

FULL OF BEANS

One of the best things about being a TV-food producer is that you get to meet all sorts of passionate people whose lives revolve around food and ingredients. That's all they think about. One of the more delightful people I've had the pleasure of interviewing is Steve Sando, the founder of Rancho Gordo, a producer of heirloom produce, seeds, and beans.

When he first came to Napa, he couldn't find a decent tomato, which was surprising since Napa is supposed to be one of the best agricultural regions in the country. All he could find in the local markets were those hard hothouse tomatoes from Holland. So, since he liked to cook with fresh ingredients, he decided to start growing his own. Eventually that led him to grow his own heirloom beans. He was attracted to them because they are indigenous to the Americas and he feels it's important to keep that heritage alive.

As he's talking, I'm thinking what's the big deal about a bean? Isn't a bean just a bean? After another half-hour of my interview with him, I realize – no – a bean is not just a bean. There are hundreds of varieties with different flavor profiles and textures. They are almost as ubiquitous as rice, being a critical crop that offers sustenance and nourishment to most of the world. Think about it, what would chili be without kidney beans? Or cassoulet without flageolets? Or even Fava beans without a nice Chianti?

His enthusiasm turned me into an heirloom bean convert. After the shoot, he loaded me up with a few pounds of his top sellers to bring back home, including my favorite, Christmas Lima Beans. As a kid, I used to gag on the canned lima beans my mom served. They had that pukey green color and were mushy and slimy. But these beans have a gorgeous purple and white swirl and are firm enough to use in a chili or stew. They taste a little nutty, almost like chestnuts. They are just the

right bean to turn a lima bean hater into a lima bean lover.

Ingredients matter and good ingredients make a difference. Once you start using quality dried beans, you'll never go back to canned again.

IRISH SODA BREAD

I've never been a fan of corned beef and cabbage, so to honor St. Patrick's Day, I lean towards a classic Irish Soda Bread. It's one of the easiest breads to make because it doesn't require any yeast, just baking powder and baking soda. I like to add raisins in mine, but currents work nicely as well.

And in the words of an old Irish blessing, "May the best day of your past be the worst day of your future."

INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons butter, chilled, cut into cubes

2 cups all-purpose flour, plus 1 teaspoon flour

4 tablespoons white sugar

1½ teaspoons baking powder

¾ teaspoon baking soda

zest of one orange

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup buttermilk

1 cup raisins

1 tablespoon raw sugar

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Use one tablespoon of butter to coat inside of an 8-inch round cake pan. Add a teaspoon of flour and shake pan to distribute flour evenly to prevent sticking.

Place 2 cups of flour, 4 tablespoons sugar, baking powder, baking soda, orange zest and salt in a large bowl and whisk to combine. Add remaining 3 tablespoons of butter.

Using your hands, mix until there is a coarse meal consistency.

Create a well in center of the mixture. Add the buttermilk and blend with the dry ingredients. Add in the raisins and combine.

Shape the dough into a ball and flatten into buttered pan. Sprinkle dough with 1 tablespoon raw sugar.

Bake bread for 40 minutes until golden brown. Remove from oven and allow to cool for 15 minutes.

Serve at room temperature with butter and jam.



TASTY TEA CAKES

Some call these snowball cookies, others might call them Russian Tea Cakes, but I call them just plain delicious. This is a riff on the Land O Lakes® Snowball Cookie recipe. I'm hoping they don't mind that I tweaked it a bit. These go great with an afternoon cup of Earl Grey. Pass the milk please.

INGREDIENTS

6 ounces pecans, lightly toasted

2 cups all-purpose flour

1/8 teaspoon salt

1 cup salted butter, softened

1/4 cup sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/2 cup powdered sugar

PREPARATION

Pre-heat oven to 325 degrees.

Finely chop pecans in a food processor. Place chopped pecans in a bowl and stir in flour and salt.

In a medium bowl, beat the cream, butter and sugar until fluffy. Reduce speed to low and beat in vanilla. Add nut mixture and beat until combined.

Using a melon baller, shape dough into 1-inch balls. Place, 1-inch apart, onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake 16-18 minutes or until very lightly browned.

Let cookies cool about 5 minutes; transfer to cooling rack to cool completely.

Place powdered sugar into shallow bowl; roll cooled cookies in sugar to coat. Store in airtight container.

IT'S ALWAYS TEA TIME SOMEWHERE

There's something so soothing about tea. It's one of the few calorie-free pleasures in my life, assuming I'm not having black tea that commands milk. I always keep one of those electric water heaters on the counter so that I can refill my cup at a moment's notice. I've got cabinets full of teas – Assam, Earl Grey, Silver Needle, Shou Mei, An Shi Ti Kuan Yin, Tumeric Ginger, and Milky Oolong are some of my favorites.



For special occasions, there's nothing better than High Tea. I love the ritual of it, the shared experience with friends, the conversation, but in truth, it's the scones I'm after. How divine it is to raise my pinky to a beautiful porcelain cup, and then schmear my scone with an over abundance of clotted cream and jam.



But perhaps my most unique experience was learning how to prepare a Chinese tea ceremony. I was working in Singapore and there was a small teashop near the office. On a whim, I signed up for a course thinking I would be with other people. I walked up the creaky stairs to a small room that could clearly fit only two. An older Chinese gentleman with one blue glass eye entered the room and bowed.



For the next two hours, we did not speak, having no language in common. Yet patiently, he gingerly poured the water over the tea leaves once, then twice, then three times, as I tasted the difference between cups. The first was too bitter, so it was poured out. The second had a burst of earthy flavor, though it was a bit harsh. The third was just perfect – clean, smooth, and relaxing.

I think the whole ceremony was about patience. It's about slowing down. It's about stopping to appreciate what's good right in front of you. It's about learning how to savor each moment. Not a bad lesson to learn from a simple cup of tea.

FRENCH TOAST WITH CRANBERRY RELISH

Whenever I pass by a French bakery I can't resist buying a loaf of freshly baked bread. One of my favorites is the classic sourdough bread, *pain de levain*. All you need is a slice, some good butter, and a cup of tea to turn a bad day into a good one.

But if you find yourself with a few extra slices, it's great to turn them into French toast. I like to garnish mine with some cranberry relish. Make sure to make the relish the day before so that it can set up in the refrigerator. The tartness goes nicely with the sweet syrup. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS (serves 2)

FOR CRANBERRY RELISH

12 ounces of fresh cranberries

1 cup of sugar

3 ounces orange juice

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon grated ginger

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cinnamon

Zest of one orange

FOR FRENCH TOAST

4 pieces *pain de levain* (or *brioche*)

3 eggs

2 tablespoons milk

pinch of nutmeg

pinch of cinnamon

2 tablespoons butter

maple syrup

confectioners sugar (for garnish)

PREPARATION

FOR CRANBERRY RELISH*

Rinse cranberries in a colander and remove any squishy cranberries. Set aside.

In a large saucepan on medium heat, combine sugar, orange juice, ginger and cinnamon. Stir until combined and sugar is dissolved. Bring to boil.

Add the cranberries and combine them with the mixture. Cook about 4-5 minutes until the cranberries begin to pop.

Skim off any foam that has formed on the surface.

Remove from heat and stir in the orange zest. Once cool, cover and store in the refrigerator. This will keep for at least two weeks.

FOR FRENCH TOAST

In a large bowl, combine the eggs, milk, nutmeg, and cinnamon. Mix well. Soak each piece of bread in the egg mixture.

Heat a large skillet. Add in one tablespoon of butter until it begins to foam. Place the four pieces of bread on the skillet and cook about two minutes or until the bottoms begin to brown. Remove each piece of bread to a plate and add the 2nd tablespoon of butter in the skillet. Flip the bread pieces over and cook for another two minutes or until brown.

TO PLATE: Place two pieces of bread on each plate. Add a

dollop of the cranberry sauce. Using a tea strainer, sift some confectioners sugar on top. Serve with maple syrup.

**NOTE: This cranberry relish recipe makes way more than you need to garnish the French toast. But it's so good, you'll want the extra on hand.*

GRUYERE GOUGERES

I'm not sure what I love more – the smell of these gougeres baking in the oven or the actual first bite as it melts in your mouth. My husband is a master at these and I beg him to make these whenever anyone is coming over. He's experimented with all kinds of different cheeses, but gruyere is by far my favorite. Feel free to substitute yours.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup grated Gruyere, large grate

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan, small grate

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup whole milk

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ " cubes

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

1 cup flour

4 eggs

honey for dipping (optional)

PREPARATION

Grate gruyere using the large hole side of a box grater. Set aside. Grate $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of parmesan with the small hole side of a box grater. Set aside.

Combine water, milk, butter and salt in a medium sized pot. Bring to a full boil over medium heat. Add the flour and stir quickly with a wooden spoon until the mixture pulls away from the sides of the pot.

Continue to cook and stir the mixture for another minute so that some of the water content evaporates. If the butter oozes out a little, don't worry. That means it's working.

Transfer to a bowl and let cool for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. (*Don't skip this part or your eggs will scramble!*) Beat in 1 egg at a time by hand or use the low speed on a hand mixer.

Make sure the egg is fully incorporated before adding the next one. Continue to mix the dough until it is smooth and shiny. Add in the gruyere and mix until well incorporated. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for 4 hours.

When you're ready to bake, pre-heat oven to 400 degrees. Remove the dough from the refrigerator. (*No need to bring to room temperature.*)

Scoop the paste into a pastry bag fitted with a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch plain tip. (*If you don't have a pastry bag, use a large ziplock bag and snip one corner leaving a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch hole.*) Squeeze out 24, 2-inch balls (*about the size of an apricot*) onto a baking sheet lined with a Silpat or parchment paper.

Sprinkle balls with grated parmesan. Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 350 degrees and continue to bake until golden brown and very firm to the touch, about 10-15 minutes more.

Turn off the oven. Poke the bottom of each gougere with a

toothpick, turn upside down on the backing sheet, and let dry in the oven for 10 minutes. Remove to a cooling rack until they are at room temperature.

Serve alongside a small bowl of honey for dipping.

(NOTE: By the way, if you leave out the cheese, you'll have the basis for profiteroles! When cooled, just slice in half, fill with your favorite ice cream and pour on the chocolate sauce.)

THE KG ANNUAL SKI FEST

As my Uncle Allen used to say, "Skiing is the glue that holds this family together." And from 1970 until this very day, he's been absolutely right. Family traditions can pack in a whole bunch of different emotions, but at the end of the day, for good and bad, they help us stay connected and grounded. Every year my cousins, husband, and I gather to keep the tradition alive. It's our tribute to my father and uncle.



My uncle Allen was the Ying to my Dad's Yang. He was as gentle and carefree as my Dad was impatient and anxious. We affectionately called him by his initials – A.G. How the two

of them ever became such good friends is a mystery to me, but they were buddies way before my father started dating his sister, my mother. As a matter of fact, they might have been the only two teenage Jewish boys in Brooklyn that skied in 1945. They often regaled us with stories that we never tired of hearing, no matter how many times they told them. Their tales were usually perfectly timed for those moments when we were being brats or unappreciative.

“We’d get up at 2:00am and get dressed in the dark so we wouldn’t wake anyone.” A.G. would start.

“Yeah, if you woke your Granddad, you’d never hear the end of it,” Dad chimed in.

“We’d get on the subway at Kings Highway and take it all the way into Manhattan to catch the ferry to Staten Island,” A.G. would continue, as each would volley back and forth telling the tale.



“Next, we’d walk from the Ferry to the train station, schlepping all of our gear up and down the stairs. And in

those days, skis were heavy. They were army surplus.”

“People would look at us as if we were nuts.”

“We’d have to take two trains and then wait for a bus just to get us close to Bear Mountain. Then we’d have to walk at least a mile to the base of the mountain.”

“Two miles.”

“Yeah, two miles, no maybe three.”

“There were no lifts, no lodges, no nothing. You had to pee in the woods.”

“All we had to eat were some egg salad sandwiches your Nana made for us the night before.”

“They were usually smashed by the time we’d get to the mountain and we’d have to melt snow just to wash them down.”

“We’d strap on our skis that had these big bear trap bindings, and grab onto that rope tow with all our might.”

“It was so rough, by the end of the day it would burn through our gloves, and our hands would be soaked in blood by the time we got home.”

“We didn’t care.”

“Yeah, those were the days.”



My cousins and I miss those stories and we miss our fathers. We've created a lot of new tall tales over the years as the next generation has joined us, something we know they would have been thrilled to see. Every time the sun cuts through the clouds, we know they are looking down on us, hoping for some fresh powder so we can make our own new tracks.