



At Home With Annie

Valentine's Day is just around the corner and with it thoughts of candlelit dinners and scrumptious food shared with our most favorite person in the world. It doesn't have to be a dinner out shared with every other couple in the nation thinking the same thing, but can easily be a relaxed dinner at home. At your own pace, without the long wait for you table and the waiter interrupting the first conversation you've had together in a month. Tuck the kids into bed early, share a nice glass of a favorite, full cabernet and then have a lovely, private dinner for two. Here is a wonderful meal for you and your sweetheart made with your own two hands. This menu will let you spend more time with your beloved and less time in the kitchen. Much of it can be prepped ahead of time and assembled when you are ready to dine. Make the mini cakes ahead of time and keep them in the refrigerator. Add at least 10 minutes to the cooking time. I wish you happy hearts and full bellies around your kitchen tables.

Warm Spinach Salad w/ Sherry Vinaigrette and Goat Cheese

2 large crostini
2 oz. goat cheese
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 slices prosciutto, diced
1 teaspoon minced garlic
6 oz. baby spinach
2 teaspoons sherry
2 teaspoons sherry vinegar
1/2 teaspoon honey
1/4 teaspoon salt
freshly ground black pepper

Crostini

Crostini are essentially slices of French bread drizzled with olive oil and toasted in the oven. They're easy to make and really dress up any appetizers. I'll often make an extra loaf of bread so that I can make crostini to serve with appetizers. Slice a loaf of French bread in approximately 1/2-inch slices. Place them on a cookie pan and drizzle with olive oil. Bake at 350° until golden brown, turning once (about 15 minutes).

Place one crostini on each plate. Sprinkle the crostini with goat cheese. Combine sherry, sherry vinegar, honey and salt in a small bowl. Heat a medium sauté pan over medium heat. Have the spinach ready next to your pan. Heat the oil and sauté the prosciutto briefly. Add the garlic and sauté briefly (only 30 seconds to 1 minute). Add the spinach to the pan and turn with tongs to insure that the garlic stops cooking. Add the sherry mixture and turn until the spinach is bright green and almost all wilted. Divide into two equal portions and place the spinach on top of the crostini and goat cheese. Grind pepper on top and garnish with a small herb sprig.

Serves 2

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Lemon Lobster with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

This recipe was a summer favorite at Jessica's Restaurant when I was a sous chef under Chef Hans Bucher. It is also rich enough for a special occasion dinner. It's important to have all the ingredients ready and on hand before you start. Don't start this one until the pasta is in the water and you've given it a good stir.

1 tablespoon butter
2 teaspoons shallots, minced
1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil, oil drained, chopped
8 oz. cooked lobster meat (approximately one 1 1/2 pound lobster)
1/4 teaspoon salt
A few grinds on the pepper mill
1/3 cup white wine
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1 tablespoon butter
Grated Parmesan cheese and minced parsley for garnish

Melt the butter in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the sun-dried tomatoes; sauté for one minute, then add the shallots and cook until soft. When the shallots are done add the lobster meat and sauté for 1 minute. Add the white wine and lemon juice; cook for another 30 seconds and remove from heat. Gently stir in the butter until it's completely incorporated. Serve over pasta and garnish with the cheese and parsley.

Serves 2



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Mini Apple Ginger Upside Down Cake

You'll only need 1/3 of this batter if you are cooking dessert for just the two of you. Either pour into all six ramekins or pour the remaining batter into a 9-inch cake pan and save it for breakfast the next morning.

4 tablespoons unsalted butter
2/3 cup packed brown sugar
2 medium apples, peeled, cored, and cut into ¼-inch wedges
1 1/3 cups cake flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 cup molasses
3/4 cup boiling water
1 large egg

Preheat oven to 300°. Butter and flour the sides and bottom of either 6 ramekins or 2 ramekins and one 9-inch round cake pan, tapping out the excess flour. In a small saucepan, melt the butter and sauté the apples. Add the brown sugar, stirring until smooth. Divide the apple mixture evenly between the ramekins.

Using a fork, stir 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda vigorously into the molasses, until the molasses has lightened, about 1 to 2 minutes. In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the molasses to the creamed butter and sugar then mix until fully combined. Sift flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves into the bowl and stir. Add the water; mix until just smooth. Finally add the egg mixing thoroughly. The batter will be very thin. Pour the batter into the ramekins; bake until a toothpick comes out clean, about 45 minutes. Cool 5 minutes and then invert the cakes onto a serving plate. Serve the cakes warm with whipped cream.

Makes 6

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