

EASY DIM SUM

Try as I might, I'm all thumbs when it comes to shaping dim sum. Even though it tastes pretty good, it NEVER looks as good as it does in the restaurant. But I found this nifty inexpensive [press](#) that makes me look like a pro. All you have to do is place a wonton wrapper over the gizmo, put a tablespoon of filling in the middle, then just close and crimp to seal in the filling. After steaming them, I like to pan fry them to get a nice crispy bottom.



INGREDIENTS (Makes approx. three dozen pieces)

1 package dumpling wrappers

1 lb ground pork

1 large bunch Chinese chives chopped

1 teaspoon garlic, minced
1 teaspoon ginger, grated
1 tablespoon oyster sauce
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
1 teaspoon sesame oil
1 teaspoon sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon white pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon five spice powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons canola oil

PREPARATION

Place pork in a bowl with your chopped chives, garlic, and ginger. Season with oyster sauce, soy sauce, sesame oil, sugar, white pepper, five spice powder, and salt.

With your hands, mix until the ingredients are thoroughly incorporated.

Place a dumpling wrapper centered on the dim sum press. Place 1 tablespoon of filling in the center of your dumpling wrapper. Wet the edges with water, then using the dim sum press, crimp together one end to the other.

Place a bamboo steamer basket in a wok. Fill the wok with water up to the bottom of the basket. Bring the water up to a simmer. Place the dumplings inside the steamer. Don't crowd them and don't allow them to touch. Cover and allow to steam for ten minutes.

Heat a large skillet with canola oil. Remove the dumplings from the steamer and place in the skillet. Pan fry each side

for 1-2 minutes.

SEA URCHIN AND QUAIL EGG BOWTIE PASTA

Admittedly, this dish may not be for everyone. But for those of us that love sea urchin, otherwise known as *uni* at your local sushi bar, this dish is a rich treat—rich in flavor, but unfortunately rich in expense. I had purchased a tray at my local fish store with hopes of making my favorite sushi at home—uni with quail egg. But as you may have read earlier this week, things didn't work out as planned. So, I found myself left with a half tray of uni and a half-dozen quail eggs that I was determined not to waste. So, I put it to good use in this dish.

INGREDIENTS (serves 2)

5 ounces fresh sea urchin (uni)

1/2 cup crème fraîche

½ pound bowtie pasta

2 tablespoons olive oil

3 cloves garlic, finely minced

1 small shallot, finely minced

1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1/2 cup dry sake

6 quail eggs, beaten

Freshly ground black pepper

Salt to taste

Parmesan cheese, grated (optional)

PREPARATION

Reserve 2-4 pieces of sea urchin for the garnish. Put the remaining sea urchin, and crème fraîche into a blender and blend until smooth. Set aside.

Cook pasta as per box or bag instructions, remembering to season the water with salt. Cook until al dente.

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil. Add the shallots and garlic and cook until translucent, about 2-4 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add in red pepper flakes. Do not allow to burn.

Strain the pasta, reserving a cup of the pasta water if needed later. Add a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the pasta water into the blender and pulse the uni mixture.

On a medium flame, add the pasta to the skillet and using tongs, toss lightly to combine. Add the uni mixture and gently toss to combine. Bring pan up to high heat and pour the eggs over the pasta and toss. If sauce seems too dry, add some more of the pasta water, a $\frac{1}{4}$ cup at a time, until the consistency is creamy. (Go slowly so that you don't add too much water to the sauce.)

Re-season to taste with salt and black pepper.

Serve pasta in bowls and garnish with the reserved sea urchin.

OPTIONAL: Garnish with grated parmesan. There's a huge debate about whether to mix seafood with cheese. Classically it's a no-no, but I leave it up to your tastebuds.

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

I know we've all felt the pinch of inflation over the last few years. When eating out, I find myself ordering half as much, yet everything costs twice as much as it used to. Sadly one of my favorite dishes at our local sushi restaurant has gone over the top. \$18 for one piece of uni and quail egg sushi. Granted, for me it's one of the best bites on earth, but it does seem a little steep. So I decided to try my hand at making it on my own.

I'm always trying to rationalize buying extravagant things. A tray of uni (sea urchin) from our local fish store is \$50. But, that will make at least 12 pieces of uni sushi. So, had I eaten 12 pieces at my local sushi bar, I would have paid \$216. So \$50 seems like a bargain. (You see how my mind works?)

Quail eggs, sushi rice and nori are relatively reasonably priced, just good luck finding them when you need them. I had noticed my local gourmet shop was carrying quail eggs, so I didn't think to buy them until I needed them and of course, when I did, they were out. So I had to schlep to their sister store a half-mile away. Of course, I live in a trendy neighborhood in Brooklyn that of course would have quail eggs. I do realize that outside of my NY bubble, that might not be the case, so plan ahead.

Back home with all the ingredients, it was time to give it a go. I have great respect for sushi chefs and know that it takes years of practice to make it correctly. I had no illusions that mine would look as appealing as theirs, but I had hoped that at least it would taste as good. I have my trusty sushi mat, my Japanese rice cooker, some pre-cut nori. How hard could this be?

I've been studying how our local sushi chef creates his delectable bites for over thirty years. So why can't I remember if he molds the rice first and rolls the nori around it or if he makes the nori circle and then adds the rice into it. Oh boy. I try both ways, but the rice is still so hot I can't really mold it tightly. Eventually I make some semblance of a base with my goal that it doesn't collapse. I add in a few pieces of uni on top. Ok, so far, it's holding. Now I need to separate the quail egg yolk from the whites. Our sushi chef just opens the egg in his hand and lets the whites drip out under his fingers. It sort of works, but there's still too much white left as I gently plopp the yolk next to the uni.

Now for the true test—tasting it. Normally this dish transports me to another universe. The unctuous taste of the uni paired with the creaminess of the quail egg is so sublime, I usually sigh when eating it. So, there's a high bar I'm hoping to reach. I raise the first piece to my mouth, and take it in whole as I gently bite down for the taste explosion—and—nothing. It's not that it's bad, it's just not anywhere near as good as I had hoped. First of all, the rice isn't right. I did use sushi rice, but it probably wasn't as high a grade as it needed to be and I didn't have the right vinegar seasoning. It was way too bland. The nori was a little soggy because I don't have the experienced touch. The uni was good, but not as great as it could have been. Although I spent \$50 on the tray, one could pay up to \$150 for superior quality uni. And lastly, there was too much of the whites from the quail egg muddying up the flavor.

So, now I have a half tray of uni and six quail eggs left and nothing to do with them. Wait a minute—do I smell a pasta dish coming on?

ORANGE CHOCOLATE RICOTTA CAKE

I love a good sale, and when I found a 32 oz. tub of ricotta cheese in the market for \$2.99, I couldn't just pass it by. So after making a lasagna, I still had tons of the ricotta left. So although I'm not much of a baker, I thought maybe a dessert would be nice. Who doesn't like orange and chocolate? This recipe worked out surprisingly well. Give it a shot and let me know what you think.

INGREDIENTS (Serves 8)

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ sticks unsalted butter, softened (room temperature)

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar

15 ounces whole milk ricotta cheese (room temperature)

3 large eggs (room temperature)

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 tablespoon Cointreau

2 large oranges, zested, plus the juice of one orange

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda

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

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup chocolate chips

powdered sugar and chocolate shavings for dusting top of cake (optional)

PREPARATION

Grease a 9-inch springform pan with butter and powdered sugar. Set aside.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Cream together the butter and sugar until combined in a large stand mixer using the whisk attachment. Add in the ricotta cheese and blend until light and fluffy, about 4 to 5 minutes.

Mix in the eggs, one at a time. Add in the Cointreau, orange zest, orange juice, and vanilla. Mix to combine. Add in the baking soda and salt and combine. Lastly, add in the flour and mix until all of the ingredients are fully combined, scraping the sides of the bowl if necessary. Remove the bowl from the stand and fold in the chocolate chips.

Pour the batter into the prepared springform pan. Bake for 45-55 minutes, or until the cake is set and a toothpick inserted in the middle of the cake comes out clean.

Let cool in pan for 20 minutes before removing from the springform pan. Cool an additional ten minutes and dust with powdered sugar and chocolate shavings before serving.