a garnish

Directions:

Turn on the oven and set the temperature to 350°F.

Melt the butter on low heat in a one quart saucepan and blend in the flour to make a roux.

Let the roux rest for a minute.

Add 2 cups of the cold milk gradually while stirring with a whisk.

Season the mixture with the salt and the cayenne pepper.

Cook the sauce on medium heat while stirring with a whisk until it is smooth and boiling.

Reduce the heat to low and stir in the first cup of grated cheese(s).

Place half of the sliced potatoes into a lightly buttered 1 1/2 quart oven casserole.

Pour half of the cheese sauce over potatoes.

Repeat with the second layer of potatoes and the cheese sauce.

Add the remaining one cup of milk along the outside edges of the potato slices.

Sprinkle the cup of remaining cheese(s) on top.

Top the casserole with some paprika for color.

Bake uncovered for about 1 hour at 350°F.

Serve hot.

Expect applause. You will get it.

Scalloped Potatoes with Ham - ☺♥

Here is a useful way to serve leftover ham that your family will enjoy. This casserole dish is similar to scalloped potatoes with cheese, but with some diced ham added.

Ingredients:

6 cups of russet potato slices

3 tbsp. of butter, divided

3 cups of diced ham (1/4" cubes)

1 1/2 cups of milk

1 1/2 cups of heavy cream

1/4 cup of flour

1 1/4 cups of grated white sharp cheddar cheese

1 cup of grated hard provolone or pecorino Romano cheese

Black pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Lightly butter a 9" x 13" glass casserole with one tablespoon of butter.

Heat two tablespoons of butter in a large skillet on medium heat.

Add the diced ham to the skillet and cook with stirring until it is thoroughly heated, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Remove the skillet from the heat and set it aside.

Combine the milk and cream in a microwave safe container, and microwave it for a minute or two, until the mixture is no longer cold.

Whisk in the flour and pepper until the ingredients are totally combined, then set the mixture aside. (You may add salt, but the cheese and ham are salty, so add salt sparingly.)

Combine/mix the 2 grated cheeses in a bowl. Set the bowl aside.

Wash and peel the potatoes.

Use a mandolin or other type of slicer to cut the potatoes into 1/16" to 1/8" thick slices (thinner is better).

Rinse the potato slices to remove excess starch and let them drain in a colander for five minutes.

Layer one-third of the potato slices in the prepared casserole dish.

Spread one-third of the ham on top, then sprinkle one-third of the grated cheeses, then pour on one-third of the cream mixture evenly.

Do the layering steps two more times, ending with a sprinkling of cheese and the rest of the cream mixture.

Cover the casserole with aluminum foil and bake the contents for 40 minutes.

Remove the aluminum foil and continue baking until the casserole contents are bubbly and hot, with the top turning gold in color, about 20 minutes more, or a bit longer if necessary.

Remove the casserole from the oven and put it on a wood cutting board.

Use a spatula to cut the scalloped potatoes with ham into serving size squares.

Serve the scalloped potatoes with ham while hot, along with any other side dishes you made for the meal.

Enjoy!

Potatoes Au Gratin - ☺♥

Here is a similar recipe to the one for scalloped potatoes with cheese but with bread crumbs on top, named as I would expect, Potatoes Au Gratin. I changed the potato requirement, the baking temperature and the time to accommodate the use of very thinly sliced raw potatoes.

Ingredients:

4 cups of diced cooked potatoes (Nah! Use raw thinly sliced potatoes, just like in the first recipe.)

6 tablespoons of butter

3 tablespoons of flour

1 1/2 cups of milk

1 cup of shredded cheese(s)

Salt and pepper

1 cup of soft bread crumbs

Directions:

Turn the oven on and set the temperature to 350°F.

Prepare four cups of very thinly sliced (1/16th") raw potatoes using a food processor or mandolin.

Place the potatoes in a shallow, lightly buttered, broiler-proof baking dish.

Melt 6 tablespoons of butter in a one quart saucepan over medium-low heat.

Remove 3 tablespoons of the melted butter to a cup or a bowl; set aside.

Add the flour to the remaining 3 tablespoons of butter in the saucepan.

Stir to blend and form a roux.

Gradually add the milk while stirring with a whisk.

Add the salt and the pepper.

Continue cooking, stirring constantly, until the sauce is thick and smooth.

Add the cheese and continue stirring until the cheese is melted.

Pour the sauce over the potatoes in the baking dish. Mix gently.

Put the bread crumbs into a bowl, drizzle them with the remaining melted butter and toss them to coat them with butter.

Sprinkle the buttered bread crumbs evenly over the potatoes.

Bake the potatoes au gratin at 350°F for about 45 minutes, then broil until light golden brown on top.

Serve and enjoy along with other meal items.

Variation:

Bread crumb topping made with garlic can be quite tasty.

Melt 2 tbsp. of butter in a sauté pan.

Add 2 cloves of minced garlic and cook just until soft.

Add 1 cup of bread crumbs.

Sauté while stirring until lightly browned.

Ray's Corn Pudding - ☺♥

This recipe is of my own making based on memories of Marie's corn pudding, what I found across various Internet recipes, and my own ideas. It is excellent and different from other corn puddings due to my inclusion of bacon and small pieces of bell peppers.

I'm getting hungry just thinking about this dish. Enjoy!

Ingredients:

4 strips of bacon

1 cup of finely chopped sweet onion

1/4 cup of freshly diced green bell pepper

1/4 cup of freshly diced sweet red bell pepper

1 teaspoon of salt

3/4 teaspoon of black pepper

1 cup of grated extra sharp cheddar cheese

5 extra large eggs

1/3 cup of butter, melted

1/4 cup of sugar

1/2 cup of milk

1 cup of light cream

4 tablespoons of cornstarch

1, 15 oz. can of corn kernels, drained

2, 15 oz. cans of creamed corn

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Fry the bacon in a skillet on medium heat until it is crisp but not burned or overcooked.

Remove the bacon from the skillet and set it aside on a paper towel to drain.

When it is cool break up the bacon into small pieces and set them aside.

Sauté the chopped sweet onion in the hot bacon fat for about five minutes on medium heat, or until it is translucent.

Remove the skillet from the heat and put the onion pieces on a folded paper towel on a saucer to drain excess bacon fat.

Lightly butter a 9" by 13" by 2" glass baking dish.

Whisk the eggs until they are well mixed in a large, 3 quart bowl.

Add the melted butter, sugar, cream and milk to the bowl gradually while continuing to whisk.

Whisk in the cornstarch, the salt and the pepper.

Stir in the onion pieces, the bacon pieces, the diced raw green and red pepper pieces, the corn and the creamed corn.

Stir in the grated cheddar cheese and mix well.

Pour the mixture into the prepared baking dish.

Bake for 1 hour, but check after 45 minutes to make certain the top is not becoming too dark. If it is already a golden or light brown color then cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and continue baking for the last 15 minutes.

Serve the corn pudding or keep it in a 160°F warming oven until the meal is served.

Scalloped Potatoes with Onions - ☺♥

Sue Gale served great scalloped potatoes to Janet and me so I asked for her recipe. She kindly provided it so now you have it too. It is "Delish!" The key to making excellent scalloped potatoes is to slice the potatoes and onions very thin, using a mandolin or a very thin setting on a food processor. Also, be sure to bake this food in a cast iron or stoneware baking dish that has a lid and is no more than 2" deep. Either will cook the food better than other types of baking dishes and the food will be less likely to burn. At the end of the baking cycle the dish should be moist within but without much remaining liquid.

Ingredients:

1 cup of Whole milk

4 tbsp. of Butter

4 medium Russet potatoes

1 medium yellow or sweet onion

Salt

Black pepper

Directions:

Set the oven temperature to 300°F.

Slice the potatoes and the onion thinly (about 1/16th of an inch thick) using a mandolin or a thin setting on a food processor. I prefer the food processor as it is very fast, safe and not labor intensive. Rinse the potato slices in lots of cold water and then dry them, one layer thick on a dish towel, with a second dish towel on top. Press lightly. Repeat as necessary with the rest of the potato slices.

Layer the potato, onion, very thin slices of butter (three or four per layer) and continue until the dish is full or the materials consumed. Season each layer very lightly with salt and pepper.

You can overload the dish slightly, if necessary, with an extra layer of potato and onion slices that is higher than the edge of the dish, as the mixture will sink as it bakes.

When all of the layers are complete, add the cup of whole milk.

Cover the dish with the lid and bake until the potatoes are tender, about one hour.

Reduce the oven temperature to 275°F and bake with the lid off to reduce the fluid contents for about 30 minutes. The top should be a light golden brown in color.

Serve. You will get many compliments.

Variation:

Adding slices of cheese products like Velveeta® to this dish, especially on the top, turns it into potatoes au gratin with onions. Other cheeses like soft provolone can also be used.

The cheese can also be layered within the dish with the potatoes and onions.

Spanish Rice - 😊♥

This recipe as found on the Internet used an Instant Pot for cooking. I changed it to make Spanish Rice conventionally in a skillet. I also checked out other recipes and made a few ingredient and cooking changes.

Spanish Rice is typically used as a side dish in Mexican cooking. Made right it is very bright tasting and enjoyable. Made wrong it is dull, orange colored, poorly seasoned rice!

Having eaten excellent Spanish Rice a few times (out of many) in my past I decided to experiment to provide Food Nirvana with a great recipe. And I surely like the results! You will too.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil

1/2 cup of onion, diced

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced

2 cloves of garlic, minced

2 cups of chicken broth

1 teaspoon of smoked paprika

1 cup of uncooked basmati rice

½ teaspoon of ground cumin

1 teaspoon of sea salt

¼ teaspoon of dried oregano

1/2 teaspoon of chili powder

1 cup of tomato sauce

1 tablespoon of butter (optional)

Directions:

Place the rice in a colander and rinse it really well. Let it drain for a few minutes.

Heat the oil in a large, deep, heavy bottom skillet on medium heat.

Once heated, add in the onion and the jalapeno pepper. Sauté for 3 minutes, then add the garlic and sauté for 1 minute.

Add the rice, stir well, and continue cooking on medium heat, with occasional stirring, until the rice is toasted, about 3 minutes.

Add the broth and scrape up any browned bits on the bottom of the skillet.

Add the seasonings and stir well.

Top the mixture with the tomato sauce.

Put a lid on the skillet.

Heat to a low boil, then move the skillet to a small burner on low heat.

Cook the rice at a simmer for 15 minutes. Then turn off the heat and let the dish sit covered for five minutes.

Remove the lid and fluff the rice with two forks.

Stir in butter if desired and serve the dish hot.

Enjoy!

Sweet Potato Casserole - ?

This dish is traditional at Thanksgiving and Christmas in many homes. Children love it because of the sweetness, for it is much like a dessert. I reviewed half a dozen Internet recipes for sweet potato casserole and I put together a composite recipe that I believe will be the best.

The picture to the right does not show the presence of the marshmallow crème in this recipe. I'll have to take a picture later of the results of this recipe to replace the picture displayed now.

I will ask my children to make this dish for Thanksgiving, which is only five days from now, in 2012. I think it will be delicious.

Potato Mixture Ingredients:

4 cups of peeled, cubed sweet potato (3 medium to large sweet potatoes)

1/2 cup of white sugar

2 eggs, beaten

1/2 teaspoon of salt

4 tablespoons of butter, softened

1/2 cup of milk

1/2 teaspoon of vanilla extract

Topping Ingredients:

1/2 cup of packed brown sugar

1/3 cup of flour

3 tablespoons of butter, softened

1/2 cup of chopped pecans

1 cup of marshmallow crème

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 325°F.

Peel the sweet potatoes and cut them into $\frac{3}{4}$ " x $\frac{3}{4}$ " cubes.

Put the sweet potatoes into a medium saucepan with water to cover.

Partially cover the saucepan with a lid and cook/boil the sweet potato pieces over medium to medium high heat until tender, about 15 minutes.

Drain the water and put the potato pieces into an electric mixer bowl.

Mash the potatoes with the electric mixer on low to medium speed.

Add the white sugar, eggs, salt, butter, milk and vanilla extract to the bowl while mixing on low speed. Then increase the speed to medium. Continue mixing until the mixture is smooth.

Transfer the mixing bowl contents to a 9x13x2 inch glass baking dish/casserole.

Now make the topping. Mix the brown sugar and flour in a medium bowl. Cut in the butter and mix until the mixture is coarse. Stir in the pecans.

Sprinkle the topping mixture over the sweet potato mixture in the casserole.

Bake the casserole contents in the preheated oven for 25 minutes.

Spread the marshmallow crème on top of the baked sweet potato topping and bake for an additional five minutes or until the marshmallow crème is a light tan in color.

Serve or put the casserole into a 160°F warming oven until the meal is ready to serve.

PROCESSED VEGETABLES:

Bok Choy Stir Fry - ☺♥

Bok Choy is found in many recipes, for good reason. It is excellent in salads or when cooked. This recipe is intended to produce a stir fry side dish, to be served along with meat or fish plus rice or some rice variation. I found it at the Woks Of Life® web site and have only slightly modified it. Thanks, folks!

I hope you make this stir fry. You will be pleased.

Ingredients:

1 1/2 pounds of fresh bok choy (washed and chopped)

3 tablespoons of a neutral oil (peanut, canola, or light olive oil)

1 slice of ginger (1/8" thick, 2" long; julienne it or mince it.)

4 large cloves of garlic, roughly chopped

3/4 teaspoon of sea salt

1 teaspoon of sesame oil

1/4 teaspoon of MSG (optional)

1/8 teaspoon of white pepper

1 1/2 teaspoons of cornstarch mixed into a slurry with 2 tablespoons of water

Directions:

Heat your wok or a large pan over low heat, and add the oil and ginger.

If you prefer a strong, garlicky flavor, add the garlic now. You can let it sizzle in the oil for 10-15 seconds, but don't let it brown, or it will turn bitter.

Add the Bok Choy when the garlic is still white. If you like a fresher, more mild garlic flavor, add it in after salting the vegetables.

Add the Bok Choy, and increase the heat to high. Stir-fry using a scooping motion so the oil and aromatics are evenly distributed.

Next, add the salt, sesame oil, MSG (if using) and the white pepper.

Stir fry for another 1 to 2 minutes.

Finish making the stir fry with the cornstarch slurry, adding it to the center of the stir fry.

Toss the stir fry until it glistens. Plate it and serve it immediately while hot.

Enjoy!

Braised Red Cabbage - ?

This recipe is compliments of the Internet and is included here to accompany meals with a German type of cuisine. It is a good choice to use with Poor Man's Schnitzel and buttered noodles or spatzle to make a complete meal. I have yet to try it but it looks pretty good and I will report back with results.

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 large sweet onions, thinly sliced

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

1/4 teaspoon ground cumin

1 small to medium small head of red cabbage, thinly sliced

1/4 cup apple cider

1/4 cup brown sugar

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

Directions:

Heat the olive oil over medium-high heat in a 4 quart pot and sauté the onions until soft.

Add the cinnamon, cloves, and cumin and cook for 30 seconds.

Mix in the cabbage and sauté for 5 minutes, until wilted.

Add the cider, sugar, and vinegar. Cover and braise over low heat until the cabbage is tender, about 20 minutes.

Serve warm.

Chinese Stir Fried Cabbage - ☺♥

I've made this dish a number of times and I enjoy it thoroughly. It is a great way to use leftover fresh cabbage. I sometimes buy large bags of freshly chopped cabbage at Sam's Club® when I want to make coleslaw and thus I find I have lots of leftover fresh cabbage that can be used in soups, stews or dishes like this stir fried cabbage. It is a fine side dish. Have fun!

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons of peanut oil

1 medium size sweet onion, sliced/chopped

2 large cloves of garlic, minced

2 teaspoons of minced fresh ginger

1/2 medium size head of cabbage, sliced/chopped

1 tablespoon of soy sauce

1 tablespoon of rice vinegar

1/4 cup of raw sesame seeds

1 tablespoon of toasted sesame oil

Directions:

Heat the peanut oil in a large wok over medium-high heat.

Increase the heat to high and add the onion and sauté, stirring, until the onion starts to become translucent.

Add the garlic, the ginger and the sesame seeds. Mix well and continue to sauté while stirring for two minutes.

Add the cabbage, mix well and cook the mixture with a lid on the wok until the cabbage is starting to wilt, about 2 minutes.

Add the soy sauce and rice vinegar and mix well and continue cooking with the lid on the wok until the cabbage is wilted, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Remove the wok from the heat and drizzle the toasted sesame oil on the top of the mixture, then mix.

Serve the cabbage in a pre-warmed serving dish.

Enjoy!

Bread and Butter Pickles - ☺♥

This recipe is a composite of multiple recipes I found on the Internet plus my own recipe from the past. The major changes to my old recipe are that I added calcium chloride (for crispness), I increased the liquid brine volume and I pasteurized during the pickling process instead of allowing the brine and cucumbers to boil. Pasteurizing the pickles also improves crispness vs. canning, and I further opted for vacuum sealing and refrigeration instead of canning. My goal was to create very tasty extra crisp pickles that are not made limp by canning/boiling them. I made multiple experimental batches and the recipe shown below is the final recipe for you to use. You will be highly pleased with your results.

You can buy the food grade calcium chloride for this recipe online at www.bulkfoods.com ... It is very inexpensive and useful in different recipes, so it is a good idea to have this product in your food pantry. This chemical is used exclusively today commercially to make pickles crisp. The calcium combines with the pectin in the vegetables to create the crisp effect. Just remember that many chemicals used by the food industry to accomplish food preservation or control of food texture or color retention can be quite poisonous if used to excess. This means that you are to follow the given recipes in Food Nirvana exactly. Do not decide, without the proper university education and professional experience with the use of specialty chemicals, to vary the amounts of the food preservation, texture or color retention chemicals referenced in this and other Food Nirvana recipes.

A most important consideration beyond the use of specialty chemicals is the area of food handling and food processing. For example, I am a strong proponent of using vacuum sealing, where appropriate, to preserve food quality and to make the life of the chef easier and the products made less expensive. I do not can products anymore unless vacuum sealing followed by refrigeration or freezing fails to provide the quality I demand or the safety essential in making any food I plan to serve to other people. Yet vacuum sealing has its own limitations depending on the product being considered. In general, if refrigeration of vacuum sealed perishable foods does not provide excellent shelf life then I will opt to freeze the vacuum sealed product, or avoid vacuum sealing altogether and opt to can the food item, or, as needed, always prepare the food item from fresh ingredients.

It turns out that the kinds of pickles I make lend themselves very well to vacuum sealing and refrigeration. The sterility of the initial product, due to pasteurizing, and the preservative effect of vinegar (and sometimes salt), make vacuum sealed

pickles have a very long refrigerator shelf life, until opened. Then, the pickles should be consumed within a few days, as I do not yet use any commercial preservatives to inhibit bacteria or mold that can ruin a product within a week once it is exposed to air.

Ingredients:

6 lbs. of 4 to 5 inch long pickling cucumbers, washed and cut into 1/4 to 5/16-inch-thick slices, with the thin slices at the ends of each cucumber discarded

8 cups of thinly sliced onions, quartering the slices, separating the pieces and packing them loosely in a one quart measuring cup

One large sweet red pepper, cleaned and diced or cut into short narrow strips

1/2 cup of Kosher or canning salt

Crushed ice or ice cubes (roughly one gallon of ice cubes or crushed ice)

4 cups of white distilled vinegar (5% acidity)

1 cup of water

4 1/2 cups of sugar

3 tbsp. of mixed pickling spices (I prefer the McCormick® brand of pickling spice)

1/4 cup of yellow mustard seeds

1/4 teaspoon of food grade calcium chloride (do not exceed the amount shown)

Directions:

Combine the sliced cucumbers, sliced onions, diced red sweet pepper and Kosher salt in a very large bowl and mix well by hand.

Cover the mixture with crushed ice or ice cubes, about two inches thick.

Let the mixture stand at room temperature for two hours.

Bring the sugar, vinegar, water, calcium chloride and spices to a boil in a large pot on high heat.

Drain the salty liquid from the cucumbers and onions and pepper pieces. A double rinse with fresh water using a colander and the large mixing bowl, rinsed and then filled almost full of water, with agitation, is recommended to remove the salt brine from the vegetables. Salty bread and butter pickles are yucky!

Add the cucumber mixture to the vinegar mixture gradually, mixing after each addition, and bring the temperature up to 180°F on medium heat. Stir often with a large wooden spoon to mix the vegetables thoroughly with the brine and to get even heat distribution, for at first the combination of brine and vegetables has relatively little liquid content for the volume of cucumbers in the pot. I use a candy-making thermometer to monitor the temperature and I control the temperature by varying the amount of heat and covering most of the top of the pot with a lid part of the time. Note that it is normal for the temperature to fluctuate plus or minus 3 degrees from the 180 degree goal temperature each time you stir the pot contents. Adjust the heat as necessary.

Hold the mixture at 180°F, within a plus or minus 3 degrees range, for thirty minutes to pasteurize the pickles, and continue to stir once every three to four minutes during this period for even heat distribution and to expose all the cucumber slices to the brine equally.

Remove the pot from the heat and let the contents cool to room temperature, covered with a lid.

If you plan to vacuum seal the pickles then chill the covered pot in the refrigerator overnight.

Vacuum seal the bread and butter pickles and brine in one pint or three cup vacuum sealing bags and keep the bags of pickles refrigerated until they are used.

The pasteurized, refrigerated, vacuum-sealed bread and butter pickles should be eaten within one year.

Note: You can decide to can the hot pickles immediately after pasteurization as an alternative to vacuum sealing. If you do, use one pint canning jars and can the sealed jars of pickles and brine under boiling water for ten minutes.

Processing Fresh Corn - ☺♥T

Depending on where you live fresh local corn may be available at roadside vegetable markets, nurseries, farmers markets, farms, etc. from June through August. This corn is typically very superior in quality/freshness and ear size to the so-called fresh corn sold by supermarkets. If you want to enjoy delicious corn year round you have to buy and process the local corn while it is readily available. Also, the price charged will vary depending on where you buy it and especially how early you buy the corn, for it tends to be most expensive early in the harvest period. Thus, I buy corn in August.

I am writing this recipe for processing corn in the month of August in New England. I found that the best local nursery/vegetable market is selling fresh corn for \$6.50 per dozen for stunningly large perfect sweet ears. Coincidentally, that price is exactly ten times higher than when I was a teenager during the latter 1950's and early 1960's. Simultaneously a local supermarket chain is selling ears of corn at the price of five for a dollar, but you should see what stale, ugly little runt ears they offer at that price. It is a come-on for fools. My point is that the more expensive corn at the nursery/vegetable market is vastly superior in quality, in particular freshness, which means sweet ears instead of older ears where the corn sugar has mostly turned into starch. In this instance you surely do get what you pay for.

Assuming that you, like me, demand the best the \$6.50 per dozen corn is what you buy and process. The only way to achieve real taste and tenderness quality in preserving corn is to freeze it. Canning and drying both seriously degrade the quality in taste and in tenderness. Thus this recipe describes how I process fresh corn and then freeze it. As you might guess, I certainly do vacuum seal packets of blanched corn kernels prior to freezing, for vacuum sealing is the perfect way to avoid any future freezer burn. Thus, the product when used later is most like the original corn in taste and tenderness. And though it might be hard to believe, you can open a pack two years later and have excellent corn.

The best way to process fresh ears of corn is to husk them immediately, before the corn sugar converts to starch, and blanch the ears for exactly four minutes in already boiling water that has salt in it at the rate of one teaspoon per gallon. That means you have a large pot with about 1 1/2 gallons of boiling salted water on high heat and you introduce only four ears of room temperature corn into the boiling water at one time. The lower temperature corn will reduce the boiling for about a minute. Ignore that. What you do is simply cover the pot with a lid when you first put the corn into the boiling water and then set a timer for four minutes. You may/will have to partially remove the lid after about a minute to

keep the water from boiling over. After four minutes the blanched ears of corn are removed with tongs and immediately put into a large bowl of very cold water, for that will quickly stop any further cooking and also allow you to hold each ear comfortably to cut off the corn kernels. Allow the ears of corn to cool in the water for two minutes, and change the water after two four ear batches of corn have been processed, so as to have cold water all the time, not water heated above room temperature by the hot corn.

I own a corn kernel removal tool that is supposed to make the cutting of the kernels from the cob fast and easy. It is my experience that the best way is still to use a sharp heavy knife and simply make about six or seven vertical cuts down the ear of corn while you hold the top of the ear at the small end and rotate the ear partially after each cut. The special purpose tool works okay only if you have an auxiliary piece of equipment, a board with a long nail sticking up through it from the bottom, so as to allow you to impale an ear of corn on the nail to hold it stationary while using the kernel removal tool, which requires two hands to use. It also wastes/fails to remove some of the corn. Frankly that is too much effort for little gain in time saved, unless you are processing hundreds of ears of corn.

The size of your family and the individual appetites should be considered when deciding how much corn to put into one vacuum sealing bag. I suggest a minimum of one ear of corn per person, which is fairly generous if you start with the great large ears of corn I discussed earlier. Whatever you decide you vacuum seal the package of corn to a vacuum level of 28 inches of mercury. It is not necessary to go beyond that vacuum level. After the vacuum sealing the contents of each bag should be distributed evenly to form a block of corn of even and minimum thickness, for that will aid in efficient storage and later thawing for use.

I recall as a child that my mother would sometimes add butter to the corn prior to freezing it, so that when the corn was used later it was ready to serve immediately. I prefer not using the butter as how I might want later to use the corn, like in making vegetable soup, it can be inappropriate to have butter in the corn.

My preferred way to cook a packet of frozen corn is to defrost it in a microwave oven and then, if appropriate, place the corn in a serving dish, add butter and salt and possibly pepper, cover the dish with plastic wrap and set it aside until the last few minutes before the meal is served. At that point I microwave the corn only to the point of making it hot, where the plastic wrap starts to swell from internal steam pressure. Recall that the four minute blanching period pretty much cooked the corn, so the reheating later need not entail a long period of cooking for the corn to be perfect.

Follow the above instructions and you can have delicious corn year round.

Enjoy!

Processing Fresh Green Beans - ☺♥

Depending on where you live fresh local green beans may be available at roadside vegetable markets, nurseries, farmers markets, farms, etc. from June through August. These beans are typically very superior in quality/freshness to the so-called fresh green beans sold by supermarkets. If you want to enjoy delicious green beans year round you have to buy and process fresh local products while they are readily available. I grow my own regular green beans and pole beans and it is very easy. Thus, I pick them at their peak and process them in small batches.

The only way to achieve real taste and proper tenderness and texture in preserving green beans is to blanch and vacuum seal and freeze them. Canning seriously degrades the quality in taste and in texture. Thus this recipe describes how I process fresh green beans and then freeze them. And I certainly do vacuum seal packets of blanched green beans prior to freezing, for vacuum sealing is the perfect way to avoid any future freezer burn. Thus, the product when used later is most like the original green beans in taste, texture and tenderness.

The best way to process fresh green beans is to wash them thoroughly and cut off the stem ends. Then blanch small batches, like two adult servings, in boiling water for three minutes and remove the beans to a very large bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. After a minute or two the now cold green beans can be put into a vacuum sealing bag, vacuum sealed, and put directly into the deep freeze. That means you have a large pot with about 1 gallon of boiling salted water on high heat and you introduce only two servings of raw green beans into the boiling water at one time. The lower temperature beans will slightly reduce the boiling for about a minute. Ignore that. What you do is simply cover the pot with a lid when you first put the beans into the boiling water and then activate a timer for three minutes. You may have to partially remove the lid after about a minute to keep the water from boiling over. After three minutes the beans are removed with tongs and immediately put into a large bowl of very cold water that has ice cubes in it, for that will quickly stop any further cooking. Allow the batch of blanched beans to cool in the water for two minutes, and change the water and add ice cubes if/when the water is no longer cold due to doing multiple hot batches of blanched beans.

The size of your family and the individual appetites should be considered when deciding how many green beans to put into one vacuum sealing bag. I prefer to stick with two adult servings per bag and simply use more bags if more than two people are eating at a given meal. Whatever you decide you vacuum seal each

package of green beans to a vacuum level of 28 inches of mercury. It is not necessary to go beyond that vacuum level.

My preferred way to cook a packet of frozen green beans is to defrost it in a microwave oven and then, if appropriate, place the beans in a serving dish, add butter and salt and possibly pepper, cover the dish with plastic wrap and set it aside until the last few minutes before the meal is served. At that point I microwave the beans only to the point of making them hot, to where the plastic wrap starts to swell from internal steam pressure. Recall that the three minute blanching period pretty much cooked the beans, so the reheating later need not entail a long period of cooking for the beans to be perfect.

Follow the above instructions and you can have delicious green beans year round.

Enjoy!

Green Bean Casserole - ▲

There are two recipes for this dish provided below. First, one cook's idea of an improved recipe. Second, the traditional recipe.

All of the traditional recipes I have seen for green bean casserole use cream of mushroom soup as one of the ingredients. This recipe did not, originally - but it does now. It also uses sour cream, and grated Swiss cheese, which are not typical ingredients for a green bean casserole.

When I watched this dish being made on a TV show I was intrigued as it sounded like it would be delicious and different. Thus, I put the recipe into Food Nirvana and we tried it for Thanksgiving dinner.

We were not impressed at all with the dish using the given recipe and it has been modified below considerably. There was too little sauce, it was bland and without character in flavor, and the beans should have been French cut first, and the good flavor from the traditional cream of mushroom soup was missing. Moreover, additional herbs and pungent cheese were needed to give the dish "zing."

If you want a totally traditional recipe for green bean casserole you can look at the second recipe shown below, but what I provide first is my present recommendation to capture the better parts of the initial imaginative TV recipe and then supplement it as needed. It needed a lot of help! But all that means is no source of recipe information is to be trusted implicitly. We try recipes and then modify them to suit our tastes, or discard them.

Ingredients:

3 cups of French's® Fried Onions (or make your own)

2 tablespoons of flour

4 tablespoons of butter

1½ cups of sour cream

1, 8 ounce can (drained net weight) of sliced mushrooms, drained

1 cup of light cream

2 teaspoons of Dijon mustard

1/2 teaspoon of grated nutmeg

1/2 cup of grated Parmesan cheese

1 1/2 teaspoons of salt

3/4 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper

1, 10 ounce can of Campbell's® Cream of Mushroom condensed soup

1/2 pound of Swiss cheese, grated

3, 16 ounce cans of French cut green beans, drained (or use the equivalent amount of blanched frozen French cut green beans, thawed and drained)

Directions:

Set the oven at 375°F.

Coat the inside of a 9"x13"x2" glass baking dish lightly with butter.

Melt the 4 tablespoons of butter on low heat in a small saucepan and then add the flour and mix well as if you were making a roux.

Once the "roux" is thickening then add the sour cream and mix well, then add the cream of mushroom soup and the light cream and again mix well.

Add the salt and pepper to the mixture and stir it in, then add the Dijon mustard, the nutmeg and the Swiss cheese and mix well.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and set the sauce aside.

Toss/mix the green beans and the canned mushrooms and the Parmesan cheese and two thirds of the fried onions in a large bowl to make a uniform mixture, then put the mixture into the casserole.

Pour the sauce over the casserole ingredients evenly. Make sure the sauce coats all the casserole contents and is evident on the underside of the casserole.

Bake the casserole for 20 minutes. Check it to make sure it is bubbling slowly due to boiling. If not, bake an additional 5 or 10 minutes.

Sprinkle the rest of the fried onions on top evenly and bake for an additional 5 minutes.

Remove the casserole from the oven and put it into a 160°F warming oven until it is time to serve the meal.

Traditional Green Bean Casserole Recipe:

Ingredients:

1 can (10 1/2 ounce) of Campbell's® Condensed Cream of Mushroom

1/2 cup of milk

1 teaspoon of soy sauce

1 dash of black pepper

4 cups of cooked cut green beans

1 1/3 cups of French's® French Fried Onions

Directions:

Heat the oven to 350 degrees.

Stir the soup, milk, soy sauce, black pepper, beans and 2/3 cup onions together in a 1 1/2 quart casserole.

Bake for 25 minutes or until the bean mixture is hot and bubbling.

Stir the bean mixture. Sprinkle the top with the remaining onions.

Bake for 5 additional minutes or until the onions are golden brown.

Serve hot.

Hot Garlic Dill Pickles - ☺♥

My mother used to make dill pickles, sweet pickle spears and bread and butter pickles every year. I never thought about making pickles of any kind because I had so many varieties available to me from family, supermarkets and delicatessens. After starting a large garden some years ago I decided it was time for me to try my hand in making pickles to see if I could compete and perhaps develop something better than what I had before.

I decided to make garlic dill pickles, hot garlic dill pickles and bread and butter pickles, using recipes I found and modified to suit myself. I did not use any family recipe. I decided not to make sweet gherkins, even though I love them and use them in various recipes, because I didn't want to have to deal with growing or buying tiny cucumbers. What I had to do was identify good types of cucumbers for what I wanted to make and also find seeds to grow seeded heads of dill like my mother used.

The difficult part was finding the dill seeds, and I looked far and wide before I got what I wanted. The best idea is to grow the dill yourself while your cucumbers are growing, or, have a friend or relative grow it/them. Typically you grow a bed of dill in the same garden location every year from seeds dropped the previous fall, though you can be extra smart and harvest a few dill heads when the seeds are mature and dry for planting the following spring, or for passing on to your friends and family for them to grow dill also. Note that virtually all recipes found on the Internet for making dill pickles use either dried dill seed or the type of dill that does not form seeded heads. Do not use dried dill seed as it is too weak in flavor.

As for the cucumbers, aside from the fact that certain types are superior for pickling, the types are normally identified regarding eating or pickling on seed packets or in young nursery plants available each spring. Similarly, pickling cucumbers can be purchased in bulk (1/2 peck) at roadside vegetable markets for about 90 cents per pound (\$1.49 per pound in 2022, \$2.49 per pound in 2024). I have nothing to say except that cucumbers should always be picked while young, fresh and crisp. Nothing is worse than a pickle made from old, limp, seedy cucumbers. Enough said.

The cucumbers and dill are harvested over a period of many weeks during a growing season, each individual item picked or cut at its peak and washed and stored in one gallon plastic Ziploc® freezer bags in a refrigerator. You will know when you have about 10 lbs. of cucumbers harvested and ready for pickling, and also enough dill. The dill is often ready to start harvesting before the cucumbers, thus refrigerated or frozen storage is used until sufficient cucumbers are ready. I

recommend growing at least eight cucumber plants to provide sufficient cucumbers in a relatively short period of time so that accumulating ten pounds of harvested cucumbers can be done within one to two weeks. Wait any longer and the older cucumbers will turn soft and rot. Similarly, grow around thirty or more dill plants to keep a good supply of dill heads available through the growing season. I recommend multiple plantings. Each plant may provide up to three nicely seeded large dill heads. A dill head is ready to harvest when the seeds have completely formed, following the yellow blossom stage, and are light green in color. Do not wait to harvest the heads individually at that point for they are at their maximum goodness/intensity in flavor.

This recipe is very simple and the results great per the folks who've eaten the pickles and requested more ASAP. Ditto the bread and butter pickles, but I provide that recipe separately in Food Nirvana. The ingredient list for hot garlic dill pickles is short, and the processing so simple there is almost nothing to it. You do, however, have to have a few supplies and equipment to do the job.

I have suggested adding a bit of calcium chloride to my original recipe here to enhance crispness. You may choose to use or not use the calcium chloride, but now I do. Also, if you want to make plain garlic dill pickles, skip the red pepper flakes. I found food grade calcium chloride at www.BulkFoods.com and purchased it inexpensively. Just remember that using too much of it makes the pickles poisonous. Follow the instructions exactly.

Supplies and Equipment:

One white plastic five gallon bucket with a lid (I buy them at Home Depot® in the paint area)

A dinner plate and something to use as weights to hold it under the brine, like two drinking water bottles filled with water and tightly capped

Canning jars, screw-on lids and inserts, or vacuum sealing bags and a vacuum sealer

A long wooden spoon for stirring the bucket contents

Ingredients:

10 lbs. of fresh young pickling cucumbers each about four to six inches long, washed and dried

6 to 8 large heads of fresh seeded dill

1 quart of white distilled vinegar

1 1/2 cups of Kosher salt

Up to 1/2 cup of red pepper flakes (Use at least 1/4 cup)

15 to 20 large cloves of fresh garlic, sliced

1 to 1 1/2 teaspoons of food grade calcium chloride (Do not use more than 3/4 teaspoon per gallon of brine. Less is fine.)

Directions:

Pour two gallons of water into the bucket and add the quart of vinegar, one and one half cups of kosher salt and the calcium chloride and mix well.

Cut 1/8th of an inch off the ends of each clean cucumber. You can leave the cucumbers whole or cut them in half lengthwise. Put the cucumbers into the bucket.

Add the seeded dill heads and the red pepper flakes to the bucket.

Peel and then cut the garlic cloves into thin slices and add them to the bucket.

Add enough water to bring the bucket contents to about four gallons. The idea is to leave enough space above the brine and cucumbers for adding a dinner plate and some weights, such that you can still cover the bucket with its lid. Stir the contents thoroughly.

Place a weighted plate on top of the cucumbers to force them down into the brine. I typically use a dinner plate and weigh it down with anything non-metallic, like plastic water bottles filled with water, tightly capped, or a stack of ceramic tiles.

Put the lid on the bucket to keep out foreign matter, insects, etc.

Ferment the pickles for about three weeks in a room that is 60°F to 70° F. Try to avoid higher temperatures, though fermentation can be done slowly at lower temperatures, like 55°F.

Check the fermentation progress every three days. Remove any mold that might form on the top of the brine with paper towels. Then mix the contents thoroughly. Replenish the brine if necessary to keep the liquid level above the cucumbers, using a mixture of 1/8 cup of kosher salt and 1/2 cup white distilled vinegar in one quart of water.

Check the pickles after two weeks by eating one. If it is pickled all the way through and tastes fairly intense and uniform in taste through the pickle then the

fermentation process is completed. If the pickles need more fermentation time give them three more days and test them again. Repeat as necessary.

Process the completed pickles, garlic, red pepper, dill and brine by canning them, or by pasteurizing and then vacuum sealing them. If you can them immerse six sealed pint or quart canning jars of pickles into a large pot of boiling water with a dish towel or two inside the pot to cushion the bottoms of the jars during canning, or, use a canning pot specially made for that purpose. Repeat as necessary to process all the pickles.

Once the covered pot of water again comes to a boil after inserting the jars of pickles, let the boiling continue on low to medium heat gently for five minutes. Then the jars can be removed and allowed to cool and seal. Remember to retighten the lids when the jars are removed from the boiling water. It is not necessary to can the pickles in the boiling water for any extended period due to the concentration of vinegar and salt in the brine. Canning in boiling water for too long will make the pickles soft instead of crisp.

One alternative to canning is pasteurization at 180°F for 30 minutes for the pickles and the brine. What I recommend first for reliable long term refrigerated storage of up to a year is increasing the salinity of the brine to increase the preservative effect. Add and mix well 1/4 cup of Kosher Salt per gallon of brine, then proceed with the pasteurization. Then you vacuum seal the pickles and brine and refrigerate the pickles for up to a year. Or, you can simply bottle and refrigerate the pickles and use them within three months. What is best is to add 1/10th of 1% by weight of sodium benzoate, which you can buy via the Internet, and then simply vacuum seal the pickles, don't worry about extra salt or vinegar, and skip pasteurization. That method will allow you to keep the pickles refrigerated for up to a year.

Enjoy ... and I know you will.

Kosher Hot Garlic Dill Pickles - ☺♥

This recipe (sans food grade calcium chloride and sans sodium benzoate post fermentation) came from Bon Appétit and it looked so interesting I decided to try it.

Per usual some listed ingredients and directions didn't quite work logically so I had to make a few corrections to their recipe. I also use food grade calcium chloride to make the pickles more crisp instead of letting them be soft. And I use sodium benzoate as a preservative to guarantee there will be no ongoing fermentation or bacteria growth that might otherwise spoil the stored pickles.

I ferment the pickles similarly to the original recipe, but not in canning jars so I increased the amount of brine. Also, I vacuum seal the pickles and brine after fermentation in quart size vacuum seal bags and then refrigerate them. Thus, later I only open enough at a time for what will be eaten within a day or two.

Ingredients:

6 cups of water

5 tbsp. of kosher salt

1 tbsp. of sugar

2 Tbsp. of black peppercorns

2 Tbsp. of coriander seeds

6 dried chilies, such as chilies de arbol (optional) (But I used fresh Thai hot green peppers and they were perfect)

3/4 cup of white vinegar (5% acidity)

3 lbs. of medium size pickling cucumbers (10 to 12 ... the number depends on the size of the pickling cucumbers)

8 to 10 garlic cloves, sliced

1/2 bunch of dill fronds (roughly 10) or 10 large fresh seeded dill heads

Food Grade Calcium Chloride (at the rate of 3/4 tsp. per gallon of brine) or, for this recipe, 3/32 of a teaspoon is the right amount ... or roughly 1/8th of a teaspoon.

Concentrated Sodium Benzoate solution (at a rate of 1/10 of 1 percent by weight of all ingredients) ... thus, weight to be determined and then the proper volume value for the concentrate. But this preservative is not used until fermentation is completed. Also, the amount you need will depend on the concentration of the product you buy. I bought my supply from a company named Koldkiss® that sells snow cone flavor concentrates and additives like sodium benzoate. You may well find sodium benzoate in crystal form, which is much easier to use if you have a sensitive kitchen scale.

Directions:

Combine 2 cups of water, the kosher salt, sugar, peppercorns, coriander and chilies over high heat in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil and remove from heat. Add the remaining 4 cups of water and the vinegar and the calcium chloride and stir to combine; let the mixture cool completely.

If needed, scrub the cucumbers to remove any dirt. Cut off a 1/8" thick slice from both ends of each cucumber and discard those pieces. Then cut the cucumbers into halves or into quarters lengthwise, unless they are small cucumbers, and in that situation leave them whole.

Put the cucumbers, garlic and dill fronds or heads into a one gallon stainless steel pot.

Add the brine to the pot and stir well. Put a dinner plate or shallow soup bowl on top of the cucumber slices and brine to keep the cucumber slices submerged in the brine.

Cover the pot with a stainless steel lid.

Store the pot in a cool, dark place (the ideal temperature is 65 degrees F), and stir gently for one minute once per day.

Check the pickles after 8 days to see how they are coming along (how fast they ferment will depend on the room temperature). If they are done fermenting (you decide based on strength of taste) proceed to the next step. Otherwise allow them to ferment for 3 more days. The brine needs to fully penetrate the cucumbers to turn them into pickles, so cucumber size will determine the minimum amount of time you must ferment the pickles. Repeat until you are happy with the intensity of the taste of the kosher dill pickles.

Add the proper volume of sodium benzoate concentrate solution to the brine and stir well. Assume a total product weight of 4 pounds. If you are using Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution you need about 5 grams of the

concentrate, or, roughly, dispense 1/2 teaspoon of the concentrate into the pot and stir well.

Vacuum seal the pickle slices in quart vacuum sealing bags, six to eight slices to a bag, with the brine evenly distributed to each bag.

Keep the bags of pickles refrigerated.

Enjoy ... and I know you will.

Hot Mix - ►

I like to make this hot mix, for it has a lot of zing for folks who crave hot foods, along with some sweetness. You can vary the ingredients from no hot peppers whatever to what is listed below. The idea is that without the hot peppers you have a fine, milder version of a Giardiniera. The small amount of food grade calcium chloride helps to make the mix ingredients crisp, especially the cucumbers/pickles.

Have fun ...

Ingredients:

16 hot red cherry peppers, halved and cleaned (or some or none)

8 habanero peppers, sliced in half but not cleaned out (or some or none)

4 lbs. of 4- to 5-inch pickling cucumbers, washed, 1/8th inch cut off from both ends, and sliced lengthwise into 1-inch wide pieces

2 lbs. of peeled and quartered small onions, or equivalent sized chunks from large onions.

4 cups of cut celery (1-inch long pieces)

2 cups of peeled and cut carrots (1/2-inch long pieces)

2 cups of cut sweet yellow peppers (1/2-inch by 2 inch pieces)

2 cups of cut sweet red peppers (1/2-inch by 2 inch pieces)

4 cups of cauliflower florets

32 fresh garlic cloves, peeled and cut in half lengthwise

¼ tsp. of food grade calcium chloride (optional)

1/2 oz. of Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution (optional)

6 cups of white distilled vinegar (5 percent acidity)

2 tbsp. of canning salt

3 cups of sugar

1 tbsp. of mustard seed

2 tbsp. of mixed pickling spices

½ tsp. of whole cloves

½ tsp. of ground turmeric

Directions:

Prepare the vegetables as indicated above.

Put the vinegar in a 2½ gallon non-stick surface pot.

Add the following ingredients:

2 tbsp. of canning or pickling salt

¼ tsp. of calcium chloride (optional)

1/2 oz. of Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution (optional)

3 cups of sugar

2 tbsp. of mixed pickling spices

1 tbsp. of mustard seed

1/2 tsp. of whole cloves

1/2 tsp. of ground turmeric

Stir well and bring the mixture to a boil on high heat.

Toss in the prepared vegetables and mix everything gently and bring the pot contents temperature up to 180°F on low to medium heat, stirring and mixing gently every three minutes. Cover the pot with a lid to shorten the heating time, but use a candy thermometer to monitor the temperature every few minutes after you stir the contents.

Pasteurize at 180°F for 30 minutes, stirring gently every five minutes. Use the candy thermometer to monitor the temperature and adjust the heat level as necessary to maintain the 180°F temperature.

Remove the hot mix from the heat, cover the pot with a lid and let it cool to room temperature.

Chill the pot, lid and contents overnight in the refrigerator.

Separate the vegetables into bowls then pack one pint vacuum sealing bags with equal ratios of the vegetables and 1/2 cup of brine.

Vacuum seal the veggies and brine.

Keep the vacuum sealed hot mix bags refrigerated.

Eat the hot mix any time after allowing two weeks for the flavors to mix and penetrate the vegetables.

If any bags swell up during storage, discard them.

Eat all of the hot mix within six to nine months for maximum quality.

Enjoy the hot mix served cold with various other foods like cheese and crackers.

Pickled Red Beets - 😊♥

My mother used to make this product about once a year, and serve it chilled at picnics and at general family snacking events. I decided to make them now, many years later, for the first time, though I was never thrilled about the taste. Well ... That sure has changed! These rascals are delicious.

If you can the jars of pickled beets under boiling water for 30 minutes, after making them in this recipe, then you can store the jars in a pantry, and use them whenever you want for up to a year. Otherwise, without canning, refrigerate the jars of pickled beets and use them within two to three weeks. Note that you can easily scale back this recipe and make only one or two quart jars of pickled red beets.

The only tricky part of this recipe is getting the right amount of water from boiling the beet slices, together with the other listed brine ingredients, and having enough, but not much excess, to fill the canning jars that contain the beet slices and hard boiled eggs. The idea is you don't want the brine to be weak or to run out of it before the canning jars are filled to the neck of each jar.

Ingredients:

5 pounds of fresh, small to medium size red beets, peeled and cut into 1/4" thick slices

1 cup of white sugar

1 1/2 tsp. of pickling or sea salt

1 pint of white vinegar (5% acidity)

1 tbsp. of whole cloves

5, one quart canning jars

10 whole hard boiled eggs, shells removed

Directions:

Place the beet slices in a 2 gallon pot with water to cover them.

Bring to a low boil, and cook until the beet slices are tender, about 15 minutes.

Use a slotted spoon to remove the beet slices from the pot and put them into the canning jars, placing two hard boiled eggs between beet slices in each canning jar. A canning jar funnel makes this task easy, so if you don't have one then

think about buying one. They are useful in many different situations to dispense food into canning jars without spillage.

Set the pot of hot beet water aside.

Combine the sugar, 5 cups of the beet water, the vinegar, and the salt in a two quart saucepan and bring the mixture to a rapid boil.

Pour that hot brine over the beet slices and eggs in the one quart canning jars, to within 3/4" of the top of each jar, and screw on the lids.

Refrigerate the pickled beets after the canning jars have sealed and use the contents within two to three weeks. Or you may decide to can the pickled beets and store them for up to a year in a food pantry.

Enjoy!

Marinated Garlic - ☺

My sweetheart Peggy introduced me to the use of marinated garlic in her recipe for Tasty Ladies, a fine appetizer recipe now in Food Nirvana. The cost of that garlic was/is prohibitive at the store she used as a supplier so we decided we should make the marinated garlic ourselves. A brief search of the Internet provided different recipes and we selected and modified the one that looked most promising. In general, garlic is marinated to add interesting flavors and to reduce the potency of the garlic itself.

We made the marinated garlic as shown below and we decided the recipe is pretty good, but we have to wait a few days for the brine to fully penetrate the garlic cloves to make our final decision on keeping the recipe as shown or modifying it. Either way the result will be a very nice and easy recipe for you to make the garlic, and you are free to modify the amounts and variety of flavoring spices to suit yourself. We wanted a mildly flavored garlic that will be complementary when used in the Tasty Ladies recipe, ergo garlic that does not mask or interfere with the flavors of the other ingredients in that appetizer. A more strongly seasoned garlic can be appropriate for other uses and you can find numerous Internet recipes if that is what you want.

I decided to use this recipe as a medium to demonstrate some special food preparation techniques. One is the use of stainless steel equipment to avoid unwanted chemical reactions. The second is the use of sodium benzoate as a food preservative. The third is the use of pasteurization to sterilize a product without boiling it in order to preserve the texture of the food. Only the first technique is essential to this recipe. The other two are techniques you should learn and use often to enhance the quality and utility of some of the foods you prepare. Beyond those three considerations, I have listed the optional use of a very tiny amount of food grade calcium chloride, which will make the pickled garlic cloves crisp in the same manner as it does for garlic dill pickles. Note that you must have a very sensitive reloader scale like the one I bought at Cabela's® to measure out the calcium chloride in fractions of a gram. If you lack that type of scale then do not attempt to use calcium chloride as it is poisonous if too much is used.

Ingredients: (makes two 8 ounce jars of marinated garlic cloves in brine)

1 quart of water (we used distilled water ... see the explanation below)

1 2/3 cups of peeled garlic cloves

2 whole peppercorns

1/8 tsp. of crushed red pepper flakes

1/2 cup of distilled white vinegar (5% acidity) plus 1 cup of (distilled) water

2 tsp. of sugar

1 tsp. of Kosher or canning salt (salt that does not contain potassium iodide, dextrose or any anti-caking chemical like calcium silicate)

1/10th of 1 percent sodium benzoate by weight (optional)

0.3 grams of food grade calcium chloride (optional)

Directions:

Be sure to use stainless steel utensils and saucepans to avoid discoloration of the garlic (the goal is to keep the garlic white by avoiding chemical reactions with containers like aluminum saucepans and utensils like wooden spoons that might have unknown impregnated chemicals from earlier use in other recipes).

Peel the garlic cloves, cut off and discard 1/8th inch from both ends of each clove, and if there are any cloves twice as large as the average size clove then cut the very large cloves in half, lengthwise.

Bring the water to a boil in a two quart stainless steel saucepan. Note that water varies a lot in chemical content due to natural minerals and even chlorine additions for municipal water supplies. Some of the minerals/chemicals can react with the garlic creating a bluish or discoloring effect. Your water may be fine as is. I believe mine is okay but to be sure there would be no possible effects when making this recipe we used distilled water, which is available at your local supermarket by the gallon.

Add the garlic and simmer on low heat while stirring for only 30 seconds, to blanch but not cook the garlic. Then drain the garlic and set it aside.

Combine the vinegar, 1 cup of (distilled) water, sugar, salt and (optional calcium chloride) in the drained saucepan. Bring the mixture to a low boil, stirring constantly with a stainless steel spoon.

Add the peppercorns and crushed red pepper flakes and boil gently on low heat for two minutes.

Add the garlic and set the heat to very low, causing the temperature to drop to 165 degrees F. If necessary, remove the pan from the heat until the temperature drops to 165 degrees F. Use a candy thermometer to measure the temperature accurately.

Pasteurize the mixture for 15 minutes at 165 degrees F, adjusting the heat as necessary to maintain 165 degrees F. Use the candy thermometer to measure and maintain the temperature, varying the heat as necessary and stirring once a minute to equalize the temperature of the mixture within the saucepan. You may have to move the saucepan partially off to the side of the heat to keep the temperature from exceeding 165 degrees F. In practice you will typically have the temperature vary from 163 degrees F to 167 degrees F. It is most difficult to maintain the perfect temperature with the stoves and other equipment most of us use in making recipes of this type.

Remove the saucepan/pickled garlic mixture from the heat and cool it to room temperature, covered.

You may skip the remainder of the recipe instructions below if all you want to do is store the marinated garlic and brine in a tightly covered one pint plastic container in your refrigerator, using all of it within three weeks. Remember to rinse the garlic pieces prior to using them in the Tasty Ladies recipe as rinsing will minimize the taste effect of the vinegar used in making the marinated garlic.

Weigh the mixture with a kitchen scale by putting a one quart stainless steel bowl on the scale and turning the scale power on so that the bowl weight (the tare weight) doesn't affect the reading.

Add the marinated garlic and brine to the bowl and record the weight.

Add 1/10th of one percent sodium benzoate by weight to the mixture and mix well. I use Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution and you will find the discussion of how to use it precisely in the Dabbling in Science topic in the Fundamentals section and Technology chapter of Food Nirvana, found prior to the recipe sections. I could provide an exact amount of the concentrate to use with this recipe but that would assume that all of the people who make this recipe will always have precisely the same weight of final product that I obtain, and use only the Koldkiss® product, and making those assumptions would be a bad mistake. Always do your own weight measurements and sodium benzoate addition calculations. For that matter, this advice applies to all chemical preservatives and other special chemicals you might add to different foods, like calcium chloride used when making pickles or ascorbic acid used when making V-8 juice.

If you plan to vacuum seal the marinated garlic then chill the mixture in the refrigerator for three hours.

Divide the mixture equally into two 8 ounce canning jars and vacuum seal the jars, or alternatively can the sealed jar contents for 10 minutes in a boiling water

bath, then refrigerate the jars of marinated garlic or store them in your food pantry. Note that vacuum sealing will result in a superior product in terms of texture, i.e., it will not be as soft (mushy) as products that are boiled as part of the canning process.

Note also that the addition of the sodium benzoate protects the marinated garlic from spoiling during pantry storage, but always refrigerate the product once a container of it has been opened.

Enjoy!

Sauerkraut - ☺♥T

Homemade sauerkraut is so superior to what we can purchase in supermarkets that the supermarket brands, canned or refrigerated, should be dumped. They are all too salty, too sour, or both. This recipe for making sauerkraut from fresh heads of cabbage is one I learned from my mother, Dorothy, who in turn learned it from my paternal grandmother, Cora. It is amazingly good, as attested to by many friends and relatives once I started making it in New Hampshire, in 2005.

My interest in sauerkraut was marginal as a child, for neither my grandmother or my mother made any while I was growing up. We only had the canned store bought stuff. I didn't know what I was missing. It turns out that my grandmother got her shredder, crocks and stomping tool from her parents, and that she used them only while her children lived at home.

I inherited (asked for) the shredder, crocks and stomping tool simply because I was interested in how things were done on the farm in the past. I had no plan to make sauerkraut. But then my wife Pat and I bought our home and I had a very large garden for the first time ever. This goes all the way back to 1973 through 1975.

Well, I grew a variety of vegetables and fruits in quantity, including enough cabbage that I could use some of it to make a crock of homemade sauerkraut. My first experience making sauerkraut was fabulous and Pat and I and our children gobbled it up quickly. Alas, I only made it one time as later unforeseen life circumstances killed my interest in gardening.

I never had a good place to garden or to grow any crops in quantity after leaving that property, for my subsequent homes either had poor growing environments or too little space to grow a lot of food of any one type. Then, very many years later, I made a garden in New Hampshire large enough to grow anything I wanted, and so I did, in 2005.

I happened to remember how great the sauerkraut was when I made it back in 1973, so I decided to do it in grand style with enough quantity to last for a year as well as be used for gifts to friends and family. And yes, I still had the stomper, but the crocks and shredder were long gone.

By fortunate circumstance Marie and I visited an antique barn in Massachusetts with our great friends Linda and Joe Lange. I found an old shredder just like the one my grandmother used though it was in poor condition. I bought it anyway and proceeded to make it as good as new. I even created a sliding rail box and pushing tool so the safety of anyone shredding cabbage would be excellent. The

two blades were razor sharp and I didn't want anyone to get hurt. That year I had my adult children and a few of my grandchildren visiting and then shredding cabbage for making sauerkraut. It was a neat family experience.

At one point, I think it was in 2006, I was growing enough cabbage that I made 120 quarts of sauerkraut at one time. Wow! I used five gallon white plastic pails with lids, purchased at Home Depot®, each of which held four gallons of sauerkraut, or, 16 quarts. Yes, I did eight pails just from my cabbage crop in that year. That was a lot of canning! But I had upgraded the shredding process. I retired the old shredder and bought a professional grade Kitchen-Aid® food processor. That sure helped with the shredding of large amounts of cabbage.

For a few years I provided pails of sauerkraut to my children, and they held a family event annually, a day of canning and sharing the final product.

In 2007 I bought a vacuum sealer and I vacuum sealed the sauerkraut instead of canning it, with great results, for simply refrigerating it instead of canning it kept the kraut very crisp. Shelf life was no issue at all due to the natural acidity and saltiness of the sauerkraut. Thus, refrigerated vacuum sealed bags of it lasted a full year with no product deterioration. I sure was pleased with that result, for ninety percent of the package processing labor was eliminated by not having to can the sauerkraut.

I literally scooped the completed sauerkraut and liquid from the pail and put them directly into vacuum sealing bags. Then I vacuum sealed them and stored them in our extra refrigerator. Later I gave many away as gifts ... very welcome gifts I might add.

Enough historical narrative. The recipe and procedure are simple and the labor almost all on the front end in processing the heads of cabbage. If you grow very large heads of cabbage one head will make a gallon of shredded, stomped cabbage. Figure on about eight medium size heads of cabbage to make four gallons of shredded stomped cabbage for one five gallon pail.

The only ingredient besides cabbage is kosher salt, which is pure, without any non-caking agents added. Sometimes I would have to make a small amount of salt brine with some water to properly cover the shredded cabbage during the fermentation process.

In any event, shredded cabbage is put into the pail two to three quarts at a time and spread evenly to form a layer about two inches thick when lightly compressed. Then about two tablespoons of kosher salt are sprinkled evenly over the cabbage. Then the stomper is used to bruise and partially crush the cabbage, initiate the salt mixing in, and get some liquid from the cabbage. I made my own

stomper from a piece of oak tree trunk about 15 inches long and five inches in diameter. I drilled one end to accommodate a broom handle and glued it in place. The stomper is used about 12 times per layer of cabbage, just enough to hit each spot twice, being sure to cover the entire exposed area in the pail.

Once four gallons of shredded stomped cabbage and salt are in the pail make sure there is enough liquid to cover the cabbage. If not, mix two tablespoons of kosher salt with one quart of water and add it to the pail.

Put a dinner plate or other type of plate on top of the cabbage, large enough that the clearance between the plate and the interior surface of the pail is no more than ¼ inch around. Then put some type of clean non-metallic weight on top of the plate to push it down ... this will keep the cabbage submerged under the liquid, which is an absolute necessity to avoid mold formation in the cabbage during fermentation. I've used everything from stacks of small ceramic tile to bowls or sealed bottles of water or sand as weights. Always cover the pail with the pail lid as the last step to keep out insects and any foreign matter, not to mention mold spores or bacteria from any source. This infers that prior to processing the cabbage that all pails, stomper, etc. should be sterilized/washed with hot water.

Fermentation is done best at temperatures between 60°F and 70°F, so it is best to make the sauerkraut in a cool basement. If the room temperature is as high as 75° F the final sauerkraut will be far too soft and not worth eating. If the room temperature is below 55°F then fermentation will be too slow. Done within the right temperature range the sauerkraut will be done in two to three weeks.

The pails should be checked every two days during fermentation. The first reason is to assure that the cabbage remains under the liquid brine. If it has pushed up and is exposed to air then add up to a quart of salt brine as described earlier, and/or perhaps increase the weight on the plate to force the cabbage under the liquid. The second reason is that some pails of fermenting cabbage will develop mold on the surface of the liquid, and it should be removed completely. My technique is to lay a dry paper towel on the surface of the liquid to contact the mold, then I pull the towel into a bunch and remove it and discard it. I use two or three paper towels to assure that all of the mold is removed, wiping the interior surface of the pail at the liquid level if needed. The liquid level may have to be adjusted as some liquid is lost in the paper towels during mold removal. As before, simply add some salt brine. Recover the pail with the lid.

The sauerkraut should be checked after two weeks for fermentation progress. That means remove the weights and the plate long enough to collect a sample of sauerkraut from about halfway down into the pail. Then replace the plate,

weights and lid. When the sauerkraut is done it will be obvious by taste alone, for it will no longer taste like cabbage or have the crunchiness of raw cabbage. It is your choice when to end the fermentation, but be sure to give it long enough to get some sourness in the final product. I like a mild sauerkraut, as do my friends and family, one that is obviously sauerkraut but not too acidic/sour.

At this point you are ready to can, vacuum seal or use some of the sauerkraut in a meal. Be sure to save the pail liquid with the sauerkraut as it will flavor foods that you make later. Also, do not simply leave the sauerkraut in the pail or fermentation will continue and ruin the product. I love sauerkraut best when it is cooked with a pork shoulder roast in a covered pot with liquid from the sauerkraut and maybe a small water addition to keep the meat mostly submerged. You don't want to use much water or the sauerkraut taste will be weakened. Also, cut slits in the roast to facilitate cooking and to provide meat flavor to the broth. After an hour or two of slow cooking on low heat, turning the meat over a few times, drop dumplings can be added and the pot covered for ten minutes to steam the dumplings.

A simple recipe for drop dumplings is one cup of flour, ½ teaspoon salt, two teaspoons of baking powder and enough milk to form a soft dumpling consistency when all the ingredients are mixed in a bowl. Some folks like to add an egg to the mixture to produce a heavier dumpling.

Yummy! What a satisfying meal!

Sweet Hot Garlic Dill Pickles - ☺♥

Long slices of slightly sweetened hot garlic dill pickles are great on sandwiches and burgers. I decided to modify the Food Nirvana recipe for Hot Garlic Dill Pickles to create the type we love in subs, other sandwiches and burgers.

The recipe below is similar to that for Hot Garlic Dill Pickles except for the elimination of red pepper flakes, a reduced amount of garlic, and the addition of sugar, mustard seed and black peppercorns.

If you want some background discussion of making pickles you can read the Food Nirvana recipe for Hot Garlic Dill Pickles. What is provided here is only the essential information for making the Sweet Garlic Dill Pickles.

I have suggested adding a bit of calcium chloride to my original recipe here to enhance crispness. You may choose to use or not use the calcium chloride, but now I do. I found food grade calcium chloride at www.BulkFoods.com and purchased it inexpensively. Just remember that using too much of it makes the pickles poisonous. Follow the instructions exactly.

Supplies and Equipment:

One white plastic five gallon bucket with a lid (I buy them at Home Depot® in the paint area).

A dinner plate and something to use as weights to hold it under the brine, like two drinking water bottles filled with water and tightly capped.

Canning jars, screw-on lids and inserts, or vacuum sealing bags and a vacuum sealer.

A long wooden spoon for stirring the bucket contents.

Ingredients:

10 lbs. of fresh young pickling cucumbers each about four to six inches long, washed and dried and cut into lengthwise slices 1/4" thick.

6 to 8 large heads of fresh seeded dill or equivalent fronds of dill from the supermarket produce area (washed in cold water and stem areas cut off)

1 quart of white distilled vinegar (5% acidity)

1 1/2 cups of Kosher salt

1 cup of sugar

20 small hot red Thai peppers, tops cut off

1/4 cup of mustard seeds

2 tsp. of ground turmeric

2 tbsp. of black peppercorns

10 large cloves of fresh garlic, sliced

1 1/2 teaspoons of food grade calcium chloride (optional) (Do not use more than 3/4 teaspoon per gallon of brine. Less is fine.)

Directions:

Pour two gallons of water into the bucket and add the quart of vinegar, one and one half cups of kosher salt, the sugar and the (optional) calcium chloride and mix well.

Cut 1/8th of an inch off the ends of each clean cucumber. Then slice them lengthwise into 1/4" thick slices. Put the cucumber slices into the bucket.

Add the seeded dill heads or fronds of dill to the bucket.

Peel and then cut the garlic cloves into thin slices and add them to the bucket.

Add the mustard seed, the turmeric, the hot peppers and the black peppercorns to the bucket and stir to mix.

Add enough water to bring the bucket contents (including the pickle slices) to about three gallons. The idea is to leave enough space above the brine and cucumbers for adding a dinner plate and some weights, such that you can still cover the bucket with its lid. Stir the contents thoroughly.

Place a weighted plate on top of the cucumbers to force them down into the brine. I typically use a dinner plate and weigh it down with anything non-metallic, like plastic water bottles filled with water, tightly capped, or a stack of ceramic tiles.

Put the lid on the bucket to keep out foreign matter, insects, etc.

Ferment the pickles for about three weeks in a room that is 60°F to 70° F. Try to avoid higher temperatures, though fermentation can be done slowly at lower temperatures, like 55°F.

Check the fermentation progress every three days. Remove any mold that might form on the top of the brine with paper towels. Then mix the contents

thoroughly. Replenish the brine if necessary to keep the liquid level above the cucumbers, using a mixture of 1/8 cup of kosher salt and 1/2 cup white distilled vinegar in one quart of water.

Check the pickles after two weeks by eating one. If it is pickled all the way through and tastes fairly intense and uniform in taste through the pickle then the fermentation process is completed. If the pickles need more fermentation time give them three more days and test them again. Repeat as necessary.

Process the completed pickles, garlic, mustard seeds, black peppercorns, hot peppers, dill and brine by canning them, or by vacuum sealing them and then pasteurizing them. If you can them immerse six sealed pint or quart canning jars of pickles into a large pot of boiling water with a dish towel or two inside the pot to cushion the bottoms of the jars during canning, or, use a canning pot specially made for that purpose. Repeat as necessary to process all the pickles.

Once the covered pot of water again comes to a boil after inserting the jars of pickles, let the boiling continue on low to medium heat gently for five minutes. Then the jars can be removed and allowed to cool and seal. Remember to retighten the lids when the jars are removed from the boiling water. It is not necessary to can the pickles in the boiling water for any extended period due to the concentration of vinegar and salt in the brine. Canning in boiling water for too long will make the pickles soft instead of crisp.

The alternative to canning is pasteurization at 160°F for 30 minutes for the pickles and the brine if you vacuum seal the pickles. Refrigerate the pickles for up to a year. Or, you can simply bottle and refrigerate the pickles and use them within three months.

Enjoy ... and I know you will.

Small Batch Of Sweet Hot Garlic Dill Pickles - ☺♥

I decided to try an experiment and make pickles with English cucumbers since regular pickling cucumbers are out of season/not available (Except at a price gouging \$2.99 per pound [twice the overpriced "in season" price]). Where are the imported ones?

I decided to make a small batch with two English cucumbers as I didn't know if the English cucumber slices would become too soft during brining, unlike regular pickling cucumbers. One big difference from typical pickling recipes is that I use food grade calcium chloride to make pickles crisp and crunchy, and I don't know if that will compensate the tendency for non-pickling types of cucumbers to get too soft during brining. (Hint: It does!)

The recipe below is a subset/small version of my full recipe for this type of pickle, modified by using peppers instead of red pepper flakes, and scaled so you can make a small batch in a 2 1/2 to 3 quart jar. Of course, you can scale the recipe to whatever size jar you decide to use. Mine was/is a leftover jar from an earlier purchase of commercial pickles (Vlasic®).

Beyond ingredient modifications I decided to process the dry ingredients in a Magic Bullet® mixer to turn all of it into powder form. That was a fine decision.

Small batches don't require large buckets or much storage space during the brining process. I'm using my garage for the brining period, which has Fall temperatures in the range of 60 degrees F to 70 degrees F in our New England climate.

I list sodium benzoate as an optional ingredient. As a preservative it allows you to keep the pickles in the brine in a sealed jar or in vacuum sealed bags, refrigerated, for a shelf life of up to a year. Note that it is not added until after the brining period, for if welcome fermentation accompanies the brining you don't want to stop it with a preservative. Later, you want the preservative to eliminate any future worry related to bacteria or yeast. If you don't use a preservative you must keep the pickles refrigerated and you should eat all of the pickles within three months.

My results? Wow! Yes, this method works just fine, and these babies are hot! You might want to use fewer peppers. Your choice. Have fun.

Ingredients: (Use a 2 1/2 to 3 quart wide mouth jar)

1 1/2 lbs. of fresh young pickling cucumbers or 2 English cucumbers

1/2 large head of fresh dill, bottom of stems cut off, chopped
1 1/2 quarts of water
6 oz. of white distilled vinegar (5% acidity)
2 tbsp. of Kosher salt
2 tbsp. of sugar
1 jalapeno pepper sliced 1/8" thick slices with seeds
8 small hot red Thai peppers, tops cut off and discarded, bases cut in half
1 tsp. of mustard seeds
1/4 tsp. of ground turmeric
1 tsp. of black peppercorns
2 large cloves of fresh garlic, sliced thin
1/4 tsp. of food grade calcium chloride
1/4 tsp. of sodium benzoate concentrate (optional) (You can buy it from Koldkiss® via the Internet)

Directions:

Powder the dry ingredients (salt, sugar, mustard seeds, turmeric, peppercorns, calcium chloride) with a Magic Bullet® mixer. That takes about one minute at most.

Add the powdered dry ingredients mixture to the liquid brine ingredients (water, vinegar) in a 3 qt. bowl and stir to mix.

Process the other ingredients (garlic, peppers, dill) except the cucumbers and mix them into the brine.

Slice the cucumbers on a either straight line, end to end, or on a diagonal, and 1/4" thick.

Add the cucumber slices to the brine bowl and mix well.

Dispense the bowl contents into the 2 1/2 to 3 quart jar. I use a canning jar funnel typically used when dispensing brines for canning vegetables, and that eliminates any spilling, unless, of course, you are spastic! Old people (like me) beware!

Place a small tumbler (glass) on top of the mixture, that slightly sticks above the rim of the jar (1/2" to 1") when it is put on top of the jar contents, to force all cucumber slices and other ingredients into the brine when you close the lid on the jar. That simple trick keeps you from having to stir the brining cucumber slices to assure even pickling and no formation of mold.

Put the lid on the jar and store the brining cucumbers at 60 to 70 degrees F for two weeks.

Add the sodium benzoate (if you are using it) to the mixture and mix well.

Then serve the delicious pickles, and perhaps vacuum seal and refrigerate some of them, where they will keep very well for months if you used the optional sodium benzoate. Otherwise, without sodium benzoate, it is best to keep the pickles and brine in the brining jar in the refrigerator and use the pickles within one to three months.

The pickle slices go very well on any sandwich like a sub, a ham and cheese sandwich, or even on an hors d'ouvres tray.

Enjoy!

Stewed Tomatoes - ▲

This is another recipe I developed in 2010 to take advantage of the bumper crop of tomatoes. Yes, I looked up about six different recipes, culled the best (in my opinion) from each, and added my secret ingredients (uh, huh ...). The result was very tasty, but were I to change the recipe I would skip the added tomato juice.

Ingredients: (makes one gallon)

24 large vine ripened tomatoes (think Big Boy® or Better Boy® varieties)

1 cup of diced celery

1 cup of diced sweet onion

1 cup of diced sweet red pepper

1 cup of diced green pepper

1/3 cup of chopped fresh basil

3 tbsp. of Sugar

1 tsp. of Sea salt

¾ tsp. of Black pepper

4 cloves of garlic, minced

6 tbsp. of Cornstarch

1/3 cup of white or rice vinegar

1 cup of Ray's tomato juice (I'll skip this in the future)

¼ cup of Texas Pete's® Hot Sauce

Directions:

Peel the tomatoes by immersing each one in boiling water for about 30 seconds, then cutting them into quarters. Discard skins and stem areas. Put tomato pieces in a 6 quart pot. Heat the pot on low once all the tomatoes have been added and stir every few minutes to create some juice. Remove one cup of juice to use later with the cornstarch.

Prepare all the diced, chopped, minced ingredients and add them to the pot. Stir well. Add the sugar, vinegar, hot sauce, salt and pepper and stir well.

Put the cornstarch and the cooled cup of extracted tomato juice into a separate bowl and mix well.

Bring the contents of the pot to a boil on high heat and then reduce to a simmer and cover the pot with a lid. Let the contents simmer for 15 minutes.

Stir the cornstarch/tomato juice mixture and add it all at once to the pot. Stir continuously on medium heat until the contents again boil. Let boil for two minutes and turn the heat off and cover the pot with the lid.

You might can the stewed tomatoes immediately or you can do what I do. I let the pot contents cool, covered, and then refrigerate it overnight. Then I vacuum seal pint quantities of the stewed tomatoes. These will keep a very long time refrigerated ... think two or three months as a minimum ... or, if you insist, freeze the product for later use.

Honesty demands that I tell you that any introduction of air borne yeast during the vacuum sealing process will yield fermentation after vacuum sealing that will cause the vacuum sealed bags of stewed tomatoes to puff up ... and that is obviously not good. If that happens I recommend you discard the product. I have had numerous successful batches and some bad batches, and I believe vacuum sealing the product while hot is the safest way to go, though it will make vacuum sealing a bit more difficult as hot liquids tend to boil up a lot during vacuum sealing. Use larger bags and smaller product quantities to overcome that problem. ==> Well, I have a new improvement to add. Use sodium benzoate (See the Food Nirvana "Dabbling in Science" section) as a preservative at a rate of 1/10th of 1 percent by weight of the product being packaged. It can be added during the cooking process, but be sure to weigh all the ingredients first to assure accuracy.

Sweet Pickled Peppers - ☺♥

Sweet Pickled Peppers are amazing on sub sandwiches, good on cheese steak sandwiches and also on some types of hors d'oeuvres. I wanted to buy the type of sweet pepper rings that used to be used by the better sub shops, along with hot pepper rings and sometimes pickle slices. But I could not find any source for the correct type of sweet pepper rings at anything below shyster prices on Amazon® and absurd shipping cost on WebRestaurant®, so it was time to find a candidate recipe on the Internet and make small batches until I recreate what I used to enjoy every time I bought a large Italian sub.

Sweet Pickled Peppers are simple to make in your own kitchen. You need clean/sterile canning jars and some type of large pot to make the brine and then to can the sealed jars of peppers and brine in boiling water. Use a canning pot if you have one ... otherwise put two or more layers of dish towel in the bottom of a 10 to 12 quart pot half filled with water, before you put in the jars of peppers about to be canned.

The ingredients listed below are for a batch of about six pints of sweet pickled peppers. I made small test batches and they came out fine, so this recipe is going into Food Nirvana now.

Ingredients: (makes six pints)

1 tablespoon of pickling salt or kosher salt

4 cups of apple cider vinegar (5% strength)

1 1/2 cups of white distilled vinegar (5% strength)

2 cups of water

4 cups of granulated white sugar

8 cloves of fresh garlic, peeled and sliced thinly

1 teaspoon of turmeric powder

1 tablespoon of whole peppercorns

1 teaspoon of mustard seed

1 teaspoon of celery seed

6 lbs. (or a bit more) of cleaned, fresh Bell peppers of various colors, and/or mild Mexican peppers, sliced 1/4" to 1/2" thick, in 2" to 3" long strips

1 large sweet onion halved vertically, peeled and sliced thinly

1/4 tsp. of food grade calcium chloride to retain crispness (optional)

1/10 of 1 percent sodium benzoate by total ingredients weight as a preservative (optional)

Directions:

In the next step weigh the brine ingredients before adding them to the pot. The idea is you want the total ingredient weight before you add the brine to the peppers so you can add the right quantity of (optional) sodium benzoate to the brine first. Remember to add the weight of the peppers to the weight of the other ingredients before doing the sodium benzoate calculation.

Make the brine in a 10 to 12 quart pot. Place the salt, cider and white vinegars, water, sugar, garlic, onion and spices, calcium chloride and sodium benzoate into the pot and bring the brine to a boil over medium to high heat.

Clean the canning jars with hot water and soap at your sink. Rinse them well in hot water.

Pack the sliced pepper strips into the canning jars. Press down to compact them and make sure you have one pound of pepper strips in each jar.

Use a wide-mouth funnel and ladle hot pickling brine with pieces of garlic, onion and spices over top of the peppers, filling the canning jar but leaving ½-inch of headspace at the top of each jar.

Remove any air bubbles by pressing the contents down with a fork. Wipe the glass rim with a clean, damp paper towel. Center the lid on the jar. Apply/turn the band until the fit is fingertip tight.

Place the filled/sealed jars in a boiling water bath. Adjust the water level to barely cover the jars. Process/boil for 15 minutes. If needed, adjust the time for elevation above sea level. Remove the jars from the water bath and place them on a wood cutting board. There is a bottle removal tool you can buy that makes the canning process easy and keeps you from burning your fingers. Otherwise ladle some hot water from the pot until you can remove the first jar without putting your fingers into the hot water.

Tighten the jar lids and allow the jars to cool completely on the cutting board for 24 hours.

For best flavor, store the sweet pickled peppers in the pantry for 3 to 4 weeks before enjoying them. Keep the jars in a cool, dry place for up to 1 year.

Enjoy. And always refrigerate the jar contents after opening.

Sweet Pickled Banana Pepper Rings - ?

I have always enjoyed both sweet and hot banana pepper Rings on Italian subs. Yet the supermarkets in the Northeast USA never seem to have the sweet variety, so I had to find a recipe for making the sweet ones.

The recipe provided here is from the Internet and I have made significant procedural changes to it to take advantage of calcium chloride as a crisping agent, sodium benzoate as a preservative, and pasteurizing instead of canning the product, followed by vacuum sealing and either refrigeration or food pantry storage.

I have to test this recipe to decide what ingredient changes might be necessary. I will modify the recipe as appropriate and get back to you with the final recipe.

Ingredients: (makes 2, 8 ounce jars)

1/2 lb of banana peppers seeded and sliced crossways into rings

1 small sweet onion sliced thinly, then cut the slices in half

1 1/2 cups of white distilled vinegar

2/3 cup of sugar

1/2 teaspoon of mustard seeds

1/2 teaspoon of celery seed

2 cloves of fresh garlic, sliced thinly

1/2 tsp. of kosher or canning salt

0.3 grams of food grade calcium chloride

1/10 of 1 percent sodium benzoate by weight of all the other ingredients

Directions:

Sterilize 2, 8 ounce canning jars, lid inserts and rings in hot water.

Bring the vinegar, sugar, mustard seed, celery seed and calcium chloride to a boil in a two quart stainless steel saucepan, stirring to assure perfect mixing and dissolving of the sugar and the calcium chloride..

Put the sliced peppers, garlic and onions into the boiling mixture, immediately shutting off the heat and mixing the slices of pepper, garlic and onion with the brine.

Use a candy thermometer to check the temperature and then heat the mixture on a very low setting to maintain a 165 degrees F mixture temperature for 15 minutes, then remove the pan from the heat and let the contents cool to room temperature, covered.

Weigh the mixture in a one quart stainless steel bowl using a kitchen scale, allowing for the tare weight of the bowl. Calculate the amount of Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution to add, following the directions in the Dabbling in Science topic in the Technology section of Food Nirvana. Measure out that amount of product using a very sensitive reloader scale. Add it to the pepper slice mixture and mix well.

Divide the mixture evenly between the two canning jars. If necessary, add a small amount of water to each jar to bring the liquid level up to the glass ring near the top of the jar and mix the water in with the rest of the brine. Seal the lids with the inserts and rings and refrigerate for at least three hours.

Slightly loosen the lid rings and vacuum seal the jars of sweet pickled banana pepper rings.

Screw on the lid rings tightly.

Store the jars in the refrigerator or in food pantry storage.

Enjoy. And always refrigerate the jar contents after opening.

Marie's Fried Zucchini - ☺♥

This recipe is one created by Marie and it is truly delicious. Better yet it is so simple a child could do it. It is easy to prepare and a fine side dish for almost any kind of meal. Have fun ... You will love this stuff.

Ingredients: (Serves two or three adults)

2 fresh young zucchini squash, about 8" long, ends cut off, sliced into pieces 3/8 of an inch thick, not peeled

2 cups of Kraft® Parmesan cheese put into a one gallon plastic Ziploc® bag

A can of Pam® cooking spray

Directions:

Make all other meal items before making the fried zucchini as it should be served quickly to retain its texture.

Hint: As you slice the zucchini use the pieces quickly to keep the cut sides moist so the Parmesan cheese will coat/stick to each side well. In the meantime, if cut slices are kept tightly together (as if the squash wasn't cut) they will not lose any appreciable amount of moisture.

Pre-warm the oven to 160°F. Put a dinner or serving plate into the oven to pre-warm it.

Add a few slices of the cut zucchini to the bag of cheese. Close and shake the bag to coat the sides of the zucchini with the Parmesan cheese.

Remove the coated slices and put them on a paper towel or a plate.

If you run low on the Parmesan cheese in the bag before you are done coating all the zucchini slices simply add more cheese to the bag.

When all the slices have been coated put the excess cheese back into its plastic container and back into the refrigerator.

Spray a large non-stick skillet generously with Pam®.

Place slices of the cheese coated zucchini into the skillet, allowing ample room to flip them over with a spatula easily during frying.

Spray the tops of the pieces of zucchini in the skillet liberally with Pam®.

Fry the zucchini on medium to medium-high heat, turning the pieces over to fry the second side when they are light to medium golden in color on the bottom. This may take three to five minutes per side, but keeping the heat limited results in a better product. The goal is to barely cook the zucchini through while achieving the crisp light to medium golden color of the cheese on each side. Experience is the best teacher so don't be afraid to modify what you do in your kitchen to get the best results.

As each batch completes put the slices onto the pre-warmed plate in the oven, but do not stack them.

I like to clean the skillet with a quick hot water rinse and a wipe with a paper towel between batches to maximize good flavor and avoid unwanted over-fried oily cheese particles.

Repeat the above frying steps until all the coated pieces of zucchini have been fried.

Serve the fried zucchini immediately, for it will lose its crisp and yummy texture within ten minutes.

Due to the use of the Parmesan cheese, which has a fairly high salt content, it is not necessary to season the fried zucchini with additional salt. But serve the fried zucchini with salt on the side anyway to please salt lovers.

Zucchini with Tomato Sauce - ☺♥

I have a very pleasant memory of my first time eating this delightful dish. I had just learned that I passed all my final college course exams, oral and written comprehensive exams and I did well on my Graduate Record Advanced Chemistry Exam. I was going to graduate from Juniata College with my B.Sc. in Chemistry. And I already had a great job offer with a large chemical company. It was time to celebrate.

My wife Pat and I were on a very tight budget but I figured this was the time to splurge and have a great meal. A trip to the supermarket yielded some nice steaks, some corn and a can of Del Monte® Zucchini in Tomato Sauce. I literally had never seen the zucchini product before, in fact, I had never eaten zucchini in any form in my entire life. The canned zucchini product was expensive compared to other canned vegetables and I guess it was considered a specialty item as it was on a top shelf with other special food items. I decided to try it. One taste and I had found another favorite food. It was sweet and the sauce was not overpowering.

For a number of years I simply bought the occasional can and enjoyed it. It didn't occur to me to try to make it at home until I grew zucchini squash. My one experiment was not successful as the sauce was far too diluted. I put that idea on the shelf for future consideration. Well, here I am, 47 years after graduating from college, and I finally decided to try again.

This time I was quite successful on my first attempt. I am most pleased. A bit of Internet research and a bit of my own judgment made the day. The difference between my product and the Del Monte® product is simply that I went very light on the seasonings so people could add salt or pepper individually at serving time. Of course, one of my chosen ingredients was Ragu® Traditional Pasta Sauce, so adding other seasonings before trying the dish would have been foolish.

This is a very simple recipe and very easy to make. It is well worth your time, and you will save a lot of money compared to buying the Del Monte® product, which has become rather expensive. I guess there must be a permanent zucchini shortage!

I provide two methods for storing the completed product, canning and vacuum sealing. The process steps are quite different so you will want to read the entire recipe first to make certain you have the necessary equipment and materials. Beyond that, I show the optional use of sodium benzoate in this recipe, which is a commonly used preservative for a wide variety of foods, at concentrations of 1/20th to 1/10th of one percent by total product weight, including any liquid. This

recipe comes in at about nine pounds total weight so the amount of Koldkiss® concentrated sodium benzoate solution needed to achieve 1/10th of one percent by weight is 12 grams of the concentrated solution. You will need a very sensitive kitchen scale to measure that amount in grams. I use a reloader scale that I bought from Cabela's®. Note that using sodium benzoate is essentially a guarantee that the product will remain fresh and free of any bacterial growth or fermentation during refrigerator storage of the vacuum sealed product. In short, you can expect shelf life for vacuum sealed bags of the product of at least one year in the refrigerator.

Have fun ... the recipe makes eight to nine pints, so you can decide to can it, vacuum seal it or simply serve a large crowd.

Ingredients:

4 lbs. of fresh young zucchini, ends cut off and cut into bite size chunks. Do not peel it.

1, quart of Ragu® Traditional Pasta Sauce (or better yet, use marinara sauce)

1, 14 ounce can of tomato sauce

1, very large sweet onion, chopped into ½" by ½" pieces

1, green bell pepper, cleaned and cut into ½" by ½" pieces

8 large leaves of fresh basil

½ cup of sugar

2 cups of water

12 grams of Koldkiss® sodium benzoate solution

Directions:

Put the pasta sauce, onion pieces and green pepper pieces into a one-gallon stainless steel or non-stick surface pot. Put two cups of water into the empty pasta sauce bottle, put the lid on and shake it, then dispense the water and sauce mixture into the pot. Add the can of tomato sauce to the pot.

Add the sugar to the pot and mix well. Measure out the sodium benzoate solution using an ultrasensitive kitchen or reloader scale and add the solution to the pot and mix.

Heat the mixture to boiling on high heat, stirring every few minutes. Then lower the heat and simmer the mixture for fifteen minutes.

Add the basil and the zucchini, mix well and heat the mixture to a pasteurizing temperature of 180 degrees F. Maintain that temperature for 30 minutes.

If you plan to vacuum seal the product, then remove the pot from the heat, cover it with a lid, let it cool to room temperature and then refrigerate it for a minimum of four hours. Vacuum seal the chilled product to 28.5 inches of mercury in 3 cup vacuum sealing bags in the ratio of two cups of zucchini solids and one cup of sauce. Refrigerate the vacuum sealed product.

If you plan to can the product then dispense the hot solid and liquid portions into pint canning jars, seal them, and process them in a boiling water bath for 15 minutes. Remove the jars after the boiling cycle, retighten the lids and allow the canned product to cool. The lids will seal during cooling. Any jar that does not seal must have the lid and jar cleaned, retightened, and be brought to a boil momentarily, then cooled to seal the jar.

Serve the zucchini with tomato sauce hot and let each person season it individually. You will get compliments.