

NANCY HOWARD'S OPAL BASIL JELLY

1 cup cider vinegar
1 1/2 cups water
2 quarts loosely packed opal basil leaves and flowers
Juice of 1 lemon
6 cups sugar
1 bottle pectin

Make an infusion of the opal basil: Bring to a boil cider vinegar, water, and opal basil leaves. Remove from heat and steep, covered, for 15 minutes. Add the juice of 1 lemon. Pour through a filter (try using a dampened coffee filter).

Bring 2 1/2 cups opal basil infusion and 6 cups sugar to a rolling boil. Add 1 bottle of pectin. Boil 1 minute.

Pour into sterilized jars and top with hot lids. Invert jars for 5 minutes, then stand upright. Allow to cool undisturbed.

When cool, check seals. Any jars that are not sealed should be stored in the refrigerator.

PESTO GENOVESE

2 cups solidly packed basil (lettuce leaf or sweet basil)
1/3 cup pine nuts, lightly toasted
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup freshly grated Romano cheese

3 garlic cloves, chopped
1/2 teaspoon finely chopped fresh marjoram
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

Put all ingredients in a food processor in the order listed, processing lightly after each addition. Slowly add oil, blending all ingredients well.

Store in a tightly covered container in the refrigerator; use within one week. You may also freeze the pesto for up to 3 months.

Use in most recipes calling for pesto; stir a spoonful into fresh tomato soup; add a little to spaghetti sauce; serve over hot pasta with a little extra oil or butter.

Eleanor Davis, Western Pennsylvania Unit

TARRAGON CHICKEN

1 1/2 cups mayonnaise
1 cup chopped fresh parsley
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
1/4 cup fresh tarragon (or 2 tbsp. dried)
1/8 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp. chopped fresh scallions
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 (16-ounce) package phyllo dough
12 chicken breast halves
1 1/3 cups butter, melted
1/2 cup grated fresh Parmesan Cheese

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Combine the first 7 ingredients to make a sauce. Lay down 1 sheet of phyllo dough and brush with melted butter. Put another sheet on top and brush again with melted butter. Put 1 1/2 tablespoons of the sauce on the corner of the dough. Put a chicken breast on the sauce and top it with another tablespoon of the sauce. Fold the dough into an envelope, enclosing the chicken, and brush the top with melted butter. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

Repeat with remaining chicken breasts. (If desired, chicken may be frozen at this point and baked later.) Bake for 25 minutes or until dough is golden brown.

Billie Beadle, Pennsylvania Heartland Unit

ROSE PETAL TRIFLE

2 cups sweetened whipped cream
2 drops rose extract
1 pound cake
1 box vanilla instant pudding (make according to directions on package)
1 cup Rose Petal Jam
Crystallized rose petals

Scent the whipped cream by adding 2 drops of rose extract. (Do not add more and be sure you are using rose extract, not rose water.)

Using a large attractive glass bowl, layer slices of the pound cake, rose petal jam, vanilla pudding, and rose-scented whipped cream. End with a layer of whipped cream and garnish with crystallized rose petals.

Rose petals may be crystallized by first rinsing rose petals (use only those that have never been sprayed with pesticides), then allowing them to drain until dry. Mix a little powdered egg with water to a viscous consistency. Dip rose petals into egg white blend, then into a fine white sugar, coating both sides. Place petals on a wire rack and allow to dry completely. Store in a tightly covered container, separating layers with waxed paper.

Marie G. Fowler, Arkansas Unit

ROSE PETAL JAM

1 cup strongly scented rose petals, tightly packed (use only unsprayed, organic roses)
1 cup water
1 cup sugar
1 cup honey
2 tbsp. lemon juice

1 package pectin, plus 3/4 cup water Snip off the white base of each rose petal and put the petals in a blender with the water, honey, and sugar.

Mix the pectin and 3/4 cup water in a saucepan and bring to a boil, boiling hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly.

Add the pectin mixture to the rose mixture in the blender and process until well blended. Pour into 4 sterilized pint jars and seal. Must be either refrigerated or frozen.

Marie G. Fowler, Arkansas Unit

SOFRITO

1 head garlic
2 seeded green peppers
2 medium onions
6 tbsp. fresh basil
6 tbsp. fresh oregano
6 tbsp. fresh rosemary
6 tbsp. fresh cilantro, or more to taste
White wine vinegar

Blend all ingredients with enough vinegar to make a thick paste.

Adjust seasoning with freshly ground black pepper as yo wish.

Keep refrigerated.

Dorothy Bonitz, North Carolina Unit

Tester's note: I received a gift of a prepared jar of Sofrito. It is fabulous, fresh-tasting condiment for use with bean dishes, meats, eggs or just on a cracker.

POLENTA TRIANGLES WITH ROSEMARY AND WALNUTS

2 1/2 cups chicken broth
2/3 cup cornmeal (coarse-grain)
3/4 cup grated Gruyere cheese
3 tbsp. butter
1/3 cup walnuts, toasted and finely chopped
1 1/2 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
8 walnut halves
White pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Butter a 9-inch glass pie plate. Bring broth to a boil in a medium saucepan; then gradually whisk in cornmeal. Reduce heat and whisk constantly until mixture thickens, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Add cheese and 1 1/2 tablespoons butter, stirring until melted. Stir in chopped walnuts and rosemary. Season with White pepper>

Transfer polenta to glass pie plate and spread around evenly. Cool until firm, at least 1 hour.

Cut polenta into triangles, dot with butter, place walnut half in center of each triangle and bake for 10-12 minutes, until golden brown.

Kay Wagstaff, North Carolina Unit

HERB HONEY

1 cup honey
2 spring herb (rosemary, basil, lavender or other)

Combine honey and herbs. Bring to a simmer in a small saucepan. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Store in a glass jar in the refrigerator.

Debra Seibert, Rocky Mountain Unit

JULIET'S CHEESE LOG

8 oz. cream cheese
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 tbsp. prepared horseradish
1/3 cup chopped Spanish olives
4-5 dried beef slices

In a medium bowl, thoroughly blend cream cheese, Parmesan cheese and horseradish. Gently stir the chopped olives into the bowl. Shape the mixture into a log. Roll the cheese log in the dried beef slices until the outside is covered. Wrap in waxed paper and aluminum foil and chill.

Serve thinly sliced on assorted crackers. Also makes a good filling for cream cheese sandwiches.

Joyce Brobst, Pennsylvania Heartland Unit

POTATO SALAD WITH HORSERADISH

5 pounds red potatoes

2 cups mayonnaise

2 cups sour cream

1/4 c wine vinegar

1/4 c sugar

1/4 c freshly grated horseradish

3 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley

2 tbsp. fresh dill

Scrub potatoes and cut into bite-sized pieces. Boil in salted water until tender. Drain and toss with remaining ingredients while still warm but not hot.

Lorraine Kiefer, South Jersey Unit

STEVE'S PORK TENDERLOIN MARINADE

1/2 cup balsamic vinegar

1/2 cup olive oil

1/2 cup fresh rosemary

1 tablespoons sugar

2 cloves garlic

Puree all ingredients. Place meat in re-closeable plastic bag with the marinade and refrigerator for 2-3 hours or overnight.

Marilyn Rhinehalt, Western Reserve Unit

RAINBOW SALSA

1/2 cup diced fresh pineapple

1/2 cup diced fresh mango or peach

1/2 cup diced green onion

1/2 cup diced green bell pepper

1/2 cup diced, seeded tomato

Juice of 1 lime

1 diced jalapeno pepper

1 tablespoon cilantro

Place all ingredients in a processor and pulse until finely chopped but not pureed.

Jennifer F. Jordon, Tidewater Unit

BASIL ZUCCHINI BAKE

6 strips bacon
3 tablespoons bacon drippings
½ stick butter
2 medium onions, chopped
5 medium zucchini, sliced
1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
2 cups fresh tomatoes (canned may be substituted when out of season)
1 cup grated cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In a large skillet, fry the bacon strips. Drain the bacon, reserving the fat and crumble the bacon.

In 3 tablespoons bacon drippings and butter, sauté chopped onion until slightly browned. Add sliced zucchini. Cook 3-4 minutes over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Add sugar, salt and tomatoes. Cover and simmer until squash is tender. Add fresh basil

Pour mixture into a greased 2 quart casserole. Sprinkle with bacon and grated cheese. Bake for 20 minutes.

Mary J. Johnson, Roanoke Valley Unit

RED PEPPER RELISH

4 cups finely chopped sweet red peppers (“lipstick pimientos are the best”)
2 tablespoons sea salt
1½ cups cider vinegar
¾ cup sugar
1 teaspoon fresh fennel seeds

Mix peppers and salt in a glass bowl, let stand overnight in the refrigerator. Drain peppers. Combine peppers with remaining ingredients in a stainless steel pot. Bring to a boil, lower heat and cook, stirring occasionally, until mixture thickens slightly. If liquid boils down too much, cover the pan.

Spoon relish into sterilized 8-ounce jars. Screw on tops and process in a boiling water bath for 30 minutes. Yields 3 jars

Nancy B. Hanst, Western Pennsylvania Unit

RICE PILAF WITH HERBS

¼ pound butter
4 ounces uncooked angel-hair pasta
26 ounces vegetable or chicken broth (in cans)
1 cup raw basmati rice
2 tablespoons fresh thyme, sage, parsley, tarragon or herb of choice (may also use a combination of herbs depending on what is in season)
Salt and pepper to taste

Optional:

1 cup shredded cooked chicken

Place butter in a large sauté pan, heating over medium heat. Break up pasta and add to butter, quickly heating until pasta just begins to brown.

Carefully stir in chicken or vegetable broth. Heat to boiling, then reduce to a simmer. Add 1 cup rice, herbs of choice, salt and pepper.

Cover and cook until rice has absorbed liquid. This usually takes about 30 minutes, but follow the directions on the rice.

If desired, 1 cup shredded cooked chicken may be stirred in. Heat through and serve with a parsley garnish.

Margaret (Peggy) Ellmore, Virginia Commonwealth Unit

CHICKEN WITH LIME AND SPICES

4 boneless chicken breasts

2 tablespoons olive oil

Marinade

3 tablespoons fresh lime juice

1 teaspoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon turmeric

1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint

Combine all marinade ingredients in a bowl. Cut chicken breasts into 5/8 inch strips. Add chicken strips to marinade, cover, and allow to marinate several hours or overnight in the refrigerator. Drain chicken.

Heat olive oil in a medium pan, add chicken. Cook over medium-high heat for 5-10 minutes, until lightly browned and tender.

Mark Ragland and Scott Norton, Virginia Commonwealth Unit

TUSCAN STEW

3 cups uncooked whole-wheat penne pasta
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 cups minced onion
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 tablespoon fresh thyme
1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage
3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
2 pounds fresh spinach, cleaned and chopped
2 (14.5 ounce) cans diced tomatoes
2 (15 ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
Fresh ground black pepper to taste
3 tablespoons fresh grated Parmesan
2 teaspoons red wine vinegar

Heat pot of salted water for the pasta. When it boils rapidly, add the pasta, give it a stir, and cook until tender, according to package directions. Drain pasta and set aside. Heat the oil in a large deep saucepan. Add the onion and half the prepared garlic and sauté for 5 minutes over medium heat, stirring often.

Add spinach, tomatoes, remaining garlic, and salt. Stir, cover and let simmer over medium heat for 10 minutes. Add beans, cooked pasta and herbs. When heated through, stir in a generous amount of black pepper, the grated Parmesan, and vinegar. Serve in bowls with extra cheese and a cruet of additional vinegar.

Dorothy Spencer, North Carolina Unit

ROASTED TOMATO PASTA SAUCE WITH FRESH HERBS

2 tablespoons olive oil
4 large tomatoes, halved
1 large red onion, sliced
3 cloves garlic, sliced
2 tablespoons fresh basil
2 tablespoons fresh oregano
1 tablespoon fresh lemon thyme
1/2 cup sliced Kalamata olives

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Coat the bottom of a roasting pan with the olive oil. Separate the onion into rings and layer them on the bottom of the pan. Scatter the fresh herbs over the onions, then spread olives over the pan. Lay tomatoes cut side down on top, packing closely. Roast for 30-40 minutes. The skins should just be browning. Remove from the oven. When cooled a bit, lift off the tomatoes skins. Pulse the vegetables briefly in a blender; the sauce should be chunky.

Serve over hot pasta

Marilyn Kushner, Northern California Unit

CARDAMOM APPLES WITH BAY LEAF CREAM

4 apples, peeled, halved and cored
1 orange
1 cup sugar
1 cup water
Seeds from 8 cardamom pods
1/4 cup plus 2 teaspoons brown sugar
4 tablespoons butter, cut in pieces
1/2 cup heavy cream
2 fresh bay leaves
2 teaspoons brown sugar

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Remove zest from orange and cut into thin strips. Juice the orange.

Place sugar, water and cardamom seeds into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Add halved apples and simmer for 3 minutes. Remove from heat and allow apples to cool in the liquid. Remove apples from liquid and drain.

Heat cream and 2 teaspoons brown sugar in a small sauce pan, just to the boiling point. Remove from heat, add fresh bay leaves, cover, and allow to steep for 30 minutes. Remove bay leaves and chill the cream in the refrigerator.

Combine 1/4 cup brown sugar and butter in a small baking dish. Carefully lay the apples on top of brown sugar, flat side down. Pour orange juice and zest over apples. Bake for 10 minutes.

Turn apples in the orange syrup and return to oven for 10 minutes. Remove apples from the syrup and place in individual serving dishes. Drizzle a little of the orange syrup over the apples and add a spoonful of bay leaf cream in the apple hollow. Yields 8 servings.

Katherine K. Schlosser, North Carolina Unit