

Spring Menu Offers Surprises

Over a century ago, the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" And today, what more delicious way to lift spirits out of the doldrums than with party fare that welcomes the new season—perhaps even before it arrives.

The menu suggested here is inspired by several different cultures, while taking advantage of the best and freshest home-grown ingredients. It's also delightfully adaptable—to festive brunch, dinner or supper—and each of the dishes is surprisingly simple to put together, requiring little kitchen time to produce impressive results.

A refreshing variation on classic rollatini, Chicken Breasts Primavera has a special filling based on ripe avocados. Fortunately, this highly versatile golden-green fruit is now available year-round, adding a taste of springtime to almost any meal. And here's another secret: both filling ingredients and chicken breasts are sautéed in pure, delicate olive oil, giving a distinctive touch of flavor and light, pleasing fragrance.

An unusual twist on that perennial favorite, pasta, Rainbow Tortellini is deceptively easy to prepare—you can even whip it up quickly for unexpected guests. Double or triple the quantity and it's an ideal buffet dish, or serve as a luncheon centerpiece.

Spring is synonymous with salads, and this sprightly Garden Bouquet combines a variety of greens with artichoke hearts and the nutty, mellow goodness of California avocados. There's an avocado bonus in the dressing—which deserves nothing less than pure Italian olive oil.

Since salads should also be synonymous with healthy eating, it's important that avocados are loaded with nutrients—Vitamins A, C and E in addition to hefty doses of potassium, magnesium and phosphorus. And although you're probably aware by now that—despite the diehard myth—neither avocados nor olive oil contains even the tiniest bit of cholesterol, did you know that each is also very high in monounsaturated fats, considered by many leading nutritionists to be more beneficial than polyunsaturates alone?

Round out the meal with an attractive Ambrosia Ring Bread. And crown it with elegant glasses of Tea Nectar, garnished with mint sprigs or lemon slices—or, for a drink that's also a dessert, small scoops of lemon sherbet.

A beverage that's popular with just about everybody, tea—all by itself—complements an almost limitless number of foods and, of course, makes an ideal base for party punches galore—enhancing rather than masking other flavors.

PERFECT HOT TEA

- Bring freshly drawn cold water to a full, rolling boil.
- Meanwhile, fill your teapot with hot water and let stand to heat it.
- Empty the teapot and put in one teabag or one teaspoon of loose tea per serving.
- Pour the boiling water (about 5½ ounces of water per serving) over tea.
- Cover and let stand 3 to 5 minutes. Remove teabags or strain.
- Serve plain or with lemon or milk (not cream) and sugar to taste.

Chicken Breasts Primavera

- 4 whole chicken breasts, skinned, boned and halved
- 1/4 cup pine nuts (or coarsely chopped slivered almonds)
- 1/4 cup sliced green onions
- 1/4 cup Bertolli Olive Oil
- 2 cups chopped fresh spinach or 1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, thawed and well-drained
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon thyme, crushed
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 1 medium avocado, seeded, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
- 1-1/2 cups chicken broth or stock
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 medium avocado, seeded, peeled and mashed (Green onions and parsley, for garnish)

Place chicken breasts between 2 sheets of waxed paper and pound until thin, about 1/4-inch. Set aside.

In skillet, brown pine nuts and cook onion until just tender in 2 tablespoons olive oil. Add spinach, garlic, thyme, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring. Just until spinach is slightly wilted. Remove from heat. Fold in chopped avocado. Spread mixture on chicken breasts. Roll up, jelly-roll fashion; fasten with toothpicks.

In skillet, brown chicken in remaining olive oil. Add mushrooms and chicken broth. Cover and simmer 10 minutes, until chicken is tender. Blend flour and wine. Add to sauce and cook, stirring, until thickened and smooth. Blend in avocado.

To serve, slice chicken. Arrange on platter and spoon sauce over all. If desired, garnish with green onion curls and parsley. Makes 8 servings.

Rainbow Tortellini

- 3 tablespoons Olive Oil
- 1-1/2 cups heavy cream
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 6 slices prosciutto, cut into strips
- 1 medium tomato, coarsely chopped
- 4 cups hot cooked tortellini or fusilli pasta
- 1 medium avocado, seeded, peeled, quartered and sliced
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley

In saucepan, combine olive oil, cream and cheese. Simmer, stirring often, until slightly thickened. Add prosciutto and tomato. Heat through.

In bowl, combine sauce with tortellini, avocado and parsley. Toss to blend. Makes 8 servings.

Garden Bouquet Salad

- 1 large bunch arugula, rinsed and patted dry or
- 1 bunch green leaf lettuce, broken into large pieces
- 1 large bunch watercress, rinsed and dried
- 4 heads Belgian endive
- 1 medium avocado, seeded, peeled and cut into strips lengthwise
- 1 cup artichoke hearts
- 1 medium avocado, seeded, peeled and mashed
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons Dijon-type mustard
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 3 drops hot pepper sauce
- 1 cup Olive Oil

Remove root ends from arugula. Remove stems from watercress. Separate endive into leaves. In salad bowl, just before serving, combine greens, avocado and artichokes.

In small bowl, combine mashed avocado, egg yolk, mustard, vinegar, garlic, pepper and sauce. Blend well. Gradually whisk in olive oil, pouring in a thin stream.

Pour dressing over salad; toss to blend. Serve immediately. If desired, sprinkle with toasted sesame seed. Makes 8 servings.

Tea Nectar

- 4 cups hot strong brewed tea
- 1 can (12 ounces) apricot nectar
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1/4 cup light brown sugar
- Lemon slices
- Mint sprigs

Combine hot tea with nectar, juices and sugar. Cover and let stand 10 minutes, to blend flavors. To serve hot, reheat gently but do not boil. To serve cold, chill thoroughly and pour over ice. Garnish with lemon or mint. If desired, garnish cold tea with lemon sherbet. Makes 8 servings.

Ambrosia Bread Ring

(not shown)

- 1 cup shredded Mozzarella cheese
- 1/3 cup Olive Oil
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley
- 2 tablespoons minced onion
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon basil, crushed
- 1 loaf ring-style Italian Bread (or use standard long loaf)

In bowl, combine all ingredients except bread; blend well.

Cut bread into 1-inch slices, cutting almost through to bottom. Spread cheese filling between slices. Bake at 350 F. for 10 minutes, or until bread is heated and cheese is melted. Makes 8 servings.

