

Recipes by *Here & Now* Resident Chef Kathy Gunst

Poached Pears in Orange-Ginger-Champagne Syrup

Kathy's Note: It was New Year's Day and friends were coming to dinner. After all the holiday festivities it was too much to think about baking a cake or serving anything rich for dessert. A basket of ripe winter Bosc pears sat on the counter alongside a half-drunk bottle of Champagne from the previous evening's party. Why of course: poached pears in Champagne, flavored with aromatic winter oranges and slivers of fresh ginger.

Serves 6.

Ingredients:

3 cups Champagne, white or red wine, or water
1 cup water
1 cup granulated sugar, or Vanilla Sugar*
6 large Bosc pears
2 tablespoons julienned fresh ginger*
2 tablespoons julienned orange zest (the zest from 1 large orange)

*To make Vanilla Sugar: cut a vanilla bean down the center lengthwise. Place it in a sugar pot and let it "flavor" the sugar for 24 hours and up to several months. Vanilla sugar is delicious in all kinds of baked goods where vanilla extract would be used.

Instructions:

To make the syrup, in a pot that is large enough to hold all the pears on their side, mix the Champagne (or wine), water, and sugar together. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium, stir well to dissolve the sugar, and simmer for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, peel the pears, leaving the stems attached. Use a small, sharp knife to remove the core from the bottom of the pear. Work the knife up into the fruit, and scoop out the core. Cut off a very thin slice from the bottom of the pear so that it will stand up straight.

Add the ginger and orange zest to the syrup and gently place the pears in the pot; the pears should be lying down on their side. Reduce the heat to a low simmer, cover, and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the size of the pears, flipping the pears from side to side every 10 minutes or so. To test the pears, gently insert a small, sharp knife into the thickest part of the fruit. It should feel soft and yielding and come out of the pear without resistance. Remove the pears with a slotted spoon to a serving bowl.

Very carefully taste the syrup in the pan; it will be hot. It should be sweet and full of rich pear, ginger, and orange flavors. Reduce the syrup over medium-high heat for about 5 to 10 minutes to thicken and further reduce and concentrate the flavors. It should be almost thick enough to coat a spoon. Pour the hot syrup with the julienne strips of ginger and orange over the pears and let cool. Refrigerate until ready to serve. (The pears can be made up to 8 hours ahead of time.)

Chicken Stew with Bacon, Baby Onions, and Crimini Mushrooms

From "Notes from a Maine Kitchen" by Kathy Gunst

Kathy's Note: This chicken stew, very reminiscent of the classic French *Coq au Vin*, is best made at least a day ahead of time, but will work just fine if you cook it a few hours before serving. We had leftover stew for two days and, trust me, it only gets better.

Serve it with parsley-flecked potatoes, potatoes gratin, mashed potatoes, polenta, or egg noodles. A good wintry salad—mixed greens, watercress, tangerine sections and a crumble of blue cheese - would also be great, along with some crusty bread for sopping up all those red wine juices. You can easily double the recipe to serve a bigger crowd.

Serves 4.

Ingredients:

2 strips bacon

About 1 ½ tablespoons olive oil

About 2 tablespoons canola oil

1 leek, dark green section discarded, and white and pale green section cut in half lengthwise and then into 1-inch pieces

4 scallions, ends trimmed and cut into ½-inch pieces

12 pearl onions, peeled and left whole*

2 large carrots, peeled, and cut on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 ½ tablespoon chopped fresh thyme, or 1 ½ teaspoons dried and crumbled

About 1 cup flour

One 3 1/2 to 4-pound roasting chicken, cut into 8 pieces

3 cups dry red wine**

1 bay leaf

½ cup finely chopped fresh parsley

11 ounces crimini mushrooms, or button mushrooms, washed gently and cut in half***

*Or 4 medium size sweet onions, peeled and quartered

**You want a really well rounded red wine, not too fruity. Choose something you would like to drink with dinner or a lesser wine made from the same grape as what you'll serve with the stew.

****Don't* place the mushrooms under cold running water to clean. Use a vegetable brush and lightly scrub the mushroom caps clean using just a tiny bit of water. Excess water will be absorbed by the mushroom creating a watery dish.

Instructions:

In a large, heavy skillet pot or casserole, cook the bacon strips over moderate heat and let them crisp up; drain the cooked bacon on paper towels. Remove all but 1 tablespoon of the bacon grease in the skillet.

Add ½ tablespoon of the olive oil to the bacon grease and place over low heat. Add the leek, scallions, pearl onions, carrots, salt, pepper, and thyme and cook, stirring occasionally for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, place the flour on a large plate and season liberally with salt and pepper. Dry off the chicken pieces with a paper towel and then dredge them in the seasoned flour, making sure all sides are well coated.

In a large, heavy skillet, heat 1 tablespoon canola oil and ½ tablespoon of the olive oil over high heat. Brown the chicken, a few pieces at a time, about 3 minutes per side, being careful not to crowd the skillet, adding the additional oil if needed. If the chicken or the oil starts to burn reduce the heat to moderate. Remove the browned pieces of chicken to paper towels or a brown paper grocery bag to drain off any excess fat.

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

When the onions are tender sprinkle in 2 tablespoons flour from the flour you used to dredge the chicken. Let cook 2 minutes. Raise the heat to high and add the wine, and the bay leaf, letting it come to a rolling boil. Add the chicken pieces, spooning the wine over the chicken so it is almost completely bathed in it. Sprinkle on half the parsley. Cover the casserole and place on the middle shelf of the preheated oven. Bake for 1 hour, basting the chicken pieces once or twice during that time. After an hour, add the mushrooms, baste the chicken making sure the mushrooms are in the wine sauce, cover and bake another 30 minutes. Remove from the oven.

If you make the stew a day ahead of time be sure to let it cool down and refrigerate overnight. The next day use a spoon to remove any fat that has risen to the surface.

Serve hot, sprinkled with the remaining parsley.

Parsleyed Potatoes

Kathy's Note: This is a classic accompaniment to any stew.

Serves 4.

Ingredients:

1 ½ pounds Maine potatoes, white or yellow fleshed, peeled and quartered
2 tablespoons butter
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup finely chopped fresh parsley

Instructions:

Bring a medium size pot of water to a rolling boil over high heat. Add the potatoes, cover, and let cook about 12 to 14 minutes, depending on the variety, or until just tender when pierced in the center with a small, sharp knife. Drain.

Place the potatoes back in the pot and toss gently with the butter, salt, pepper and parsley. Serve hot.

Maine Shrimp, Haddock, and Jerusalem Artichoke Chowder

From "Notes from a Maine Kitchen" by Kathy Gunst

Kathy's Note: The Jerusalem artichokes give this Maine shrimp-based chowder a great crunchy texture and sweet flavor. This year Maine shrimp season may be called off so you can substitute with large shrimp cut into ½-inch size pieces.

The chowder can be made a few hours (or a day) ahead of time and simply reheated over low heat until bubbling hot. You can easily double the recipes for a crowd.

Serves 4 to 6.

Instructions:

3 strips bacon, optional
About 1 tablespoon olive oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme, or 1 teaspoon dried and crumbled
1 pound potatoes, peeled and chopped into ½-inch cubes, Yukon Gold works well
½ pound Jerusalem artichokes, peeled and chopped into ½-inch cubes
1 pound haddock, cut into 1-inch cubes
1 to 1 ½ tablespoons flour*
1 pound peeled whole Maine shrimp
1 ½ cups low fat milk
1 cup cream*
1/3 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
Pinch cayenne pepper

*You need one tablespoon of flour as a thickener, but if you prefer a thinner chowder only add this amount. If you want a thicker, more stew-like soup add 1 ½ tablespoons flour.

**You'll need 2 ½ cups dairy—for a lighter chowder add all milk and for a richer one add the cream. You can play with the proportions of milk and cream depending on how rich you like it.

Instructions:

In a large soup pot cook the bacon until crisp on both sides; drain on paper towels. Crumble the bacon into small pieces and set aside. Remove all but 1 tablespoon of the bacon grease.

Add 1 tablespoon of the oil to the bacon grease (if you choose not to add bacon work with about 1 ½ tablespoons olive oil instead). Add the onion to the hot oil and cook, stirring frequently, over low heat for about 8 minutes, or until the onions are soft and just beginning to turn color. Add salt, pepper, and half the thyme and stir well. Add the potatoes and artichokes and cook, stirring, for about a minutes to coat the potatoes and artichokes thoroughly with the spices and onions.

Meanwhile heat the milk and cream in a small saucepan over moderate heat until just simmering.

Add the haddock to the pot with the onions and potatoes and stir well. Sprinkle on the flour and stir gently to coat all the ingredients. Let cook about 2 minutes. Add half the crumbled bacon (if using), the remaining thyme, and then the warm milk/cream. Raise the heat and bring to a gentle simmer. When the chowder simmers reduce the heat, add half the parsley, and the cayenne; cover, and let cook for about 10 to 15 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender. Add the shrimp and cook for about 4 to 5 minutes, or until they firm up. Taste for seasoning and add more salt and pepper and cayenne if needed.

Serve hot with a sprinkling of parsley and some of the remaining bacon on top.

Wild Blueberry Syrup (for cocktails or homemade soda)

Kathy's Note: Add a heaping tablespoon of this syrup to Champagne, sparkling wine, rum or vodka drinks. You can also add it to seltzer for a sweet natural soda.

Ingredients/Instructions:

Make a simple syrup: mix 1 cup water and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar in saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat and let simmer for about 10 minutes, or until the syrup begins to turn a pale gold. Add 3 cups frozen wild blueberries and remove from the heat. Let sit for 15 minutes. Then strain the syrup, pressing down on the berries to extract all the flavor. The syrup will keep for at least a week refrigerated or can be frozen for 6 months.