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We believe fresh, good food not only feeds the body, but the mind and spirit as well.”

Reynaldo Hernandez,
Co-Founder and VP,
Epicurean Group



A Warm and Well-Seasoned Wintertide

The grey mornings and the chilly, early evenings of a California winter are here. It's no surprise that the early pagan feasts and today's religious celebrations and holiday festivals focus on bringing light into the world at the time of "The Longest Night" of the year.

One way to brighten these dark chilly nights is to head to the kitchen to cook a robust warming soup. My take on a typical winter root vegetable soup is to "kick it up a notch," as Emeril says, using curry and chilies. There's an added step to the soup preparation, but the resulting depth of flavor is truly worth it.

And for dessert? My Five-Spice Shortcake finished with apples and cranberries is a sweet conclusion to any wintertime celebration. And the fragrance of spices that will greet your guests as they come in from the cold? Heavenly!

—**Chef Rey Hernandez**, Co-Founder and VP, Epicurean Group

WINTER MENU

Serves 8

Curried Route 1 Farms Organic Winter Root Vegetable Soup

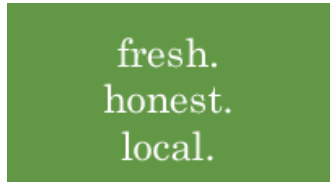
*Lakeside Organics Winter Greens, Kumquats and Pomegranate Seeds
with Strauss Family Creamery Yogurt and Fresh Ginger Dressing*

*Tamarind-Glazed Stemple Creek Ranch Beef Short Ribs
with Lundberg Farms Wild Rice and Dried Cherry Pilaf
and Cardamom-Scented Delicata Squash*

Five-Spice Shortcake with Gabriel Farm Apples and Fresh Cranberries



photo: www.chowtownstudios.com



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Curried Route 1 Farms Organic Winter Root Vegetable Soup

For the Spice Mix:

6 dried red chilies*
1 teaspoon mustard seeds
1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds
12 black peppercorns
6 cloves of fresh garlic, crushed and chopped coarsely
1/2 cup vegetable stock
6 curry leaves
2 ounces tamarind pulp with the seeds and fibers removed**

** Epicurean Tip: Experimenting with Heat*

There are many varieties of chilies from all over the world. For this recipe I used authentic Kashmiri chilies from a specialty Indian food grocery. They are good but I also love the subtle heat of the dried Chile de Arbol when a recipe calls for dried chilies. My tip for you: experiment with dried chilies from China, South America, Mexico, until you find ones you like.

** Epicurean Tip: Tamarind Prep*

To remove the seeds and fibers from tamarind pulp start with a cup of pulp and one cup of boiling hot water. Place the pulp in a bowl and cover with the boiling water. Let it sit for about 20 minutes. Remove the pulp with a slotted spoon and place in a fine strainer. Use your fingers or a spatula to mash and push the pulp through the strainer. You can use the paste immediately or cover and refrigerate for later use.

Directions:

Heat a medium-size sauté pan over medium heat. Add dry chilies, seeds and peppercorns and toast, while stirring gently, until just fragrant. Add garlic and cook for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and add stock, curry leaves and tamarind pulp. Stir together, place back on heat and heat to just boiling. Drop the heat and simmer on low for a half hour. Turn off heat and set aside.

For the Soup:

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 white onion, diced small
4 cloves garlic crushed and chopped fine
1 medium celery root, peeled and diced small
1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme, chopped fine
3 quarts vegetable stock
2 russet potatoes, peeled and diced small
4 parsnips, peeled and diced small
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper

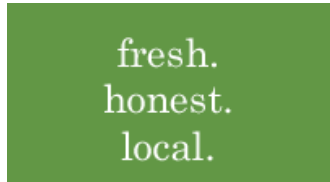
Heat a large soup pot on the stove on medium-high heat. Add oil and heat until it starts to shimmer. Add onion, garlic, celery root and thyme and cook, while stirring, until the onions are translucent. Add the stock, potatoes and parsnips and stir together. Leave on medium heat while you add the tamarind seed mixture to a blender*. Blend to a smooth paste and add to the soup. Stir until well incorporated. Raise heat and bring soup to a boil. Drop heat to a simmer and cook until potatoes are fork tender. Adjust seasoning with kosher salt and fresh ground pepper. Keep warm until ready to serve.

To serve:

Ladle soup into 8 bowls. Serve immediately.

** Epicurean Tip: It's a (Great) Grind!*

A mortar and pestle is the traditional way to grind spice blends into pastes and powders. It is time consuming, but extracts more of the natural oils and flavors from the spice blend. An electric blender can be a short cut. If you have the time, use the mortar and pestle. They are made from many different materials; lava stone, ceramic, marble, wood. I prefer a ceramic mortar with a long-handled pestle to give me more leverage while grinding.



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Lakeside Organics Winter Greens, Kumquats and Pomegranate Seeds with Strauss Family Creamery Yogurt and Fresh Ginger Dressing

2 heads escarole, washed, dried and cut into bite-size pieces
2 heads Treviso, washed, split and cut on the bias
8 tablespoons pomegranate seeds, rinsed and drained
16 kumquats, cut lengthwise in quarters

For the Dressing:

1 cup Greek yogurt
1-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and grated fine
Zest from half of an orange
Juice from 1 orange, strained
Kosher salt and a pinch of cayenne pepper

Place yogurt, ginger, zest and orange juice in a non-reactive bowl. Mix together until well incorporated and let rest for a half hour in the refrigerator.

To serve:

Place escarole and Treviso in a salad bowl. Meanwhile, remove dressing from refrigerator, add kosher salt and cayenne pepper to taste. Pour dressing over greens and toss to coat. Distribute onto 8 chilled salad plates. Garnish with kumquats and pomegranate seeds. Serve immediately.

Tamarind-Glazed Stemple Creek Ranch Beef Short Ribs with Lundberg Farms Wild Rice and Dried Cherry Pilaf and Cardamom-Scented Delicata Squash

8 lbs. beef short ribs
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
2 ounces rendered bacon fat
1 ounce extra virgin olive oil
1 large yellow onion, diced large
3 large carrots, peeled, bias cut 1 inch thick
4 celery stalks, washed, trimmed and bias cut 1 inch thick
8 whole garlic cloves, peeled
1 cup port
1 cup white wine vinegar
1/4 cup piloncillo (Mexican raw sugar)
1 cup tamarind pulp, seeds and fiber removed
1 cup beef stock, plus more stock as needed

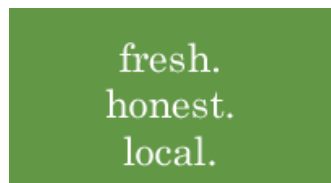
Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Season ribs liberally with kosher salt and fresh ground pepper.

Heat fat and oil in a large, heavy-duty roasting pan until they shimmer. Add ribs and brown for 3-4 minutes per side and leave in pan. Remove pan from heat. Add onion, carrots, celery and garlic to ribs. In a small bowl, mix port, vinegar, piloncillo, tamarind and stock. Mix well. Place roasting pan back on stove over medium heat. Pour port/stock mix over the ribs. Add more stock as needed to come halfway up the side of the ribs. Bring to a boil and cover roasting pan tightly with foil. Turn off heat and move pan to the oven. Cook for 2 1/2 to 3 hours or until ribs are fork tender.

Remove pan from oven, uncover and remove ribs and vegetables. Arrange them on a large casserole pan and keep warm. Strain the liquid from the roasting pan into a large sauce pan. Skim excess oil off the top of the liquid and discard. Bring to a boil and then drop to a simmer. Reduce until thick enough to coat the back of a spoon*. Adjust seasoning with kosher salt and fresh ground pepper. Pour glaze over the ribs and serve immediately.



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** Epicurean Tip: Determining Sauce Thickness*

A chef that I worked for taught me to dip the back of a spoon into your sauce. Hold it up and blow on it; a "rose" will be created. The definition and length of time the "rose" stays on the spoon indicates the thickness of the sauce. If the sauce runs off the spoon or your breath does not create a "rose," it needs to reduce more.

For the Wild Rice:

4 cups plus 1/2 cup vegetable stock
2 cups wild rice, rinsed and drained
4 tablespoons rice bran oil
4 cloves of garlic, peeled, crushed and chopped fine
1 medium red onion, peeled and diced small
1/2 cup dried cherries, chopped coarse
2 tablespoons fresh marjoram, chopped fine
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper

Bring 4 cups vegetable stock to a boil in a large sauce pot. Add wild rice and return to low boil. Cook until rice grains are just starting to split and show a bit of white, about 40 minutes. Turn off heat, drain and return to same pot. Fluff rice with a fork and cover with a lid, off heat.

In a large sauce pan, heat rice bran oil until it shimmers. Add garlic and onion and cook until just turning brown. Add cherries, marjoram and remaining stock. Bring to a boil and then drop to a simmer. Cook until almost dry. Add wild rice and marjoram and stir together until well incorporated. Add kosher salt and fresh ground pepper to taste. Place on a platter and keep warm.

For the Delicata Squash:

1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons butter, melted
3 medium Delicata squash, washed and drained
4 tablespoons pure maple syrup
Kosher salt
Ground cardamom

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Use 3 tablespoons of butter to coat a sheet pan. Cut the squash in half, scoop out the seeds and then cut into 1-inch rounds. Place rings in a bowl and add maple syrup and 1/4 cup melted butter. Toss to coat and then spread out on sheet pan. Sprinkle with kosher salt and cardamom. Place in oven and bake for 20 minutes.

Remove from oven and flip each ring to expose the other side. Season with kosher salt and cardamom and return to the oven for another 20 minutes. Squash should be fork tender. Remove from oven and keep warm.

Five-Spice Shortcake with Gabriel Farm Apples and Fresh Cranberries

For the Apple Cranberry Topping:

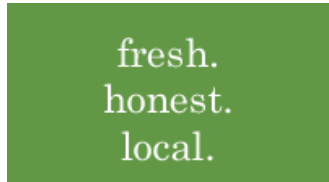
2 tablespoons sweet butter
4 Fuji apples, peeled, cored and diced into 1/2-inch dice
1 cup fresh cranberries
3 tablespoons evaporated cane juice
2 ounces port wine

Directions:

Heat butter in a large sauce pan over medium-high heat. When foaming subsides, add apples and toss to coat. Cook until the apples turn golden in color. Add cranberries and cane juice and toss until well combined. Cook for 5 minutes or until cranberries just start to pop and sugar starts to caramelize. Add port and simmer for 5 minutes. Take off heat and keep warm

For the Cream:

1 cup whipping cream



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1 tablespoon evaporated cane juice
1 teaspoon pure vanilla

Chill a mixing bowl and the whipping cream for 30 minutes before starting.

Place cream in bowl and whip on medium speed until foaming. While mixer is going, add cane juice and vanilla. Place mixer on high speed and whip to stiff peaks. Place bowl in refrigerator until service.

For the 5-Spice Shortcake:

2 cups all-purpose flour
1/3 cup evaporated cane juice
1 1/2 teaspoon 5-spice powder
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 cup butter, cut in cubes
1 egg lightly beaten
2/3 cup milk

Directions:
Preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Combine flour, cane juice, five-spice powder and salt in a mixer. Mix on low speed and add the butter, one cube at a time. Mix until it resembles coarse bread crumbs. Stop the mixer. In a small bowl mix the egg and milk. Turn the mixer on to low speed and slowly add the milk mixture until all is just moistened.

Spread the mix into an 8-inch cake pan and bake for 15-20 minutes until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove from the cake pan and cut into 2 layers.

To serve:

Place bottom layer on a cake platter and spoon half of the cranberry mixture and half of the whipped cream over the cake. Place top layer on the cranberry mixture and cover that layer with the remaining cranberry mixture and cream. Let rest for 10 minutes and cut into eight even slices. Place on dessert plates and serve immediately.