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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



Bringing Warmth to Winter

In Northern California, the Winter Solstice brings us brisk winds, rain, cooler temperatures and, of course, shorter days. It's the perfect weather to stay in – and cook!

This season's menu is planned as the perfect antidote to winter doldrums. A hearty and healthful lentil and whole-grain farro soup begins the meal and, for the main, there's a braise of free-range chicken and kale. A braise is a combination-cooking method that uses both wet and dry heat; it tenderizes and adds flavor to your food and warmth to your kitchen.

Take your time and enjoy preparing the menu. Then, share a cozy, casual meal – perhaps even in the kitchen if you have enough space – with close friends and family members who are sure to appreciate your slow-braised feast.

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

WINTER MENU

Serves 8

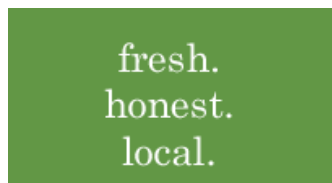
Canvas Ranch Lentil and Farro Soup

River Dog Farm Organic Endive and Radicchio Salad with Pecans and Red Wine Vinaigrette

Braised Petaluma Farms Free-Range Chicken with Buckwheat Groats and Braised Lacinato Kale with Balsamic Reduction

Eggnog Acme Bread Pudding with Cyrus Noble Bourbon Caramel Sauce





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Canvas Ranch Lentil and Farro Soup

4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 medium leeks, trimmed, washed* and diced small
4 celery stalks, washed, trimmed and diced small
3 carrots, peeled and diced small
1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme, chopped finely
1 tablespoon fennel seed
1 cup dry white wine
1 pound dry lentils, rinsed and drained
1/2 cup farro, rinsed and drained
3 quarts vegetable stock, preferably homemade
Kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper

** Epicurean Tip: Leeks, Sans Sand*

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.

Directions:

Heat a large soup pot on the stove on medium-high heat. Add oil and heat until it starts to shimmer. Add leeks, celery, carrots, thyme and fennel seeds and sauté, while stirring, until they are tender.

Add the white wine and stir together. Cook for 3 minutes. Add the lentils and farro. Stir until well incorporated. Add the vegetable stock. Raise the heat to high and bring soup to a boil. Drop heat to a simmer and cook, uncovered, until lentils and farro are tender, about 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Adjust seasoning with kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper. Use a strainer to remove half of the solids in the soup and hold in a separate container. Use a hand-held blender or a standing blender to purée the rest of the contents to a smooth consistency. Add retained lentil, farro and vegetable solids to soup. Keep warm until ready to serve.

To serve:

Ladle soup into 8 bowls. Serve immediately.

River Dog Farm Endive and Radicchio Salad with Pecans and Red Wine Vinaigrette

4 heads Belgian endive, root end trimmed 1/2 inch and cut into quarters, lengthwise
2 heads radicchio, washed, core removed and cut into 1-inch julienne
2lbs. golden beets, salt-roasted*, peeled, cooled and cut in matchsticks
1 1/2 cups pecan halves, toasted
Kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper

** Epicurean Tip: Build a Better Beet*

Salt-roasted beets result in a richer-flavored roasted beet. The salt crust moderates and evens out the heat and moisture loss is minimized, meaning the beet retains more flavor and color than plain roasting, steaming or boiling techniques.

Salt-Roasted Beets

2 pounds golden beets
1 cup egg white
3 cups kosher salt

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix egg whites and salt to a "wet sand" consistency. Coat each beet with mixture until well covered. Place on a parchment-lined sheet pan and cook for 1 3/4 hours. Remove from oven and let rest for 15 minutes. Use a meat mallet to break the salt crust on each beet. Cool until you can handle well enough to peel. Cut as your recipe requires.



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For the Vinaigrette Dressing:
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1 shallot, peeled and chopped finely
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1/2 bunch chervil, chopped finely
6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper

Place mustard, shallot, vinegar and chervil in a non-reactive bowl. (link to Cook's Tips) Mix together until well incorporated and drizzle the olive oil into the mixture while you whisk. Continue until all oil is incorporated.

Season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside until ready to serve.

To serve:

Place endive and radicchio in a salad bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Pour dressing over greens and toss to coat. Distribute onto 8 chilled salad plates. Garnish with roasted beets and toasted pecans. Serve immediately.

Braised Petaluma Farms Free-Range Chicken with Buckwheat Groats and Braised Lacinato Kale with Balsamic Reduction

2 chickens, approximately 3 1/2 pounds each, cut into 8 portions each – separate legs from thighs and cut breasts in half – washed and patted dry
4 tablespoons of rendered bacon fat (or duck fat)
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 cup chicken stock
3 ounces tomato paste
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
Kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper

For the Marinade:

2 onions, peeled, sliced very thinly on a mandoline
8 cloves garlic, peeled, grated on a microplane
2 tablespoons fresh ginger, peeled and grated on a microplane
1/2 cup fresh lime juice
1 teaspoon Kosher salt
1 teaspoon fresh-cracked pepper

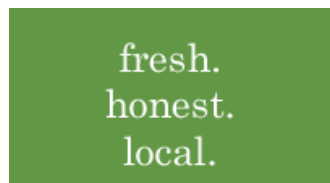
To marinate, place the chicken in a large non-reactive bowl. Mix all the marinade ingredients together and pour over the chicken pieces. Mix well so that all the chicken is coated. Marinate for at least 4 hours or overnight in the refrigerator.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Heat the fat in a large skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers. Add as many chicken pieces that will fit in the skillet and brown evenly on all sides. Repeat until all pieces are browned. Hold browned chicken in a large roasting pan or casserole.

Deglaze skillet with marinade and scrape the pan well. Add the white wine, stock, tomato paste, and cayenne. Whisk together until well mixed and bring to a hard boil. Immediately pour over chicken, cover the pan tightly with foil and place in the oven. Cook for 45 minutes or until a meat thermometer placed in the thigh reads 165 degrees. Remove from the oven and strain all cooking liquid into a small sauce pan. Keep the chicken warm until ready to serve.

Reduce the braising liquid to 2 cups, add salt and pepper to taste. Pour the sauce over the chicken and hold until ready to serve.



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For the Buckwheat Groats:

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 parsnips, peeled and diced small
1 small red onion, peeled and diced small
1 1/2 cups buckwheat groats, rinsed and drained
3 1/2 cups vegetable stock
Kosher salt and fresh-ground pepper
1/2 bunch Italian parsley, chopped coarsely

Directions:

Heat oil in a large pot over medium-high heat until it shimmers. Add parsnips and onion and cook until just fragrant. Add the groats and stock and stir all together. Increase heat and bring to a boil. Drop heat to low simmer, cover pot with lid. Cook for 18 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat, remove lid and fluff groats with a fork. Add salt and pepper to taste. Keep warm until ready to serve.

Before serving, remove lid and stir in chopped parsley.

For the Braised Kale:

6 tablespoons grapeseed oil
8 each garlic cloves, peeled and sliced thinly
3 bunches lacinato kale, ribs removed and cut in 1-inch pieces
Kosher salt, fresh ground pepper
1 cup vegetable stock
3 ounces balsamic vinegar

Directions:

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant. Add kale and stir. Season with salt and pepper. Add the stock and bring to a boil. Drop the heat and simmer. Add the vinegar and continue to simmer until the liquid is gone. Remove from the heat and keep warm until ready to serve.

To serve:

Serve the main course "family style."

Eggnog Acme Bread Pudding with Cyrus Noble Bourbon Caramel Sauce

1-2 tablespoons butter
4 large eggs
1/2 cup evaporated cane juice
4 cups eggnog
1/2 teaspoon fresh ground nutmeg
1 loaf Acme challah, cut into 1-inch cubes

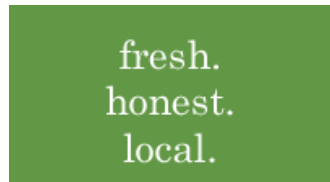
Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

Lightly butter a 9-inch by 13-inch casserole dish. In a large non-reactive bowl whisk together the eggs, cane juice, eggnog and nutmeg until well mixed. Add the bread cubes and mix together. Let the mixture set for 10 minutes. Pour the mixture into the casserole and bake for 45 minutes or until a paring knife inserted into the center comes out clean. Pull from the oven and rest on a cooling rack until ready to serve.

For the Caramel Sauce:

1 cup evaporated cane juice
2 tablespoon pure maple syrup
1/4 cup bourbon
3/4 cup whipping cream



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** Epicurean Tip: Concerning Caramel*

When making caramel, some of the cane juice will crystalize and cling to the sides of the pot as the water evaporates. This could potentially burn and affect the caramel's flavor. To prevent this, dip a small pastry brush in cold water and brush the sugar crystals clinging to the sides back into the caramel. Use sparingly so as not to add more water to the caramel. Remember, when it reaches the amber color stage during cooking it is 350 to 380 degrees! Handle with care and avoid getting it on your skin.

Directions:

In a sauce pan over medium-high heat, add the cane juice, maple syrup and bourbon. Heat until the mixture turns a light amber. Turn off the heat and add the cream while stirring vigorously. Transfer to a ceramic container and keep warm in a double boiler until ready to serve.

To serve:

Cut 8 portions out of the casserole and place each on a dessert dish. Top with caramel sauce and serve immediately.