

Spring Food

Spring is finally here and it is time to lighten up your dinner fare with some dishes that just scream about spring's arrival. Here are some of my favorite spring time dishes.

Lamb Chops with Rosemary

8 loin lamb chops, fat trimmed
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 cloves garlic, smashed
1 cup dry red wine
1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary leaves
1 cup chicken stock
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 teaspoons whole-grain mustard
3 tablespoons heavy cream

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Dry the lamb chops well and season with salt and pepper. Add the oil to the pan and heat until shimmering. Lay chops in the pan and cook, turning once, about 5 minutes per side. After cooking the lamb on each side, stand it up on its edges to brown the sides as well, about 2 minutes more. Remove chops from the skillet and set aside in a warm place.

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from the skillet. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add the wine and rosemary, stirring up browned bits from the bottom of the pan, and simmer over high heat until syrupy, about 3 to 4 minutes. Add the chicken broth and cook until reduced by half, another 5 to 6 minutes. Remove pan from the heat and whisk in the butter. When the butter has incorporated, whisk in the mustard and heavy cream. Season with additional salt and pepper.

Fancy Grilled Chicken Salad

Vinaigrette:

1 tablespoon lemon juice
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Salt and pepper

4 whole boneless, skinless chicken breasts
2 tablespoons fresh rosemary
1 red pepper, sliced
1 yellow pepper, sliced
1 red onion, sliced
1/3 cup olive oil
1/2 cup water chestnuts, sliced
1/2 cup sun dried tomatoes, chopped
1/2 pound asparagus, blanched and cut into thirds
Salt and pepper
1/2 pound Gorgonzola or stilton
6-8 cups lettuce leaves, preferably Bibb or other soft lettuce

Vinaigrette: Whisk together all ingredients and set aside.

Marinate chicken in 1/2 cup vinaigrette at least 1 hour. Grill chicken, then slice in strips and toss with rosemary. Saute peppers and onions briefly in 2 tablespoons olive oil.

Combine chicken, peppers, onions, water chestnuts, sun dried tomatoes and asparagus in a bowl.

Add salt, pepper, Gorgonzola or Stilton, and remaining olive oil. Toss well.

Line plates with lettuce and place chicken salad on top.

Asparagus with Lemon Butter

1/2 pound fresh asparagus
Salt
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 teaspoon lemon zest
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Wash asparagus and trim off bottom of stems by about 2 inches. In a large skillet, bring about 1/2 inch of water to a rapid boil. Season the water with salt and add the asparagus. Cook the asparagus for 2-3 minutes or until bright green and just tender. Drain the asparagus and add butter to the skillet. Stir in the zest and juice. Return the drained asparagus to the skillet and toss to coat. Serve immediately

If you do not like mint, use any fresh herb here. The herbs really brighten the flavor of the potatoes.

Smashed New Potatoes with Fresh Mint

2 pounds red new potatoes, scrubbed
1/4 cup chopped fresh mint leaves
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut in chunks
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the potatoes and cook, uncovered, for about 20 minutes, until the potatoes are fork tender. Drain the potatoes and put them in a mixing bowl while they are still hot. Add the chopped mint and mash. Fold in the butter and stir everything together. Drizzle with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Orzo with Green Beans and Tomatoes

1 1/4 pounds thin green beans, chopped
2 cups orzo
1/2 onion, minced

2 garlic cloves
4 medium vine-ripened tomatoes, chopped
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons white-wine vinegar
2 tablespoons chopped flat-leafed parsley leaves
1 cup crumbled feta
Salt and pepper

In a large skillet cook onion and garlic in oil over moderate heat until onion is softened. Add tomatoes and cook, stirring, until tomatoes are softened, about 2 minutes. Remove skillet from heat.

Have ready a bowl of ice and cold water. In boiling salted water blanch beans 1 minute. With a slotted spoon transfer beans to ice water to stop cooking. Drain beans well in a colander and pat dry. Add beans to tomato mixture and return water in kettle to a boil. Boil orzo until al dente and drain in colander. Add orzo to bean mixture with vinegar, parsley, feta, and salt and pepper to taste, tossing to combine well

Exotic Fruit Salad

For the vinaigrette:

1/2 cup pineapple juice
1/4 cup red wine vinegar
1 shallot, minced
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup canola oil

For the salad:

1 mango, peeled, seeded and cut into 1/4-inch strips
1 papaya peeled, seeded and cut into 1/4-inch strips
1/2 cup dried cranberries
1/2 cup banana chips
1/2 cup macadamia nuts, chopped
Salt and pepper

For the vinaigrette:

Whisk together the pineapple juice, red wine vinegar, shallot and salt and pepper. Slowly incorporate the canola oil. Taste, for seasoning.

For the salad: In a large salad bowl, toss together the mango, papaya, cranberries, banana chips and macadamia nuts with 1 cup of the vinaigrette. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

Sour Cream Pound Cake with Fresh Berries

1/2 pound (2 sticks) butter
3 cups sugar
1 cup sour cream

1/2 teaspoon baking soda
3 cups all-purpose flour
6 large eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla

1 pint fresh berries, washed and dried

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the butter and sugar and cream together. Add the sour cream and mix until incorporated. Sift the baking soda and flour together. Add to the creamed mixture alternating with eggs, beating each egg 1 at a time. Add the vanilla and pour the mixture into a greased and floured 10-inch tube pan. Bake for 1 hour 20 minutes. Serve with berries.