

Gourmet Group May-June 2020

Cooking for your Families during Social Distancing

Hello everyone!! I trust that you are all staying healthy and practicing safety measures in these unprecedented times. Since we cannot meet at each other's homes and socialize as usual, I am going to share a few of my favorite, simple recipes that you can try out for your families especially if you have young children at home.

Breakfast/Brunch

Healthy Breakfast Egg Muffins

Easy, low carb and freezer friendly, these egg muffin cups are easy to store and reheat. Add spinach, sausage or hash browns! You can make them cheesy or keep them dairy free.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup lightly packed baby spinach, chopped
- 3/4 cup finely diced red bell pepper, about 1 small pepper
- 3/4 cup finely diced green bell pepper, about 1 small pepper
- 3/4 cup quartered cherry tomatoes, or grape tomatoes, about 1 cup whole tomatoes
- 6 large eggs
- 4 large egg whites
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
- Ground black pepper, or cayenne pepper if you like a little kick!
- 1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese, plus additional to sprinkle on top

Instructions:

Place a rack in the center of your oven and preheat to 350 degrees F. Lightly coat a standard 12-cup muffin tin with nonstick spray. Divide the spinach, red bell pepper, green bell pepper, and tomatoes among the cups (they will be about two-thirds of the way full).

In a large bowl or large measuring cup with a spout (my favorite because it makes the mixture easy to pour), briskly whisk together the eggs, egg whites, salt, basil, oregano, and pepper until well combined. Carefully fill each muffin cup three-quarters of the way to the top with the egg mixture. Sprinkle the feta evenly over the tops of the cups.

Bake for 24 to 28 minutes, until the egg muffins are set. Let cool for a few minutes, and then run a butter knife around the edges of each muffin to loosen it. Remove them from the pan and enjoy immediately, or let cool on a wire rack and refrigerate or freeze for later (see notes for more details).

Recipe Notes

Store leftover egg muffins in an airtight container or zip lock bag in the refrigerator for up to 3 days or individually wrap and freeze for up to 3 months. Reheat gently in the microwave (once thawed or directly from frozen) until hot and warmed through to the center, about 30 seconds (from thawed) or 1 or so minutes (from frozen), depending upon your microwave.

This recipe is incredibly flexible. Feel free to swap the listed veggies for the same amount of any other diced vegetable or cooked, diced meat. If the vegetables are very firm, such as carrots or sweet potatoes, I recommend cooking and cooling them first before adding them to the cups.

Easy Crepe Recipe

Ingredients:

- 1 c. all-purpose flour
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tbsp. granulated sugar
- 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 1/2 c. whole milk
- 1 tbsp. butter
- Fresh fruit, for serving
- Powdered sugar, for serving

Instructions:

In a large mixing bowl, create a well with flour then add eggs, slowly whisking them into flour. Add sugar and salt and stir until combined. Gradually add in milk, whisking to combine after each addition. Let batter stand at room temperature until slightly bubbly on top, 15 to 20 minutes.

In a small skillet over medium heat, melt butter. About 1/4 cup at a time, drop batter evenly onto pan, swirling it to evenly coat.

Cook for 2 minutes, then flip and cook for 1 minute more. Repeat with remaining batter. Serve crêpes warm with fresh fruit and powdered sugar.

For a savory option, omit the 1 tbsp sugar in the batter and the powdered sugar. Fill with smoked ham and swiss cheese or any combination or your choice.

Breakfast Banana Split

Ingredients:

- 1 banana, split lengthwise
- 1 c. vanilla yogurt
- 1/4 blueberries
- 1/4 chopped strawberries
- 4 tbsp. granola
- Honey, for drizzling

Place banana slices in a long narrow serving dish. Scoop yogurt on top. Drizzle with honey and top with blueberries, strawberries and granola. Serve immediately.

Monkey Milk

Kids will go bananas over this simple drink, which is specially designed for young chefs to prepare (with an adult on hand to supervise). This was and still is an all time favorite in our house. It works perfectly well with alternative milk and yogurt.

Ingredients:

- 2 ripe bananas, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 cup vanilla yogurt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 Tbsp. honey
- 1 cup ice cubes (optional)

Instructions:

In a blender, combine the bananas, yogurt, milk, honey and ice cubes. Blend on high speed until the mixture is smooth, about 1 minute.

Pour the monkey milk into glasses and serve immediately. Serves 4 adults or 8 children.

Lunch/Dinner

I am going to share with you some very easy pasta dishes that are a favorite in our family. These are always my go-to dishes when I have had a busy day and I want to make something quick but not compromise on taste. Feel free to use the pasta you have in your pantry. With the shortage of certain ingredients, we can improvise as needed.

Cacio e Pepe, Amatriciana, Carbonara - The Roman Trio of Pasta

Cacio e Pepe

Ingredients (2 servings):

- 1 cup Pecorino Romano
- 1 cup Parmigiano Reggiano
- 7 oz pasta (spaghetti or tonnarelli)
- 1 tsp cornflour
- Salt and Pepper

Instructions:

The sworn enemy of this pasta dish is the ball effect caused by the cheese forming into lumps. To prevent this setback, you should grate the cheese well, until it has a very fine consistency.

In a frying pan, toast peppercorns, and when they're ready, grind them up in a mortar and pestle or a food processor (a pepper mill will do). Cook the pasta separately in unsalted boiling water. Put the cheese, a teaspoon of cornstarch and a few ladlefuls of pasta water in another pan. Mix until you create a smooth cream. The cornstarch will help the cheese melt without coagulating. At this point, remove the cheese pan from the heat, add the al dente pasta, a drizzle of oil, pepper and a handful of cheese, and continue mixing until well combined. Serve immediately.

Pasta Amatriciana

Ingredients (2 servings):

- 9 oz peeled tomatoes
- 4 oz guanciale (diced pancetta or bacon instead)
- 7 oz spaghetti or bucatini
- Pecorino Romano
- salt and pepper
- Basil

Instructions:

Dice the guanciale and brown it in the frying pan without adding anything else. In a separate pot, bring the water to the boil without salt, plunge the spaghetti into water and cook according to the directions on the package (a minute less for al dente). In the meantime, blend the peeled tomatoes, add to the browned guanciale, add salt, and cook for 10 minutes. I like to add a piece of peperoncino or a sprinkle of chili flakes and let it simmer in the sauce. Drain the spaghetti, combine with the sauce and mix together. Take off the heat, sprinkle with plenty of Pecorino, pepper and basil, and serve steaming.

Carbonara traditional recipe

Ingredients (2 servings):

- 3 egg yolks
- 3/4 cups Pecorino Romano
- 3/4 cups Parmigiano Reggiano
- 4 oz guanciale (diced pancetta or bacon instead)
- 7 oz spaghetti or short pasta like rigatoni or ruote

Instructions:

Start by browning the guanciale until it's crispy, then take it out of the frying pan and dry it on a sheet of paper towel. I add a few cloves of crushed garlic with the guanciale but it is totally up to you. In a separate bowl, combine the freshly grated cheese with the eggs, mix with the whisk and add half a glass of sparkling water; the bubbles help capture the cheese and help beat the eggs, preventing the "frittata" effect. In the meantime, cook the pasta in unsalted boiling water. Halfway through the suggested cooking time, drain it and cook it in the frying pan with the leftover guanciale fat, adding ladles of hot pasta water until cooked.

Then take it off the heat and add the egg and cheese mixture, the browned guanciale, salt and pepper. Mix and serve immediately.

Buon appetito!

Here is another easy pasta recipe and perfect for children

Pasta Alla Checca

Pasta alla Checca is the perfect Fresh Tomato Summer dish. A fast and easy Roman dish made with a few simple ingredients.

Ingredients:

- 3 medium firm ripe tomatoes or 20-25 grape or cherry tomatoes*
- 2-3 pinches salt
- 1-2 dashes pepper
- 1-2 cloves garlic minced
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 10 fresh basil leaves
- 3 cups cooked pasta (spaghetti)

*If using medium tomatoes then cut and seed them before chopping. Cherry or grape tomatoes just need to be sliced in half.

Instructions:

In a large bowl add the chopped seeded tomatoes or grape tomatoes, salt, pepper, garlic, olive oil and fresh basil, toss gently to combine, then cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let sit for an hour.

When approximately 35 minutes has passed then bring a large pot of water to boil, add some salt and the pasta, cook al dente. Drain the pasta and add to the bowl, and gently toss to combine. Serve immediately with some chopped fresh basil if desired. Enjoy!

Notes

If desired you can add some chopped fresh mozzarella, add it when adding the pasta.

Baking

Banana Blueberry Bread

Another all time favorite, at our house.

Ingredients:

- Butter, for greasing the loaf pan
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for dusting the loaf pan
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon fine salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 ripe bananas, peeled and coarsely mashed to yield about 3/4 cup of mashed banana
- 1 cup (about 4 ounces) fresh blueberries

Instructions:

Place an oven rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Butter and flour a 9- by 5- by 3-inch loaf pan. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, salt, baking powder, cinnamon and nutmeg. In a large bowl, beat the sugar, oil, eggs and vanilla until blended. Stir in the bananas and blueberries. Add the dry ingredients and stir just until blended.

Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan. Bake until a cake tester inserted in the center of the loaf comes out clean, about 1 hour. Cool for 15 minutes. Remove the loaf from the pan and cool completely on a wire rack, about 2 hours.

Lemon and Almond Cake

We conclude the menu of simple recipes with a dessert: lemon and almond cake. Excellent for breakfast or as a dessert. To prepare it, you'll need:

Ingredients:

- 5 oz flour,
- 4 eggs,
- 5 oz sugar,
- 1 teaspoon vanilla,
- 1 lemon,
- 150 g almonds (or any other nuts that you already have leftover in the pantry like walnuts and hazelnuts)
- 120 g of extra-virgin olive oil.

Instructions:

In a large bowl, cream the sugar and eggs using an electric whisk until blended. Finely chop the almonds (they must become a sort of flour). Add the flour to the mixture, continuing to stir. Pour the oil and lemon juice into the mixture and transfer it to a buttered baking tray (or covered with baking parchment). Cook at 350°F for about 30-35 minutes.

Vanilla Cupcakes:

Ingredients:

- 1 and 1/3 cup (165 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1 and 1/4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup (115 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup (120 grams) full fat sour cream
- Vanilla Frosting:
 - 1 cup (230 grams) unsalted butter, softened
 - 3 cups (360 grams) confectioner's sugar
 - 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
 - 2 tablespoons (30ml) heavy cream

Instructions:

To make the vanilla cupcakes:

Preheat the oven to 350F. Line a 12-count muffin pan with cupcake liners. Line a second muffin pan with 2 liners (this recipe will make 14 cupcakes). Set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl using a hand-held mixer), beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy.

Beat in the eggs one at a time, then the vanilla. Add in the sour cream and mix until fully combined.

Slowly add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients and mix until just combined, making sure not to over mix the batter.

Scoop the batter into the cupcake liners, filling them a little over half way full. You should end up with exactly 14 cupcakes.

Bake in separate batches at 350F for 18-22 minutes or until a wooden toothpick inserted into the center of the cupcake comes out clean.

Remove from the oven and allow to cool for a couple of minutes. Remove all of the cupcakes from the pan and transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

To make the frosting:

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl using a hand-held mixer) beat the butter on medium speed until smooth.

Add in the confectioner's sugar and vanilla and mix on low until well combined. Slowly add in the heavy cream, increase the speed to medium-high, and mix for a few more minutes until the frosting is smooth and well combined.

Frost the cooled cupcakes as desired.

Enjoy cooking and stay healthy!!