

Here's a culinary approach to some artisan breads

My son Christopher and I enjoy watching the Food Channel on cable TV especially the Japanese show "Iron Chef." The comedic aspects of this culinary extravaganza are sometimes hilarious.

The other day, the episode involved a competition between one of the formidable Iron Chefs and Japan's leading Sommelier. It seemed like an uneven match - professional versus amateur. But the result was an upset win for the wine expert over the Iron Chef.

The panel of judges give the Sommelier the winning edge largely because he matched different wines to his various dishes in a way that one complemented the other beautifully.

And that got me thinking of the parallel with breads of different kinds and the way that they can enhance different courses of a meal. That is assuming one has access to a bakery that makes a wide range of fine, artisan breads.

Let me illustrate how well this could work. Before dinner, it's delightful to serve bread to dip into seasoned, extra-virgin olive oil. How much better, if the crusty bread has been made with Kalamata olives and fresh rosemary.

A soup might follow. And a dinner roll made with little pieces of redskin potato and dill, and then dusted with flour, would make a delicious accompaniment.

On to the entree - perhaps a classic pasta dish. For this, what better than a bread basket containing freshly cut slices of bread made with

Asiago cheese and chips of roasted garlic?

Or perhaps the entree is a dish prepared with a cheese sauce. Then a different bread would be a better partner.

A rustic loaf with sun-dried tomato and rosemary, or a crunchy crusty sourdough (preferably a subtle French Levain, rather than the overpowering San Francisco variety) would be ideal.

And for dessert? Well, here's an idea: Take a loaf made with aromatic orange zest, Southern pecans and delicious raisins. Slice it very thin. Butter it and sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake it until it's crisp all the way through. Then you have a mouth-watering, toasted "biscuit" to go with an Italian sorbet or a mixed fruit salad.

Maybe you're asking yourself the question, "Is eating bread with each course too much?"

Not at all. If the portions are moderate and each one makes the course really special.

You know, in France the average person eats four times the amount of bread we do in this country. Interestingly, the French are far less overweight than we are.

So, do explore the wonderfully complex flavors of great, hand-crafted bread. You might discover other happy "marriages" for different courses. If you dream up a great combination, contact me and you will be rewarded with a free baguette from The Give Thanks Bakery.

That'll go well with a wedge of wonderful cheese and a fresh vine tomato!

Gerald Matthes is the owner of The Give Thanks Bakery & Cafe in downtown Rochester and a Bloomfield Hills resident. Look for his column on the third Sunday of the month in Taste. He can be reached at (248) 601-1542.



Give Thanks
Gerald Matthes

Add bold flavor to tomato soup and lentils with olives

By J.M. HIRSCH
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

A proper appreciation of olives begins early and fixates more on the fingers than mouth.

It usually starts with the pedestrian but quite serviceable canned black olives that toddlers - and perhaps even this adult when no one is looking - delight in shoving on their fingers and delicately nibbling off.

It was my grandmother's otherwise dull salads of iceberg and beefsteak that introduced me to them. Those crowning thick and juicy jewels just never seemed to make it to the table.

From those fingertip munchies grew a love affair with olives, their oils and anything that can be made with either, from tangy Kalamata tapenade spread to Spanish olives stuffed with almonds to crisp crostini bathed in the golden, peppery oil.

Olives are an easy way to add bold flavors (and a bit of good fat) to vegetarian dishes. The oil adds a savory touch to soups and spreads, while the fruits add a meatiness to pasta and rice dishes. Thanks to food writer Ford Rogers, there is a cookbook dedicated to the numerous varieties of olives and their oils - "Olives: Cooking with Olives and Their Oils" (Ten Speed Press, 2002, \$17.95).

Rogers' lusciously illustrated book is like a well-balanced meal. It offers just the right amount of history and tips for selecting, cooking, storing and pitting, before moving on to the main course - 60 recipes for everything olive.

Among his suggestions: ■ Because all olives are cured with some amount of salt, be sure to taste before adding additional salt to a dish. Particularly salty olives can be toned down by simmering in water for 10 minutes, or rinsing before using.

■ Olives should always be kept moist, either in the brine they were packed in, plain water or drizzled with olive oil. They can be kept at a cool room temperature for two weeks in olive oil, but should be refrigerated for longer storage.

■ Olives that come in brine should be rinsed before eating or cooking.

TOMATO SOUP WITH RED WINE AND KALAMATA OLIVES

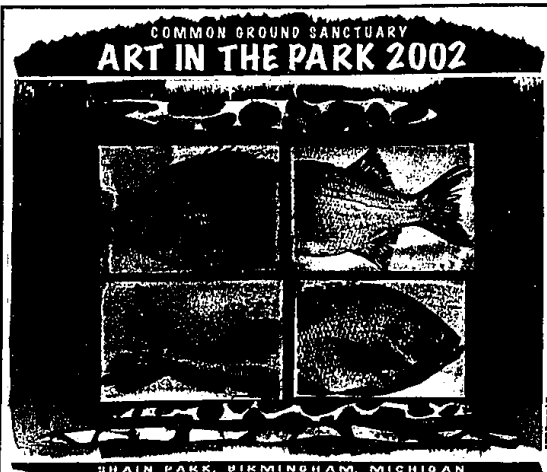
(Preparation 45 minutes, plus chilling time)
3 pounds fresh tomatoes, sliced (or 40 ounces canned)
1/2 cup chopped onion
3 cloves garlic, minced
3 cups high quality Bordeaux wine
1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce (or vegetarian version)
1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill, plus 1/2 tablespoons for garnish

nish
2 tablespoons tomato paste
3 sprigs fresh parsley
1 small bay leaf
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 cup Kalamata olives, pitted and sliced

Place all ingredients except the olives and dill for garnish in a 4-quart stockpot. Bring to a boil, lower heat, cover and simmer 20 to 30 minutes, or until tomatoes are tender. Pour the soup through a mesh strainer, pressing the solids with the back of a spoon to extract as much liquid as possible. Discard the solids. Rinse out the soup pot and return the soup to the pot. Bring to a simmer. Soup can be served warm or chilled. When ready to serve, divide soup among serving bowls. Distribute olives among the bowls, and top each with a sprinkling of dill. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

LENTILS WITH ALPHONSO OLIVE ROUILLE

(Preparation 45 minutes)
3 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup finely chopped shallots
1/2 cup finely chopped celery
1/2 cup finely chopped carrots
2 cups dried lentils, rinsed and drained
4 cups vegetable broth
A bouquet garni of 1 bay leaf and 3 sprigs each of fresh oregano and parsley, tied together
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 1/2 cups soft fresh bread crumbs
2 cloves garlic, smashed and peeled
1/2 cup Alphonso olives (or other green olives)
2 hot red peppers, seeded and chopped, or 2 teaspoons hot pepper sauce
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Heat the 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over a medium-high flame.
Sauté the shallots, celery and carrots until the shallots are soft and translucent, about 2-3 minutes. Add the lentils, broth and bouquet garni and bring to a boil.
Cover, lower heat and simmer 15-25 minutes, or until the lentils are tender but still hold their shape. Time will depend on variety of lentils.
Meanwhile, combine the vinegar, bread crumbs, garlic, olives and peppers in a food processor or blender.
Pulse until mixture is finely chopped. Scrape down the sides as needed. With the machine running, pour in the extra-virgin olive oil until the mixture is smooth.
Discard the bouquet garni from the lentils and season with salt and pepper to taste. To serve, place a dollop of rouille on each bowl of lentils. Makes 6 servings.



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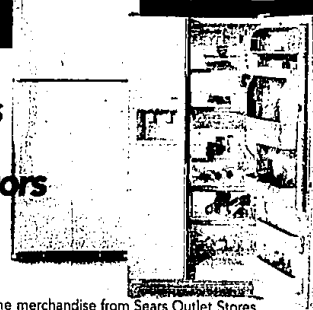
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