

COOKING WITH COFFEE

We usually think of coffee mostly as a beverage and then maybe as a flavoring for ice cream or candies. Coffee however has a rich culinary history and has been used in a variety of ways, both sweet and savory.

Authorities seem to agree that it was first consumed in West Africa and the Middle East. There it was first eaten whole; berry, bean and all usually with some kind of fat or in combination with dried fruits and beans. The fermented pulp of the berry was also used to make a kind of wine.

The practice of roasting the beans to develop their aromatic flavors probably started in the 13th century. Alan Davidson, author of The Oxford Companion to Food, notes that in YEMEN by the end of the 13th century, the beverage had acquired its familiar name, *Qahwah*, which was originally a poetic name for wine. Coffee has many similarities to wine. The language to describe its flavors is similar and like wine, coffee varies tremendously in flavor and intensity depending on the place where it is grown.

No doubt the original appeal of coffee was the stimulating boost it offered from the caffeine it contained. At one time or another, it was called “The Devil’s Brew” and condemned by clerics. Many decried coffee as a potent aphrodisiac. The Vatican among others called coffee “Satan’s latest trap to catch Christian souls”. Pope Clement VIII however intervened and according to legend demanded to taste coffee and make up his own mind. He liked it so much that he decreed that this was something that Christianity should make its own. This probably why Italy became the place where coffee culture first blossomed in Europe (although some French dispute this!).

Coffee has become such a fixture in American culture that it is only natural that we would begin to explore other uses for this deliciously complex product. My first recollection of tasting coffee as something other than as a beverage was a recipe my grandmother used to make. Being of sturdy Scotch/Irish/German descent, she was genetically programmed to never waste anything. She used to take the coffee that had been on the heat too long (you know that stuff that becomes so strong that the acids and bitterness could remove the enamel from your teeth!) and turn it into a wonderful poaching liquid for fruits.

Poaching fruits in wine has been with us for a long time. Coffee has many of the same characteristics as wine: rich flavor, good acidity, tannins, etc. which are a nice foil for sweet fruits. I’ve included her recipe below using pears. The poaching liquid is equally wonderful with other fruits such as apples or firm bananas. The liquid can be used repeatedly and after a while thickens to become the most delicious fruit-infused syrup that is delicious on pancakes, waffles and ice cream.



COFFEE POACHED PEARS

Serves 8

I like to make the pears a couple of days ahead of time and let them rest refrigerated in the poaching liquid. They develop an even more intense coffee flavor. You can serve them warm or chilled. Save the poaching liquid to use again. It eventually becomes a great syrup for ice cream.

6 cups of strong coffee
2-1/2 cups dark brown sugar
Zest and juice of 2 medium oranges
2 tablespoons chopped fresh ginger
1 3-inch cinnamon stick
8 medium firm-ripe pears, peeled and cored
3/4 teaspoon cornstarch
1/4 cup fresh orange juice

Garnish: Fresh orange segments, mint sprigs and a dollop of whipped cream or ice cream, if desired.

In a large, wide non-reactive saucepan, combine the coffee, brown sugar, zest and juice of the 2 oranges, ginger, and cinnamon stick and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer for 4 minutes. Add the pears and return to the simmer. Partially cover and gently simmer until the pears are cooked through and tender, about 15 minutes. Test the pears for tenderness with a toothpick. The cooking time will vary depending on the type, maturity and size of the pear used. When tender, remove from the heat. Strain 1 cup of the poaching liquid into a small saucepan. Leave the pears in their liquid while making the sauce.

Dissolve the cornstarch in the orange juice and add to the small saucepan containing a cup or so of poaching liquid. Bring to a simmer and cook stirring for 2 minutes or until lightly thickened. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool.

Serve the pears whole or sliced and fanned in shallow bowls or on plates. Spoon some of the sauce over and around the slices. Garnish with 2 or 3 orange segments, mint sprigs and the whipped or ice cream.

QUAIL ROASTED WITH COFFEE, SPICES AND A VANILLA SAUCE

Serves 6

So I know this sounds pretty “cheffy” but it’s simpler than you’d think. You can make the rub 3 days ahead and store tightly covered in a cool place. The sauce can be made a couple of hours ahead and kept warm. Quail are available online. A good local source is www.devilsgulchbranch.com. If quail are outside your budget, then 6 good-size skin-on chicken thighs can substitute.

For the rub:

- 1 tablespoon white sesame seeds
- 12 black peppercorns
- 20 coriander seeds
- 3 whole cloves
- 2 juniper berries
- 1/2-inch piece of cinnamon stick
- 1 small bay leaf
- 3 tablespoons freshly ground espresso coffee (grind very fine)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons sugar

- 12 semi boned quail
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 bunches spinach, well washed and stems removed
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- Vanilla Sauce (recipe follows)

Preheat the oven to 375°. On a baking sheet arrange in separate piles the sesame, peppercorns, coriander, cloves, juniper berries and cinnamon and toast until the sesame seeds are golden colored (about 8 minutes). Remove and with an electric coffee grinder, finely grind the toasted spices along with the bay leaf. Add the coffee, salt and sugar and continue grinding until mixture is finely ground. Turn the oven up to 450 degrees.

Lightly rub the quails with 2 tablespoons of olive oil and then rub with the spice mixture. Refrigerate for 2 - 3 hours. In a heavy ovenproof sauté pan large enough to hold all the quail in a single layer, heat the remaining oil and brown the quail on all sides over moderate heat. This will take 4 – 5 minutes. Turn all quail breast side up and place in oven for 5 – 7 minutes to finish cooking. Test by inserting the point of a knife at the thigh joint. Juices should run clear but meat should still be slightly pink and juicy.

To serve: Quickly sauté spinach with butter until just wilted. Season with salt and pepper and arrange in the middle of warm plates. Top with two quail and spoon vanilla sauce around.

For the vanilla sauce:

3 tablespoons chopped shallot
1/2 cup sliced mushrooms
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
3 cups flavorful quail or chicken stock
1 cup dry white wine
2/3 cup heavy cream
1 three-inch vanilla bean, split
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Salt and freshly ground white pepper

Sauté the shallots and mushrooms in 1 tablespoon butter until soft but not brown. Add stock and wine and reduce by half over high heat, 8 – 10 minutes. Add cream and vanilla bean and reduce again to a light sauce consistency, about 5 minutes. Strain through a fine mesh strainer pressing down on the solids. Scrape the soft center of the vanilla bean into the strained sauce and discard bean. Correct seasoning with drops of lemon juice, salt and pepper. Whisk in the remaining butter in bits. Hold the sauce in a warm water bath or thermos until serving time (up to 3 hours).

COFFEE CHILE DRY RUB

Makes about 1/2 cup, enough for 4 good size steaks.

Easy to make; rub beef, pork or lamb with a bit of olive oil and then massage in the rub. Allow to sit for an hour before grilling on a barbeque or in a stovetop ridged grilling pan.

2 tablespoons finely ground dark roast coffee
2 tablespoons ancho chile powder
2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
1 tablespoon smoked paprika
1 teaspoon ground cumin
2 teaspoons kosher salt

In a small bowl, mix all the ingredients thoroughly, to break down the dark brown sugar into fine crystals.

Liberally sprinkle a thin layer of the rub onto the oil-brushed steak or other meats or sturdy fish, then massage it in with your fingers so it adheres. Let sit for at least an hour at room temperature before grilling.

BRISKET BRAISED IN COFFEE

Serves 6 – 8

The great virtue of brisket of beef is the fact that it is marbled with fat between the connective tissue or collagen. This tissue, when cooked slowly in a low oven or smoker or braised in a flavorful liquid, melts and the fiber of the meat softens to yield one of the most succulent pieces of meat imaginable. Brisket has become a very popular cut and certainly one of the most versatile whether part of a K.C. or Texas barbecue, sliced for a Southeast Asian *Pho*, simmered for an Italian *Bollito Misto*, corned for St. Patrick's Day or pot roasted for *Rosh Hashana*. Like most stew or braises, it's even better the next day reheated.

4 tablespoons olive oil
4 pounds brisket of beef, trimmed of excess fat if necessary
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 large onions (1 ½ - 2 pounds), sliced
1/4 cup sliced fresh garlic
2 tablespoons (or more) ancho or chipotle chile powder
2 teaspoons each whole fennel and cumin seed
2/3 cup brown sugar
2/3 cup apple cider vinegar
4 cups strong brewed coffee
1 cup rich meat or mushroom stock
1 – 14 ½ ounce can diced tomatoes in juice

Add 2 tablespoons of the olive oil to a deep pot or Dutch oven and quickly brown the brisket on both sides, seasoning liberally with salt and pepper. Remove the meat from the pot, discard the fat and wipe the pot out.

Back on the stove add the remaining oil and sauté the onion and garlic until just beginning to color. Add the chile and sauté for a minute more or until fragrant. Add the spices, sugar, vinegar, coffee, stock and tomatoes and bring to a simmer. Return meat to the pot, cover and place in a preheated 300-degree oven for 3 – 3 ½ hours or until meat is very tender,

Remove meat and set aside. Puree the braising liquids and vegetables until smooth and season to taste with salt and pepper. Return meat to the pan and add enough of the pureed sauce to not quite cover the meat. Return pot to oven and bake uncovered for 30 - 45 minutes more or until brisket is nicely glazed. Serve cut thinly across the grain or “pulled” (shredded) with the warm pureed sauce spooned over.



BROILED CHICKEN WITH COFFEE BARBECUE SAUCE

One 3-1/2 Chicken, spatchcocked or split in half, brined if possible
Vegetable oil
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1-1/2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
Coffee barbecue sauce (recipe follows)

Brush chicken on both sides with the oil. Season with salt and pepper (ignore this step if chicken has been brined or marinated).

Broil skin side down under a preheated broiler 8 inches or so from the broiler element for 12 to 14 minutes. Turn the chicken skin side up and broil until the skin is crisp and browned, another 15 to 18 minutes for a bone-in chicken. The breast should reach an internal temperature of 155°. If the skin begins to char before the chicken is done, lower it an inch or two from the broiler or tent with a piece of foil.

About 5 minutes from the finish of cooking brush skin side liberally with the coffee barbecue sauce. Finish cooking under the broiler until the sauce is browned and bubbling.

Remove from oven and let stand at least 5 minutes before carving.

Coffee barbecue sauce

Makes 2 cups

- 1 cup strong black coffee
- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 cup cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon pure chile powder such as ancho
- 1 teaspoon pressed or crushed garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 cup dark brown sugar
- Drop of hot sauce to taste

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and simmer for 5 minutes. Baste meat with sauce when it's nearly done (last 5 minutes or so). Refrigerate sauce for up to 3 weeks.



PORK TENDERLOIN WITH COFFEE MAPLE SAUCE

Serves 4

Pork tenderloin is very lean and, if overcooked, can toughen and dry out. This technique of searing first in a sauté pan and then finishing in the oven helps prevent this. Time to also use your instant-read thermometer.

One 1-1/2 pound pork tenderloin, well-trimmed
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
2 tablespoons vegetable oil such as canola

For the Sauce:

1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
2 tablespoons pure ancho chile powder
1 tablespoon brown sugar
3/4 cup strong black coffee (espresso)
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1/3 cup maple syrup
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
1 teaspoon grated bitter chocolate, optional
Fresh watercress for garnish

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Season the pork tenderloin generously with salt and pepper. Allow it to sit for an hour at room temperature.

Heat the oil in a large oven-proof skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add tenderloin and brown on all sides, about 4 minutes. Transfer to the oven and roast until meat registers 145 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, 10 – 12 minutes or so. Remove from oven, tent with foil to keep warm.

Meanwhile make the sauce. Mix the cloves, chile powder, sugar, coffee, Worcestershire and maple syrup together in a small saucepan. Heat to a boil, stirring. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the butter a few pieces at a time. Keep the sauce warm over the lowest possible heat.

To serve, cut tenderloin into 3/4-inch medallions, place on warm plates, spoon sauce around and sprinkle the chocolate over if using. Garnish with watercress.

COFFEE FLAN

Serves 6

Sweetened condensed milk is the secret ingredient that gives this popular Spanish dessert its silky texture.

3/4 cup sugar

1 (14-oz) can sweetened condensed milk (1 1/4 cups)

3 3/4 cups whole milk

5 large eggs

4 1/2 teaspoons instant coffee granules dissolved in 4 teaspoons hot water

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/8 teaspoon salt

Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 350°F.

Cook sugar in a dry small heavy saucepan over moderate heat, undisturbed, until it begins to melt. Continue to cook, stirring occasionally with a fork, until sugar melts into a deep golden caramel. Immediately pour into a 9-inch round ceramic or glass baking dish or metal cake pan (2 inches deep) and tilt dish to coat the bottom (use caution, dish will be hot). Cool until hardened, 10 to 15 minutes.

Blend remaining ingredients in a blender, in 2 batches if your blender is small, until smooth. Pour custard through a fine-mesh sieve over caramel in the dish, then transfer the dish to a 17- by 11-inch roasting pan lined with a kitchen towel. Cover the dish loosely with a piece of foil, then pour enough boiling-hot water into the roasting pan to reach 1 inch up the side of the dish. Bake until custard is set but still wobbly in center when gently shaken and a knife inserted in center comes out clean, 1 to 1 1/4 hours. Transfer dish to a rack to cool completely, about 40 minutes. Chill flan, covered, until cold, at least 8 hours.

To unmold the flan, run a thin knife around the edge of the dish to loosen the flan. Invert a large platter with a lip over the dish. Holding dish and platter securely together, quickly invert and turn out flan onto platter. Caramel will pour out over and around the flan.

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