

Italian Springtime Supper

Written by Debbi Covington
Wednesday, 15 April 2009 14:48

In Sicily, the land of orange and lemon groves, Orange, Frisee and Black Olive Salad is often served.



It's a fine example of the Italian passion for sweet and savory combinations. The refreshing salad is delightful when served with traditional Olive Oil and Garlic Bruschetta. Bruschetta is simple and easy to make. The most important thing is not to overcook the garlic – it must on no account turn brown or it will taste bitter. Risotto is a classic Italian dish that is both comforting and luxurious. The charm of Spring Risotto with Herbs is found in the delicate flavors and colors of spring. The vegetables are small and sweet, the herbs fresh and fragrant. Don't be tempted to skimp on the herbs! Not only do they impart intense flavor, they add a beautiful touch of spring green! Traditional risotto begins by sauteing Arborio rice in butter. Then, simmering broth is added one ladle at a time and stirred until the liquid is absorbed. The process continues until all of the broth is added. Arborio rice is a high-starch, short-grained Italian rice. Its high starch content provides creaminess to the risotto that can't be duplicated with any other type of rice. You can find it in most local grocery stores. Serve the risotto piping hot with freshly grated Parmesan cheese. It's a great one-dish meal, but even better accompanied by Lemon and Garlic Roasted Chicken.

Roasting a chicken is easier than you might think. All of the flavors permeate the flesh during its time in the oven, and the smell in the kitchen is wonderful! The leftover chicken is particularly good served cold. Zabaglione is a great Italian dessert to finish your meal! There's nothing quite as sensual as warm zabaglione served straight from the pan. Many chefs like to beat it in a copper bowl so that it cooks quickly. The secret is not to let the mixture get too hot, but still hot enough to cook and thicken the egg yolks. It must be made at the last moment, but it doesn't take long and is well worth the effort!

Orange, Frisee and Black Olive Salad

For the salad:

2 oranges
1 red onion
4 ounces frisee (about 2 cups)

For the dressing:

Grated zest and juice of 1 orange
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh basil leaves, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons black olives, finely chopped
2 sun-dried tomatoes in oil, finely chopped
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

To make the dressing, put the orange zest and juice, olive oil, basil, olives and sun-dried tomatoes in a large bowl. Mix well, season with salt and pepper, and set aside to develop the flavors. Peel the oranges with a sharp knife, removing all the skin and white pith. Divide into segments. Thinly slice the onion, using a very sharp, thinbladed knife or a mandoline.

Italian Springtime Supper

Written by Debbi Covington
Wednesday, 15 April 2009 14:48

Immediately toss the onion and oranges in the dressing to prevent discoloration. Let marinate in a cool place for 15 minutes. Place the frisee on a plate and pile the dressed orange and onion mixture in the center, spooning any remaining dressing over the top. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Olive Oil and Garlic Bruschetta

4 large garlic cloves
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
Pinch of hot red pepper flakes
1/4 cup chopped Italian parsley
4 slices sourdough bread

Slice the garlic lengthwise into paper-thin slices. Heat the olive oil in a small saucepan and stir in the garlic. Cook until the garlic starts to give off its aroma and is golden but not brown. Remove the pan from the heat and mix in the hot pepper flakes and parsley. Cover to keep warm. To make the bruschetta, toast, broil or pan-grill the bread on both sides until lightly browned or toasted. Spoon or brush with the garlicky oil. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Spring Risotto With Herbs

6 cups chicken broth, heated
1 stick unsalted butter
6 scallions, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1-1/4 cups diced carrots
2 cups risotto rice
4 ounces asparagus spears, cut into 1-inch lengths
3/4 cup thin green beans, cut into 1-inch lengths
1/2 cup frozen peas, thawed
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for garnish
1/2 cup chopped mixed fresh herbs: chives, dill, Italian parsley, mint and tarragon
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Place the chicken broth in a heavy saucepan and keep at a gentle simmer. Melt half of the butter in a large, heavy saucepan and add the scallions, garlic and carrots. Cook gently for 5 minutes until the scallions are soft and translucent but not browned. Add the rice and stir until well coated with the butter and heated through. Begin adding the broth, a large ladle at a time, stirring gently until each ladle has been almost absorbed by the rice. The risotto should be kept at a bare simmer throughout cooking. Do not let the rice dry out, add more broth as necessary. After 10 minutes, add the asparagus, green beans and peas and continue cooking until the vegetables are tender and the rice is tender and creamy, but the grains still firm. (This should take 15-30 minutes depending upon the type of rice used. Check the package instructions.) Taste and season well with salt and pepper. Stir in the remaining butter, Parmesan cheese and

Italian Springtime Supper

Written by Debbi Covington
Wednesday, 15 April 2009 14:48

the herbs. Cover and let rest for a couple of minutes. Serve piping hot with freshly grated Parmesan cheese. (You may wish to add a little more broth to the risotto just before serving to loosen it.) Serves 4.

Lemon and Garlic Roasted Chicken

1 free-range chicken (about 3 pounds)
1 lemon, sliced very thinly
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
6 fresh sage leaves, plus extra to make a bed
Olive oil
Sea Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Starting at the vent end of the chicken, slice your hand carefully underneath the skin of each breast to loosen it. Push 3 or 4 slices of lemon under the skin of each breast, slide the garlic slices on top of the lemon, then finish with 3 sage leaves on each side. Smooth down the skin. Rub with olive oil, then salt and pepper. Arrange a bed of sage leaves in a roasting pan and put the remaining lemon slices over them. Place the chicken on top and roast in a preheated 375 degree oven for 20 minutes per pound, plus 20 additional minutes, basting occasionally, until golden brown, crisp, and cooked through. To check for doneness, push a skewer into the thickest part of the thigh. The juices should run clear and golden. If there is any trace of pink, cook for 5-10 minutes longer and check again. Serve hot or chilled. Serves 6.

Zabaglione

2 large egg yolks
2 tablespoons sweet Marsala wine
2 tablespoons sugar
Lady fingers, for dipping

Put the egg yolks, Marsala and sugar in a medium heat-proof bowl (preferably copper or stainless steel) and beat with an electric beater until well blended. Set the bowl over a saucepan of gently simmering water. The bottom should at no time be in contact with the water. Do not let the water boil. Whisk the mixture until it is glossy, pale, light and fluffy and holds a trail when dropped from the whisk. This should take about 5 minutes. Serve immediately in warmed cocktail glasses with lady fingers for dipping. (Chilled Variation: When cooked, remove bowl from heat and whisk until completely cold. In a separate bowl, whisk 2/3 cup heavy cream until floppy, then fold into the cold zabaglione. Spoon into glasses and chill for 2-3 hours before serving.) Serves 2.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.