

COOKING AT REN

January 11, 2012

Hummus

2 cups drained well-cooked or canned chickpeas, liquid reserved
1/4 cup tahini (sesame paste), optional, with some of its oil
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus oil for drizzling
2 cloves garlic, peeled, or to taste
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 teaspoon ground cumin or paprika, or to taste, plus a sprinkling for garnish
Juice of 1 lemon, plus more as needed
Chopped fresh parsley leaves for garnish

Put everything except the parsley in a food processor and begin to process; add the chickpea liquid or water as needed to allow the machine to produce a smooth puree.

Taste and adjust the seasoning. Serve, drizzled with the olive oil and sprinkled with a bit more cumin or paprika and some parsley.

Fattoush Salad

3/4 cup vine-ripened cherry tomatoes, halved
3/4 cup English cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced in 1/4 inch cubes
1/4 cup thinly sliced red onions (about 1/2 of a small red onion)
1/4 cup finely chopped cilantro (about 1/2 a bunch)
1/4 cup finely chopped mint (about 1/2 a bunch)
6 cups hearts of romaine lettuce (about 3 hearts), torn roughly by hand
2 pieces of pita bread
2/3 cup sheep's milk feta cheese
1/4 cup pitted Kalamata olives (about 12 olives)

Lemon vinaigrette:

1 teaspoon finely chopped garlic (about 1-2 cloves)
1/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
3/4 teaspoon toasted and freshly ground cumin (see below)
2 ounces olive oil
5 ounces extra virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

To make the pita chips, preheat oven to 350°. Trim edges off of the pita, keeping a circle shape, so that the pita can be split into two halves. Cut each half into 6 triangles and arrange on a baking sheet. Toast for approximately 12 minutes, or until the pita chips crisp up and are golden brown. Turn baking sheet halfway through baking. Set aside

and cool. Break the chips into large pieces.

To make the vinaigrette, in a small saucepan over medium-heat, toast cumin until aromatic and light brown, approximately 3 minutes. Toss occasionally to prevent burning. Let cool and set aside. Grind in a spice grinder until cumin becomes almost like powder. In a medium bowl, whisk together the garlic, lemon juice, rice wine vinegar, cumin, extra virgin olive oil and olive oil. Season to taste with generous amount of salt and black pepper. Set aside.

To serve, toss romaine hearts, cherry tomatoes, feta cheese, mint, cilantro, red onions and olives with the vinaigrette in a large bowl, making sure that the leaves are well coated with the vinaigrette. Serve immediately.

Moroccan Chicken With Olives and Lemon

1 1/4 teaspoons sweet paprika
 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
 1/4 teaspoon ground coriander
 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 3 strips lemon zest (each about 2 inches by 3/4 inch)
 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 5 medium cloves garlic, minced
 1 whole chicken (3 1/2 to 4 pounds), cut into 8 pieces (4 breast pieces, 2 thighs, 2 drumsticks; wings reserved for another use) and trimmed of excess fat
 Salt and ground black pepper
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1 large onion, halved and cut into 1/4-inch slices (about 3 cups)
 1 3/4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
 1 tablespoon honey
 2 medium carrots, peeled and cut crosswise into 1/2-inch-thick coins, (about 2 cups)
 1 cup Greek cracked green olives, pitted and halved
 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves

Combine spices in small bowl and set aside. Mince 1 strip lemon zest; combine with 1 teaspoon minced garlic and mince together until reduced to fine paste; set aside.

Season both sides of chicken pieces liberally with salt and pepper. Heat oil in large heavy--bottomed Dutch oven over medium-high heat until beginning to smoke. Brown chicken pieces skin side down in single layer until deep golden, about 5 minutes; using tongs, turn chicken pieces and brown on second side, about 4 minutes more. Transfer chicken to large plate; when cool enough to handle, peel off skin and discard. Pour off and discard all but 1 tablespoon fat from pot.

Add onion and 2 remaining lemon zest strips to pot and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions have browned at edges but still retain shape, 5 to 7 minutes (add 1 tablespoon water if pan gets too dark). Add remaining 4 teaspoons garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add spices and cook, stirring constantly, until darkened and very fragrant, 45 seconds to 1 minute. Stir in broth and honey, scraping bottom of pot with

wooden spoon to loosen browned bits. Add thighs and drumsticks, reduce heat to medium, and simmer for 5 minutes.

Add carrots and breast pieces (with any accumulated juices) to pot, arranging breast pieces in single layer on top of carrots. Cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest part of breast registers 160 degrees, 10 to 15 minutes.

Transfer chicken to plate or bowl and tent with foil. Add olives to pot; increase heat to medium-high and simmer until liquid has thickened slightly and carrots are tender, 4 to 6 minutes. Return chicken to pot and add garlic-zest mixture, cilantro, and lemon juice; stir to combine and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

Couscous Pilaf With Raisins and Almonds

4 tablespoons unsalted butter
 2 cups plain couscous
 3/4 cup sliced almonds
 1 small onion , chopped fine
 3/4 cup raisins
 salt
 1 3/4 cups canned low-
 sodium chicken broth
 2 cups water
 1 1/2 teaspoons fresh lemon
 juice
 Ground black pepper

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When the foaming subsides, add the couscous and cook, stirring frequently with a wooden spoon, until some grains are beginning to brown, about 3 minutes. Scrape the grains from the skillet into a large bowl and return the pan to medium heat. Add the almonds and cook, stirring frequently, until they are lightly toasted and aromatic, about 1 1/2 minutes. Scrape them into a small bowl.

Add the remaining 2 tablespoons butter to the skillet. Once it melts, add the onion, raisins, and 3/4 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion has softened and is beginning to brown, about 5 minutes. Add the broth and water, increase the heat to medium-high, and bring to a boil.

Add the boiling liquid to the bowl with the toasted couscous, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and allow to sit until the couscous is tender, about 12 minutes. Remove the plastic wrap, fluff the grains with a fork, and gently stir in the almonds and lemon juice. Adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

Lemon and Cardamon Rice Pudding with Candied Pistachios

Lemon and Cardamon Rice Pudding

1/2 cup basmati rice
 1 3/4 cup whole milk
 1 Cardamon pod, gently bruised
 1/2 vanilla pod split lengthwise
 3 oz sugar
 1 egg yolk
 1/4 cup cream
 Finely grated zest 1 small lemon plus extra for garnish
 1 Tbl butter
 pistachios (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Place the rice in a large saucepan with 200ml cold water. Bring to the boil, reduce heat to low, then cover and simmer very gently for 12 minutes or until the water is absorbed.

Pour the milk into a separate saucepan and add the cardamom pod. Scrape the vanilla seeds into the milk with a sharp knife. Heat to simmering point over a low heat and pour over the rice. Add the sugar and cook over a medium heat for 12-15 minutes, until the rice is tender and the milk has thickened.

In a small bowl, beat together the egg yolk, cream and lemon zest. Stir in a large spoonful of the rice mixture, mix well, then add to the remaining rice mixture. Cook over a low heat for 6-8 minutes, stirring all the time, until the pudding is thick and creamy.

Take the pan off the heat, remove the cardamom pod and stir in the butter. Spoon into individual dessert bowls or glasses, garnish with the extra lemon zest sprinkle with the pistachios and serve.

Candied Pistachios

1 1/2 tea granulated sugar
 1 1/2 tea hot water
 1/4 cup shelled pistachios
 1 Tbl turbinado sugar

Preheat the oven to 350. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. In a bowl, stir the granulated sugar with the hot water. Add the pistachios and turbinado sugar; stir to coat. Spread the pistachios on the cookie sheet and bake until crisp, about 8 minutes. Let cool, then break into pieces.

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Cooking At Ren **Meet The Chef**

Chef Mark Wright has been cooking since his childhood. He received his formal training from two renowned culinary programs and has worked at several restaurants fine dining restaurants in the Chicago area. He combines his passion for food with his desire to educate and delight with every meal he prepares. His philosophy is that cooking is an experience that anyone can enjoy given the right inspiration.