

Winter 2012

## F901 - Comfort Foods: Recipes

Each of the four classes in this winter's term cooking class involved at least two recipes. We had to work within the constraints of 90 minutes including eating time and the necessity of getting out of the main room before the next class, a computer class, arrived. So the two recipes had to work together as to prep time and cooking/baking time. Happily with everyone pitching in, we managed to get the food done and good, the main purpose. Recipes presented here are the basic recipes for an average number of people, while ours had to be multiplied for 12 lunchers. Occasionally we had a little left over but none got thrown away. Members of the class voted on what foods to make for the last three sessions.

### Session One: Potato Leek Soup

Melt three tablespoons butter in large saucepan, add 3 leeks, thinly sliced and rinsed of any sand. Include chopped up medium onion and cook, stirring until onions are limp and just slightly brown. Add 6 to 8 thinly sliced russet potatoes (we used a mandolin to get them really thin) and pour in enough chicken broth to just barely cover the potatoes. Continue cooking until potatoes are tender. Mash and stir potatoes until desired consistency is reached and be sure to avoid scorching by keeping the soup moving. Add a cup of cream to the mixture, salt and pepper and let cook for 15 minutes more. You can use an emulsion blender to smooth out the mixture.

Brownies: We used a packaged brownie mix.

### Session Two: White bean and ham soup. (we used Great Northerns)

A recipe for bean soup always includes the requirement to soak the beans first for several hours, if not overnight. So I had to do this at home. I also cooked up ham hocks (very meaty, acquired from Wegmans') in a pot of hot water with herbes de Provence and kept the broth from that once the meat on the hocks was falling off the bone. I arrived at class then with soaked up beans, cooked ham hock and broth. In class, students chopped up a small onion, a stalk of celery, a carrot, and a clove of garlic. This was dumped into the pot of stock with the beans. The ham was removed from the bone and held aside until after an hour when the beans had begun to soften and then all put together, heating through. Checked for seasoning. Be careful as some hams are saltier than others. Serve with a little chopped parsley on top.

Old Fashioned Egg Pie: We made this because we originally had wanted custard; however, custard in a baking dish takes a long time to bake and in individual ramekins, involves a bain marie and I didn't want to fool with that and a bunch of small dishes. So I found that making custard pie was a faster alternative. We made two of them, good thing as they were very good and one would not have been enough.

I used prepared pie dough (store brand and Pillsbury's) and lined two pie plates with the dough, building up the edges to accommodate the very liquid filling and to keep it from spilling.

For the filling: we scalded milk on the stove (for one pie 2 1/2 cups) and slowly added that to a mixture of beaten up eggs (4), sugar (3/4 cup), vanilla (1 tsp.), and a dash of salt. Actually, I made a mixture of a little scalded milk with some of the egg mixture and then poured that into the bowl of egg, following with the balance of the milk. I was concerned about the too hot milk curdling the room temperature eggs. This was then poured into the pie shells and moved very carefully to the oven that was preheated at 400 degrees. Pies cooked for 25 minutes, and came out all puffed up and golden. A minute or two of cooling and then cut into some very delightful wedges. With whipped cream and raspberries and banana, this was a divine dessert.

I had brought in some from-scratch hot cocoa, another comfort food.

### Session Three:

#### Apple Dumplings:

These turned out really well, despite the difficulties we encountered putting them together. Since we did that, I've learned a few tricks that will help if you decide to make your own.

Each person was given an apple, in this case a small Fuji apple, and a piece of dough. The dough was one quarter of a Pillsbury pie pastry and it was large enough to accommodate the apple. The apples were peeled, cut in half and then the core removed leaving a tunnel in which to pour brown sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg and a glob of butter. The problem was that the apple split into several pieces rather than a neat half when we attempted to core it. I've learned that if you take a melon baller and cut out the core with that, and then follow up with chiseling out the top piece of core, it shouldn't split. Wet the edges of the dough with water and holding the apple together at the center, bring up two opposite corners and squeeze the dough together, then do the same to the other opposite corners Seal all around so that no part of the apple is exposed. Place in a pan and pour simple syrup over it. Assuming you will make more than one, perhaps four, use a square brownie pan.

Simple syrup: This is a very useful easy to make syrup that can be used for numerous recipes; it becomes a glaze when it hardens so it is nice over any unbaked fruit pie, like a strawberry pie. In a pan, put one cup of water and one cup of sugar. For the apple glaze, add 1/4 tsp each of cinnamon and nutmeg and bring the whole thing to a boil. Add 2 T of butter and stir until the butter melts. Let cool. Apply to apples, sprinkle with sugar and put apples in the oven. Bake at 375 degrees for about 35 minutes until golden. Pour half and half over each serving to gild the lily.

Tomato Soup: I wanted something to go with the risotto that would be comforting and easy to make. This is insanely easy and works out well.

Combine in a large pan one carton of chicken stock, one large can of crushed tomatoes, and bring to just below a boil. Stir in 1 cup of heavy cream and lower heat to simmer. Add a little salt and pepper and simmer gently for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally to keep from sticking. Using an immersion blender if you have one, puree soup and garnish with a chiffonade of fresh basil. You could also top with crusty bread, or freshly ground black pepper. Maybe a dollop of sour cream.

Mushroom Risotto:

In a saucepan, warm chicken broth over low heat. You'll need about one carton for a regular size recipe for four people, not what we used when cooking for twelve people.

In a large skillet, in a little olive oil, sauté an eight-ounce package of mushrooms, wiped clean and sliced. I used Baby Bellas because they are nice and meaty but you can use other varieties as you like. Once browned and soft, remove the mushrooms and set aside.

In the same skillet, put more oil and add two garlic cloves or shallots, diced, and sauté for just about a minute. Do not allow to burn. Add 1-1/2 cups of Arborio rice and stir until the rice is golden. Stir in 1/2 cup of dry white wine and cook for a few minutes until the wine is evaporated. Then begin the process of adding the broth, two ladlefuls at a time and stirring until that liquid is absorbed. Then add two more ladlefuls and again stir until all liquid is absorbed. Do not leave your post, stir constantly and continue to add broth until all is gone and the rice is al dente. Soft with a slight crunch.

Final steps: add the mushrooms, salt and pepper to taste, 3 tablespoons of chopped chives, 4 tablespoons of butter, and 1/3 cup of freshly ground parmesan cheese. Then beat the heck out of the whole thing until it gets really creamy. Serve. I'm told this doesn't keep for the next day but when we tried this at home, the leftover rice was still good.

N.B.: If you prefer to make risotto with something other than mushrooms, like peas, winter squash, asparagus, etc or even shrimp, as with the mushrooms, the added item should be readied first. Par cook the veggie, thaw frozen peas. For shrimp, the small ones can be added at the end if raw and within those few final moments, the shrimp should turn pink and firm.

Session Four:

Shepherd's Pie:

We made this with lamb, which I understand is the authentic meat that the Brits use, not beef when the result is called "cottage pie." And never add cheese.

Basically this is a stew with mashed potatoes on top. Begin with browning one pound of ground lamb (Wegman's carries this while some supermarkets don't). When brown, remove lamb from pan with a slotted spoon, and drain off

most of the fat. Leave a little in which to brown the veggies. Sauté one chopped onion, two stalks celery and two carrots, and 2 cloves minced garlic in a large skillet. Add the lamb back into the skillet, cover with beef stock, add some fresh thyme or rosemary, season with salt and pepper. When the vegetables have begun to soften, make a slurry of two tablespoons of cornstarch and 1/4 cup of hot liquid. Add this to the mixture and stir it all in, continuing to stir until the liquid thickens.

Meanwhile, since we did not make mashed potatoes from scratch, but with prepared mashed potatoes that I purchased from the supermarket, we put the potatoes in a pan and added a little milk and warmed them to make them soft and spreadable. We poured the meat mixture into a large pan, but you can use a baking dish, and then spread the mashed potatoes over the whole thing to the very edges of the baking vessel. Smoothed it over and created a nice basket weave pattern in the topping with the tines of a fork. We could have made an egg wash to spread on top to improve the browning but we didn't. Popped into the oven at 400 degrees and baked about 30 minutes. We should have let it go a few minutes longer to get browner but we were short on time. Cut into portions and enjoy. You can always garnish with a sprig of rosemary or thyme, whatever you used in the stew.

#### Rice Pudding:

We started this too late for it to finish as I would have liked, but despite the fact that it was soupy, it was still very good. Rather than make a baked rice pudding, which would have taken more time than we had, we did a stovetop version. We didn't include raisins because my raisins weren't very fresh so it went without the raisins. You can add some if you like. Recipe serves about four people.

In a heavy bottomed pan, bring 2 ½ cups of milk, 1/3 cup of short grain rice (I used Arborio) and a pinch of salt to a boil over high heat. Reduce to low and simmer until the rice is tender, about 25 minutes. Stir frequently to prevent the rice from sticking to the bottom of the pan.

In a small mixing bowl, stir together 1 egg and 1/4 cup of brown sugar until well mixed. Add a half-cup of the hot rice mixture to the egg mixture, a tablespoon at a time, vigorously whisking to incorporate. Add egg mixture back into the saucepan of rice and milk and stir on low heat for ten minutes or so until thickened. Do not allow to boil. Remove from heat. Add one teaspoon of vanilla and ¼ teaspoon of cinnamon and the raisins if desired. Serve warm or cold.