

January 2012 Menu

A No-Theme Meal

Just Some Food Solon Likes to Cook and Eat

Appetizer: *Baked Goat Cheese with Caramelized Onion, Garlic and Mission Figs*

(This is a fun dish with sliced, dried mission figs rehydrated with sherry then combined with caramelized onions and garlic. This concoction placed on creamy goat cheese and baked. I like it on crostini.)

Chef: Mike

Soup: Oyster Stew

(Simple oyster stew with sautéed celery and store-bought oyster crackers. I used this recipe to woo Nancy, now my wife, when we were in college.)

Yes! She still will eat it!

Chef: Trevis

Salad: Simple Salad

(A simple salad to give a break between the soup and entre. Hopefully some bitter greens will help between the creamy soup and the cream sauce in the entree)

Chef: Steve

Entree: Chicken and Spaghetti Squash

(Chicken breasts and a sauce made of reduced chicken stock, cream and milk on top of spaghetti squash. A drizzle of truffle oil gives an interesting note.)

Chef: John

Other Chef: Edgar

Side: Green Beans.

(If the green beans don't look good, another green veggie will be used.)

Chef: Tom

Dessert: Port Wine Pears

(Pears poached in cheap port wine and spices.)

Chef: Bill

Baked Goat Cheese with Caramelized Onion, Garlic and Mission Figs

Ingredients:

2 pounds goat cheese
Cream (to soften goat cheese if needed)
14 dried Mission figs (1 cup) cut into about 1/8" thick slices
1/2 cup dry sherry
1/4 cup olive oil (actually as little as you can use while cooking the onions)
2 large Spanish onions, thinly sliced (I find that this dip is easier to eat if the onions are sliced thinly and cut in quarters. i.e. no long pieces.)
10 garlic cloves, crushed and chopped
3 rosemary sprigs
2 tsp salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 sliced baguettes, for dipping (I like crispy pita chips out of a bag better!)

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

In a sauce pot combine the figs and sherry with enough water to barely cover the figs. Place the sauce pot over high heat and bring up to a bubble. Cover and remove from the heat. Let the figs plump while the onions are cooking.

If necessary, blend cream into goat cheese until smooth. Add just enough so that it can be manipulated without crumbling. A little extra cream will not harm.

Spread the goat cheese across the bottom of an oven safe dish and set aside.

Sauté the onions, garlic, rosemary, salt and pepper in the olive oil, stirring often, for about 10 minutes, or until lightly browned. Remove the plumped figs from the sauce pot, leaving behind any of the plumping liquid. Add the figs to the cooked onions. Stir to combine and then spoon over the goat cheese. Place the dish into the top half of the oven for about 20 minutes, until the edges begin to bubble.

Remove and serve immediately with sliced baguettes.

Oyster Stew

Ingredients:

5 cups of celery (Chopped into 3/16" to 1/4" pieces)
1 sticks of butter (salted or unsalted)
2 tsp salt
1 quarts cream
1 quarts half and half
4 eight ounce containers of fresh oysters
Salt to taste
Black pepper (fresh ground)

Directions:

Sauté celery in butter and 2 tsp of salt until almost all the aromatic taste is gone from the celery. The celery will have just started to soften. Grind in some black pepper when the celery is almost ready.

Add most of the juice from the oysters. Then add the cream and half and half and heat to near boiling while stirring. Try to avoid hard boiling. (Don't worry about getting all the juice out now, just pour out what is easy.)

Add oysters and quickly heat to serving temperature. (The trick is to heat it as fast as you can so the oysters won't cook much.)

Salt and grind in black pepper to taste.

Serve with oyster crackers.

Simple Salad with Blackberries

Ingredients:

- Sweet Spring Mix
- Arugula – Just enough to add a little bitterness.
- Blackberries (6-7 per serving)
- Sugar (If needed)
- Salt
- Fresh ground black pepper
- Olive oil (not too strong)
- Balsamic vinegar
- Blue cheese

Directions:

Mix greens and arrange on serving dish.

Taste the blackberries, and if they are tart, dampen them and sprinkle with sugar. Arrange blackberries on the dish.

Salt to taste.

Add vinegar and oil.

Grind fresh pepper on top.

Place chunk of blue cheese on side of plate. (I like blue cheese with the vinegar and oil.)

(By the way, cold, leftover port wine poached pears (tonight's dessert) cut up into this salad is a great way to use the pears.)

Chicken with Cream Sauce on Spaghetti Squash

Ingredients:

1 large or 2 medium spaghetti squash
12 chicken breasts (brined for 12 – 24 hours)
Olive oil
3 quarts chicken stock
1 1/2 quart cream
Dried thyme
Salt
Pepper
Truffle Oil (I prefer the black to the white)

Directions:

Spaghetti Squash

Slice spaghetti squash axially and scrape out seeds and veins with spoon.

Cover with plastic wrap

Cook in microwave oven on high until you can separate squash threads with a fork. The goal is to keep the squash slightly crispy. (A medium-sized half squash takes about 6 minutes in my microwave.)

Remove and let cool a little so you don't burn your hands off during the next step.

With a fork, scrape the meat out of the squash. It will break apart in separate strings.

Cover and set aside.

Chicken and Cream Sauce

Rinse the brining from the chicken breasts and dry.

Sprinkle a little pepper and some dried thyme onto the chicken breasts.

Heat a fairly deep pan with enough olive oil to brown the chicken breasts. (This will probably need to be done in batches. Only one layer of breasts in the pan.) When the oil is hot, cook breast on both sides to a light brown. This is only to brown the chicken, not cook it so keep the pan hot. Remove the chicken and set aside. (Note: if the bottom of the pan looks like it is about to burn between batches of the chicken breasts, deglaze the pan with some of the chicken stock and reserve the resulting mixture.)

After all the chicken is browned, add chicken stock and any deglazing liquid to pan and reduce to 1/3 to 1/4 the original volume.

After the stock is reduced, stir in cream and heat to boil, while stirring.

Add salt to taste if needed. Add a tsp of dried thyme.

Add chicken breast and finish cooking.

Rewarm spaghetti squash in microwave, if necessary, being careful not to cook it very much. Add salt to taste if desired. (I like it under-salted to give more freedom with the sauce.) Place squash on plate.

Slice the chicken breasts fairly thick and place on top of the squash. Add cream sauce from the pan over the chicken and squash.

Place green beans on plate.

Drizzle truffle oil over chicken, squash and a little on the beans. About two teaspoons per plate is a good starting point.

Serve.

Haricots Verts with Sage and Roasted Garlic Butter

Ingredients:

2 pounds Haricots Verts (or different small, young green beans)
Water
Salt
5 – 6 tbsp sage and roasted garlic butter
Freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

Sage and Roasted Garlic Butter

(For the sake of time, this compound butter will be provided)

Set out four sticks of butter to soften

Roast 6 pods of garlic. (It seems like everyone has their favorite way of doing this.)

Chop fresh sage very finely. You'll want about ¼ cup or a little more.

Press roasted garlic through a fine strainer into the butter and add sage. Stir.

Roll into logs in plastic wrap. This will keep in freezer a long time.

Green Beans

(Note: Between my wife, two sons, and me, there are four opinions on how long to cook green beans, so the chef should cook them to the doneness he chooses.)

Set out compound so it starts to come to room temperature.

Cut both ends off the beans. Discard the beans that are significantly larger and the real small ones. (So all will cook within the same time.)

In a large pan or skillet add beans and enough water to halfway cover. Add 2 tsp of salt.

Boil and stir often until almost the desired doneness.

Drain the water and return to heat and continue stirring until beans are dry.

Remove from heat, add butter and stir until butter is melted and beans are covered.

Salt and pepper to taste

Pears Poached in Cheap Port Wine

Ingredients:

12 pears (ripe Comice pears if possible)
3 liters of cheap port wine
2 cups white sugar
6 cinnamon sticks
1 whole nutmeg
15 whole cloves
2 tsp salt

Directions:

Peel pears and cut bottom flat so they will stand. Stand up on bottom of pan that is just large enough to hold all the pears.

Pour wine over pears to cover.

Spread sugar and salt over the wine. Grate about half the nutmeg into the wine and drop in the remaining half pod along with the whole cloves and cinnamon sticks. Bring to a gentle simmer.

If the pears are real ripe, simmering an hour is plenty. If they are harder, longer is better.

Place individual pears into serving bowls, standing up, and spoon a little wine mixture around each.

Serve.

(Note: If you like ginger, this same dish can be made with water, fresh ginger, sugar, salt and a little butter. We like this version served with smoked pork.)