

SUMMER 2020

Each season has its unique ingredients and flavors, but summer provides the most abundant, I think you'd agree. It's hard to keep up with the delicious "glut" that we are presented with. That Grande Dame of English food writing, Elizabeth David noted that "*Summer cooking implies a sense of immediacy, a capacity to capture the essence of the fleeting moment*". So, my challenge to you is don't miss the moment. Be adventurous and maybe try things you haven't tried before!

Suggest you also listen to your favorite summer music while you are cooking. At the risk of revealing my dotage, some of mine are: "Here comes the Sun" by George Harrison, "Hot Time in the Summertime" by Sly and the Family Stone, "Summer Breeze" by Seals and Croft. Fill in with your own playlist. What are yours?

Here then are some of my perennial favorite summer recipes to get you going.



Photo by John Ash

LIME LICUADO

Makes about 3 cups

Licuados ("*blendeds*" or "*liquifieds*" in Spanish) are part of the larger universe of fruit drinks made with fruit juice diluted with milk (either fresh or canned) or water found all over Mexico

and Central America. They are simple to make and there are as many variations as are the cooks who make them. Besides fruit they can also include nuts and raw egg.

By contrast with aguas frescas, which are made in advance and ladled from large jars, and other drinks such as refrescos and jugos, which are typically mass-produced and bottled, licuados typically are blended and made to order. Sometimes they are also made into an “adult beverage” with the addition of a little rum.

2 large limes, washed and roughly chopped
1/3 cup sugar
1/3 cup sweetened condensed milk
3 large mint leaves plus more for garnish
2 cups cold water

Place all ingredients in a blender and blend on high speed for 30 - 40 seconds or until limes are nicely finely chopped. Strain thru a medium strainer pressing down on the solids. Adjust sweet and sour elements to your own taste. Chill till very cold or pour over a few ice cubes and garnish with mint.

Variation: Add 1 small skinned and seeded avocado before blending.

SUMMER SUCCOTASH

Serves 6

Native Americans (the Narraganset) introduced colonists to this mix of beans and corn which they called “*msickquatash*”. Mark Twain listed succotash (along with possum, coon, and cobbles) among the foods that he most craved from home when he was traveling!

3 cups green and/or yellow wax beans cut on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoon butter
1 cup chopped sweet red onion
1 medium red bell pepper
1 medium poblano pepper
2 cups diced zucchini or other summer squash
2 cups fresh corn kernels
3/4 cup or so chicken or vegetable stock
1/2 cup crème fraiche
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil, parsley, tarragon, or whatever herb you like.

Blanch the beans in boiling salted water until crisp tender. Drain and run under cold water to stop the cooking. Heat the oil and butter in a large skillet over moderately high heat. Add the onion and peppers and cook for a minute or two or until just beginning to soften. Stir in squash and corn and cook for another minute or two, stirring. Add the stock and crème fraiche and cook

until vegetables are crisp tender and liquid has reduced to a creamy consistency. Season to your taste with salt and pepper and stir in basil just before serving.

"FIRE AND ICE" PEACH SALAD WITH FETA, FIGS AND PROSCIUTTO

Serves 8

This is a perfect summertime dish. The “fire” comes from heat of the serrano chiles that contrasts with the “ice” - - cool, refreshing fruit. The aromatic mint, tart lime, feta, and salty prosciutto add delicious flavor counterpoints. Use whatever fruit are best in the market.

1/3 cup sugar or honey
1/4 cup white wine or water
1 teaspoon seeded and minced serrano chiles or to taste
2 tablespoons finely diced red bell peppers
1/4 cup fresh lime juice
2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
8 firm ripe peaches
4 ounces fresh feta cheese, cut into 8 attractive pieces
8 fresh ripe figs, fanned
8 paper thin slices of prosciutto or other salumi of your choice
Lime wedges for garnish

Garnish: Edible flower petals such as nasturtium, chive, borage, if desired

In a small saucepan, combine the sugar and wine and over moderate heat stir until the sugar is dissolved. Add the chiles and peppers and cool. Stir in the lime juice and mint just before serving. Syrup can be stored covered and refrigerated for up to 3 days.

To serve: Peel peaches if desired, cut in half and remove seeds. Cut each half into thirds and arrange along with feta attractively on chilled plates. Spoon chile syrup over peaches and arrange figs and prosciutto artfully around. Sprinkle with edible flower petals, if using.

A note on Chile heat: There actually is a way to measure the heat level in chiles. It is called the Scoville Scale and was developed back at the turn of the last century by W.L. Scoville. His method involved extraction of the heat elements in chiles known as capsaicinoids, which were then diluted to a point where they were barely detectable. For example, if a gram of chile extract had to be diluted in 40,000ml of water and alcohol to be barely perceptible then that chile was rated at 40,000 Scoville heat units. Although this is not a precise test, since each of us has some differences in sensitivity to chiles, it does give a good basic estimate.

Here are some Scoville heat ratings for various chiles:

- Bell Peppers 0
- Anaheims 800-1200
- Poblanos 800-1200
- Jalapenos 8000-10,000
- Serranos 10,000-18,000
- Japanese (Hontaka) 25,000-40,000
- Thai types 40,000-60,000
- Pure Capsaicin* 1 million

* Capsaicin is one of the compounds in the capsaicinoid family and is thought to be the most potent of the heat elements in chiles.



Photo by John Ash

FRESH CORN POLENTA WITH BLISTERED TOMATOES AND BURATTA

Serves 4

This is a relatively quick brunch, lunch, or supper dish. Buratta is called the queen of Italian cheeses. With an outer shell of fresh cow or buffalo mozzarella, it is filled with a mixture of curds and fresh cream. In Italian buratta literally means “buttery”.

2 tablespoons butter

1 tablespoon finely chopped shallots

3-1/2 cups chicken or vegetable stock

3/4 cup coarse polenta meal 1 cup fresh or frozen corn kernels, coarsely pureed (1 medium ear of corn)

1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan or Asiago cheese

Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground pepper

Blistered tomatoes (recipe follows)

2 4-ounce balls buratta, cut in half

Lemon olive oil such as “O” or McEvoy

Fried basil leaves, if desired

In a medium saucepan over moderate heat, melt the butter and sauté the shallots for a couple of minutes till translucent but not brown. Add the stock and bring to a boil. Whisk in the polenta slowly to prevent lumps and stir until mixture returns to a boil. Stir in corn.

Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 10 - 12 minutes or until the mixture is smooth and cooked to your liking. If you prefer a softer texture cook for a few minutes more adding a bit more stock and being sure to stir to prevent sticking and burning. Off heat, cover and keep warm.

To serve: Stir grated cheese into polenta and divide the polenta into 4 shallow soup plates. Top with the tomatoes and then the buratta. Drizzle with the olive oil and serve immediately

Blistered tomatoes:

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

3 cups fresh cherry and regular tomatoes, cut into attractive shapes

1 tablespoon coarsely chopped mixed herbs such as chives, parsley, basil and/or tarragon

Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Heat the oil over moderately high heat in a small sauté pan. Add the garlic and cook and cook for a few seconds. Add tomatoes and stir for a couple of minutes more or until they begin to soften and blister. Off heat, cool slightly and stir in herbs. Season to your taste with salt and pepper.

HEIRLOOM TOMATO SALAD WITH ANCHOVY VINAIGRETTE

Serves 4

This warm, garlicky anchovy dressing here is fantastic here and I am betting will become a favorite for other salads.

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 anchovies, minced
1 garlic clove, minced
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
1 medium shallot, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 large eggs
1 1/2 pounds assorted heirloom tomatoes—large ones wedged; small ones halved
Flaky salt such as Maldon's
Freshly ground pepper
For serving: Flat-leaf parsley leaves and chopped chives

In a small skillet, combine the olive oil, anchovies, garlic, and lemon zest.

In a small bowl, toss the shallot with the vinegar and let stand for 10 minutes.

Bring a small saucepan of water to a boil. Turn the heat to low and, when the water is simmering, gently place the eggs in the water. Cook for 6 minutes, until lightly boiled. Have an ice bath ready near the stove. With a slotted spoon, plunge the eggs in the ice bath and let cool for 2 minutes. Peel the eggs.

Arrange the tomatoes on 4 plates and season with flaky salt and pepper. Scatter the shallot and vinegar over the tomatoes.

Warm the anchovy dressing over moderate heat to a gentle simmer; pour over the tomatoes. Cut the eggs in half crosswise and place a half on each plate. Scatter the parsley and chives over the salad and serve at once.



Photo by John Ash

SWORDFISH WITH GREEN OLIVES AND ORANGES

Serves 4

A couple of decades ago swordfish were severely overfished and we almost lost them as a viable commercial species. You may remember the chef boycotts about not including swordfish on their menus. Today however the major seafood resource groups (Seafood Watch, NOAA, Marine Stewardship Council) have applauded the responsible fishing and habitat preservation that have allowed North Atlantic swordfish especially to repopulate. You can consume it with a good conscience. Be sure to check where it comes from and how it is harvested. Swordfish is one of the easiest fish to grill because of its firm, meaty texture. Be sure to give your grill a vigorous scrubbing with a grill brush and then lightly oil the grill and the fish ahead. You can also substitute halibut, salmon or any firm fleshed fish that you like.

- 2 large seedless oranges, preferably navel
- 1 small garlic clove, peeled and very thinly sliced
- 1 cup pitted green olives such as Cerignola, pitted and coarsely chopped
- 1 tablespoon capers, drained and chopped
- 3 anchovies in olive oil, drained and chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for brushing
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes or to taste
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
4 swordfish fillets, about 5 ounces each

For the oranges:

Peel and segment the oranges over a small bowl to catch the juices. Squeeze the remaining membrane over the bowl to extract all the juices. Discard membrane and season oranges very lightly with salt and pepper. Set aside.

For the green olive topping:

Add the garlic, olives, capers, anchovies, parsley 2 tablespoons olive oil and red pepper flakes together in a small bowl. Season to your taste with salt and pepper. Set aside.

For the swordfish:

Prepare a gas or charcoal grill for direct grilling over medium-high heat.

Pat the fish dry with paper towels. Lightly brush the fillets on both sides with olive oil, then season with salt and black pepper. Lightly oil the grill rack. Place the fish on the grill rack and cover the grill. Cook, turning once, until the swordfish looks opaque when pierced with the tip of a sharp knife, about 6 minutes total. Be careful not to overcook.

Transfer the fillets to individual plates, top each with a generous spoonful of the green olive topping and add orange segments around with some of the juice. Serve immediately.



Photo by John Ash

GINGER, FIG AND CRANBERRY SEMIFREDDO WITH BLACKBERRY SAUCE

Yields one 8 cup terrine serving 8 - 10

This is a simple but lovely dessert which could be made in the terrine as suggested here or in individual serving size molds as you desire. "*Semifreddo*" is Italian and translates to "half-frozen", which is what this dessert is -- somewhere between ice cream and a pudding. If you are concerned about using raw egg yolks, you could whisk the yolks and sugar with one half cup or so of dry white wine in a double boiler over simmering water until light, fluffy and cooked before folding in the whipped cream. It melts relatively quickly so plate just before you plan to serve it, preferably on plates that you've put in the freezer for at least 15 minutes.

2-3/4 cups heavy whipping cream
8 egg yolks
2/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup minced candied ginger
1/4 cup finely chopped dried figs
1/3 cup dried chopped cranberries, finely chopped
2 tablespoons grated orange zest
Blackberry Sauce (recipe follows)
Mint sprigs.

With an electric mixer beat cream until stiff peaks and set aside. In a separate bowl, beat egg yolks until light in color. Gradually beat in sugar and continue beating for 3 - 4 minutes until light and fluffy. Gently fold the egg and cream mixture together along with rest of ingredients through the zest.

Line a 7 -8 cup terrine with plastic wrap and fill with mixture. Cover top with plastic and freeze for 6 hours or overnight.

To serve: Unmold, cut into slices, and surround with fresh blackberry sauce and mint sprigs.

Blackberry Sauce

5 cups fresh or IQF blackberries
3/4 cup sugar (or to taste)
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons blackberry brandy (optional)

Add all ingredients to a blender or food processor and puree. Push through a fine strainer to remove all seeds. Store refrigerated up to 5 days.

John Ash © 2020