

Game plan

The day before:

- Make the cheese spread and refrigerate.**
- Make the Parmesan mixture for the garlic bread; refrigerate.**
- Lightly toast the pine nuts for the salad.**
- Make the dessert; refrigerate.**

A couple of hours ahead:

- Prep the chicken, asparagus, and carrots and put them in their own baking dishes.**
- Remove the Parmesan mixture from the fridge to soften.**
- Butter the bread; wrap in foil.**
- Wash the greens and herbs for the salad.**

An hour before guests arrive:

- Heat the oven. Roast the chicken, followed by the asparagus and carrots.**
- Shave the Parmigiano and prepare the fennel for the salad. Zest and juice the lemon for the dressing.**
- Remove the chicken and vegetables from the oven when done. Increase the oven temperature to 425°F.**

As guests arrive:

- Unmold the cheese spread and serve.**
- Put the garlic bread in the oven.**

Just before dinner:

- Make the dressing and toss the salad. Serve it along with the garlic bread.**

After the main course:

- Scoop the cookies and cream into individual bowls, garnish, sauce, and serve.**



Goat Cheese Spread with Herbs & Olive Oil

Yields about 1 1/4 cups; serves six.

- 1/2 lb. goat cheese (about 1 cup)**
- 2 Tbs. heavy cream; more if needed**
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for drizzling**
- 2 Tbs. dry white wine**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh herbs (choose at least two from the following: parsley, chives, tarragon, dill)**
- 1 Tbs. finely grated lemon zest**
- Good crackers or slices of walnut bread**
- About 1 pint cherry tomatoes**
- 1 celery heart, cut into sticks**

Put the goat cheese, cream, olive oil, and wine in a food processor (or mix in a bowl with a wooden spoon). Pulse just to blend. The mixture should be spreadable; if it's too thick, add another 1 or 2 Tbs. cream and pulse again. Season with salt and pepper, pulse again, and taste, adjusting the seasoning as necessary. Reserve 1 tsp.

of the herbs for sprinkling, and add rest to the processor. Add 2 tsp. of lemon zest. Pulse once more to blend.

Line a small (about 1 1/2-cup) round bowl or cup with a sheet of plastic wrap and fill with the cheese mixture. Cover and chill for at least 30 minutes and up to 24 hours.

To serve, invert the bowl onto a serving platter and peel off the plastic wrap. With the back of a spoon, level off the top of the cheese and make a small depression. Drizzle olive oil over the top. Sprinkle with the reserved herbs and lemon zest. Arrange the crackers or bread slices, tomatoes, and celery sticks around the cheese and let guests serve themselves.



Salad of Roast Chicken & Spring Vegetables with Lemony Dressing

Serves six.

- 6 medium bone-in, skin-on chicken breast halves**
- About ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves**
- 1 lb. asparagus, woody ends trimmed**
- 1 lb. trimmed baby carrots (or larger carrots, peeled, halved crosswise, and thick halves split lengthwise)**
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice; more if needed**
- 1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest**
- ¼ tsp. Dijon mustard**
- 6 cups salad greens (such as bibb lettuce torn into pieces with some sliced radicchio added for color)**
- 1 medium fennel bulb, trimmed, cut in half lengthwise, cored, and sliced crosswise as finely as possible**
- ½ cup fresh flat parsley leaves**
- ½ cup fresh mint leaves (torn into bite-size pieces if large)**
- ½ cup pine nuts, lightly toasted**
- Thin shavings Parmigiano-Reggiano (use a vegetable peeler)**

Position racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven. Heat the oven to 400°F.

Arrange the chicken in a shallow, flameproof roasting pan, rub each breast with olive oil, and season both sides generously with salt and pepper. Sprinkle the thyme on top of the chicken breasts. Roast skin side up in the oven on the upper rack until the juices run clear (an instant-read thermometer should register 165°F), 35 to 45 minutes.

Meanwhile, put the asparagus in a medium baking dish (9x13-inch, or one in which they'll fit in a single, uncrowded layer). Drizzle on enough olive oil to coat, season with salt and pepper, and toss. Arrange in a single layer. In a separate dish, do the same with the carrots. Roast the vegetables on the lower rack along with the chicken until they're tender, 12 to 16 minutes for the asparagus and 20 to 30 minutes for the carrots. The carrots can be roasted very deeply, but take care not to over-roast the asparagus or it will turn mushy. When the vegetables are done, set them aside.

Make the dressing: When the chicken is done, transfer the breasts to a platter and tent with foil. Pour any juices and fat from the roasting pan into a small bowl (don't worry if there isn't much). Put the roasting pan on a burner over medium heat. Add 3 Tbs. of the lemon juice to the pan and, using a wooden spoon or spatula, quickly scrape up all the browned juices, dissolving them in the lemon. Pour this into the bowl with the cooking juices. Once the chicken has rested for about 10 minutes, uncover and add any accumulated juices to the bowl. Whisk in the lemon zest, mustard, and enough olive oil to balance the acidity of the lemon juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper. You should have about ½ cup dressing.

Finish the dish: When the chicken is cool enough to handle but still quite warm, slide your fingers between the meat and the bones and pull the meat and skin away in one piece (the tenderloin may come off in a separate piece). Cut each breast (and tenderloin) into about six slices on the diagonal, keeping them intact so you can fan them out on the salad later.

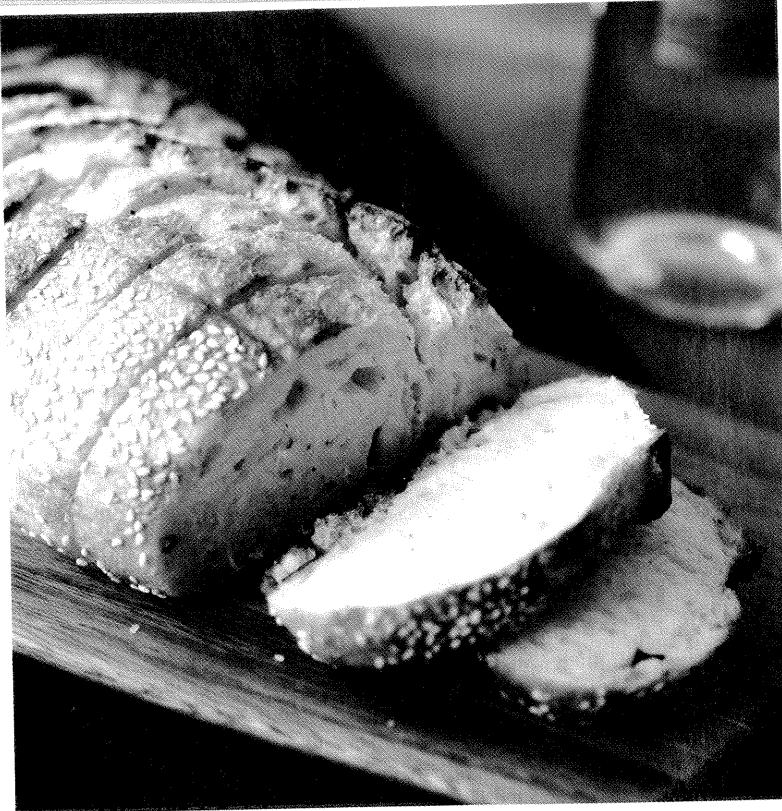
Put the greens, fennel, and fresh herb sprigs in a large bowl. Toss with the remaining 1 Tbs. lemon juice and about 2 Tbs. olive oil, adding more if needed to lightly coat the salad. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

On six large plates or in six large shallow bowls, arrange a bed of the greens. On each plate lay a fan of chicken meat on one side, a few spears of asparagus on another side, and some carrots on another. Drizzle about 1 Tbs. of the dressing over the meat and vegetables. Sprinkle with the pine nuts and top with a few Parmigiano shavings. Serve immediately.

What to drink

To pair with the goat cheese spread, you'll want a bright, fruit-forward white with crisp acidity and no oak, like a Pinot Gris. Try those from Elk Cove or WillaKenzie Estate (both from Oregon). The appealing fruit and supple texture of Pinot Noir make it a perfect mate with the main dish. Try A to Z's Pinot Noir from Oregon or Saintsbury's Garnet from the Carneros region of California.

If your schedule is too tight to make dessert (even the easy one on p. 24), break a bar of good dark chocolate into glossy shards and share.



Garlic-Parmesan Bread

Serves six.

- 1/4 lb. (1/2 cup) salted butter, softened**
- 1/4 cup lightly packed finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**
- 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 large cloves garlic, very finely minced or grated on a rasp-style grater**
- 1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 medium loaf artisan-style bread with a tight crumb (preferably a bâtarde shape, not a baguette)**

Heat the oven to 425°F.

In a food processor or a large bowl, combine the butter, Parmigiano, oil, garlic, lemon zest, 1/4 tsp. salt, and 1/8 tsp. pepper. Pulse a few times to blend but don't overprocess or

the butter might separate. If mixing by hand, mash with a fork or a wooden spoon.

Slice the bread 1-inch thick, cutting almost but not all the way through the bottom crust, so it's easy to pull apart. Spread a light, even coating of the butter mixture on both sides of each slice of bread. (You may not need all the butter; refrigerate any leftover for up to a week or freeze for up to three months.) Wrap the bread in foil and put the loaf on a baking sheet to catch any butter that runs out. Heat in the oven for about 15 minutes, then open the top of the foil to slightly crisp the top of the loaf, about another 5 minutes. Serve while hot.

Chocolate-Raspberry Cookies & Cream

Yields 2 1/2 cups cream and 3/4 cup sauce; serves six.

If you don't have crème fraîche, you can use all cream.

- 3 cups frozen raspberries (about 12 oz.), thawed**
- 5 Tbs. granulated sugar; more if needed**
- Few drops fresh lemon juice**
- Kosher salt**
- 2/3 cup heavy cream**
- 1/3 cup crème fraîche**
- 21 Famous Chocolate Wafer thin chocolate cookies**
- 6 cute mint sprigs**

Put 1 cup of the raspberries in a small bowl, sprinkle with 2 Tbs. of the sugar, mash with a fork, and let sit for a few minutes.

Meanwhile, put the remaining 2 cups of berries and another 2 Tbs. sugar in a food processor (or blender) and process until the berries form a purée. Strain through a fine sieve into small bowl, pressing with a rubber spatula to get the seeds out. Squeeze in a few drops of lemon juice and a tiny pinch of salt. Taste and add more sugar or lemon if needed. The sauce should be thin enough to drizzle. If it seems too thick, add a few drops of water. Cover and refrigerate.

In a medium bowl, combine the cream, the crème fraîche, and the remaining 1 Tbs. sugar and whip with a hand mixer until the mixture forms firm thick peaks. Stir the mashed berries and sugar and lightly fold into the cream mixture with a rubber spatula, leaving streaks.

Reserve 6 of the cookies for decoration and crunch up the rest into uneven pieces—not too small. Fold the cookies into the cream. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing the wrap onto the surface of the cream, and chill until the cookie pieces are thoroughly softened, at least 2 hours and preferably overnight.

To serve, use an ice cream scoop or large spoon to scoop out a mound of cookies and cream into a small bowl or onto a plate. Drizzle a ribbon of raspberry sauce around the plate, tuck a cookie into the cream, and decorate with a mint sprig.



Shopping list

Fresh produce

- 1 head garlic
- 10 to 12 oz. salad greens
- 1 bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 small bunch fresh chives, tarragon, or dill
- 1 small bunch fresh thyme
- 1 small bunch fresh mint
- 1 celery heart
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 1 bunch asparagus (about 1 lb.)
- 1 lb. baby carrots
- 1 medium fennel bulb
- 2 lemons

Meat & dairy

- 6 bone-in, skin-on chicken breast halves
- 1/4 lb. lightly salted butter
- 1/2 lb. fresh goat cheese
- Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1 cup heavy cream
- Crème fraîche

Wine

- Dry white wine

Bakery

- Walnut bread (if not using crackers)
- 1 loaf artisan-style bread (for the garlic bread)

Other groceries

- 12 oz. frozen raspberries
- 1/3 cup pine nuts
- Good crackers (if not using walnut bread)
- Famous Chocolate Wafers (thin chocolate cookies)
- Granulated sugar
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Dijon mustard
- Kosher salt and whole black peppercorns for grinding

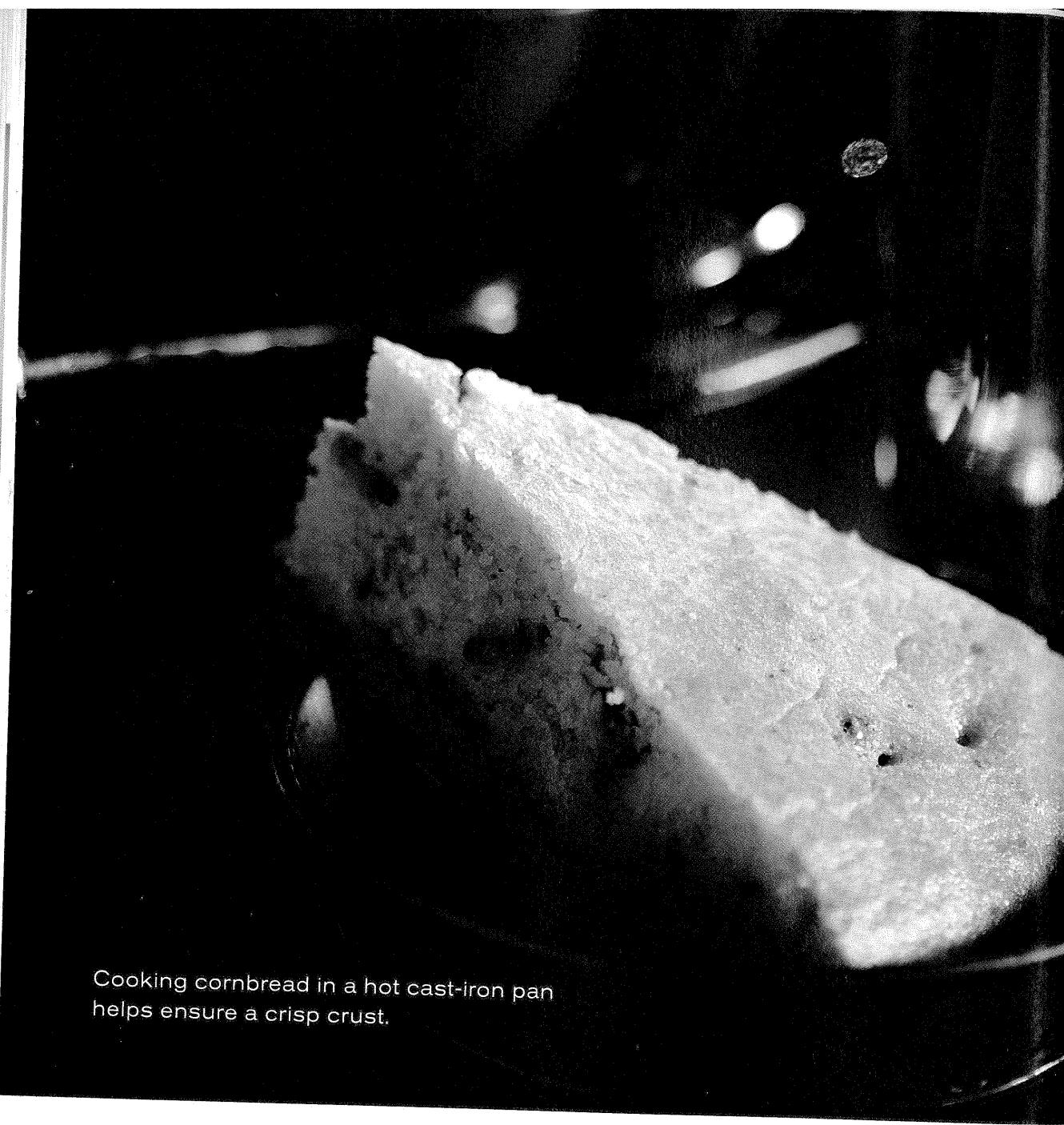


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Cooking cornbread in a hot cast-iron pan helps ensure a crisp crust.

Cornbread with Scallions & Bacon

Yields one 10-inch round bread; serves eight.

This cornbread has a moist, tender crumb, which is why you can make it ahead and it will still taste fresh.

4½ oz. (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 cup yellow cornmeal, preferably stone-ground
2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. table salt
1¼ cups low-fat milk
2 Tbs. honey
1 large egg
⅓ cup corn oil

8 scallions (white and light green parts only), trimmed and thinly sliced

Freshly ground black pepper
3 thick slices bacon

Heat the oven to 400°F.

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt. In a medium bowl, whisk the milk, honey, egg, corn oil, scallions, and a couple of grinds black pepper until well combined.

In a 10-inch ovenproof skillet (preferably cast iron), cook the bacon over medium heat until crisp. Transfer to

paper towels to drain. Spoon off all but about 1 Tbs. of the bacon fat from the skillet. Add the milk mixture to the dry ingredients and stir with a rubber spatula until the ingredients are just blended. Crumble the bacon and fold it in; don't overmix.

Pour the batter into the hot skillet and bake until the top is golden brown, firm, and springy to the touch, 20 to 25 minutes; a toothpick inserted in the center should come out clean. Let cool in the pan for 5 minutes. Turn out onto a rack or serve in the pan, warm or at room temperature.

Cornbread with Scallions & Bacon

Yields one 10-inch round bread; serves eight.

This cornbread has a moist, tender crumb, which is why you can make it ahead and it will still taste fresh.

4 1/2 oz. (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour

1 cup yellow cornmeal, preferably stone-ground

2 tsp. baking powder

1 tsp. table salt

1 1/4 cups low-fat milk

2 Tbs. honey

1 large egg

1/3 cup corn oil

8 scallions (white and light green parts only), trimmed and thinly sliced

Freshly ground black pepper

3 thick slices bacon

Heat the oven to 400 deg. F.

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt. In a medium bowl, whisk the milk, honey, egg, corn oil, scallions, and a couple of grinds black pepper until well combined.

In a 10-inch ovenproof skillet (preferably cast-iron), cook the bacon over medium heat until crisp. Transfer to paper towels to drain. Spoon off all but about 1 Tbs. of the bacon fat from the skillet. Add the milk mixture to the dry ingredients and stir with a rubber spatula until the ingredients are just blended. Crumble the bacon and fold it in; don't overmix.

Pour the batter into the hot skillet and bake until the top is golden brown, firm, and springy to the touch, 20-25 minutes; a toothpick inserted in the center should come out clean. Let cool in the pan for 5 minutes. Turn out onto a rack or serve in the pan, warm or at room temperature.

Texas Beef Chili with Poblanos & Beer

Serves eight; yields 8 cups.

This chili has a pleasant kick and thickens as it sits overnight. It tastes best made with pure chile powders (not the old-fashioned chili powder mix, which typically contains other spices and salt), especially chipotle and New Mexico chile powders. (Ancho, another pure chile powder, is a good substitute for New Mexico.) Both ancho and chipotle powders are available from McCormick in grocery stores. For mail-order options, see p. 119.

3 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed
2 large sweet onions, diced (about 4 cups)
2 large fresh poblano peppers, stemmed, seeded, and diced (about 1½ cups)
5 cloves garlic, minced
Kosher salt
4½ lb. boneless beef chuck, cut into 1-inch cubes
2 bay leaves
2 cinnamon sticks, 3 to 4 inches long
3 Tbs. New Mexico chile powder (or 2 Tbs. ancho chile powder)
1 Tbs. chipotle chile powder
1 Tbs. ground cumin
½ tsp. ground cloves
One 12-oz. bottle amber ale, such as the Texas-made Shiner Bock (or Dos Equis Amber or Anchor Steam Liberty Ale)
1½ qt. homemade or lower-salt beef broth

FOR THE GARNISH:

Two 14-oz. cans kidney beans, rinsed and drained
1 medium red onion, chopped
3 medium tomatoes, cored, seeded, and chopped
½ cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
12 oz. sour cream or whole-milk plain yogurt

In a 12-inch skillet, heat 2 Tbs. of the oil over medium-high heat. Add the onions and sauté until softened, translucent, and starting to brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the poblanos, reduce the heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the poblanos soften, another 8 to 10 minutes. If the pan seems dry, add a little more olive oil. Add the garlic and 1 tsp. salt and sauté for another 5 minutes. Set aside.

Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil in an 8-qt. or larger Dutch oven (preferably enameled cast iron) over medium-high heat. Sear the

beef cubes until browned and crusty on two sides, working in batches to avoid crowding the pan. With tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the browned beef to a bowl. During searing, it's fine if the pan bottom gets quite dark, but if it smells like it's burning, reduce the heat a bit. If the pan ever gets dry, add a little more oil.

Once all the beef is seared and set aside, add the onions and peppers to the pan, along with the bay leaves, cinnamon sticks, chile powders, cumin, and cloves and cook, stirring, until the spices coat the vegetables and are fragrant, 15 to 30 seconds. Slowly add the beer while scraping the pan bottom with a wooden spoon to dissolve the coating of spices. Simmer until the beer is reduced by about half and the mixture has thickened slightly, 5 to 7 minutes. Add the beef, along with any accumulated juices, and the beef broth. Bring to a simmer and then reduce the heat to medium low. Simmer, partially covered, for 3 hours, stirring occasionally. Test a cube of meat—you should be able to cut it with a spoon. Discard the cinnamon sticks and bay leaves.

If not serving immediately, chill overnight. The next day, skim any fat from the top, if necessary, before reheating.

To serve, heat the chili gently. Using a slotted spoon, transfer about 2 cups of the beef cubes to a plate. Shred the meat with a fork and return it to pot. (The shredded meat will help create a thicker texture.) Taste and add more salt if needed. Heat the beans in a medium bowl covered with plastic in the microwave (or heat them gently in a saucepan). Arrange the beans, chopped red onion, tomatoes, cilantro, and sour cream in small bowls to serve as garnishes with the chili.

Browning the meat well is a crucial step for building deep, rich flavor.

Game plan

Up to two days ahead:

Make the chili.

Roast the beets for the salad.

Bake the pecan squares.

Make the vinaigrette.

Prepare the spicy pepitas.

That morning:

Skim the fat from the chili.

Peel and slice the beets.

Clean the salad greens and the cilantro for the garnish; refrigerate separately.

Bake the cornbread.

An hour before serving:

Combine the cabbage, red onion, and beets with half of the vinaigrette.

Take the chili out of the refrigerator; warm gently.

Warm up the cornbread.

Prepare the salad garnishes.

Prepare the chili toppings; arrange in bowls.

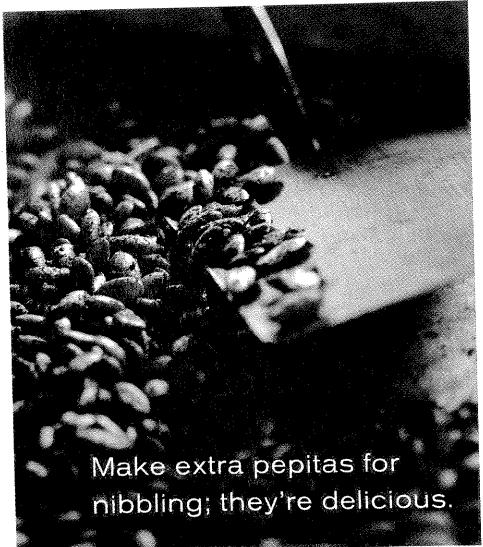
Just before serving:

Finish tossing the salad.

Slice the cornbread.



The bold flavors of this salad hold their own against the chili.



Make extra pepitas for nibbling; they're delicious.

Spicy Pepitas

Toss 6 oz. pepitas (available in natural-foods or specialty stores) with 1 tsp. corn or peanut oil, 1 tsp. pure chile powder (such as New Mexico or ancho), and $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt. Spread evenly on a rimmed baking sheet and roast at 375°F until golden and fragrant, 6 to 8 minutes. Let cool completely on the baking sheet. Store airtight once cooled.

Ruby Salad with Feta & Spicy Pepitas

Serves eight.

A delicious tumble of taste and textures, this salad can be served right along with the chili.

FOR THE BEETS:

1 bunch small beets (4 to 5), trimmed and scrubbed
2 to 3 sprigs fresh thyme or rosemary, or 3 bay leaves
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher or sea salt
1 Tbs. olive oil

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
2 Tbs. sherry vinegar
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

FOR THE SALAD:

4 cups very thinly sliced red cabbage (from 1 very small head)
1 medium red onion, very thinly sliced
 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. (4 cups) mixed baby greens
6 oz. feta cheese, crumbled (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup)
6 oz. spicy pepitas (1 generous cup; see the recipe at left)

Roast the beets: Heat the oven to 400°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil. Put the beets, herbs, salt, and a drizzle of olive oil in the center; toss the beets to coat. Fold the foil into a loose-fitting but tightly sealed packet around the beets. Roast the packet on the baking sheet until the beets are tender when pierced with a paring knife, 1 hour to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Let the beets cool completely in the foil. When cool, peel and slice each beet into six or eight wedges. The beets can be roasted up to two days ahead.

Make the vinaigrette: In a small bowl, combine the mustard, vinegar, lemon juice, $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Slowly whisk in the oil.

Make the salad: Combine the cabbage and onion in a medium bowl and set aside. Up to an hour before serving, add the beet wedges to the cabbage and onions; toss gently with half of the vinaigrette.

Just before serving, add the baby greens, half of the feta, and half of the pepitas; toss with the remaining vinaigrette. Arrange on a big serving platter and garnish with the remaining feta and pepitas.



Try a nip of bourbon with dessert.

Mexican-Style Pecan-Chocolate Squares

Yields sixteen 2½-inch squares.

A hint of cinnamon in the cookie base calls to mind the flavor of Mexican chocolate.

FOR THE COOKIE BASE:

**6 oz. (¾ cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces
9 oz. (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ cup packed light brown sugar
2 tsp. ground cinnamon
½ tsp. table salt
2 oz. finely grated bittersweet chocolate (a scant ½ cup)**

FOR THE PECAN TOPPING:

**10 oz. pecans (3 cups), toasted
¼ lb. (½ cup) unsalted butter
1 cup packed dark brown sugar
½ cup honey
2 Tbs. heavy cream
½ tsp. table salt**

Make the cookie base: Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Put the butter in a food processor, along with the flour, light brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Pulse until the mixture is well

combined (about 20 pulses). Scatter the dough into a 9x9-inch baking pan and press it evenly over the bottom. (Wipe out the processor bowl but don't bother washing it.) Bake the base until firm and lightly browned, about 25 minutes. When the cookie base comes out of the oven, sprinkle the grated chocolate evenly over the top. (Don't turn off the oven.) Set the pan aside.

Make the pecan topping: As the cookie base bakes, pulse the pecans in the food processor until coarsely chopped. In a medium-size heavy saucepan, melt the butter. Stir in the dark brown sugar, honey, cream, and salt. Simmer for 1 minute, stirring occasionally. Stir in the pecans. Pour the pecan mixture over the chocolate-sprinkled cookie base, spreading evenly. Bake until much of the filling is bubbling (not just the edges), 16 to 18 minutes. Let cool completely in the pan. When ready to serve, cut into 16 squares. Tightly covered, these bars will keep for about five days.

What to drink

The combination of savory and spicy flavors and dark beer in the chili makes you want to reach for a beer. The perfect pairing would be a bottle of the same amber beer used in the recipe, but you have lots of other options, too. The body and texture of the chili call for something robust, like Samuel Smith's Nut Brown Ale. A fine Belgian ale, such as Duvel or Orval, would also be delicious. Finally, try a hand-crafted bourbon such as Knob Creek or Blanton's to sip with the pecan squares.

Shopping list

Fresh produce

- 2 large sweet onions
- 2 medium red onions
- 1 head garlic
- 8 scallions
- ¼ lb. (4 cups) mixed baby greens
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro
- 3 sprigs rosemary or thyme
- 2 large fresh poblano peppers (or green bell peppers)
- 3 medium tomatoes
- 1 bunch (4 or 5) small beets
- 1 very small head red cabbage
- 1 lemon

Meat & dairy

- 4½ lb. boneless beef chuck
- 3 thick slices of bacon
- 1 large egg
- 12 oz. sour cream or whole-milk plain yogurt
- 6 oz. feta cheese
- 10 oz. (2½ sticks) unsalted butter
- ½ pint heavy cream
- 1¼ cups low-fat milk

Beer

- One 12-oz. bottle amber ale

Other groceries

- 1½ qt. homemade or lower-salt beef broth
- Two 14-oz. cans kidney beans
- 6 oz. pepitas
- ½ cup honey
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Olive oil
- Corn oil
- Sherry vinegar
- Dijon mustard
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal, preferably stone-ground
- Baking powder
- Unbleached all-purpose flour
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- 1 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 2 oz. bittersweet chocolate
- 10 oz. pecan halves
- Chipotle chile powder
- New Mexico or ancho chile powder
- Bay leaves
- Cinnamon sticks
- Ground cinnamon
- Ground cumin
- Ground cloves
- Table salt
- Kosher salt and whole black peppercorns for grinding



Smoky Eggplant & White Bean Dip with Pita Crisps

Yields 1½ cups dip; serves four to six.

- 5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for the pan**
- 1½ lb. small eggplant (2 to 3 small), trimmed and cut in half lengthwise**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 anchovy fillets (optional)**
- 1 small clove garlic**
- 1 cup canned cannellini beans, drained and rinsed**
- 3 pitas (preferably pocketless), each cut into eight wedges**
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more to taste**
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh mint; plus 1 Tbs. small leaves for garnish**
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh oregano**
- 2 Tbs. pine nuts, toasted**

Position a rack 4 inches from the broiler element and heat the broiler to high. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and grease lightly with oil. Rub the eggplant all over with 2 Tbs. of the oil and sprinkle the flesh side with ½ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper.

Arrange the eggplant, flesh side down, on the baking sheet and broil until the skin is charred and the eggplant flesh is very tender, 20 to 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, if using anchovies, mash them into a paste with the side of a chef's knife. Roughly chop the garlic, sprinkle it with a generous pinch of salt, and mash it into a paste with the side of a chef's knife. Transfer the anchovy and garlic pastes to a food processor and add the beans, 2 Tbs. of the oil, and 1 Tbs. water. Purée until smooth.

When the eggplant is done, set it aside to cool briefly. Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, toss the pita wedges with the remaining 1 Tbs. oil and ¼ tsp. salt. Arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet. Lower the rack so it's 6 inches from the broiler. Broil the pita wedges until golden brown on both sides, 1 to 2 minutes per side.

Scrape the eggplant flesh from the skin and add the flesh to the puréed beans in the food processor, along with the lemon juice, chopped mint, and oregano. Pulse briefly to form a chunky dip. Adjust the seasoning with more salt, pepper, or lemon juice to taste. Serve sprinkled with the pine nuts and mint leaves, with the toasted pita crisps on the side for dipping.

Couscous with Orange, Almonds & Herbs

Serves four to six.

Couscous is quick enough to make at the last minute, but you can make it ahead and reheat it in a heatproof serving dish, covered with foil, in a 350°F oven for about 15 minutes.

- 2 Tbs. olive oil**
- ½ medium yellow onion, finely chopped (about ½ cup)**
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped**
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 1½ cups couscous**
- Kosher salt***
- ½ cup slivered almonds, toasted**
- ½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley or cilantro, or a mix**
- Zest of 1 orange**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

In a medium straight-sided skillet or a large saucepan with a tight lid, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring frequently, until soft but not browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook for 2 minutes. Add 2¼ cups water and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat, add the butter, couscous, and 1 tsp. salt. Stir to combine. Cover and let stand for 15 minutes. With a fork, fluff the couscous. Stir in the almonds, herbs, and orange zest to taste. Season with salt and pepper to taste.





Moroccan Vegetable Ragoût

Serves three to four.

- 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced (about 1 1/4 cups)
- One 3- to 4-inch cinnamon stick
- 1 1/2 tsp. ground cumin
- 2 cups peeled and medium diced (1/2-inch) sweet potatoes (about 3/4 lb.)
- One 14- to 16-oz. can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- One 14 1/2-oz. can diced tomatoes, with their juices
- 1/2 cup pitted green Greek or Italian olives
- 6 Tbs. orange juice, preferably fresh
- 1 1/2 tsp. honey
- 2 cups lightly packed very coarsely chopped kale leaves (from about 1/2 lb. kale)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oil in a 5- to 6-qt. Dutch oven or other heavy pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring frequently, until soft and lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add the cinnamon stick and cumin and cook until very fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the sweet potatoes, chickpeas, tomatoes and their juices, olives, orange juice, honey, and 1 cup water; bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until the sweet potatoes are barely tender, about 15 minutes. Stir in the kale. Cover and continue cooking until wilted and softened, about another 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

What to drink

A dry, tangy rosé such as Bonny Doon's Vin Gris de Cigar from California or the Mas Grand Plagniol Rosé from the Costières de Nîmes region of France will go really well with this meal, particularly with the couscous and the salad. A sweet Muscat wine would be delicious to sip with the pear dessert.

Game plan

Up to 1 day ahead:

- Make the dip and refrigerate it.
- Toast the nuts for the couscous.
- Make the dressing for the salad and refrigerate it.

Earlier in the day:

- Assemble the pear tarts but don't bake them. Refrigerate them on their baking sheet.

An hour ahead:

- Make the ragoût up to the point of adding the kale. Take it off the heat.

- Sauté the onion and garlic for the couscous. Leave in the pan off the heat.

- Prepare the vegetables for the salad. Put them in the serving bowl, cover with a slightly damp towel, and refrigerate.

Heat the oven for the tarts.

About 20 minutes before serving:

- Remove the dip from the fridge.
- Finish the couscous and let it stand.
- Reheat the ragoût; add the kale and finish cooking.
- Bake the tarts.

Just before each course:

- Toast the pitas for the dip.
- Toss the salad.
- Season the ragoût.
- Dollop the still-warm tarts with a little ice cream.

Baby spinach makes a tender salad and is easy to work with; the leaves need no stemming and require just a quick rinse.



Spinach & Cucumber Salad with Yogurt-Mint Dressing

Serves four.

- 1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp. honey
- 1½ Tbs. Greek-style yogurt (like Fage Total) or whole-milk yogurt
- 2½ Tbs. olive oil
- 1 Tbs. roughly chopped fresh mint
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 cups lightly packed baby spinach leaves, washed and dried (4 oz.)
- 1 medium cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and sliced ¼-inch thick (1½ cups)
- One-quarter small red onion, halved lengthwise and sliced very thinly (½ cup)

In a medium bowl, whisk the lemon juice and honey. In another bowl, whisk the yogurt and olive oil. Add the yogurt mixture to the lemon juice, whisking constantly. Add the mint, ¼ tsp. salt, and pepper to taste. Chill, covered, for up to 24 hours.

In a large bowl, combine the spinach, cucumber, and red onion. Season lightly with salt and pepper and add just enough of the dressing to moisten the ingredients. Toss to coat, portion onto four plates, and serve, passing any extra dressing at the table, if you like.

Free-Form Pear Tarts with Almond & Cinnamon

Yields 4 tarts.

Serve topped with a pretty scoop of vanilla ice cream, if you like.

- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry (9¾-inch square), thawed overnight in the refrigerator
- All-purpose flour for dusting
- 2 Tbs. almond paste (from a can or tube)
- 4 tsp. sour cream
- 2 small firm-ripe pears (preferably Bartlett), peeled, cored, and cut into 12 wedges each
- Vanilla ice cream for serving (optional)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Combine the sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl. Unroll or unfold the puff pastry on a lightly floured surface. Pinch any creases together and then smooth them out with your fingertips. Cut the pastry sheet into four equal squares and transfer them to the lined baking sheet.

Roll 1½ tsp. of the almond paste into a small ball, flatten it slightly with the palm of your hand, and put it in the center of one puff pastry square. Drop 1 tsp. of sour cream on top. Sprinkle about ½ Tbs. of the cinnamon sugar over the sour cream. Arrange four pear wedges in the center of the puff pastry, two leaning away from the center one way and two leaning the other way. Sprinkle with another ½ Tbs. of the cinnamon sugar. Repeat with the remaining three puff pastry squares and filling ingredients—you won't need all of the sliced pears.

Fold the corners of the puff pastry over the pears until the tips are just touching but not overlapping and press the dough against the pears. (The tarts won't look pretty now, but they'll be beautiful once they bake and puff up.) Bake until puffed and golden brown at the edges, 22 to 27 minutes. Let cool. Any juices that leak onto the baking sheet will harden to a candy-like consistency, so break off and discard these bits before serving.

If you like, garnish with ice cream before serving.

Shopping list

Fresh produce

- 2 medium yellow onions
- 1 small red onion
- 1 head garlic
- 1 small bunch fresh mint
- 1 small bunch fresh oregano
- 1 small bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley or cilantro (or both)
- 4 to 5 oz. baby spinach leaves
- ½ lb. kale
- 2 to 3 small eggplants (1½ lb. total)
- 1 medium cucumber
- 1 large sweet potato (¾ lb.)
- 2 small firm-ripe pears, preferably Bartlett
- 1 lemon
- 2 oranges

Dairy

- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 1½ Tbs. Greek whole-milk yogurt (such as Fage Total brand)
- 4 tsp. sour cream

Frozen foods

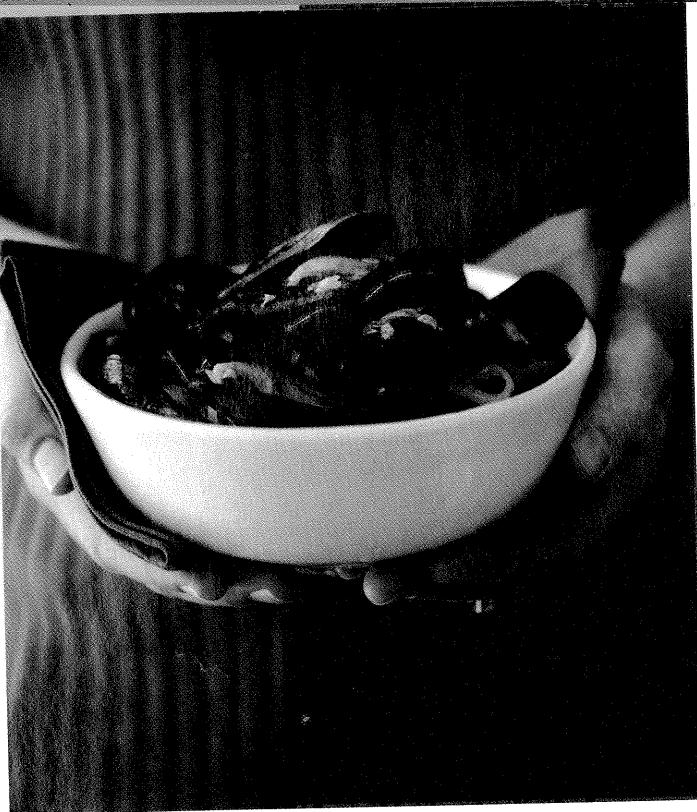
- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry
- Vanilla ice cream to serve with the tarts

Other groceries

- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Olive oil
- 2 anchovy fillets
- ½ cup pitted green Greek or Italian olives (look in the deli section)
- One 15- or 16-oz. can cannellini beans
- One 14- to 16-oz. can chickpeas
- One 14½-oz. can diced tomatoes
- Pine nuts
- Pita bread (three, preferably pocketless)
- Couscous (1½ cups)
- Slivered almonds (½ cup)
- Ground cumin
- Ground cinnamon
- 1 cinnamon stick
- Kosher salt and whole black peppercorns for grinding
- Granulated sugar
- All-purpose flour
- Almond paste
- Honey

tip: Take a little time to arrange the pear slices over the almond paste to make a neat little package. Then fold the pastry up so the edges touch but don't overlap. This allows the puff pastry tips to "blossom" while baking.





Steamed Mussels with Wine, Garlic & Parsley

Serves six to eight.

3½ to 4 lb. mussels
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
6 medium cloves garlic, finely chopped
4 shallots, thinly sliced
¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
1½ cups dry white wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc
¾ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
Good-quality crusty bread for serving

Rinse the mussels well under cold water. Pick them over, pulling off any beards and discarding any mussels that are broken or gaping open.

In a large pot with a lid, heat the oil and butter over medium heat. Add the garlic, shallots, and red pepper flakes and

cook until the shallots are fragrant and soft but not colored, 3 to 5 minutes.

Add the mussels, wine, and half of the parsley. Increase the heat to high, and cover the pan. After 2 minutes, remove the lid and toss the mussels well with a large spoon. Cover the pot again and cook until the mussels have opened wide, another 3 to 4 minutes. Add the remaining parsley, give the mussels a final toss, and divide the mussels and the broth among bowls. Serve with the bread so people can tear off hunks of it to soak up the broth.

Pasta with Sausage, Olives, Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Cream

Serves six to eight.

Kosher salt
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
1 medium clove garlic, finely chopped
1¼ lb. hot Italian sausage, casings removed
½ cup dry white wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc (can be the same wine as for the mussels, at left)
1 cup pitted Kalamata olives, coarsely chopped
1 cup (about 6 oz.) oil-packed sun-dried tomato halves, drained and coarsely chopped
1 cup heavy cream
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
¼ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
1 lb. dried farfalle or fusilli
Freshly ground black pepper

Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil over high heat.

Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add the sausage and cook, breaking it into bite-size pieces with a spoon, until just cooked through, 6 to 8 minutes. Spoon off the fat if it's excessive. Add the wine, increase the heat to medium high, and cook, scraping up any browned bits in the pan, until most of the wine is evaporated, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the olives and sun-dried tomatoes and cook for 2 minutes.

Add the cream, increase the heat to high, bring to a boil, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the cream thickens slightly, 2 to 5 minutes. Stir in 2 Tbs. of the parsley and 2 Tbs. of the Parmigiano. Keep the sauce warm over low heat.

Cook the pasta in the boiling water until al dente. Reserve ¼ cup of the cooking water and then drain the pasta. Return the pasta to its pot, add the sauce and the reserved cooking water, and set the pot over high heat. Gently toss the pasta for 30 to 60 seconds and season to taste with salt and pepper. Divide among warm bowls and sprinkle with the remaining 2 Tbs. Parmigiano and 2 Tbs. parsley.



This whole menu takes just an hour and a half to pull together; less if you're good with a knife (or have help).



Baby Greens with Mango & Marinated Onion

Serves six to eight.

- ½ cup very thinly sliced red onion
(about half a small onion)**
- ⅓ cup red-wine vinegar**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. seasoned rice vinegar**
- 2 Tbs. canola or grapeseed oil**
- 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 8 to 10 oz. (six to eight large handfuls)
baby greens or mesclun, well washed and dried**
- 2 medium-size ripe mangos, peeled,
pitted, and finely diced (about 2 cups)**

In a small bowl, combine the onion and red-wine vinegar with a little salt and pepper. Set aside for at least 20 minutes or up to 90 minutes.

In a small bowl, combine the rice vinegar, canola or grapeseed oil, and the olive oil. Just before serving, generously season the greens with salt and pepper, whisk the dressing, and toss the greens with just enough of the dressing to lightly coat. Portion the salad onto six or eight large salad plates. Drain the onion. Arrange the onions and mangos over the greens. Serve immediately.

Game plan

When you get home from work (and the store):

Chop the garlic for the mussels and the pasta. Slice the shallots for the mussels.

Thinly slice the onion for the salad; marinate it in the vinegar. Chop the onion for the pasta.

Cook the pasta sauce up to adding the olives and tomatoes; take off heat.

Clean the mussels.

Chop the parsley for the mussels and the pasta, keep separate.

Dice the mangos and whisk the vinaigrette for the salad.

Wash and dry the greens, put them in a serving bowl, and refrigerate.

15 minutes before your guests arrive:

Finish cooking the pasta sauce; keep warm on the stove.

When your guests arrive:

Take the dessert cheeses out of the fridge to let them come to room temperature.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil.

Cook and serve the mussels.

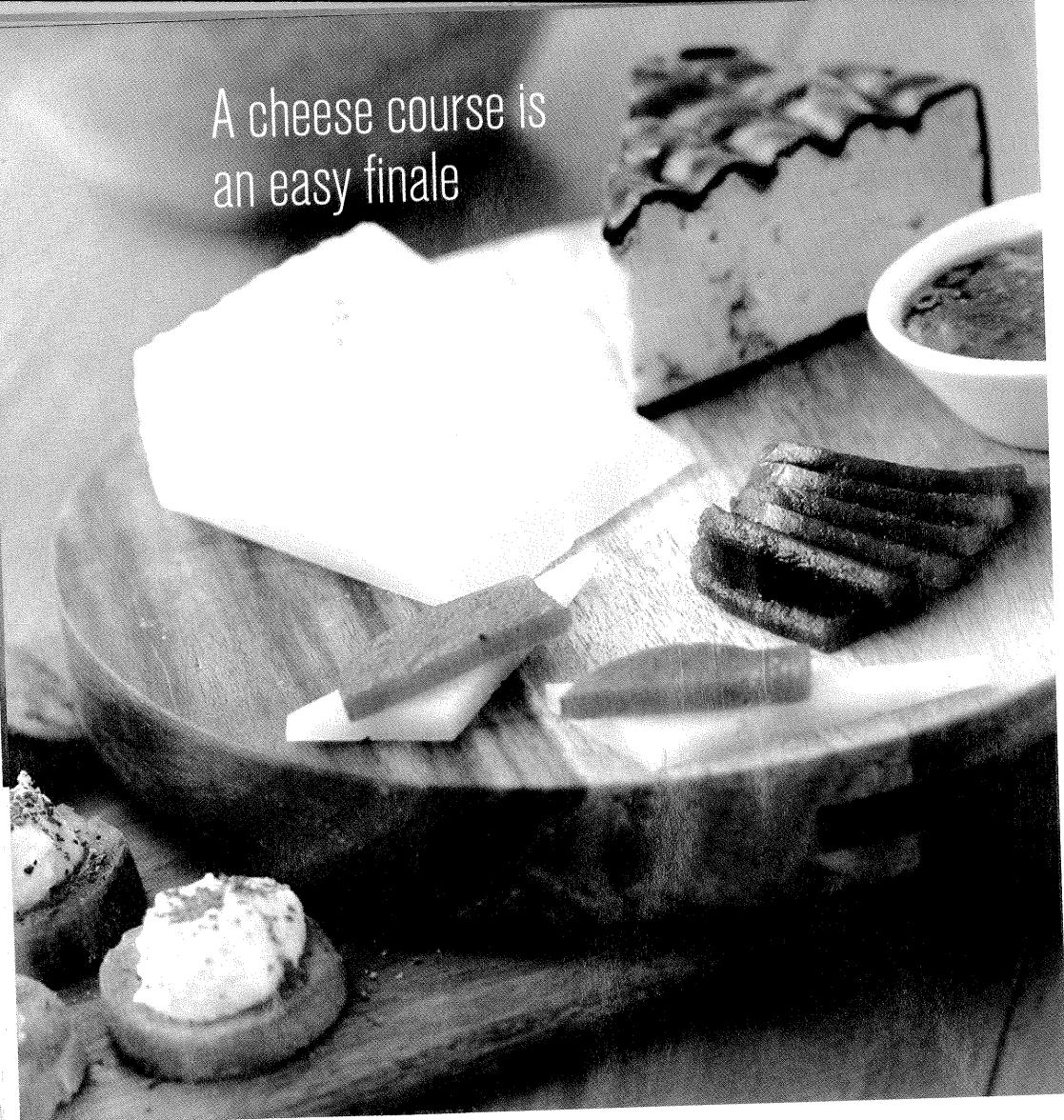
Boil the pasta, toss with the sauce (reheating as necessary), and serve.

Toss the salad and serve.

After dinner:

Assemble the cheese platter and serve.

A cheese course is an easy finale



If you're pressed for time, you can stop at a bakery for dessert or serve ice cream. Or you can forego a traditional dessert course entirely. Instead, put together a selection of cheeses and a few sweet accompaniments. Try putting a wedge of Spanish manchego on a small cutting board, alongside that country's famous *membrillo* (quince paste), which comes in a soft slab and is sliced rather than spread. (You

can find *membrillo* at some supermarkets and good cheese markets and online at Tienda.com.) Alongside, set out a hunk of good blue cheese and perhaps a small bowl of fig jam. If you'd like to include something a little more dessert-ish, try spreading some good-quality fresh ricotta on small slices of toasted baguette. Over the ricotta, drizzle a tiny bit of honey, grind a little fresh black pepper, and sprinkle a little grated dark chocolate.

What to drink

A casual Friday night menu calls for easy-drinking, easy-on-the-budget wines. For starters, a crisp, unoaked white wine with herbal notes is a good match for the mussels. Try a Canyon Road Sauvignon Blanc or Bonny Doon's Ca' del Solo Big House White, both from California. A fruity red wine with moderate tannins and bright acidity is the right call for the pasta, and the same wine will also go well with the cheeses. Da Vinci Chianti, from Italy, would be a good choice.

Shopping list

Fresh produce

- 1 medium yellow onion
- 1 small red onion
- 4 medium shallots
- 1 head garlic
- 1 bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 10 oz. mesclun mix
- 2 medium-size ripe mangos

Seafood

- 4 lb. mussels

Wine

- 2 cups dry white wine

Meat & dairy

- 1 1/4 lb. hot Italian sausage
- Unsalted butter (1 Tbs.)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- Parmigiano-Reggiano
- Cheeses and sweet accompaniments for a cheese course, if you like

Bakery

- Crusty bread for the mussels
- Small baguette for the cheese course

Other groceries

- 1 cup pitted Kalamata olives
- 6 oz. oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes
- 1 lb. dried farfalle or fusilli
- Crushed red pepper flakes
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Grapeseed or canola oil
- Red-wine vinegar
- Seasoned rice vinegar
- Kosher salt and whole black peppercorns for grinding



Spiced Mixed Nuts

Yields 4 cups.

You can use any combination of unsalted nuts you like but avoid Brazil nuts; their high oil content makes the coating slide off them.

**1 lb. (4 cups) mixed unsalted nuts
(such as cashews, macadamias,
walnuts, pecans, or almonds)**
½ tsp. ground coriander
½ tsp. ground cumin
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 Tbs. dark brown sugar
2 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary
¼ tsp. cayenne
Kosher salt

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Scatter the nuts on a rimmed baking sheet and bake, shaking the sheet a couple of times during baking, until the nuts are nicely toasted, 10 to 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, set a small heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Sprinkle in the coriander and cumin and toast until aromatic, about 30 seconds. Remove the pan from the heat and add the butter, brown sugar, rosemary, and cayenne. Return the skillet to low heat and stir until the butter melts and the sugar dissolves, 2 to 2½ minutes. Keep warm.

Tip the nuts into a large warmed bowl, pour the warm spiced butter over the nuts, and add 1½ tsp. salt. Stir until the nuts are well coated. Taste for seasoning and add more salt if necessary. Let cool completely.

make it ahead:

The nuts can be made up to a week in advance; store in an airtight container.



Arugula & Radicchio Salad with Ruby Grapefruit & Toasted Almonds

Serves six.

2 medium ruby grapefruit
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
2 tsp. honey
¼ tsp. kosher salt
6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. chopped fresh mint; plus whole leaves for garnish
6 to 8 large handfuls arugula, tough stems removed (about 8 oz.)
1 head radicchio, cored and cut into strips
½ cup sliced almonds, toasted

With a sharp knife, cut away both ends of one of the grapefruit. Stand the fruit on one of its cut ends and slice off the skin in strips (try to get all the bitter white pith). Working over a bowl, cut the segments free from the membrane, letting each segment fall into the bowl as you go. When you've removed all the segments, squeeze the membrane to extract all the juice;

discard the membrane. Repeat with the second fruit. Spoon out the grapefruit segments from the bowl and set them aside on a plate. Remove any seeds from the juice.

Measure out 3 Tbs. juice into a small bowl. Save the rest for another use (or drink it). Whisk the lime juice, honey, and salt into the grapefruit juice. Whisk in the oil and then the chopped mint. Drag an arugula leaf through the vinaigrette and taste for seasoning. Drizzle about 1 Tbs. of the vinaigrette over the grapefruit segments.

Combine the arugula and radicchio in a large bowl. Toss with enough of the vinaigrette to coat the leaves lightly but evenly (you may not need all of it). Arrange the greens on six salad plates and garnish with the grapefruit segments, almonds, and a few mint leaves.



A little fennel and orange jazz up a simple rice pilaf.

Game plan

Up to 1 week ahead:

Make the spiced nuts. Let them cool completely before storing airtight.

Make the caramel sauce.

Up to 2 days ahead:

Make the vinaigrette for the salad. Refrigerate but let come to room temperature before serving.

A few hours before serving:

Cook the fennel and onion for the rice. Leave in the pan off the heat until ready to finish.

Make the olive coating for the lamb; refrigerate.

Make fresh breadcrumbs, if necessary.

1/2 hour before serving:

Cook the rice.

Coat, sear, and roast the lamb.

Just before each course:

Toss the salad.

Fluff and serve the rice.

Carve the lamb into chops.

Reheat the caramel sauce, if necessary.

Orange-Scented Rice Pilaf with Fennel

Serves six.

Reserve a fennel frond and garnish the rice with it and a thin strip of fresh zest.

3 Tbs. unsalted butter
3/4 cup finely chopped fennel
1/2 cup finely chopped onion
1 1/2 cups long-grain rice, preferably basmati
2 3/4 cups chicken broth
Two 1/2-inch-wide strips orange zest
1 bay leaf
3/4 tsp. kosher salt

In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the fennel and onion; cook, stirring, until softened, about 6 minutes. Add the rice and cook, stirring, until the grains are glossy and beginning to crackle, about 2 minutes. Add the broth, orange zest, bay leaf, and salt. Bring to a boil, cover, and lower the heat to a simmer. Simmer until the rice is tender and all the liquid has been absorbed, about 17 minutes. Off the heat, remove the lid, lay a kitchen towel over the pot, replace the lid, and let sit for at least 5 and up to 30 minutes. Fluff the rice with a fork, remove the cooked zest, and serve.

make it ahead:

The rice can sit, covered, for up to 30 minutes before serving.

Rack of Lamb with Herb & Olive Crust

Serves six.

1/3 cup very coarsely chopped pitted Kalamata, Picholine, or Manzanilla olives, or a mix
1/4 cup very coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 1/2 Tbs. fresh thyme
2 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
Pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
1 1/2 Tbs. mayonnaise
2 racks of lamb (7 to 8 ribs each), trimmed, or frenched
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3/4 cup fresh breadcrumbs

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Combine the olives, parsley, thyme, garlic, and red pepper flakes in a mini food processor or a mortar. Process or pound with a pestle to a rough paste. Stir in the mayonnaise. Set aside.

If there's more than a thin layer of fat left on the racks of lamb, trim it so that only a thin layer remains. Don't remove all the fat. Heat a large, heavy skillet (cast iron works very well; don't use a nonstick pan) over high heat. Season one rack with salt and pepper and set it in the hot skillet, meat side down. When the surface is nicely browned, about 2 minutes, turn the rack with tongs and brown the bottom for another 2 minutes. Remove and repeat with the second rack. If necessary, reduce the heat to medium high.

Spread the breadcrumbs in a pie plate. Coat the surface of the lamb with the olive paste, then roll the meat in the breadcrumbs, pressing the crumbs so they adhere. Arrange the racks, bone side down, in a roasting pan (you may need to interlock the bone ends to make them fit). Wrap the tips of the bones with a strip of foil so they don't burn.

Roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the meat reads 120° to 125°F for rare or 130° to 135°F for medium rare, 20 to 25 minutes (the temperature will rise about another 5°F once it's out of the oven). Let the lamb rest for about 5 minutes. Cut down between the bones to carve into chops and serve.



make it ahead:

Although the lamb should be cooked at the last minute, the coating may be made ahead.

Be sure to let the lamb rest for at least 5 minutes before carving into chops.



Shopping list

Fresh produce

- 1 small yellow onion
- 1 head garlic
- 1 small bunch fresh rosemary
- 1 small bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 small bunch fresh mint
- 1 small bunch fresh thyme
- 8 oz. arugula
- 1 head radicchio
- 1 small fennel bulb
- 1 lime
- 2 medium ruby grapefruit
- 1 orange

Meat & dairy

- 2 racks of lamb (7 to 8 ribs each), preferably frenched
- 5 Tbs. unsalted butter
- Heavy cream (3/4 cup)

Frozen foods

- 2 to 3 pints vanilla ice cream

Spirits

- Kahlúa (optional)

Other groceries

- Bread to make breadcrumbs or already prepared fresh breadcrumbs (3/4 cup)
- Long-grain rice, preferably basmati (1 1/2 cups)
- Homemade or lower-salt chicken broth (2 3/4 cups)
- 1 lb. mixed unsalted nuts
- Sliced almonds (1/3 cup)
- Olives (pitted Kalamatas, Picholines, or Manzanillas; 1/3 cup)
- Bay leaf
- Cayenne
- Crushed red pepper flakes
- Ground coriander
- Ground cumin
- Kosher salt and whole black peppercorns for grinding
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Mayonnaise (1 1/2 Tbs.)
- Honey
- Granulated sugar
- Dark brown sugar
- Brewed espresso (if you don't have an espresso machine, pick up a cup at the local café)
- Chocolate-covered espresso beans (1/2 cup; optional)

What to drink

To start the evening and to have with the Arugula & Radicchio Salad, try a crisp herbal Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, such as Kim Crawford or Matua Valley. To pour with the lamb, try a youthful Cabernet Sauvignon, such as Wynn's Coonawarra from South Australia or Chalk Hill from California.

Vanilla Ice Cream with Espresso-Caramel Sauce

Serves six; yields about 1 1/2 cups sauce.

You can make the caramel sauce up to a week in advance and refrigerate; it may separate, so stir to combine as you gently reheat the sauce before serving.

3/4 cup heavy cream
1 cup granulated sugar
3 Tbs. brewed espresso
1 Tbs. Kahlúa (optional)
2 to 3 pints vanilla ice cream
About 1/2 cup chocolate-covered espresso beans, roughly chopped, for sprinkling (optional; for sources, see p. 119)

Measure the heavy cream into a liquid measuring cup. Put 1/2 cup water in a small, heavy saucepan with steep (at least 4-inch) sides. Add the sugar and swirl the pan to moisten it. Cover and bring to a boil over medium heat, swirling the pan occasionally, until the sugar dissolves, about 1 minute.

Increase the heat to high and cook, still covered but checking frequently, until the sugar starts to turn light brown, 3 to 7 minutes. Remove the lid and continue to cook, swirling the pan occasionally, until the sugar turns dark amber, 2 to 4 minutes. Immediately remove the pan from the heat, and slowly and very carefully stir in the heavy cream; it will bubble and splatter. Continue to stir until the sauce is smooth.

Pour the caramel into a small, heatproof bowl, and let it cool slightly. Stir in the espresso and the Kahlúa, if using.

To serve: If the caramel is cold or has thickened from sitting, reheat it gently over low heat. Put a scoop or two of ice cream into six individual cups or dishes. Drizzle some caramel on top and sprinkle with a spoonful of espresso beans, if using.



Tomato Soup with Orange & Cumin

Serves six; yields about 10 cups.

- 1 small yellow onion (5 oz.), peeled and quartered
- 2/3 cup fresh orange juice (from about 1 large orange)
- 1 medium baking potato (9 oz.), peeled and cut into large chunks
- 2 oz. (1/4 cup) unsalted butter
- 1 Tbs. ground cumin
- 3 bay leaves
- Two 28-oz. cans peeled whole tomatoes (without basil), with their juices
- 1 Tbs. packed finely grated orange zest (from 1 large orange)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Snipped fresh chives for garnish

Put the onion, orange juice, potato, butter, cumin, bay leaves, and 3 cups water in a large (at least 4-qt.) sauce-

pan. Cover, bring to a boil over high heat, and reduce to a simmer. Cook until a skewer easily pierces the potato, 15 to 20 minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juices and the orange zest. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to maintain a steady, low simmer, and cook, uncovered, until the potato chunks are falling apart, another 20 minutes. Discard the bay leaves. Purée the soup with a hand blender, stand blender, or food processor. Strain through a medium sieve; discard the contents of the sieve. Season with 1 Tbs. salt and pepper to taste. If not serving immediately, let cool completely before refrigerating or freezing. Heat gently, adjust the salt and pepper as needed, garnish with the chives, and serve.

Mushroom Filling

Yields enough to fill six croustades.

- 1 lb. fresh white button or cremini mushrooms, cleaned
- 2 medium shallots
- 1 clove garlic, cut in half
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 1 Tbs. olive oil
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Trim the mushroom stems close to the caps. Put the mushrooms, shallots, and garlic in a food processor and pulse until finely chopped but not puréed; scrape the bowl as needed. Transfer the chopped mushrooms to the center of a clean dishtowel. Gather up the sides of the towel and twist, keeping the mushrooms well contained in the cloth, bonbon style. With one hand, hold the ball of mushrooms over the sink; with the other hand, twist the gathered cloth, squeezing out as much liquid as possible.

Heat the butter and oil in a 10-inch skillet or sauté pan over medium heat. Add the mushrooms, cover, and cook stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms are very soft and fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes. Do not let them brown. Uncover and cook until the pan is mostly dry, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the parsley; season with 1/2 tsp salt and pepper to taste. This filling can be refrigerated for up to a week or frozen for up to two weeks. If frozen, thaw overnight in the refrigerator and, if necessary, cook gently in an uncovered skillet to evaporate any juices that have developed in the free-

Individual Beef Croustades with Boursin & Mushrooms

Serves six.

Ask for filets from near the tail end of the tenderloin so they're tall and narrow, rather than short and wide.

6 filets mignons, 6 oz. each and about 1 3/4 inches thick

Kosher salt

1 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 Tbs. vegetable oil

Two 5.2-oz. cakes peppercorn Boursin cheese, slightly softened at room temperature

One 1-lb. package phyllo dough (with at least 24 sheets, preferably more), thawed in the refrigerator overnight (see Test Kitchen, p. 116, for phyllo handling tips)

1/4 lb. (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, melted; more if needed

1/4 cup thinly sliced fresh chives

Mushroom Filling (at left)

Season the filets mignons generously on all sides with salt. Heat the butter and oil in a 10-inch skillet or sauté pan over medium-high heat until very hot and sizzling.

Put three of the filets in the pan and sear on one side until well browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Turn and brown the other side. Then quickly sear along the sides, using tongs to turn, about another 1 minute per side. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towels. Repeat with the remaining filets. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

To assemble: Mash the Boursin with a fork in a small bowl until spreadable. Remove at least 24 sheets of phyllo from the package and cut them into 10-inch squares. Cover them with plastic wrap and a damp dishtowel while you work, to keep them from drying out. Lay a single phyllo sheet on a clean, dry surface. With a pastry brush, lightly paint an even coat of the melted butter over the entire surface of the square. Sprinkle with about 1/2 tsp. of the chives. Set a second sheet at a 90-degree angle over the first. Brush butter over it as well and sprinkle with another 1/2 tsp. chives.

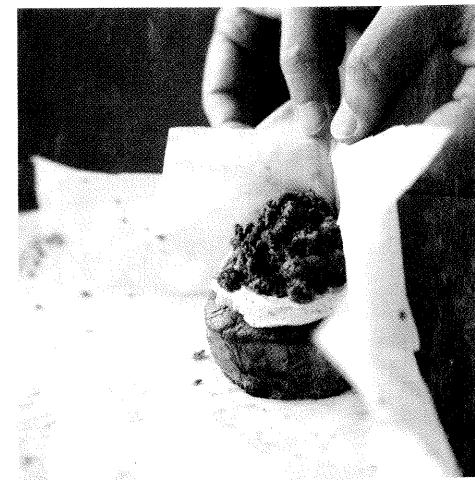


The croustades can be assembled up to eight hours before cooking, refrigerated, and brought to room temperature.

How to assemble the croustades



As you layer the phyllo, angle the sheets so they make a pointed star.



Gather the edges around the seared (but cooled) beef like a beggar's purse.

Game plan

Up to 3 days ahead:

Make the tomato soup.

(This could also be made up to two weeks ahead and frozen.)

Up to 2 days ahead:

Make the chocolate mousse.

Up to 1 day ahead:

Make the mushroom filling.

(This could also be made up to two weeks ahead and frozen.)

Clean the spinach.

Brown the filets.

That morning:

Assemble and refrigerate the beef croustades.

Make the chocolate shavings for the mousse garnish.

Two hours before:

Cook the spinach. (Leave it in the pan to reheat at serving time.)

Lightly whip the heavy cream for the mousse garnish; refrigerate.

As guests arrive:

Reheat the soup over low heat.

Heat the oven.

Just before dinner:

Put the croustades in the oven. (When you clear the soup plates, the croustades will be ready.) Take them out of the oven and let them sit for a minute while you reheat the spinach.

Just before serving, give the sautéed spinach a fresh hit of flavor with lemon zest, scallion greens, and nutmeg.



Baby Spinach with Scallions & Lemon

Serves six.

**2½ lb. baby spinach
3 Tbs. olive oil
4 scallions, trimmed and sliced, white and green parts separated
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbs. lightly packed finely grated lemon zest (from about 1 large lemon)
¼ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg**

Rinse and drain the spinach. (You needn't dry it completely; clinging droplets of water are fine.) Heat the olive oil in a large, deep Dutch oven or wok over medium heat. Add the scallion whites and cook, stirring, until they start to soften, about 1 minute. Pile in the spinach and cook, turning with tongs so it gets evenly heated. (You'll need to add the spinach in stages; as it heats, it will shrink.) Once all the spinach is in the pan, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until all the leaves have wilted and released their liquid, about 2 minutes. Uncover the pan, increase the heat to high, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the spinach is very soft, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and season with salt and pepper to taste. Just before serving, reheat gently, adding the scallion greens, lemon zest, and grated nutmeg. Drain briefly in a colander before serving.

What to drink

An *apéritif* is a great way to begin any meal: Sip it before dinner and then serve it with the soup, too. Dubonnet Rouge and St. Raphael Rouge are widely available vermouth-like *apéritifs* (see p. 16 for more on *apéritifs*). Serve them chilled with a thin slice of orange. The beef calls for a rich, velvety Pinot Noir with the complexity to match the creamy-earthy elements in the package. If you're up for a splurge, make it a red Burgundy.



Chocolate Mousse

Serves six; yields about 6½ cups.

10 oz. best-quality bittersweet chocolate, chopped

¼ cup strong brewed coffee

¾ cup whole milk

4 large egg yolks

2 Tbs. granulated sugar

Pinch kosher salt

2 cups cold heavy cream; plus ½ cup for garnish

3 Tbs. dark chocolate shavings for garnish (optional)

Put the chocolate and coffee in a heavy saucepan. Heat gently over low heat until the chocolate starts to melt; set aside. In a medium saucepan, heat the milk until bubbles begin to form around the edge; don't let it boil. In a small mixing bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the sugar and a pinch of salt just until well blended.

Whisk half of the hot milk into the egg yolks. Return the yolk mixture to the milk in the saucepan. Cook slowly over low heat, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon, until the custard thickens slightly and coats the back of the spoon (enough so that a finger run through the sauce will leave a clean trail). The time it takes for this thickening to occur will vary. It may take as little as a few minutes or as many as

20, but once the thickening begins, it happens quickly; watch carefully or the eggs will coagulate. Check with a thermometer; don't let the temperature exceed 160°F. Immediately pour the custard through a strainer over the partially melted chocolate. Whisk until smooth. Transfer to a large mixing bowl and let cool, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is about 96°F; if you dab a bit on your lip, it should feel just slightly cooler than your lip. Don't let the mixture set or the mousse won't be smooth. (If it cools too far, set it over a pan of hot water briefly and whisk until smooth.)

Beat 2 cups of the heavy cream until it holds soft peaks. With a rubber spatula, gently fold half of the whipped cream into the chocolate mixture until no white streaks remain. Gently fold in the remaining whipped cream. Spoon the mousse into six goblets or one large bowl. Cover and chill for at least 3 hours or up to two days.

To serve, beat the remaining ½ cup heavy cream until it holds soft peaks. Dollop a little on each serving and scatter with the chocolate shavings, if using.

Shopping list

Fresh produce

- 1 small yellow onion
- 2 medium shallots
- 1 head garlic
- 1 medium baking potato (9 oz.)
- 1 bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 2 bunches fresh chives
- 4 scallions
- 2½ lb. baby spinach
- 1 lb. fresh white button or cremini mushrooms
- 1 large lemon
- 1 large orange

Meat & dairy

- 6 thick filets mignons (6 oz. each; 1¾ inches thick)
- ½ lb. unsalted butter
- 4 large eggs
- 2 packages (5.2 oz. each) peppercorn Boursin cheese
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 2½ cups heavy cream

Frozen foods

- One 1-lb. package phyllo dough (with at least 24 sheets, preferably more)

Other groceries

- Two 28-oz. cans peeled whole tomatoes (without basil)
- 1 lb. bittersweet chocolate
- Bay leaves
- Ground cumin
- Whole nutmeg
- Ground coffee (to make ¼ cup brewed)
- Olive oil
- Vegetable oil
- Granulated sugar
- Kosher salt and whole black peppercorns for grinding

Game plan

Up to 3 days ahead:

Roast the squash for the soup.

Cool and refrigerate for up to 2 days before using in soup.

Up to 2 days ahead:

Make the soup and refrigerate it.

(It can also be made a month in advance and frozen.) Reheat gently to serve.

Up to 1 day ahead:

Poach the pears and refrigerate them.

Earlier in the day:

Make the stuffing for the pork.

Stuff, tie, and refrigerate the tenderloin.

About 1 hour before serving:

Let the tenderloin warm up a bit at room temperature before cooking it.

Roast the potatoes and keep in a warm place. Reheat in the hot oven if necessary.

Reduce the liquid from the poached pears and let it cool.

Just before each course:

Make the pan sauce for the tenderloin while the meat rests.

Slice the pork and serve it with the sauce and the potatoes.

Fan out the pears, garnish, and serve.

What to drink

The robust, earthy flavors of a Grenache blend from southern France would be delicious with the Spinach & Mushroom-Stuffed Pork Tenderloin. Look for Guigal Côtes du Rhône or Paul Jaboulet Côtes du Rhône Parallèle 45.



Butternut Squash Soup with Cumin & Coriander

Yields about 6 cups; serves four to six.

One 2-lb. butternut squash
2 Tbs. olive oil; more for roasting the squash
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 medium onion, diced
3/4 tsp. ground cumin
1/2 tsp. ground coriander
One 14 1/2-oz. can diced tomatoes, with their juices
3 cups homemade or lower-salt chicken broth
1 Tbs. plain yogurt or heavy cream per serving for garnish
1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Roast the squash: Heat the oven to 400°F and line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment or foil.

Cut the squash in half lengthwise. Use a soupspoon to scoop out the seeds and scrape out the strings from the hollow. Rub the cut surfaces with a little oil, season generously with salt and pepper, and roast on the prepared baking sheet, cut side up, until deeply browned and very tender, 80 to 90 minutes. Let cool.

Make the soup: Heat the 2 Tbs. olive oil and the butter in a heavy soup pot set over medium heat. Add the onion and 1/2 tsp. salt and sauté for 2 minutes and then cover and let sweat until translucent, about 3 minutes. Uncover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions begin to brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the cumin and coriander and cook, stirring, until very fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in the tomatoes and their juices, season with a few grinds of pepper, and cook for 2 minutes. Cover and simmer for another 10 minutes.

Peel the roasted squash and add the flesh to the pot, breaking it up with a wooden spoon. Add the chicken broth, cover, and bring to a simmer. Adjust the heat to maintain a simmer and cook, covered, for 30 minutes. Let cool slightly and purée batches in a blender or a food processor.

Taste and add more salt and pepper if needed. Return the soup to the pot and stir occasionally over low heat until hot. Garnish each serving with a spoonful of yogurt or a drizzle of cream and a sprinkling of the minced parsley.

Spinach & Mushroom-Stuffed Pork Tenderloin with Sherry Cream Sauce

Serves four.

5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
3½ oz. fresh shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and thinly sliced (1½ cups)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
6 oz. baby spinach (5 lightly packed cups)
1 large pork tenderloin (about 1¼ lb.), trimmed of any silverskin or excess fat
1 Tbs. lightly chopped fresh thyme leaves
¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
2 large shallots, finely diced (½ cup)
¾ cup homemade or lower-salt chicken broth
2½ Tbs. sherry vinegar
2 Tbs. heavy cream

Set a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Heat 2 Tbs. of the oil in a heavy, ovenproof 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering hot. Add the mushrooms, sprinkle with ½ tsp. each of salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until browned and tender, about 3 minutes. Stir in the spinach, sprinkle with salt, and cook, tossing well with tongs, until just wilted, about 2 minutes. Transfer the spinach mixture to a colander and set the skillet aside.

Butterfly the tenderloin by making a horizontal slice lengthwise through the tenderloin almost all the way to the other side. Open the meat flat, like a book. Cover with plastic wrap, and using a meat mallet, a small, heavy skillet, or the heel of your hand, lightly pound the pork so that it's ¼ inch thick. Rub the pork all over with 1 Tbs. of the oil, half of the thyme, and about ½ tsp. each of salt and pepper.

Squeeze any excess liquid from the spinach and mushrooms. Spread over the pork, leaving bare a 2-inch border along one long edge. Sprinkle on the Parmigiano. Starting with the long side that's covered with filling, roll the stuffed tenderloin toward the bare-border side so that it forms a cylinder, and tie it closed with kitchen twine.

Wipe the skillet clean if necessary. Heat the remaining 2 Tbs. oil in the

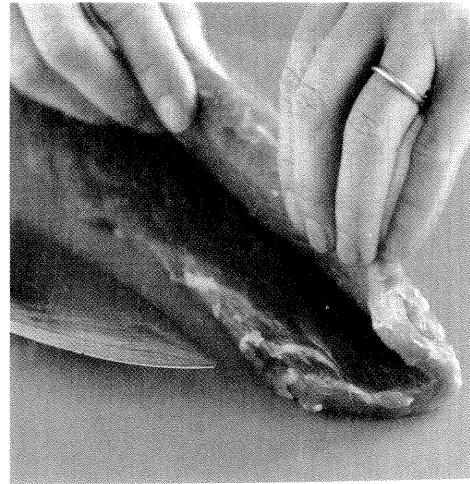


skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering hot. Sear the pork on all three non-seam sides until well browned, about 6 minutes total. Flip onto the seam side, then transfer the skillet to the oven. Cook until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the roast registers 140°F, 10 to 15 minutes.

Transfer the meat to a clean cutting board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, return the skillet to the stove over medium-high heat (be careful; the skillet's handle will be hot). Add the shallots, season with ¼ tsp. salt, and cook, stirring, until the shallots soften and brown, about 2 minutes. Add the chicken broth, sherry vinegar, and the remaining 1½ tsp. thyme, and simmer briskly until the mixture reduces by a bit more than half, about 4 minutes. Stir in the cream and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Slice the pork into ½-inch-thick slices (a serrated knife works well) and serve with the sauce.

How to butterfly pork tenderloin



By slicing the tenderloin almost all the way through lengthwise, you can open it like a book and stuff it with flavorful ingredients.

Red Potatoes Roasted with Onions, Thyme & Sherry Vinegar

Serves six.

2 small red onions
2 lb. very small red potatoes (about 20), scrubbed and cut in half
3 Tbs. olive oil
3 Tbs. sherry vinegar
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves (from about 1 bunch)

Position a rack in the center of the oven. Heat the oven to 425°F.

Trim the root ends of the onions, leaving enough of the core intact to hold the onion wedges together. Trim the other end of the onions and cut the onions in half vertically. Cut each half into four wedges, about 1 inch wide.

In a medium bowl, combine the onions,

potatoes, olive oil, and sherry vinegar and season with salt and pepper. Toss to coat well. Spread the vegetables and any liquid in the bowl on a large heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet in a single layer, making sure that the potatoes are all cut side down. Roast until the cut sides of the potatoes are crusty and golden brown, about 35 minutes. Turn the potatoes and onions using a metal spatula. Sprinkle the thyme leaves over the potatoes and return the pan to the oven and roast until the potatoes are tender and the onions are very brown, about another 5 minutes. Taste and season with more salt if needed.



Red Wine-Poached Pears

Serves four.

2 1/4 cups dry red wine, such as Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon
1/2 cup granulated sugar
2 whole star anise
1/2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
Pinch of kosher salt
2 ripe but slightly firm pears, peeled and halved through the stem, and cores removed
1 pint vanilla ice cream
2 Tbs. roughly chopped, lightly toasted pistachios (see the mango lassi recipe, p. 93)

Combine the wine, sugar, star anise, vanilla, salt, and 3/4 cup water in a 3-4-qt. saucepan that's wide enough to fit the halved pears in a snug single layer. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally to



Shopping list

Fresh produce

- 1 medium yellow onion
- 2 small red onions
- 2 large shallots
- 2 lb. very small red potatoes
- 1 medium butternut squash (2 lb.)
- 3½ oz. fresh shiitake mushrooms
- 6 oz. baby spinach
- 2 firm-ripe pears
- 1 small bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 large bunch or 2 small bunches fresh thyme

Meat & dairy

- Unsalted butter (1 Tbs.)
- Plain yogurt or heavy cream for the soup garnish (4 to 6 Tbs.)
- Heavy cream (about ½ cup)
- 1 large pork tenderloin (about 1¼ lb.)
- Parmigiano-Reggiano

Frozen foods

- 1 pint vanilla ice cream

Wine

- Dry red wine (Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon; 2½ cups)

Other groceries

- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Olive oil
- Sherry vinegar
- One 14½-oz. can diced tomatoes, with their juices
- 1 qt. homemade or lower-salt chicken broth
- Ground coriander
- Ground cumin
- Star anise
- Kosher salt and whole black peppercorns for grinding
- Pistachios (½ cup)
- Pure vanilla extract
- Granulated sugar

ar Anise & Pistachios
dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat to low, add the pears, and cook at a bare simmer (basting occasionally if there are any unsubmerged parts) until just tender when pierced with a wooden skewer or toothpick, 15 to 30 minutes, depending on ripeness. Remove the pot from the heat and allow the pears to macerate in the poaching liquid for at least 2 hours, or discard the star anise and refrigerate in the liquid overnight.

Transfer ⅔ cup of the poaching liquid to a small saucepan and boil over high heat until reduced by half and slightly syrupy, about 5 minutes. Let cool. Spoon a little syrup onto each of four serving plates. Put the pears, side down, on a cutting board and, holding the knife at a 45-degree

angle, slice them lengthwise about ⅓ inch thick almost to the stem, so the slices remain attached at the stem end. Transfer the pears to the serving plates and press down gently to fan them out, exposing the lighter centers. Serve the pears with a scoop of ice cream and a sprinkle of the pistachios.

tip: How long the pears need to poach depends on their ripeness. Periodically test the pears with a skewer or toothpick to avoid overcooking.