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GALLERY



Braised Black Figs with Arugula and Aged Parmesan

Description:

Figs are one of the sexiest foods you can find on the market. For centuries, figs have been symbols of feminine sexuality, and it's not hard to see why: their delicate, curved shape, the softness of their skin and their sweet, tender insides... oh. This salad is all about sensuality. The braising process in the beginning pulls out the sweet juices inside the fruit and warms them up to a melt-in-your-mouth texture, and the pairing of the sweet fig with the peppery arugula and rich, salty Parmesan creates the perfect counterpoint. Enjoy...

Ingredients:

- 1 pint basket whole black figs, sliced in half lengthwise
- 1 bunch baby arugula, washed and stemmed
- 4 oz. aged Parmesan, roughly shaved
- 3 tblsp. aged balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1 tblsp. butter
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 lemon
- Fresh cracked black pepper
- Salt

Prepare:

In a seasoned cast iron skillet, melt the butter with the sugar. Braise the figs, face down in the pan, for 2-3 minutes. The face of the fig will become sticky and slightly golden around the edges. Remove from heat. Turn face side up to cool.

In a skillet, heat up the balsamic vinegar until bubbly, then reduce heat and simmer for 4-5 minutes until the vinegar is reduced by half. Remove from heat.

In a bowl, toss the arugula with 1 tblsp. olive oil to coat; squeeze the lemon over the top; toss again. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Heap the arugula on a plate and arrange the figs over the top. Sprinkle with the rough shavings of Parmesan.

How To Serve:

This is best served on a small salad plate so that all of the ingredients can be clearly seen. The figs are shiny and dark, accentuated by the glossy green leaves of arugula and complimented by the pale cheese. Serve this as the perfect beginning to your meal, alongside other small plates, or as an accompaniment to a red meat dish like lamb or beef.

Experiment:

For a more pronounced flavor, try substitute creamy chunks of blue cheese - a Stilton, for instance - in place of the Parmesan. The figs can stand up to the strength of the cheese, but the dish itself becomes a predominant player in the meal, so only do this if it won't compete with the other flavors you're assembling.



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Red Wine and Dark Chocolate Fondue

Description:

This simple fondue has only four ingredients, and yet it tastes simply divine. The secret to this recipe is in the quality of the chocolate... only buy the very best chocolate you can find, preferably in bar form, and melt it verrrrry slowly to keep it from burning. Fill up your favorite tray (that antique silver one would be perfect) with the right dippers (angel food cake and strawberries are our favorites!), light the candles and savor every bite!

Ingredients:

1/2 cup heavy cream
 10 oz. Bittersweet chocolate
 - use chips or cut a bar into pieces
 1/2 c. red wine
 1/2 tsp. chili powder

Prepare:

Stovetop: in a heavy saucepan, heat the cream until it bubbles, and drop in the chocolate, immediately reducing heat. Stir slowly until the chocolate melts, then stir in the wine and chili powder until smooth and well combined.

Microwave: place the chocolate in a small glass bowl and heat on high for 2 minutes.

Once chocolate has melted, stir in the wine and chili powder until smooth and heat again to combine all ingredients.

How To Serve:

Transfer mixture to a fondue pot and light a low flame, or pour into a warmed ceramic dish and serve immediately. Serve with dippers.

Experiment: Create a platter with an assortment of fun and delicious dippers, such as the following:

- Graham cracker pieces
- Fruit slices/chunks: strawberries, grapes, oranges
- Biscotti
- Cream cheese balls, made by shaping small chunks of chilled cream cheese and rolling them in cocoa powder and cinnamon
- Marshmallows
- Small pieces of candy bars, like Snickers or Mars Bar
- Cake squares - angel food, chocolate, lemon
- Brownies or pieces of cookies

Wine Pairings: With wine already in the fondue, why not pour a glass alongside? The dark chocolate can stand up to whatever you're in the mood for, so go ahead and break out that big, juicy Cabernet for a double dose of decadence.



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Orgasmic Punch

- 2 bottles of white rum
- 2/3 liter of dry white wine
- 1 cup Triple Sec
- Juice of 10 oranges
- Juice of 6 lemons
- 20-ounce can of pineapple chunks, drained
- 1 cup of sugar
- 2 vanilla beans, split
- 2 nutmegs, ground
- 2 oz of muira puama tincture
- 1-2 oz of damiana tincture
- 2 whole oranges studded with cloves
- A handful of fresh or dried rose petals (optional)

Place the alcohol, juices, pineapple, sugar, vanilla, nutmeg, muira puama, and damiana in a large punch bowl and stir well until sugar is dissolved. Carefully float the clove-studded oranges in the punch, and immediately before serving sprinkle with rose petals. Note: the essentials are the damiana and muira puama. Experiment with the rest to find what tastes good to you.