

DRAGON FRUITINI

The dragon fruit is an odd, yet fascinating fruit. At first glance, it's a bit scary looking with its spikes jutting out of its skin as if it's a holdout from prehistoric times. Once cut open, its beautiful white flesh dotted with tiny black seeds is a surprising juxtaposition against its redish-pink exterior.

It's a popular fruit in parts of Asia, as well as Mexico and Central America where it's also known as a pitaya. You've probably passed them by in markets not knowing what to do with them. Well, next time you see one, buy it and try this cocktail. The fruit itself has a mild, sweet flavor – just enough to balance the botanicals in a good gin.

INGREDIENTS (1 Cocktail)

$\frac{1}{2}$ dragon fruit, flesh removed from skin and chopped into small pieces

2 oz gin

1 oz Cointreau

1 slice dragon fruit for garnish

Ice

PREPARATION

In a shaker, muddle the dragon fruit flesh with the gin and Cointreau. Fill the shaker with ice $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way full.

Shake vigorously.

Using a large mesh strainer, pour everything – except the ice cubes – into a martini glass. You'll want some of the pulp and the black seeds for flavor and presentation.

Garnish with a half slice of dragon fruit. Enjoy!

SHOVEL IT!

There's nothing like a great big Brooklyn snowstorm. We used to be able to count on at least one big dump each season, but now these storms are far more infrequent here and less severe, no doubt due to global warning.

In the old days, I remember for a few wonderful hours, everything stopped as branches were laden with white powder and the streets emptied, creating a welcomed silence. I was mesmerized as the falling snowflakes stacked up on our windowsills, sealing us in our warm, cozy home.



As morning broke, cross-country skiers found their way to Prospect Park before the rush of kids descended with their sleds. Little kids made snow angels as snowballs flew across the fields. Well-dressed snowmen seemed to popup every few feet. Everything was beautiful—until it wasn't.



It wasn't long before the sanitation department plowed the streets, piling gray, dirty snow high against everyone's cars. I feared some of my older neighbors might give themselves heart attacks as they dug their cars out. As I shoveled our busy corner hoping to make a path for people, the sanitation guys seemed to take joy plowing me back in. When I was younger, I used to bat my eyes at them and occasionally they would lift up their shovel while passing, but I guess I've lost my charm with the years.



Maybe if I had bribed them with freshly baked cookies and hot chocolate they would take pity of me. What do you think were my odds of that every happening?

ONE POT CHICKEN AND MUSHROOMS

It's the middle of winter, it's freezing in my kitchen and I just want something to throw together quickly that's tasty and uses the least amount of dishes and bowls so that I can get downstairs as fast as possible where it's warmer. And bonus – it makes a lot, so there will be leftovers for lunch.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 4)

2-3 tablespoons olive oil

1 large onion sliced

3 cloves of garlic minced

6 ounces sliced shiitake mushrooms

6 boneless, skinless chicken thighs cut into 1" pieces

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

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons fresh ground pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon red pepper flakes

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups jasmine rice

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups chicken broth

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups white wine

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

3 tablespoons maple syrup

1 scallion chopped for garnish

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan (optional)

PREPARATION

In a large dutch oven, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté until beginning to brown, about 6 minutes. Add the garlic and mushrooms and continue to sauté for an additional 2 minutes. Add another tablespoon of olive oil if too dry.

Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Add the chicken to the pot and stir until chicken is browned, about three minutes. Stir in the red pepper flakes, and the remaining salt and ground pepper. Add the rice and stir for one minute.

Add the chicken broth, white wine, mustard and maple syrup and stir to combine. Bring the mixture up to a boil and then lower to a simmer until the rice is cooked, about 15 minutes. Turn

off the heat and let rest for five minutes. Stir the mixture to fluff the rice.

Serve in bowls and garnish with scallions and Parmesan.

GAME DAY CHILI

I love this dish because it's great to make the day before, it feeds a crowd, and it leaves me free to watch the game with everyone else. And if you have leftovers, you can make nachos the next day. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS (Serves 8)

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 1/2 pounds ground turkey (or beef)

1 medium onion, diced

1 red bell pepper, diced

1-2 jalapeno peppers, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1/4 teaspoon cayenne

1 package McCormick Chili spices

1 chipotle pepper with adobo sauce, chopped

1 can red kidney beans (15 ounce), drained and rinsed

1 can whole tomatoes (17 ounces), chopped with liquid

1/2 cup BBQ Sauce

1 can sweet corn kernels, drained

Salt and pepper to taste

Sour cream for garnish

1 cup cheddar cheese, large grate for garnish

Tortilla chips (optional)

PREPARATION

Add 2 tablespoons of olive oil to a large skillet on medium-high heat. Add the ground turkey, breaking it up into crumbly pieces until browned, about 4-5 minutes. Set aside on a plate.

Add the remaining tablespoon of olive oil into skillet and heat. Add the onion and peppers and sauté for five minutes. Add the garlic and sauté an additional minute. Add the turkey meat back into the skillet. Sprinkle on the cayenne and McCormick Chili spices and combine.

Add in the chipotle pepper, kidney beans, whole tomatoes, BBQ sauce, and corn. Stir to combine. Bring to a boil, and then reduce to simmer for 30 minutes.

Adjust seasonings to taste with salt and pepper.

Serve with a dollop of sour cream, grated cheese and tortilla chips.

(NOTE – great to make a day ahead. Just reheat and serve)

SPINACH EGG DROP SOUP

I've been watching this documentary series on NETFLIX, *You Are What You Eat*, and quite frankly, it's scaring the bejeebers out of me. Basically, it has convinced me that I eat way too many fatty meats and not enough plant based foods. So, in an effort to balance my foods a bit better, I've been testing out some new options. So far, this recipe has been a big hit. Rather than adding smoky sausages—which is often a staple in my soups—I'm using lean turkey meat and forming them into tasty meatballs. And of course, I gotta have some greens, so this has a generous serving of spinach.

And a special shout out to my friends at [Gustus Vitae](#) for sending me their delicious spice blends! They were a great addition to the meatballs.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 6-8)

4 tablespoons olive oil

1 pound lean chopped turkey

2 teaspoons [Gustus Vitae "Everything But the Avocado Toast" spice mix](#)

1 onion, thinly sliced

2 medium sized potatoes, cubed

3 cloves garlic, minced

2 quarts turkey or chicken [bone broth](#) (or stock)

3 eggs, lightly beaten

3 cups baby spinach

salt and pepper to taste

Croutons (optional for garnish)

Parmesan cheese, grated (optional for garnish)

PREPARATION

Break up the chopped turkey in a large bowl. Add in the spice mixture and mix with your hands. Form 1" meatballs and set aside.

In a large skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Add in the meatballs and brown all sides. Don't overcrowd the meatballs. Cook them in batches if necessary. Set aside.

In a large dutch oven, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Sauté onions until they begin to turn brown, about 6 minutes. Add in the potatoes and brown, about 3 minutes. Add in the garlic and continue to cook for one minute.

Add in the bone broth and meatballs. Bring to a boil, and then down to a simmer for 20 minutes.

Add in the spinach. Stir until wilted, about one minute. Season the beaten eggs with salt and pepper. Slowly drizzle the eggs into the soup, gently stirring the pot with a wooden spoon for about thirty seconds until the eggs form ribbons. Remove from heat.

Re-season to taste with salt and pepper. Ladle into bowls and garnish with croutons and grated Parmesan cheese.

PACCHERRI LASAGNA PIE

I'm not gonna lie – this recipe takes some time. But it's quite a fun showstopper for a special occasion. You'll need a

9" spring form pan and some large hollow pasta tubes like paccherri. And if you make the Bolognese sauce a day ahead, it will make the whole process much easier. The flavors in the sauce will also have some time to meld. I use a Bolognese recipe based on Marcella Hazan's classic, changing up the meats and doubling the proportions. If I'm going to the trouble of making a Bolognese, I might as well have leftovers for next time.

INGREDIENTS (serves 8 – 10)

FOR THE BOLOGNESE

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

6 tablespoons butter

1 cup chopped onion

1 cup chopped celery

1 cup chopped carrot

3 cloves garlic minced

1 pound ground beef chuck

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound ground veal

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound ground pork

Salt

Fresh ground pepper

2 cups whole milk

Pinch nutmeg

2 cups dry white wine

3 cups canned imported Italian plum tomatoes, cut up, with

their juice

FOR THE BECHEMEL

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons flour

1- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of milk (warm)

Grated nutmeg

Salt & pepper

FOR THE CHEESE MIXTURE

2 cups ricotta

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan cheese (grated, small holes)

1 tablespoon fresh oregano (chopped)

1 tablespoon fresh basil (chopped)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked spinach

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Salt and pepper

FOR THE ASSEMBLY

1 lb cooked Paccherri (prepared al dente as per instructions on box)

1 cup grated mozzarella

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated Parmesan

Fresh basil for garnish

PREPARATION

FOR THE BOLOGNESE

In a large Dutch oven, combine the oil and butter on medium heat. Add the onions and cook until they are translucent. Add the chopped celery and carrot. Stir and coat the vegetables and cook for 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute.

Add the meats, 1 teaspoon of salt and fresh ground pepper. Crumble the meat with a wooden spoon and brown.

Add milk and let mixture simmer gently until fully incorporated and you can no longer see the milk. Add a pinch or two of grated nutmeg and stir.

Add the wine, let it simmer until it has evaporated, then add the tomatoes and stir thoroughly to coat all ingredients well. When the mixture begins to boil, lower the heat to as low a simmer as possible. Cook uncovered for 3 hours or more, stirring from time to time. If the sauce starts to dry out, add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water when needed. At the end, however, no water at all must be left. The fat should have separated from the sauce. Mix all together and season to taste with salt and pepper.

FOR BECHAMEL

In a saucepan, melt butter until it starts to foam. Add flour and whisk for two minutes until sandy colored, but not brown. Slowly pour in milk and whisk until it starts to lightly boil. Lower flame to simmer for eight minutes to thicken, whisking often. Turn off heat, season with pinch of grated nutmeg, salt and pepper, and set aside. If film forms on top, remove before using.

FOR RICOTTA MIXTURE

In a medium sized bowl, mix the ricotta, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan, oregano, basil, spinach, garlic powder, and red pepper flakes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

FOR ASSEMBLY

To make sure there is minimal leakage, use a large piece of aluminum foil to cover the bottom and outside sides of the spring form pan. Grease the inside of pan with olive oil.

Coat the bottom of the spring form pan with a layer of the Bolognese.



Next, stand the cooked pasta upright in the pan starting with an outside circle and continuing with smaller circles, filling the entire pan until packed in. *(You might want to test this the day before. Stand up the dried pasta in the spring form to*

see if you have enough to pack it in. The first time I made this, I had to use every last one. Pasta tubes can vary in size, so you don't want to be in the middle of the assembly and find out you don't have enough. Also, one or two might break, so you may need a few extra.)

Put the ricotta mixture in a Ziploc bag and cut a small hole in one corner. Squeeze the cheese mixture down towards the hole as if this is a pastry bag.

Fill each pasta tube halfway up with the ricotta filling. Tamp down the ingredients by lifting the springform pan about an inch above the counter and gently dropping it so that the ricotta makes its way to the bottom.

Using a ladle, cover the noodles with a thin layer of béchamel.

Spoon more Bolognese into the tubes filling them to the top. Spread a light layer over all the noodles so that the sauce seeps into the spaces between the tubes. Ladle another layer of béchamel. Tamp the springform pan again so all the ingredients settle.

If you have room, do another layer of ricotta, meat sauce and béchamel. Tamp the springform pan again.

Spread the mozzarella and Parmesan on top.

Place the pan on a baking sheet. Grease a piece of aluminum foil and cover the pie with the greased side down.

Bake for 35 minutes. Uncover; bake 20 minutes longer or until the top is bubbly and golden brown.

Let stand for 30 minutes. Run a knife along the outside edge and carefully open the spring form pan. It's important for the dish to cool enough so that the cheese sets a bit otherwise you'll have a sloppy mess.

Slice into pieces and top with remaining meat sauce. Garnish with Parmesan and a sprig of fresh basil.

CHICKEN POBLANO SOUP

Every week during the cold months I make a huge pot of bone broth. I'm always looking for new soups to make using the broth, and this idea came to me at the end of the summer when our garden had an abundance of poblano peppers. I love these peppers because they give a little kick of heat without being too painful. You should be able to find poblanos year round at your local grocery. If you like it hotter, add a jalapeno or two. If you dare, add a habanero, but don't say I didn't warn you.

INGREDIENTS

3 poblanos

1 sweet Italian pepper

1 onion, sliced

2 Tablespoons olive oil

2 corncobs, kernels removed, save the cobs

3 garlic cloves, minced

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

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons fresh ground pepper

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

2 quarts chicken broth or bone broth

2 cup shredded cooked chicken

blue corn chips, crumbled

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cotija cheese or queso fresco (grated – large holes)

Sour cream and sliced avocados for garnish

PREPARATION

Heat oven to 400 degrees.

Place a sheet of aluminum foil on a baking sheet. Rinse and dry the peppers. Place the whole peppers on the baking sheet and place in the oven for 40 minutes, turning once. The peppers should blacken. Remove the peppers from the oven and allow to cool. Remove the skins and seeds, rough chop the remaining peppers, and set aside.

In a medium sized pot, heat olive oil. Add onion and sauté for 6-7 minutes until they start to brown. Add the corncobs and peppers, sauté for 2 more minutes. Add in garlic cloves, sauté for 1 more minute.

Add the salt, pepper, and cumin and stir ingredients. Add chicken broth. Bring to boil, then simmer for ten minutes.

Remove and discard the corncobs. Using an immersion blender, purée the soup. Re-season to taste.

Add in the cooked chicken and the corn kernels and continue to simmer for 15 minutes.

To serve, ladle soup into bowls. Garnish with crumbled blue corn chips, cheese, a dollop of sour cream, and 3-4 slices of avocado in each bowl.