



The Chef's Table

Spring is in the Air.

Warm-Weather Fare that's Easy to Prepare

By Helen Nash

Spring is in the air, and Passover is approaching. Now is a wonderful time for light dishes with herbs, like cold soup, fish and vegetables.

Beet Soup

5-6 servings

This soup is delicious served hot or cold.

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small red onion, cubed
- 2 garlic cloves, cubed
- 1 McIntosh apple, peeled, cored and cubed
- 1 1/4 pounds fresh beets, plus one extra beet for garnish
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar, approximately
- 1 tablespoon light or dark brown sugar, approximately
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Heat the olive oil in a medium saucepan with a cover. Add onion, garlic and apple, and sauté for a few minutes.

Peel the beets, and cube (except the one for garnish). Add to the saucepan along with 3 1/2 cups broth.

Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and cook gently, covered, for about 30 minutes, or until the beets are tender.

Cool a bit, then puree until smooth, in batches, in a blender. Adjust the consistency as needed with the reserved 1/2 cup broth. Season to taste with vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper.

While the soup is cooking, wrap the unpeeled, reserved beet in foil, place in a toaster oven set to 400°, and bake for about 30 minutes, or until al dente. Peel, then grate or julienne the beet.

Serve the soup in individual bowls, and garnish with the julienned beets.

Helen Nash is the author of Kosher Cuisine (New Jersey, 1995) and Helen Nash's Kosher Kitchen (New Jersey, 2000). She lives in New York City.

Tilapia, Mexican Style

2 servings

I like this fish because it is light, and lends itself to any type of preparation.

2 tilapia filets (about 6 ounces each)

- Topping:
- 1 garlic clove, quartered
 - 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and quartered
 - 2 scallions, including the green part, quartered
 - 1 plum tomato, halved, seeded and quartered
 - 1/4 cup loosely packed cilantro leaves
 - 1 tablespoon olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons lime juice
 - 3/4 teaspoon salt, approximately
 - Freshly ground black pepper

Tilapia, Mexican Style
Photos: James Poster



Preheat the oven to 450°. Place all of the topping ingredients into a food processor fitted with the steel blade, and puree until almost smooth. Transfer to a dish, and set aside.

Place the fish in an ovenproof dish that is lightly greased with olive oil.

Spoon the topping over the fish, and bake in the center of the oven, uncovered, for 13 to 15 minutes, or until the fish is cooked through.

London Broil-Split Fillet, Barbecued

4 servings

This recipe lends itself to barbecuing or broiling. Fresh basil marinade gives the dish a nice spring flavor.

2 pounds London broil-split filet

- Basil marinade:
- 1 cup tightly packed basil leaves (1 small bunch), rinsed, spin dried
 - 2 cloves garlic, quartered
 - 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 - 3 tablespoons olive oil
 - 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
 - Freshly ground black pepper

Place all the marinade ingredients into a food processor fitted with a steel blade, and puree until smooth.

Place the meat into a (non-reactive) glass or ceramic dish, and coat with the marinade.

Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for a couple of hours, turning the meat once.

Bring the meat back to room temperature before broiling or barbecuing.

To grill:

Preheat grill well, and cook the filets for about 5 minutes on each side for rare meat. Then let the meat stand, wrapped in foil, before slicing it.

To broil:

Line the rack of a broiling pan with heavy-duty foil, and place the meat on it. Broil close to the heat source. Follow directions for grilling.

To serve:

Cut the filet on a diagonal, across the grain, into medium to thin slices.

Sweet Potato Pie

10-12 servings

Sweet potato is a perfect Passover vegetable, and this dish is especially convenient since it can be made ahead of time. The pie can be served warm, cold or at room temperature.

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus some for greasing the foil
- 5 medium sweet potatoes, about 2 1/2 to 3 pounds
- 1/2 inch gingerroot (approximately), peeled, minced
- 1 1/2 tablespoons light brown sugar, approximately
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt, approximately

Preheat the oven to 400°.

Grease a 10- or 11-inch by 1 1/2-inch pie plate with vegetable oil. Line the pie plate with aluminum foil, and grease the foil.

Spoon the oil into a large bowl.

Peel the potatoes, cut them into quarters horizontally, and thinly slice them in a food processor. Transfer the potatoes into the bowl with the oil, and toss with ginger, brown sugar and salt.

Place the potatoes into the prepared foil-lined pie plate, and pat them down firmly. Cover the top with another piece of well-greased foil, then weigh the top with a heavy flat lid, and bake in the center of the oven for 30 minutes.

Remove the lid and foil, and bake for another 30-35 minutes.

Remove the pie from the oven, let stand for several minutes, then invert onto a serving platter. Remove the foil, and cut into wedges.

Eggplant with Cumin

4 servings

I like to serve this appetizer warm or at room temperature. You can garnish it with chopped parsley, and serve it with your favorite cracker. The calorie conscious can serve it with endive petals, which will make the dish look even more appealing.

- 1 medium to large eggplant, about 1 pound
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 scallions, including the green part, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 4 cultivated mushrooms
- Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper
Italian parsley, chopped, for garnish (optional)

Preheat the oven to 400°.
Place the eggplant on a foil-lined pan, and bake for 30 minutes, turning once, or until tender to the touch. Remove and cool until easy to handle.

While the eggplant is baking, heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a skillet. Add the scallions, garlic and cumin. Sauté over low heat until the scallions are soft.

Wipe the mushrooms with a damp paper towel. Discard the stems, and chop the caps finely.

Add the extra 1 tablespoon olive oil to the skillet, add the mushrooms, raise the heat, and sauté for a minute.

Cut the eggplant in half, and scrape out any extra seeds. Pour off any eggplant liquid. Peel the eggplant, and chop finely.

Add the eggplant flesh to the mushrooms, and sauté for a minute. Season well with salt and pepper, and garnish with parsley.

Chocolate, Prune and Walnut Torte

12 servings

This “fairly good for you” dessert contains readily available ingredients and is easy to prepare. It also freezes well.

Unsalted margarine for greasing the pan
8 ounces walnuts
8 ounces semisweet chocolate
8 ounces pitted prunes, chilled
2 tablespoons potato starch, + for dusting the pan
6 egg whites
1/2 cup superfine sugar

Confectioners' sugar for dusting the top of the torte

Preheat the oven to 450°.

Grease the bottom and sides of a 10-inch springform pan with margarine. Line the pan with wax paper. Grease the wax paper, and dust it lightly with potato starch. Invert the pan, and tap to shake out the excess potato starch. Chop the walnuts semi-fine, in batches, in a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Break the chocolate into small pieces, and chop it finely, also in batches, in a food processor. Combine the walnuts and the chocolate in a large bowl.

Cut the chilled prunes into very small cubes. Transfer to a small bowl, and mix with the potato starch. Then combine with the walnut-chocolate mixture.

In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat the egg whites, at high speed, until they hold soft peaks. Add the sugar gradually, and beat until stiff. With a rubber spatula, fold half of the whites into the chocolate-walnut-prune mixture. Then reverse the process, pouring the batter over the whites. Gradually fold together, making a figure-eight motion until well combined. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, and smooth the top. Bake the torte in the center of the oven for 20 minutes, or until the top is light brown.

Place the torte on a wire rack, and let cool. Remove the rim. Invert the torte onto a cake plate, remove and discard the wax paper. Chill the torte, covered with foil, before serving; it will be easier to slice.

To serve:

Dust with confectioners' sugar. To make it more festive, serve with raspberry sorbet and fresh raspberries. **JA**



Chocolate, Prune and Walnut Torte