

EASY DOES IT

A Good Egg

A make-ahead dish for an easy morning meal.

I LOVE A LEISURELY BREAKFAST OR BRUNCH, but I hate getting up early to cook. So when I'm expecting house-guests, I simply start the meal the night before, and in the morning I can create a delicious breakfast with ease. Open-faced sandwiches are a quick yet elegant solution. Start with hard-cooked eggs and a no-fail mock hollandaise sauce that can be prepared ahead of time. Add a few convenience products from the market, and you're done. The following recipe puts a Scandinavian spin on the traditional eggs Benedict, but I've also created a number of other easy combinations. If you can boil water, you can make all of them. Enjoy! — *Judy Feagin*

Scandinavian Brunch Sandwich

total time: 35 minutes;

active time: 17 minutes

- 4 1-inch-thick slices of French bread
- 3 tablespoons butter (or margarine), softened
- 1/4 cup cream cheese, softened
- 1 4-ounce package sliced smoked salmon
- 4 hard-cooked eggs, sliced
- 1 cup Mock Hollandaise Sauce (see recipe)
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Toppings: chopped red onion, grated hard-cooked egg, and caviar (optional)

Spread the French bread slices with butter and place them on a baking sheet. Bake at 350° 5 to 8 minutes, or until lightly browned. Spread cream cheese on toasted bread. Top with salmon, slices of hard-cooked egg, and Mock Hollandaise Sauce. At this point, you can refrigerate the dish overnight if you wish.

Bake at 350° 5 to 8 minutes, or until thoroughly heated. Sprinkle with black pepper. Top the dish with chopped red onion, grated hard-cooked egg, and caviar (if using). *Yield: 4 servings*

MOCK HOLLANDAISE SAUCE:

- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- Dash paprika

Combine all ingredients; spoon over sandwich as directed.

Yield: about 3/4 cup



Sandwich Variations

Easy Eggs Sardou: Cook one 9-ounce package frozen creamed spinach according to package directions. Stir in one 14-ounce can artichoke hearts, drained and chopped. Spoon spinach mixture over toasted French bread. Top with hard-cooked egg slices and Mock Hollandaise Sauce. Sprinkle with paprika. Bake at 350° 5 to 8 minutes, or until eggs are thoroughly heated.

Easy Eggs Benedict: Toast buttered English muffins. Top with Canadian bacon, hard-cooked egg slices, and Mock Hollandaise Sauce. Bake as above.

Southwestern Brunch Sandwich: Sprinkle French bread slices with shredded pepper jack cheese. Bake at 350° until cheese melts. Top with cooked bacon, hard-cooked egg slices, and Mock Hollandaise Sauce. Bake as above. Garnish with pickled jalapeño slices.

Alpine Brunch Sandwich: Sprinkle French bread slices with shredded Swiss cheese. Bake at 350° until cheese melts. Top with thinly sliced Black Forest ham, hard-cooked egg slices, and Mock Hollandaise Sauce. Sprinkle with paprika. Bake as above.

Making Hard-Cooked Eggs

Start with eggs that have been stored for a week to 10 days. (Fresh eggs are more difficult to peel.) Place the eggs in a single layer in a non-aluminum saucepan. Add enough water to cover one inch above the eggs. Cover and bring to a boil. Immediately remove from heat; let stand 15 minutes for small eggs, 16 minutes for medium, 17 minutes for large. Pour off water and place eggs under cold running water. (If eggs are overcooked, or if they are not cooled quickly, a harmless green ring will form around the egg yolk.) Crack eggs and peel under cold running water. Hard-cooked eggs can be stored in the refrigerator for one week.

EASY DOES IT

Antipasto Perfect

An easy-to-assemble meal makes for an instant party.

MY FAVORITE RESTAURANT serves AN antipasto platter that's so delicious and satisfying, we make a regular meal out of it. It always combines meats, cheeses, and roasted vegetables, but the selections change regularly to incorporate what's fresh and in season.

With so much versatility, antipasto is a great idea for your next dinner party. Your guests get to choose from an array of appetizing foods, and you can do all the work ahead of time. If you don't wish to cook at all, simply shop at your favorite local deli or gourmet shop and arrange your selections on a platter. Or, roast a few vegetables to round out your meal. The only rule is that you keep a balance of meats, cheeses, vegetables, and bread.

Start with about 2 ounces of cured meat per person: anything from mortadella (Italian bologna), pepperoni, prosciutto, salami, or soppressa (an Italian dried sausage). Next, select several cheeses for your display—again, 2 ounces per person. Fresh mozzarella is always a great choice, as are Asiago, fontina, firm goat cheese, Gorgonzola, provolone, Parmigiano-Reggiano, and Roquefort. For vegetables, try marinated olives, capers, marinated artichoke hearts, pickled carrots, pickled green beans, or pepperoncini. Add freshness with vine-ripened tomatoes and a mound of garden-fresh salad greens, such as arugula.

To round out your meal, prepare roasted garlic bulbs, new potatoes, and red and yellow peppers (see above

right). You can pile all of your choices on a large platter or showcase individual foods in small bowls for a bountiful buffet. Be creative; there are no hard-and-fast rules. However, no meal is complete without fresh Italian bread (see “The Italian Bread Box”) and a bottle of crisp white wine. Enjoy!

— Judy Feagin

ROASTED GARLIC

Slice off pointed end of a large garlic bulb, discarding top. Place garlic on a piece of aluminum foil and drizzle with olive oil. Fold foil to seal. Bake 30 minutes at 450°. To serve, squeeze the pulp from its papery casings and spread on bread.

ROASTED POTATOES AND ONIONS

Cut fingerling or new potatoes in half, then cut onions into quarters. Place them in a heavy-duty zip-top bag. Drizzle with olive oil and toss gently to coat. Remove vegetables from bag, place in a baking pan, then sprinkle with chopped fresh rosemary, salt, and pepper. Bake 25 to 30 minutes at 450°, or until vegetables are tender, stirring every 10 minutes. Serve at room temperature.

ROASTED RED AND YELLOW BELL PEPPERS

Bake whole peppers on an aluminum-foil-lined baking sheet 20 to 25 minutes at 450°, or until peppers appear blistered and are slightly blackened. Place peppers in a heavy-duty zip-top bag and seal. Let stand 10 minutes or until cool. Peel peppers, then remove and discard seeds. Cut



into wedges. Drizzle with olive oil and balsamic vinegar, then sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper.

The Italian Bread Box

Any of these breads would be a wonderful accompaniment to antipasto. Better yet, choose several varieties and let your guests try them all.

Bruschetta is a garlic bread made by rubbing slices of grilled or toasted bread with garlic, drizzling with extra-virgin olive oil, and sprinkling with salt and pepper. It is served warm and is sometimes topped with tomatoes and basil or other toppings.

Ciabatta is a flat, crisp, long bread made with olive oil. In Italian, *ciabatta* means “slipper,” which is reflected in the bread’s shape.

Crostini is a term for thin slices of toasted bread, usually brushed with olive oil, and topped with savory items such as roasted garlic and cheese.

Focaccia is a flat yeast bread that is drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with salt and herbs before baking.

Grissini are Italian breadsticks, a foodstuff that originated in Turin, Italy. They are crisp and thin and can be easily found in most supermarkets.

Antipasto is the first course of an Italian meal and should not be confused with pasta. It literally means “before the food” in Italian. In the United States, antipasto refers to a platter of assorted meats, cheeses, and vegetables, usually with Italian ingredients.

EASY DOES IT

Glorious Greens

An easy, meatless, one-dish meal.

WHEN THE AIR IS CRISP AND THE LEAVES BEGIN TO TURN, leafy greens come into their prime. I like to buy fresh greens at my local farmers' market. Somehow, they just taste better. I adore mustard greens. They can be as spicy hot as mustard, yet as tender as spinach. Turnip greens are great too, but if you prefer a milder green, opt for spinach, collards, or escarole. All of these greens are packed with vitamins and minerals, and they are extremely low in calories.

The following recipe can be prepared with pantry staples, greens, and a little Parmesan cheese. It's also highly adaptable. You can use prewashed or frozen greens. If you like, stir in a little cream just before serving. And remember: Greens cook down to less than half their original volume. Enjoy! — *Judy Feagin*

Pasta and Greens

total time: 35 minutes;

active time: 15 minutes

- 1 8-ounce package pasta
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 14.5-ounce can vegetable broth
- 1 pound fresh greens (mustard, turnip, spinach, kale, escarole, or collard)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Freshly grated Parmesan cheese, to taste

Cook pasta according to package directions; drain and set aside.

In a Dutch oven over medium-high heat, sauté onion and garlic in oil 2 minutes. Add vegetable broth and bring to a boil. Gradually add fresh greens, stirring constantly. Cover and cook 3 to 10 minutes, depending on the greens selected. Stir in cooked pasta, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle with cheese. Serve immediately. *Yield: 4 servings*

Choosing Your Greens

Collard greens are dark, leafy greens in the cabbage family. Unlike cabbages, they don't form a head. Closely related to kale, collards taste like a cross between kale and cabbage.

Escarole is a variety of endive with broad, pale-green leaves with slightly curved edges. Milder in flavor than either Belgian endive or curly endive, escarole can be eaten raw or cooked. Peak season is June to October.

Kale has a mild cabbage-like flavor. The leaves are frilly and deep green with shades of blues and purple. Available year-round.

Mustard greens are the peppery leaves of the mustard plant. They are dark green and have a pungent flavor.

Spinach leaves are dark green and spear-shaped, and are either curled or smooth depending on the variety. Because the leaves grow so close to the ground, they need a thorough cleaning to avoid grittiness.

Turnip greens are slightly sweet when young. However, they develop a strong, sharp, slightly bitter flavor as they age. Available year-round.

— *Adapted from The New Food Lover's Companion* (third edition)

Cleaning Your Greens

To prepare greens, remove tough stems and discolored spots; then wash the greens at least three times in lots of cold water. Drain and chop roughly. Store greens in heavy-duty zip-top bags lined with damp paper towels up to 3 days in the refrigerator.



HOWARD L. PUCKETT

EASY DOES IT

Crêpes Made Easy

Start with a quick batter, then add fillings for an easy entrée or elegant dessert.



DON'T LET CRÊPES INTIMIDATE YOU; they're actually easy to make. By starting with a baking mix and a blender, you can mix a batch in seconds. Then, while the batter rests, whip up one of our creamy fillings, or create your own. This basic batter recipe may be used for savory or sweet fillings, and you can double the recipe and keep the extras in the freezer.

To cook your crêpes, start with a good, heavy skillet. I've used everything from costly electric crêpe makers to heavy copper skillets to discount-store models, and my favorite is an inexpensive, heavy, nonstick, 8-inch skillet with a smooth bottom and sloping sides. Once I get the temperature of the pan just right, the crêpe slips out easily. — *Judy Feagin*

Shrimp and Asparagus Crêpes

total time: 1 hour 35 minutes;

active time: 35 minutes

- 1/2 pound asparagus
- 1 pound medium shrimp
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 1 bunch scallions, chopped
- 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 3 cups cold milk
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh dill
- 3/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese, divided
- 8 Quick Crêpes (see recipe)

Preheat oven to 350°. Snap off tough ends of asparagus and cut into 1-inch pieces; arrange in a steamer basket over boiling water. Cover and steam 6 minutes or until crisp-tender. Plunge asparagus into ice water to stop cooking process; drain and set aside.

In a large saucepan, bring about 1 quart of water to a boil; add shrimp and cook 3 to 5 minutes, or just until they turn pink. Drain and rinse with cold water. Peel shrimp and devein, if desired. Set aside.

Melt butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat; add scallions and cook 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Whisk in flour; cook 1 minute, whisking constantly. Gradually whisk in milk; cook, whisking constantly, until mixture is thickened and bubbly. Whisk in salt, pepper, dill, and 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese. When blended,

reserve 1 cup of sauce to use later. Then stir shrimp and asparagus into remaining sauce.

Spoon about 1/4 cup filling down the center of each crêpe. Roll up and place seam-side down in a lightly greased 13x9-inch baking dish. Spoon remaining 1 cup sauce over crêpes; sprinkle with remaining 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese. Bake 20 minutes or until thoroughly heated. *Yield: 4 servings*

QUICK CRÊPES:

- 1 cup baking mix, such as Bisquick
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup milk
- Vegetable oil for skillet

Process mix, egg, and milk in a blender or food processor until smooth, stopping to scrape down sides. Cover and chill at least 1 hour.

Coat bottom of an 8-inch nonstick skillet with vegetable oil; place skillet over medium heat until hot. Pour 3 tablespoons batter into skillet; quickly tilt in all directions so batter covers bottom of skillet. Cook 1 minute or until crêpe can be shaken loose. Turn crêpe over and cook 30 seconds. Place on a sheet of waxed paper to cool. Repeat procedure with remaining batter, brushing skillet with additional vegetable oil as needed, and placing a sheet of waxed paper between crêpes. Wrap in foil or place in a heavy plastic zip-top bag. Store in the refrigerator up to 2 days or in the freezer up to 3 months.

Yield: 8 crêpes

Other Crêpe Fillings

From a simple shower of grated cheese to more elaborate combinations of cheese, meat, vegetables, and herbs, crêpe fillings can be as simple or as complex as you'd like. For breakfast, fill crêpes with scrambled eggs, smoked salmon, and chives. For dessert, try them with ice cream and fresh berries, or lemon juice and sugar. The following combinations, based on the recipe for Shrimp and Asparagus Crêpes, are great anytime.

Chicken and Ham Crêpes: Sauté one 8-ounce package fresh mushrooms; drain. Prepare sauce as directed, omitting dill. Stir in salt and pepper, 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg, and 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Set aside 1 cup sauce. Stir mushrooms, 1 1/2 cups chopped cooked chicken, 1 1/2 cups chopped cooked ham, and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley into 2 cups remaining sauce mixture. Proceed as directed.

Sausage and Mushroom Crêpes: Cook 1 pound hot or mild bulk sausage; drain and set aside. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over low heat; add one 8-ounce package sliced mushrooms and 1 bunch chopped green onions. Cook 2 minutes over medium-high heat or until vegetables are crisp-tender. Drain and set aside. Prepare sauce as directed, omitting dill. Stir in 1/2 cup shredded Parmesan cheese. Set aside 1 cup sauce. Stir mushroom/green onion mixture and cooked sausage into remaining sauce mixture. Proceed as directed.

EASY DOES IT

Ham It Up

A new take on an old family favorite.

HAM STEAK, JUST ANOTHER NAME for the center-cut ham slice, is one of the easiest and most economical meats to prepare. It comes partially cooked (labeled “ready-to-cook”), which means that you can have dinner on the table in just 20 minutes. Bring the meat to an internal temperature of 160° (or simply reheat if your ham is labeled “fully cooked”) and you’re on your way. Just be careful not to overcook it.

To jazz up the dish, we wanted something other than the usual pineapple slices, raisin sauce, or sautéed apples, so we created this Jalapeño-Glazed Ham Steak with White Bean Salsa. Pork is an important part of Mexican cooking, and these flavors meld beautifully. It’s especially good with Skillet Tomatoes and Spinach Sauté on the side. Enjoy! – *Judy Feagin*



Jalapeño-Glazed Ham Steak with White Bean Salsa

total time: 20 minutes; active time: 20 minutes

- 1 15.5-ounce can great northern beans, rinsed and drained
- 1/4 cup chopped red onion
- 1/4 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped fine
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper
- Vegetable cooking spray for skillet
- 1 1½-pound center-cut ham steak (about 1/2 inch thick)
- 3 tablespoons jalapeño pepper jelly

Combine the first 10 ingredients to make the salsa; set aside. Heat a nonstick skillet coated with cooking spray over medium-high setting. Add the ham steak and cook 2 minutes on each side. Brush each side with pepper jelly and cook, turning once, 1 minute, or until internal temperature reaches 160°. Serve with salsa.

Yield: 3 to 4 servings

Skillet Tomatoes

total time: 5 minutes; active time: 5 minutes

- 3 ripe tomatoes
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar

Cut ripe tomatoes into 1/2-inch slices; sprinkle with salt. Melt butter in a large skillet. Cook the tomato slices about 2 minutes on each side. Sprinkle with brown sugar, turn, and cook until sugar melts.

Yield: 4 servings

Spinach Sauté

total time: 8 minutes; active time: 8 minutes

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small shallot, chopped
- 1 10-ounce package fresh baby spinach
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Melt butter in a large skillet; add olive oil and chopped shallot. Cook over medium heat about 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Add spinach and cook, stirring constantly, until the spinach wilts. Season with salt and pepper and toss again. Serve warm.

Yield: 4 servings

Cook It Your Way

Grill: Place ham steak on a grill rack over medium-high heat (350° to 400°). Grill 2 minutes on each side; brush with pepper jelly and cook 1 minute longer on each side, or until internal temperature reaches 160°.

Broil: Place ham steak on a lightly greased rack in a broiler pan. Broil 3 inches from heat and 2 minutes on each side; brush with pepper jelly and cook 1 minute longer on each side, or until internal temperature reaches 160°.

An Early-Fall Menu

Jalapeño-Glazed Ham Steak with White Bean Salsa

Skillet Tomatoes

Spinach Sauté

EASY DOES IT

Steaks in a Flash

THE BEST STEAKS TAKE JUST MINUTES TO PREPARE. All you need are a heavy skillet and a tender steak. Select a cut with lots of marbling, which means that it has thin streaks of fat that run throughout. There are just a few boneless cuts that are tender enough for this quick-cooking method. Choose from boneless club, rib eye, New York strip, or (my favorite) filet mignon. You'll need 4 to 6 ounces of beef per person. If you settle for a less-expensive cut, opt for top-quality ground beef, which also works well with these recipes.

First, pat the steaks dry and salt both sides. Cook the steaks in a sizzling skillet 3 minutes on each side and place in a 300° oven. Cook the steaks until they reach your desired degree of doneness. Deglaze the skillet by adding liquid (beef broth, wine, or brandy) and scraping up any brown bits left in the skillet. Add cream or broth to finish the sauce. The steaks will be ready when the sauce is done (about 5 minutes). Enjoy these sauce recipes and have fun creating your own.

— Judy Feagin

Pan-Seared Steaks with Marsala-Mushroom Sauce

Total time: 20 minutes; active time: 20 minutes

- 4 4 to 6-ounce boneless beef steaks (about 1 inch thick)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 2 tablespoons butter, divided
- 1 8-ounce carton sliced fresh mushrooms
- ¼ cup dry Marsala wine or beef broth
- ¾ cup heavy cream

Season steaks with salt and pepper; set aside.

Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil and 1 tablespoon butter over medium-high heat in a large heavy skillet. Add mushrooms; cook, stirring constantly 3 minutes or until mushrooms are tender and lightly browned. Remove mushrooms from the skillet; set aside. Wipe the skillet clean with a paper towel. Add the remaining oil and butter to the skillet; heat on medium-high 1 minute or until the skillet is hot. Add steaks, then reduce the temperature to medium. Cook 3

minutes on each side. Transfer steaks from the skillet to an ovenproof dish, then pour off the excess fat from the skillet. Place in a 300° oven until the internal temperature reaches 145° or the desired degree of doneness. Do not overcook.

Add Marsala wine or beef broth to the skillet and scrape to loosen any brown bits. Cook the liquid over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is reduced by half; stir in heavy cream. Cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens and is reduced by half. Return mushrooms to the sauce and cook 1 minute, or until mushrooms are thoroughly heated. Spoon the sauce over the steaks. Serve immediately.

Yield: 4 servings

Deglazing the Pan

Sauté steaks in a hot skillet, then pour off the excess fat. Add wine or broth to the pan and stir the liquid to loosen any bits of food and seasonings that have stuck to the bottom of the pan. Use the remaining liquid as a base for the sauce to accompany the meat.



Pan-Seared Steaks with Marsala-Mushroom Sauce

Saucy Options

Dijon Mustard Sauce: Cook steaks as directed; place in the oven. Pour the excess fat from the skillet. Add 1 tablespoon brandy to the skillet and scrape to loosen any brown bits. Stir in ¾ cup heavy cream, ¼ cup Dijon mustard, and 1 teaspoon green peppercorns; return to cooktop. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture is reduced by half. Serve the sauce over the steaks. Sprinkle with additional green peppercorns, if desired.

Horseradish Cream Sauce: Cook steaks as directed; place in the oven. Pour the excess fat from the skillet. Add ¼ cup beef broth to the skillet and scrape to loosen any brown bits. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture is reduced by half. Stir in ¾ cup heavy cream and 1½ tablespoons prepared horseradish; cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture is reduced by half. Serve the sauce over the steaks.

Balsamic Sauce: Cook steaks as directed; place in the oven. Pour the excess fat from the skillet. Add ⅓ cup balsamic vinegar and ⅔ cup beef broth to the skillet and scrape to loosen any brown bits. Bring the mixture to a boil; reduce heat to medium-high and cook, stirring occasionally, 5 minutes or until the mixture is reduced by half. Serve the sauce over the steaks. Sprinkle with chopped parsley.

EASY DOES IT

Hot and Hearty

Oozing with flavor, these sandwiches are a welcome addition to brunch, lunch, or dinner menus.

Tired of the “same old, same old”? Give your mealtime menus a lift with fast and flavorful hot open-faced sandwiches. You can make the filling a day or two in advance and serve brunch, lunch, or dinner at a moment’s notice. Toast the bread before topping for a crisp, sturdy sandwich base. I prefer to use English muffins, but hamburger or hot dog buns, sub rolls, pita bread, and sandwich breads are also good choices. Just pile on one of the toppings and bake until the cheese melts and the mixture is bubbly.

These sandwiches are hearty enough for a meal, but if you’d like, add a simple green salad for balance. Better yet, serve with a low-calorie raw-vegetable side such as broccoli or cauliflower florets, carrot sticks, sliced celery, cherry tomatoes, cucumber slices, green onions, or radishes. — *Judy Feagin*

Cheesy Shrimp Melts

Total time: 35 minutes; active time: 20 minutes

To eliminate one step and a few minutes of preparation time, buy precooked shrimp at a seafood market or in the seafood department of your grocery store.

- 3 cups water
- 1 pound medium fresh shrimp, unpeeled
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons thinly sliced scallion
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Pinch of ground cayenne pepper
- 4 English muffins

In a Dutch oven, bring water to a boil; add shrimp and cook 3 to 5 minutes, or just until shrimp turn pink. Do not overcook. Drain and rinse with cold water. Peel, devein, and roughly chop shrimp.

Heat oven to 350°. In a medium bowl, gently combine remaining ingredients except English muffins. Split muffins in half and bake 5 minutes. Remove from the oven and spread shrimp mixture on the cut side of each half. Return to the oven and bake 10 to 15 minutes, or until mixture is bubbly and bread is toasted. Serve immediately.

Yield: 8 luncheon or 4 dinner servings



Cheesy
Shrimp Melt

Crostini

Any of these recipes can be turned into elegant appetizers. Slice a baguette into 1/4- to 1/2-inch-thick pieces; place cut side down on a baking sheet. Bake at 350° 5 minutes on each side. Spread one side with any of the cheesy sandwich toppings. Bake 10 minutes, or until mixture is bubbly and bread is lightly browned.

Cheesy Variations

Ham and Swiss Cheese Melts

Follow the recipe for Cheesy Shrimp Melts, substituting ¾ pound chopped cooked ham (about three ¼-inch-thick slices) for shrimp, 1 cup shredded Swiss cheese for cheddar cheese, and 2 tablespoons chopped red onion for scallion.

Creamy Crabmeat Melts

Follow the recipe for Cheesy Shrimp Melts, substituting 1 pound fresh crabmeat, picked over, or two 6-ounce cans lump crabmeat, rinsed and drained, for shrimp and 1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese for cheddar cheese. Sprinkle each sandwich with paprika before baking.

Curry and Cheese Olive Melts

Follow the recipe for Cheesy Shrimp Melts, substituting ¾ cup pitted and chopped kalamata olives for shrimp. Increase cheddar cheese to 2 cups (8 ounces). Add ½ teaspoon curry powder to cheese mixture.

Bacon, Pimiento, and Cheese Melts

Follow the recipe for Cheesy Shrimp Melts, substituting 12 ounces bacon, cooked and crumbled, for shrimp. Increase cheddar cheese to 2 cups (8 ounces) and add one 4-ounce jar diced pimientos, drained.

Ooh La La

A classic French salad is an easy main course.

SALADE NIÇOISE (PRONOUNCED “NEE-SWAHZ”) is a French Riviera favorite named after the archetypal city of Nice. Classic Mediterranean ingredients are the building blocks: anchovies, green beans, garlic, hard-cooked eggs, Niçoise olives, tomatoes, and tuna.

Salade Niçoise has long been a favorite with my family. When my children couldn't pronounce “Niçoise,” we just called it a cold plate or a cold supper, and the ingredients varied by what was on hand and in season—it was like having an in-home salad bar.

Every cook has a different interpretation of this dish, and many have strong feelings about it. Some prefer to update the classic salad with grilled fresh tuna cut into chunks, while purists argue that it must be prepared with cans of imported oil-packed tuna. Others, still, insist that the vegetables must be served raw. Some use no lettuce and toss the ingredients together, while others prefer an arranged salad served on tomato slices or crisp lettuce leaves. My only requirement is that the dressing be homemade and include freshly squeezed lemon juice. Make it your way to suit your palate.

This salad is ideal for parties or a casual spring supper; you can prepare the vegetables early in the day or, better yet, the day before. Store precooked, cooled vegetables in individual heavy-duty zip-top bags or in airtight containers so they don't absorb other flavors. Just before serving, arrange the components on a bed of crisp lettuce. For a buffet or family-style platter, I keep each ingredient separate so that diners can make their own versions. Add a loaf of crusty French bread and a glass of crisp white wine, and you'll feel the warmth of the Mediterranean sun.

— Judy Feagin

Salade Niçoise

total time: 30 minutes;

active time: 30 minutes

- $\frac{3}{4}$ pound haricots verts or other small green beans
- 1 pound small new potatoes, unpeeled
- Garlic Vinaigrette (see recipe)
- 4 large eggs
- 1 head Bibb lettuce
- 1 12½-ounce can oil-packed tuna
- $\frac{1}{2}$ fennel bulb, thinly sliced
- 1 small red onion, sliced and separated into rings
- 1 cup cherry or grape tomatoes
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound Niçoise olives or other small ripe olives
- 6 to 8 whole anchovy fillets (optional)
- 1 tablespoon capers, rinsed

Cook haricots verts in a small amount of boiling water 2 minutes or until crisp-tender. Drain beans and immediately plunge into ice water to stop the cooking process. Drain and set aside.

Cook potatoes in boiling water to cover about 15 minutes, or until fork-tender. Drain and cool; then cut into quarters. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons Garlic Vinaigrette; set aside.

Place eggs in a single layer in a small saucepan; add water to cover eggs by 1 inch. Cover and bring to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat and let stand, covered, in hot



water 15 minutes. Immediately pour water off and rinse eggs in cold water. Tap eggs gently and peel under cold running water. Cut into quarters; set aside.

Line a serving platter or individual plates with lettuce. Arrange haricots verts, potatoes, eggs, tuna, fennel, onion, tomatoes, olives, and anchovies, if desired, over lettuce in a decorative pattern of your choice. Sprinkle with capers. Serve with Garlic Vinaigrette.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

GARLIC VINAIGRETTE

- 1 small garlic clove
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

In a food processor, pulse together all ingredients except oil until well blended. With the processor on, pour in oil in a thin, steady stream until smooth.

Yield: about 1 cup

EASY DOES IT

Heaven-Sent

This true classic is also super-easy and deliciously low-fat.

THE NAME ALONE EVOKES IMAGES OF FLOATING CLOUDS and winged celestial beings offering sweet gifts from the oven. When made right, this cake is indeed an ethereal treat from your own kitchen. The key to a light and fluffy cake is in the ingredients: fresh egg whites, which you must whip to pillowy perfection for heavenly results; cream of tartar, which helps stabilize the whites so the cake won't deflate after it comes out of the oven; and cake flour, for a tender crumb. This recipe also calls for a mix of vanilla and almond extracts, but feel free to use all of one or the other or your own combination (just keep it to a total of 1½ teaspoons).
— *Annie B. Copps*

ANGEL FOOD CAKE

total time: 1½ hours (including cooling time);

active time: 30 minutes

- 7 large egg whites
- ³/₄ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ¹/₄ teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¹/₂ teaspoon almond extract
- ³/₄ cup sifted cake flour
- Garnish: fresh berries

Heat oven to 375°. Using an electric mixer, beat egg whites, cream of tartar, and salt until the whites hold stiff peaks. With the mixer on, carefully add sugar, ¹/₄ cup at a time, until the mix becomes glossy and peaks still hold—do not overmix. Beat in extracts. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold in flour. Spoon batter into an ungreased 9-inch (10-cup) tube pan. Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until a cake tester inserted comes out clean. Invert the pan onto a cooling rack. Let cool completely, then slide a thin knife around outer and inner edges of the cake to dislodge it from the pan. Slice and garnish with berries. *Yield: about 8 slices*



EGG-CELLENT TIPS

- Use the freshest eggs you can—the whites will whip up better and hold more strongly.
- Start with more eggs than you need. It's important that no yolks are in this recipe.
- Let the eggs come to room temperature before you use them.
- When breaking eggs, break the shell against a hard, flat surface—whacking them against the rim of a bowl may cause the shell to break in toward the center, increasing the chance of shell bits getting into the mix.
- When separating eggs, break them into clean, individual bowls. Be sure to keep the yolk whole; using clean hands, scoop out the yolk and let the white slip through your fingers back into the bowl, or use one half of the broken eggshell to scoop out the egg yolk. Save the yolks for custard.

EASY DOES IT

Erin Go Bragh

Simple ingredients and a little science are all part of the charm of Irish soda bread.

AS ANY LEPRECHAUN WILL TELL YOU, the key to good soda bread is to avoid overworking either yourself or the dough in the process. Kind of like a giant scone or biscuit, soda bread is easy and quick to make, as long as you observe some commonsense guidelines.

Whether you're starting with dough or batter, gluten, the protein in flour (activated by liquid), gives all baked goods their structure. With yeast breads, you have to work the gluten into long strands, via kneading, so that hot air can get in between them. With cakes, muffins, and "quick" breads such as soda bread, however, it's important to mix the ingredients just until they're combined and holding together.

Traditional Irish soda bread is made from only four ingredients: flour, baking soda, salt, and sour milk or buttermilk, which activates the baking soda and adds a tang that masks soda's natural bitterness. This adapted recipe uses just a wee bit of baking soda and a tablespoon of baking powder, for lightness. Raisins, caraway seeds, egg, and a bit of sugar are flavorful extras.

We're pretty sure that Europeans learned the technique of leavening with carbonates instead of yeast from Native Americans, who added ash from wood fires to their doughs. In Ireland, soda bread has been a staple since the 1840s, when commercial baking soda was introduced there as a leavening agent for the country's "soft" (low-protein) wheat flours. Here in the States, it's become a cherished St. Paddy's Day tradition, whatever your ethnic heritage.

— Annie B. Copps

Soda Bread

total time: 1 hour 15 minutes; active time: 30 minutes

- 3 cups all-purpose flour,
plus extra for work surface
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
(1/2 stick), melted
- 2 tablespoons caraway seeds (optional)
- 1 cup regular or golden raisins
(or sultanas)
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 egg

Heat oven to 350°. In the bowl of a standing mixer with paddle attachment, combine flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Add butter, caraway seeds (if desired), and raisins. Combine just until incorporated. In a small bowl, whisk together buttermilk and egg. Add to dough and mix just until incorporated.

Turn dough onto a lightly floured work surface and fold it over onto itself two or three times, shaping it into a round, 8-inch loaf. Transfer loaf to a baking sheet lined with parchment or Silpat (a nonstick silicone baking mat). Score an "X" on the top of the dough. Bake 45 minutes, until well-browned and a toothpick plunged into the center emerges clean. Remove to a wire rack to cool completely before slicing. Serve with butter and your favorite jam or preserves. *Yield: 1 loaf*



KITCHEN CHEMISTRY

Baking soda is pure sodium bicarbonate. When combined with moisture and an acidic ingredient, it quickly produces carbon dioxide bubbles, which expand when heated, causing baked goods to rise. Be careful to use only recommended amounts, however, to avoid leaving a salty, bitter taste behind. *Baking powder* contains sodium bicarbonate with cream of tartar (a potassium acid salt) and cornstarch (which keeps things dry). It has a bit more staying power than baking soda and has a more neutral taste.

One more quick-bread tip: Don't overbake your loaf, which will dry it out, but be careful not to underbake; you don't want it to come out doughy and uncooked in the middle, either.

EASY DOES IT

Just Like Mom Used to Make

The ultimate comfort food is also a snap to prepare.

MOST PEOPLE ENJOY MACARONI AND CHEESE JUST LIKE THEIR MOM MADE. For some, that means a custard-based sauce; for others, it's a béchamel sauce with the addition of cheese. Then there's the entire generation that prefers the boxed version (this group does not know what they're missing). I've had fun with all three versions. (Yes, I surrendered to the box when my 2-year-old granddaughter was not impressed with my own mac and cheese testing—oh, what we do to keep them happy!)

My mother always made the custard version, in which a combination of milk and beaten eggs was poured over layers of cooked macaroni and shredded cheddar cheese. I favor the velvety smooth cheese sauce that's prepared while the pasta cooks. Mother always used elbow macaroni, but I prefer a larger noodle such as penne, rigatoni, or ziti; these shapes seem to hold up better to the hearty cheese sauce. I add crushed red pepper flakes and a sprinkling of buttered panko bread crumbs to elevate a nostalgic recipe to new levels. If you can't take the heat of the pepper flakes, leave them out or try adding a tablespoon of Dijon mustard to the sauce. — *Judy Feagin*

HOWARD L. PUCKETT; JUDY FEAGIN; VIRGINIA CRAVENS

Macaroni and Cheese

Total time: 50 minutes; active time: 25 minutes

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs
- 1 8-ounce package ziti, macaroni, or your favorite pasta
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups milk
- ¼ teaspoon kosher or sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch of crushed red pepper flakes (optional)
- 8 ounces (about 2 cups) sharp Vermont cheddar cheese, shredded

Heat oven to 350°. Melt unsalted butter in a large, heavy skillet. Add panko and stir until coated; set aside.

Cook pasta according to package directions, stopping 2 minutes shy of suggested cooking time; drain and set aside.

Meanwhile, melt 4 tablespoons butter in a large, heavy saucepan over low heat; whisk in flour until smooth. Cook, whisking constantly, about 1 minute, being careful not to let the mixture brown. Gradually add milk and cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until the mixture is thickened and bubbly, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, then add salt, pepper, red pepper flakes (if desired), and cheese, whisking until the cheese melts.

Add the pasta, then spoon the mixture into a lightly greased 2-quart casserole or four lightly greased 2-cup baking dishes. Sprinkle with bread crumbs. Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until bubbly.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings



Panko

Panko is a crunchy, flaky bread crumb from Japan, available in Asian markets and most grocery stores. If you can't find panko, make your own bread crumbs using day-old French or Italian bread. Place bread in a food processor fitted with a steel blade and pulse three or four times or until bread turns to fine crumbs. Spread on a baking sheet. Bake at 300° 6 to 8 minutes, or until crumbs are dry and crisp. Do not brown.