

The Chef's Table

Usher in Spring

By Helen Nash

Spring recipes may require seasonal ingredients that are a little tricky to get, since new vegetables are not yet at their prime. I have therefore selected a few recipes with ingredients that are available year-round. Please note that these are recipes for spring; they are not necessarily related to Pesach.

Sweet and Sour Eggplant

4 servings

A lovely addition to your appetizer recipes, this pareve dish is not only easy to prepare and quite flavorful, but it keeps well. Mint really enhances its flavor. Serve it warm or at room temperature, with crackers, toasted pita or by itself.

*1 medium eggplant, about 1 1/2 pounds, unpeeled,
cut into 1-inch cubes*

Kosher salt

1/4 cup olive oil

1 medium onion, finely chopped

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2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 pound plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped

1/2 cup loosely packed Italian parsley, coarsely chopped

1-2 tablespoons seasoned rice vinegar

1/2 tablespoon sugar

Freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons fresh mint, coarsely chopped

Place the cubed eggplant in a colander, and sprinkle with salt. Let it drain for about 30 minutes, then pat dry with paper towels. Heat the olive oil in a medium saucepan, add the onion and garlic, and cook over moderate heat, stirring from time to time, until golden (about 10 minutes). Add eggplant, and stir for a minute.

Stir in tomatoes, and cook together over low heat, covered, stirring from time to time until the eggplant is soft

Curried Chicken

(about 10 minutes). Add parsley, vinegar and sugar. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

At serving time, add mint. If combined too early the mint tends to lose its aroma.

Curried Chicken

2 servings

This dish has a touch of curry, and looks attractive with the bits of grainy mustard.

2 medium skinless, boneless, single chicken breasts

Coating:

1 tablespoon honey

1 tablespoon whole grain mustard

1/2 tablespoon olive oil

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

1/2 teaspoon Madras curry powder

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 450°.

In a small dish, mix the coating ingredients. Line a small baking sheet with heavy aluminum foil, and place the chicken on it. Spoon the coating over the chicken, and bake for about 12 minutes (without turning), or until the chicken has a slight trace of pink on the inside. Remove the chicken from the oven, and cover it with foil so that it continues to cook.

To Serve:

Let rest for a minute, covered with foil, then cut the chicken on a diagonal into medium-wide slices, and spoon the accumulated juice over it.

Lentil Salad

6 servings

This easy-to-prepare salad is nutritious and colorful. In addition, lentils are particularly appealing since they do not require presoaking and are easily available.

1/2 pound brown or green lentils

4 tablespoons olive oil

2 teaspoons Dijon-type mustard, approximately

2 tablespoons lemon juice, approximately

3 scallions, including green parts, finely chopped

1/2 cup tightly packed Italian parsley, finely chopped

3 carrots, coarsely grated (see note)

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Place the lentils in a heavy saucepan with a cover. Add just enough cold water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer partially covered for about 15 minutes, or until the lentils are soft and the water is absorbed. (If the water is not absorbed, but the lentils are soft, drain them in a sieve.)

In the meantime, mix the olive oil, mustard and lemon juice in a large bowl. Add the hot lentils and toss well. Cool, then add the scallions, parsley and carrots. Mix well, season, and serve at room temperature.

Note:

Use the medium attachment of a food processor to grate the carrots.

White Bean Potato Puree

6 servings

With the addition of beans and soymilk, this recipe is a nutritious and tasty accompaniment to poultry and meat.

2 medium baking potatoes (about 1 pound), peeled and sliced

15-ounce can white beans, drained

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 cloves garlic, mashed to a paste with 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1/2 to 3/4 cup soymilk

1/2 cup loosely packed Italian parsley, finely chopped

Kosher salt

Freshly ground white pepper

Steam potatoes until soft (about 10 minutes). Cool. Place in a food processor fitted with a steel blade along with the drained beans, olive oil and garlic. Through the feed tube, slowly pour the amount of soymilk needed to obtain a smooth consistency. Transfer the puree to a double boiler in order to keep warm. Stir in the parsley, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Chocolate-Orange-Almond Cake

10-12 servings

This cake is ideal for Pesach or any other time. It is not too sweet or rich, and it freezes well. Try serving it with sorbet or diced fruit and fruit coulis. (See next page for a recipe for raspberry coulis.)

Unsalted margarine for greasing the pan
1 1/4 cups almonds (6-7 ounces)
1 cup sugar (scant measure)
6 ounces semi-sweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1/2 cup orange juice
2 teaspoons grated orange zest
6 large eggs, separated
1 vanilla bean, or 1 teaspoon vanilla extract (see note)

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease the bottom and sides of a 10-inch springform pan with margarine.

Place almonds and 1/4 cup sugar into a food processor fitted with a steel blade, and pulse until almonds are finely ground. Transfer to a bowl. Place chocolate into the food processor, and pulse until finely ground; add to nuts.

In a small bowl, whisk together cocoa powder, orange juice and orange zest until smooth.

In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat the egg yolks at medium speed, adding 1/2 cup sugar gradually, about 4 minutes, until ribbons form. Beat in seeds from vanilla bean, or vanilla extract, then cocoa mixture. With a rubber spatula fold in the chocolate-nut mixture.

In another bowl, beat egg whites at high speed until soft peaks form. Gradually add remaining sugar, beating until whites are stiff, not dry.

With a rubber spatula fold half of the egg whites into the batter, then reverse the process pouring the batter over the egg whites. Gently fold together, making a motion like a figure eight until just combined. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, and smooth the top.

Bake in the center of the oven for about 35-40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Place cake on a wire rack to cool. Release the sides of the pan, and remove the rim. Invert onto a cake platter, and remove the top.

Note:

Cut a vanilla bean in half lengthwise and scrape off the seeds. Vanilla beans (without the seeds) can be placed in a jar with sugar to flavor the sugar.

Raspberry Coulis:

10 ounces frozen raspberries, unsweetened, thawed
2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar, approximately
Liquor, such as cognac, to taste (optional)

Puree raspberries in a blender. Strain them through a mesh sieve (medium), pushing on the solids with a wooden spoon. Discard the seeds. Flavor the coulis to taste with sugar and liquor. You will have 1 generous cup. **1A**

*Chocolate-Orange-Almond
Cake with Raspberry Coulis*

