

Thursdays in the Kitchen: Cooking with Summer Tomatoes

July 11th, 2013

Jamon Serrano on Toast with Red Tomato Preserves

Makes as many as you want to make!

Have you ever tried Serrano Ham? It's a Spanish beauty. We regard this ham with nearly the same respect the Spaniards do and serve it sliced – just thicker than prosciutto – with especially delicious things like a perfectly ripe avocado or with sweet plump Red Tomato Preserves.

These toasts are so good we eat them for breakfast in the morning with café con leche. And then again at the end of the day with a glass of dry white wine or really cold fino sherry:

Brush small, thin slices of crusty bread with some really good olive oil and toast them in a preheated 400 degree oven until golden on each side. Let the toasts cool. Drape each toast with a slice (or half a slice if a whole one is too much) of Serrano ham. Top the toasts with small spoonfuls of Red Tomato Preserves.

Variation: Serve thin slices of Manchego Cheese on Toasts topped with a small spoonful of Red Tomato Preserves.

Canal House Red Tomato Preserves

Makes 4-6 half-pints

The tomato is, after all, a fruit. Actually, it is one of the most luscious fruits around. We will be preserving them every which way this summer while gardens and farmers' markets are full up with the lovelies.

5 pounds ripe tomatoes

2 cups granulated cane sugar

Rind and juice of 2 lemons

A fat 3-inch finger fresh ginger, peeled and thinly sliced

1 stick cinnamon

1. Plunge tomatoes into a pot of boiling water for 20 seconds to loosen their skins. Remove the tomatoes from the pot and when cool enough to handle, peel off the skin. Halve tomatoes crosswise and squeeze out the seeds. Put tomatoes, sugar, lemon rind and juice, ginger, and cinnamon into a large, heavy pot. Cook over medium heat until it comes to a boil, stirring from time to time with a wooden spoon to keep the sugar from burning while it melts. Stir gently so the fruit doesn't break up too much. Reduce heat to low and gently simmer until tomatoes look slightly translucent and the liquid has thickened, about 1 hour. Using a slotted spoon, divide the

tomatoes between 4-6 hot sterilized jars. Increase the heat to high and reduce the juices until thick and syrupy, about 5 minutes more. Remove the cinnamon stick. Divide the syrup between the jars and seal. Allow the jars to cool undisturbed for several hours. These preserves will keep in the refrigerator for a few months.

Caprese Skewers with Balsamic Drizzle

Ingredients

1 cup balsamic vinegar

cherry or grape tomatoes

mini mozzarella cheese balls (could use regular sized ball, and cut into bite-sized pieces)

fresh basil leaves, cut in half if large

salt & pepper

toothpicks

Directions:

Bring balsamic vinegar up to a boil in a saucepan, then lower heat to medium and simmer until it's the consistency of very thin maple syrup, about 10 minutes. Pour into a bowl and let cool. Cut tomatoes in half. Thread a mini mozzarella cheese ball, basil leaf (fold in half if large) and a tomato half onto a tooth pick. Repeat with remaining ingredients. Sprinkle with salt & pepper, then drizzle cooled balsamic reduction on top.

Salmon & Melting Cherry Tomatoes

Serves 4

Ingredients:

Good olive oil

1 cup chopped sweet onion, such as Vidalia

2 teaspoons minced garlic (2 cloves)

2 cups (1 pint) cherry or grape tomatoes, halved through the stem

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 ½ tablespoons good balsamic vinegar

1 (2-pound) salmon fillet cut crosswise into 4 pieces

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Heat 3 tablespoons of the olive oil in a medium (10-inch) sauté pan. Add the onion and sauté over medium-low heat for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until very tender but not browned. Add the garlic and sauté for 1 more minute. Stir in the tomatoes, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook over medium-low heat for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the liquid evaporates and the tomato sauce thickens slightly. Off the heat, stir in the vinegar and basil.

Meanwhile, place a large (12-inch) cast-iron pan over high heat for 5 minutes. Brush the salmon all over with olive oil, sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper, and place it skin side up in the pan. Cook the fish for 3 to 4 minutes without moving them, until browned. Turn the salmon skin side down with a small metal spatula and transfer the pan to the oven for 8 minutes. (The salmon will not be completely cooked through). Remove the fish to a serving platter, cover with aluminum foil, and allow to rest for 5 minutes.

Reheat the tomatoes, season to taste, and serve hot, warm, or at room temperature along with the salmon.

Basic Pie Crust

Who doesn't love pie crust? This recipe is great because it yields a flaky crust, and a flavorful one too (it's ALL BUTTER). Don't forget: it is always best to roll out cold dough because the dough won't toughen as it would if it were warm. Also, this recipe will yield enough dough for one 9 inch two-crust pie or two 9 inch single crust pies. Or, if you're like me, enough dough for one thick-crust pie with lots of embellishments and some extra dough left over for snacking on – raw or with cinnamon and sugar in the oven.

Ingredients:

2 ½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting

1 tsp. kosher salt

1 tsp granulated sugar

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cold, cut into ½ inch or smaller cubes

ice water as needed

Directions:

In a large bowl, whisk flour, salt and sugar until combined. Add chilled butter. Cut the butter into the flour mixture with a pastry blender. Continue to cut the butter into the flour until the contents of the bowl look like coarse meal. The butter should be in very small chunks, the largest of which will be smaller than a pea. You are now ready to add the ice water.

Begin to add ice water to the mixture in small dribbles. In total you will use around 1/3 to ½ cup water. This amount will vary each time you make the recipe... so don't pay attention to the amount, pay attention to the saturation of your dough! After you've added a few dribbles of water, cut the dough again with your dough cutter. The flour granules should begin to stick together, and the dough should start amassing at this point. If not, add more dribbles of water and repeat. Try to work with the dough quickly, as the more you work the dough with the cutter the tougher it will get.

To check if the dough is ready for the final step, grab some in your palm and squeeze. If the dough holds together and doesn't fall apart, you're in good shape. Turn the dough onto a large sheet of plastic wrap and, holding the edges of the plastic wrap in your hands, gently kneed the dough into a cohesive mass. Pat into a ½ inch round, and refrigerate for 30 minutes or until needed.

This dough keeps in the fridge for 3 days and in the freezer for 3 months.

Tomato Tart

A tomato tart, layered with roasted garlic and fontina cheese, is a perfect way to use the garden's bounty. Serves 8.

Ingredients:

1 head garlic

3 tablespoons olive oil

All-purpose flour, for dusting

½ recipe Basic Pie Crust

2 ounces Italian fontina cheese, grated (about ½ cup)

1 ½ pounds firm but ripe tomatoes (4 medium) cored and sliced ¼ inch thick

Coarse salt and freshly ground pepper

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place garlic on a piece of aluminum foil. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon oil. Wrap to enclose garlic in foil, and place on a small baking sheet. Bake until soft and golden brown and the tip of a knife easily pierces the flesh, about 45 minutes. Remove from oven; set aside. Raise oven temperature to 450 degrees. When garlic is cool enough to handle, using either your hands or the dull end of a large knife, squeeze the cloves out of their skins and into a small bowl; mash with a fork, and set aside. Discard the papery skins.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to a 1/8-inch-thick circle, about 12 inches in diameter. With a dry pastry brush, brush off the excess flour; roll the dough around the rolling pin, and lift it over a 10-inch tart pan with a removable bottom. Line the pan with the dough, pressing it into the corners. Trim the dough so that it is flush with the edges; transfer to the refrigerator to chill, about 30 minutes.

Spread roasted garlic evenly on the chilled crust. Sprinkle with half of the cheese. Arrange the tomatoes on top of the cheese, in an overlapping circular pattern. Season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with remaining cheese, and drizzle with remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Transfer to oven. Reduce temperature to 400 degrees and bake until crust is golden and tomatoes are soft but still retain their shape, 45 to 55 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool for 20 minutes, and serve warm.