

What a Dish!

The taste was sublime... summer sublime

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."
-- Albert Einstein



By
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Living in a rural area where even at its most distant, we are only three to four minutes max from rolling countryside, life takes on somewhat different colouring don't you think? My awareness of this was raised last week as I gathered together the makings of a meal.

I had gone into Imaginations, Main Street and Market, looking for a favour from Chef Tony and while waiting I looked at the new -- to me -- items on the shelves. One of those things was Gocce Di Tartufo Bianco -- a combination of olive oil and white truffle flavouring. He also had some Bocconcini on special and so I bought both thinking the cheese would be nice in a salad that night and I would give the truffle flavoured oil a try -- after I gave it some thought. I'm always nervous about trying something new -- what if I don't like it?

How in the world that has become so earth shatteringly important, I don't know. You don't like it? You don't eat anymore of it! Simple! And if it is that bad, use your napkin to get the foul stuff out of your mouth and to the garbage. But, you know, I can let a food sit on a shelf in the cupboard or fridge until no one would like it, trying to get my nerve up to try it!

But Chef Tony headed that problem off without realizing it. When he brought the two items to the cash register, he said these two would be really good with a fresh field tomato and basil. Yes, of course! A month ago I described that very salad -- Shirley Adams served it at our last Martini Maids gathering but she didn't have a truffle oil.

So off I went with my Bocconcini and oil with truffle flavouring. I hopped in the car and headed out to Matz's (pick your closest/favourite roadside market) where I picked up a fresh field tomato and of course, fresh corn and fruit -- my eyes are always so-o-o big -- then returned to the IGA and bought a loaf of whole grain bread

flecked with a nice mix of seeds and grains. I brought all this home and then slipped out to the garden for some fresh basil. As I walked across the patio to the herbs, a startled cricket hiding in the greenery stopped singing.

Back in the kitchen I looked at all I had assembled for dinner that night. In the space of less than 20, maybe 30 minutes, I had been to a specialty food store downtown where the Chef had offered some yummy suggestions for using his fare, out to a country market, back to the local grocery store on the outskirts of town and home where I finished with gathering the basil from my back yard. And silenced a cricket.

Do you think we take this way of doing things for granted? I suppose, but that makes it really nice when you can immerse yourself in the experience. I really enjoyed my meal that night because of that heightened awareness.

Back in the kitchen, the cricket singing in the garden again, I put some water on to boil and then returned to the back step to husk a cob of corn. The husks went in the compost.

Back in the kitchen again, I cut a medium thick slice of multi-grain bread and while it was toasting put the corn into the boiling water. I drained a Bocconcini ball and sliced it and the tomato thickly.

When the toast was done, I drizzled it with a little truffle oil, topped it with the tomato slices, Bocconcini and slivers of basil. Just hold three or four basil leaves in your fingers and snip-snip-snip with the scissors. Drizzle with a little more oil and a tad of balsamic vinegar. If you clipped the recipe for the balsamic reduction a few weeks back, use that. It is soooo good here!

Lift the corn from the water with some tongs, drain and plate it beside the truffle oil salad. If you like, bring a bit of butter or non-hydrogenated margarine to the table for the corn. (Naturally, that's what I did. But just a bit!) The colours jumped from the plate and the taste was sublime -- summer sublime!

The olive oil with white truffle flavour has a wonderful nutty taste. It isn't intended for cooking but can be added to hot food just before serving -- the aromatics are lost to heat. You can try it on pasta and rice

dishes, in a salad dressing or if you like bruschetta it can add a new dimension if you drizzle it on the toasted bread first like I did above. It is expensive but you will notice that you only need a little. And, of course as Chef Tony says, "Use your Imagination!"

Chef Tony did the favour I was asking on behalf of the Summer Festival and then, if you can believe it, I had the nerve to ask if he would share one of his recipes with you. He gave me the recipe he used in the Chili Blowout last February. Lots of you liked this chili recipe but he intends to enter a different one in 2007 so, Voila! he shares.....

Of course, you may think it is too hot for this right now, but September is just a few weeks away. And maybe someone in the family is going on a fishing trip? This makes a healthy dish to take along for the gang.

P.S. He didn't give me instructions -- you know what Chefs are like -- they find it so easy to put a dish together. So if there are any mistakes there, they are mine.

CHEF TONY'S SANTA FE CHICKEN CHILE WITH WHITE BEANS

1/2 cup navy beans, cooked (beans double in volume plus a bit, when they are cooked)
1 slice bacon, chopped
1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cubed
1 cup red bell pepper, chopped
3/4 cup sliced celery
1/2 cup chopped red onion
1/4 cup chopped scallions (green onions)
3 Tb tomato paste
1 1/2 lb tomatoes, peeled
1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
1/2 tsp ground cumin
1/2 tsp dry mustard
2 small bay leaves
1/2 tsp thyme
1/4 tsp Kosher salt (big pinch table salt)
1/4 tsp pepper
1/4 cup olive oil (or whatever you have)
3/4 tsp peeled and minced fresh garlic

Prepare navy beans according to package directions or follow these cooking techniques and tips:

Broad beans contain several indigestible sugars. Once these sugars dissolve in the soaking

or cooking water, they can be drained away. Replacing the water several times improves beans digestibility.

Cover beans with cold water and soak overnight in a cool place - the refrigerator is best. Drain and rinse.

Cover with fresh cold water and 1 tsp oil which helps reduce foaming.

Do not add salt or any acidic ingredient at this point as that will toughen the bean.

Bring to a boil and cook for 5 minutes.

If you wish to reduce gassiness even more, drain and rinse again.

Return beans to pot, cover with fresh cold water and bring to the boil.

Reduce the heat and simmer until tender. The time depends on the age, type and quality of the bean. Navy beans can take up to 3 hours and that's if they are fresh! If they are really old, forget it! I once cooked some navy beans for 9 hours - and they were still leathery.

OR
Substitute 1 to 1/4 cups canned beans. Drain and rinse canned beans thoroughly to improve their digestibility. Now that's more like it -- 2 minutes and they're ready!

Heat a large skillet or heavy bottomed pot over medium heat. Cook bacon to render the fat. Add the chicken. Cook turning a few times to brown and cook through. Remove chicken and bacon; set aside.

Add half the oil to the pan and when hot add pepper, celery, onion and scallions. Cook about 5 minutes on medium heat until softened. Using a rubber spatula, remove from pan and set aside.

Add remaining oil to skillet and when hot add the spices and garlic. Stir constantly for 30 to 45 seconds. When the scent of the spices is rich and full, -- *get your nose over the pot and give it a gentle sniff* -- stir in tomato paste and tomatoes and heat through. Return vegetables, chicken and bacon to the pot. Simmer together for 30 minutes. Serve with crusty bread.

See you at the Summer Festival this weekend.

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