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susannye@tds.net
603/526 7319

It happens all the time. People ask me when, why, how I took up cooking.



It all started in a teeny, tiny Vermont town. Just out of college, I was in Vermont for my first real job. A budding foodie, I soon discovered that restaurants were few and far between. Interesting restaurants were even fewer and farther between. Not to mention that my starting salary was best described as piddling. It didn't take long to realize that somehow or other I had to figure out the whole cooking thing.

At the start, I was pretty timid in the kitchen. I recreated my mother's special mushroom chicken. It combined chicken breasts with cream of mushroom soup, a dollop of sour cream and a splash of sherry. If I was feeling extravagant and could find them, I threw in some fresh mushrooms and a few pearl onions. I proudly imitated Nana Nye's baked scrod and figured out sauce Bolognese.

And then one Sunday the Boston Globe did a special feature on then-Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Most politicians get roped into a fluff piece or two and the Duke was no exception. The Globe wangled an afternoon in the Governor's kitchen to learn about his Greek heritage and make spanakopita.

I was and still am a fan of spanakopita. I discovered this cheesy spinach pie on an afternoon theater outing in Boston with my mother. Before the matinee, we joined the ladies-who-lunch at the old Athens Olympia restaurant on the corner of Tremont Street. I was hooked. I decided to give it a try. The Governor could do it, why not me?

I was way over my head. My ill-equipped kitchen was the size of a postage stamp and outfitted with cast-offs, thrift store finds and a few cheap pots and pans from Kmart. I owned one cookbook, the *Joy of Cooking*, but had barely cracked the spine.

My guests' were invited for 6:30. Dinner would be served after a leisurely hour of wine and nibbles. According to the Governor's recipe, the spanakopita took 45 minutes to prep and an hour to bake. Either the Governor lied or enlisted the helping hands of several staffers. Convinced I had time to spare, it was more or less 5:30 when I wandered into the kitchen to make my spinach pie.

My guests arrived fashionably late but the spanakopita wasn't in the oven or anywhere near the oven. While my friends enjoyed an extra glass or two of wine, I enjoyed more than a few Lucy moments and shouted updates from the kitchen. They waited and waited and waited some more. Dinner was served sometime after 9:00, early for Greece, but decidedly late for Vermont.

Thank goodness my friends were forgiving. They proclaimed the spanakopita worth the wait and raved about the dinner for weeks. It was a wonderful evening. Our conversation sparkled with wit and laughter. (Of course all that extra wine might have helped.)

Instead of being daunted by the experience, I was energized. I was struck by how easy (okay relatively easy) it was to create a memorable evening and make people happy. Even now when asked why I love to cook, I think of that cold winter night in Vermont. It was the first of many special evenings and many more to come!

Happy cooking and bon appétit!

Spanakopita Triangles



I lost the Governor's recipe a long time ago but through trial and error created this bite-sized version for a yummy cocktail party treat. Enjoy!

Makes 2-3 dozen triangles

Olive oil
 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 About 12 ounces frozen spinach, thawed and drained
 1/2 cup fresh mint leaves, chopped
 1/2 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
 Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
 8 ounces feta, crumbled
 8 ounces ricotta
 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
 2 large eggs, lightly beaten

1 pound phyllo, defrosted and at room temperature
 6 tablespoons or more butter, melted

Heat a little olive oil in a large heavy skillet over medium heat and sauté the onion until almost translucent, add the garlic and sauté for a minute more.

Put the spinach in a clean dish towel and squeeze out any excess moisture.

Put the spinach, herbs, onion, garlic, cheeses and nutmeg in a large bowl, season with salt and pepper and toss to combine. Add the eggs and toss again.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.



Place the phyllo vertically on your work surface. Depending on how large you want your triangles, cut the phyllo lengthwise into 2 or 3 equal columns. Stack the phyllo leaves, cover with a clean, damp kitchen towel and set aside.

Remove the first leaf and place it vertically on your work surface. Brush lightly with butter. Place another sheet on top and brush again with butter if using regular phyllo. If you are using thick country-style phyllo, one layer is plenty. Place a scant tablespoon of filling (1-2 tablespoons for larger triangles) on the bottom right-hand corner of the phyllo. Fold the phyllo like a flag to create a triangle. Place the triangle on a baking sheet seam side down. Cover with a clean, damp kitchen towel and continue with the remaining filling and phyllo.

Brush all the triangles with butter. Bake for about 15 minutes at 350 degrees or until the triangles are puffed and golden. Let rest for about 5 minutes before serving.



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