



A Taste of Home
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PREVIEW

TRANCHETTE DE SAUMON ÉPICÉE

CAJUN SPICED SALMON SLICES WITH CUCUMBER SALAD

Serves 4 as a starter. Prep: 20 mins Cook: 10 mins

I vividly remember eating a kind of cucumber salad at home when I was a child. I loved the simplicity of it – cucumber, lemon juice, cream or yoghurt (depending on how my mum was feeling) and a few chopped herbs, served with a piece of warm bread – that was it! It was always served chilled, so it was a refreshing way to start dinner.

The first time I tried blackened salmon (it was served to me by an America chef called Phil, who now runs a very successful restaurant on the Wirral), my mum's cucumber salad came to mind straight away as the perfect accompaniment.

The freshness of the lime, mint and coriander and creamy cooling dressing offsets the heat of salmon and gives you different sensations on your palate. I love creating dishes in this way, borrowing flavours from cuisines around the world to make something delicious. I feel I've cheated a bit by including it in this book because it's not really 100% a 'Taste of Home', but it's simple and easy to make for family and friends.

I've decided to give you instructions for preparing it as a starter, but you could easily increase the portion size to make it into a main course; ideal on a lovely summer's day. I'm a big fan of Cajun spice. It goes so well with fish and is great for seasoning steak for the barbecue.

INGREDIENTS

4 120g pieces of salmon fillet
3 dessertspoons Cajun spice mix
4 dessertspoons olive oil

Salad

1 cucumber (250g)
2 dessertspoons extra virgin olive oil
50ml whipping cream
90g or 2 dessertspoons cream cheese
Juice of 1 lime
1 bunch fresh coriander, leaves picked and chopped
1 bunch fresh mint, leaves picked and chopped
Salt and pepper

If you can, make the cucumber salad at least 1 hour, or even a day, before you need it, so all the ingredients have time to infuse together. I also like to marinate the salmon ahead. Mix the Cajun spice with 4 dessertspoons of olive oil, roll the salmon pieces in the marinade to coat and place them in the fridge.

To make the cucumber salad, cut the ends off the cucumber and cut it in half lengthways. Using a teaspoon, scoop out all of the seeds from each half, then thinly slice and place the pieces in a mixing bowl with a teaspoon of table salt. Mix well, transfer to a fine sieve suspended above a bowl and leave for 20 minutes (the salt will draw some of the water from the cucumber), then quickly rinse the cucumber pieces in very cold water. Place the slices in a clean kitchen cloth, or on kitchen paper, to dry.

Meanwhile, mix the extra virgin olive oil, whipping cream, cream cheese, lime juice and chopped coriander and mint together in a small bowl. Add the cucumber and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste; it should be tangy and fresh. Place it in the fridge until later.

You are now ready to get the dish to the table. I suggest you place your serving plate in the fridge before serving so that it's nice and cold when you need it.

To cook the salmon, place a non-stick frying pan on a high heat and add all the Cajun olive oil marinade. Place the fillets in the pan skin-side down. If you feel the temperature drops too much, increase the heat a bit; you want to hear the salmon 'singing' (one of my old chef phrases). After about a minute, turn the fillets over carefully, using a palate knife, fish slice or long knife, so that they stay in one piece. Cook for another minute before turning the heat down and continuing to cook for another 2 to 3 minutes, depending on the thickness of the salmon. Turn off the heat and leave the salmon to rest in the pan.

You are now ready to assemble the dish. Tip your cucumber salad into your chilled serving dish and arrange the salmon on top. You need a nice piece of French bread and a glass of white wine to go with this. As a thank you to Phil, whose salmon dish gave me the idea for this recipe, I think it should be something Californian.



CONFIT DE CANARD DE LA BRASSERIE DE VALBONNE

CONFIT DUCK LEG WITH BEANS, NEW POTATOES, CHERRY TOMATOES AND GARLIC

Serves 4. Prep: 30 mins Cook: 30 mins to 2 hours, if you make your own duck confit

I had this dish a few years ago in a brasserie on a square in Valbonne, in the South of France, and it was an excellent reminder that preparing beautiful ingredients, simply, is the key to a great dish. The duck leg was crispy on the outside and the meat melted in your mouth. The hot green beans and sweet new potatoes were dressed in buttery olive oil and full of garlicky, herby flavours. It was outstandingly good, the place was magic, and together with the rosé we had with it, it was exactly what I needed after the stressful journey getting there!

You don't need to make your own confit duck legs; you can buy good quality ones cheaply in tins. I've ordered lots of different brands online, and all of them were very good. Having them in your cupboard means that you can create a quick and easy lunch whenever you like. Anyway, I'm going to give you a recipe in case you'd like to make them.

INGREDIENTS

For the confit duck legs

4 duck legs (about 350g each)

100g sea salt (enough to cover the duck legs)

A couple of sprigs of rosemary or thyme and 2 bay leaves (to flavour the goose fat)

1 garlic bulb, cut in half

2 jars of 320g of goose fat (enough to cover duck legs)

Accompaniments

400g green beans, top and tailed (blanch in boiling water for 2 minutes, then place in iced water to cool down and dry)

500g cooked new potatoes, cut in half

8 cloves garlic, peeled

4 large shallots, peeled and finely sliced

About 10g (a dessertspoon) of chopped mixed herbs (thyme, rosemary, parsley)

30g butter, softened

200g cherry tomatoes, cut in half

2 dessertspoons clear honey

Juice of 2 oranges

I like to make the confit duck the day before they will be served. To do this, start by putting the duck legs on a tray, covering with sea salt and placing in the fridge for 3 hours.

Rinse the duck legs with cold water to wash the salt off, pat them dry with kitchen paper and place them in a large heavy-bottomed saucepan with the garlic and herbs and cover with the goose fat. Alternatively, you can use vegetable oil if you don't have any goose fat available.

Place your duck legs in the oven at 150°C to cook for about 2 hours depending on the sizes. The legs are cooked when the meat almost falls off the bone. You can leave the duck legs in the fat until you need them, just take any excess fat off them before roasting them in the oven. The duck leg confit will keep in a sealed container in the fridge for up to a week.

To make the herb dressing, place a medium-sized saucepan on a medium heat and add 3 tablespoons of the fat you used to confit the duck legs. Allow it to heat up and add your chopped shallots. Soften them slowly, stirring frequently. Meanwhile, put the garlic, chopped herbs and the softened butter in a food processor and pulse until combined. When the shallots are soft, add your garlic and herb butter to the pan, put aside and reserve until needed.

You are now ready to put the dish together, which will take about 20 minutes.

Heat the oven to 160°C. Place the cooked new potatoes on a roasting tray along with the cooked green beans and cherry tomatoes. Pour over your herb and shallot dressing, season with salt and pepper and toss everything together. Place the cold duck legs on top of the mix and place in the oven to cook for 20 minutes. In the last 10 minutes of cooking, brush the duck legs with honey to make them crispier and sweeter.

When your duck legs are nice and crispy, take the tray out of the oven and pour over the orange juice. Leave to cool down for few minutes before placing the tray in the middle of table and pouring yourself a nice glass of chilled Provençal rosé. Enjoy!



PALETS BRETON AUX ABRICOTS, CRÈME CHANTILLY ET PISTACHES

BRITTANY BISCUITS WITH APRICOTS, PISTACHIO AND CHANTILLY CREAM

Serves 6. Prep: 1 hour Cook: 30 mins

This sweet is all about the biscuit base, which is originally from Brittany. It is quite a thick biscuit, about 1.5cm deep, the equivalent of three shortbread biscuits piled on top of each other. I would describe the texture as somewhere between a sponge base and shortbread. I love using them as a base for a colourful mix of fruits, the selection of which depends on the season. From time to time, I also use crème patissière instead of Chantilly cream, which also works really well, especially if you add a few drops of Grand Marnier or rum!

For this recipe I serve them with warm roasted apricots and figs, a few berries, Chantilly cream and caramelised pistachios. The combination of different colours and textures looks beautiful on the plate. I recommend that you have a go at this – it will be well worth it!

INGREDIENTS

Biscuits

200g plain flour
1 level teaspoon
baking powder
150g butter,
cubed (at room
temperature)
120g caster sugar
1 pinch of sea salt
4 egg yolks

Fresh fruit topping

6 figs, cut into
quarters
6 fresh apricots
(washed, halved
and stones
discarded)
2 dessertspoons
caster sugar
A good pinch of
cinnamon (optional)
12 strawberries,
cut in half
12 blackberries
or raspberries

2 tablespoons
caster sugar
A good pinch of
cinnamon powder
(optional)

Caramelised
pistachio
50g pistachios
2 teaspoons icing
sugar

Crème Chantilly
300ml double
cream (very cold)
60g icing sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
extract

For decoration
(optional)
Icing sugar,
to dust
A few fresh mint
leaves

You will need six metal rings, each 7.5cm in diameter, as the biscuits need to be cooked inside metal rings to keep the shape and the height. Sift the flour with the baking powder, add the salt and set aside.

Place the egg yolks and sugar in a mixer, and whisk until pale and creamy. Add the butter and mix well again until all the butter is dissolved into the mix. Using a wooden spoon, gently fold the flour into the mixture until it becomes a dough. Wrap the dough in cling film and refrigerate for a couple of hours.

Place the dough between 2 sheets of greaseproof paper and roll out to the thickness of 0.75cm using a rolling pin. Place it in the freezer, with the paper on, for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, line a flat roasting tray with greaseproof paper. Remove your biscuit base from the freezer and take off the top sheet of greaseproof paper. Place one of your metal rings on top of the dough and press down firmly. Repeat the operation until you have used up all the pastry and place the rings (with the biscuits inside) on the prepared roasting tray. I like to cook them as late as possible, so I return them to the fridge until later.

When you want to cook the biscuits, simply bake them in a preheated oven at 180°C/160°C fan/315°F/gas 3 for about 15 minutes, until golden brown. Leave for 5 minutes to cool down before taking the ring off. Reserve until you need them.

To make the crème Chantilly, pour the cold cream, vanilla extract and icing sugar into a stand mixer and whisk, starting slowly and steadily increasing the speed, until stiff peaks form. Keep in the fridge until needed.

In a mixing bowl, place the fresh apricots and figs; add the sugar and cinnamon, if using, and mix well. Tip the mix onto a roasting tray and place in a hot oven (210°C/190°C fan/375°F/gas 5) for about 5 minutes until they begin to caramelize. Take them out and reserve. To caramelize the pistachios, place a frying pan on a medium heat. When hot, add your pistachios and icing sugar and stir with a wooden spoon until caramelised. Transfer the mixture to baking parchment to cool down.

You can place all of the elements of this dish in the middle of the table and let people choose their own combination or you can serve the dessert on individual plates. If you decide to serve them individually, transfer your crème Chantilly into a piping bag fitted with a star nozzle. Place a biscuit in the middle of each plate and pipe a generous blob of Chantilly cream on top of each one. Add some roasted apricots and figs and a few berries, sprinkle over some caramelised pistachios, dust with icing sugar and finish with some fresh mint to bring the dish to life. Like it?

P.S. You need “un verre de Champagne”!

