



Thursday Night Cooking Parties

April

- 12 Grazing on Tapas
- 26 French Bistro Cuisine

May

- 10 More Cooking in Tuscany
- 24 More French Country
Cooking

June

- 7 Summer Salads

Summer

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filled

In Europe, Easter is a big deal. It is not driven by religion; the number of church-goers has shrunk considerably in recent years. The churches and cathedrals celebrate but, with some notable exceptions like Vatican Square, most are not exactly to the rafters. Unlike the White House lawn and New York's 5th Avenue, Easter is not over the top with bunnies, egg hunts and parades. Easter is big in Europe because it takes 4 days to celebrate. Businesses shut down Thursday evening and stay closed through Monday. Most everyone leaves town for the beach, mountains or Euro Disney.

Four days in early spring, what could be better? Well, I would argue 4 days in winter, 4 days in summer or 4 days in early autumn. Late March or early April in most of Europe is a lot like New England, cold and prone to rain. My first year in Switzerland, I followed the crowds, jumped on the train and headed south to the Cote d'Azur. I imagined South Beach, palm trees, sunshine and bikinis. My brother, John, was backpacking across Europe and we met in Nice and spent 4 days on the Mediterranean coast. It was overcast, windy and rainy, not a brilliant blue, azure coast; it was Côte Gris or grey.

Not to be daunted, I tried again, but went further south to North Africa. I imagined walks by the sea, swimming in the surf and laying by the pool with a tropical drink. There was plenty of sun, but it was too windy and cold to hang out on the beach for long. The hotel pool was empty; waiting to be filled when it warmed up in early May.

The search for a beach blanket bingo holiday was not working so I decided to try skiing. Snow would not be a problem. In the Alps the ski season starts in mid November and lasts at least to the first of May. The snow was fine, but the lift lines were long and the restaurants and cafés were packed. And the weather; it was four days of drizzle and fog.

After beach combing in the wind and rain and skiing in the fog, I gave up and admitted defeat. So while almost everyone fled Geneva, I stayed put. The city was like a ghost town but as luck would have it, a handful of good friends decided they too had had enough of bad weather and crowds. On Saturday evening I gathered everyone together for an Easter celebration. We were all feeling quite smart and smug for staying home. Confident in our genius, we hit upon another brilliant idea; an Easter Sunday bike ride.

We were a bit of a motley crew. Kevin and I rode often and our bikes were in reasonable shape. My friend Julie borrowed a bike. I'm not sure where she found it, but I suspect it belonged to Miss Gulch from the Wizard of Oz. Her elbows flapping, she was quite a sight riding along the country roads. I would have been worried if I'd had a little dog. Mark had his own bike, but it's very possible that he bought it from Miss Gulch's brother at a garage sale.

It was a gorgeous day as we headed out across the fields above the Lake of Geneva and then down to the shore. At midday we stopped in a lakeside park for a break and a lovely picnic. Never the fool, Mark bailed on us after lunch and returned to Geneva in style on the steamboat. He was sitting comfortably in a quay side café, admiring the view, when we peddled up, hot and thirsty and delighted with ourselves and the day.

After that glorious Sunday, I made a point of staying home on the long Easter weekend. It was rainy or overcast more often than not, but I managed a little biking, a little roller blading and a few walks over the years. And even in a ghost town, I always found a few friends to gather around the table for an early spring feast. I wish you and all of your families a happy Easter and a wonderful Passover,

Bon appétit! - Susan



Happy Easter!

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Easter Menu

This menu mixes flavors from the south of France and Italy. Lamb, asparagus and lemons are all available year round, but still symbolize spring for me. Enjoy and happy holiday!

Antipasto

Grilled Butterflied Lamb

Risotto with Asparagus

Mixed Baby Greens with Lemon Vinaigrette

Tarte au Citron

Antipasto

Create a no fuss platter by buying not making most of the ingredients.

Thinly sliced prosciutto

Wedge of your favorite cheese

A mix of green and black marinated olives

Sun-dried Tomato Provencal Dip (recipe follows) and fresh vegetables – radishes, Belgian endive, cherry or grape tomatoes, fennel, cucumbers and peppers

Fresh and dried fruit - cantaloupe or grapes; dried figs; dates or apricots

Nuts

A selection of breadsticks, crackers and toasted baguette

1. Arrange prosciutto, cheese, olives, vegetables and dip, fruit and nuts on a large platter. Serve with breadsticks, crackers and toasted baguette and let your guests help themselves.

Sun-dried Tomato Provencal Dip

4 halves oil packed sun dried tomatoes, drained

2 cloves garlic

½ cup olive oil

¼ cup red wine vinegar

1 tablespoon fresh tarragon leaves

½ tablespoon fresh thyme leaves

½ tablespoon fresh parsley leaves

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1. In the small bowl of a food processor or blender combine the sun dried tomatoes, garlic, olive oil, vinegar, herbs, salt and pepper. Process until smooth.

Grilled Butterflied Lamb

Serves 8-10

6-to-7 pound leg of lamb, trimmed, boned and butterflied (ask your butcher to bone and butterfly it for you, or buy a 3-to-4 pound butterflied leg)

2 cups dry red wine

Juice of 1 lemon



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4 cloves garlic, finely minced
1 shallot, finely chopped
2 tablespoons of fresh rosemary, finely chopped
1 tablespoon of fresh thyme
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon honey
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1-2 tablespoons butter

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together the red wine, lemon juice, garlic, shallot, herbs, mustard, honey, salt and pepper.
2. Put the lamb in a large, heavy-duty plastic sealable bag. Add the marinade; seal the bag, pressing out excess air. Marinate lamb in the refrigerator, turning every few hours, for at least 4 hours or overnight. Longer is better.
3. Prepare a charcoal or gas grill. Fire should be medium hot.
4. Remove the lamb from the marinade. Grill the lamb, turning occasionally until a thermometer inserted in the thickest piece of meat registers at 130°, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board and let stand for 20 minutes, loosely covered in foil. Slice the lamb and serve.

Risotto with Asparagus

Serves 8-10

2 cups Arborio rice
1 1/2 pounds Asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 small onion, finely chopped
1 cup dry white wine
2-3 cups hot chicken stock
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2-3 tablespoons butter
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
Olive oil

1. Heat 1-2 tablespoons of olive oil in a heavy saucepan. Add the onion and cook over medium heat for 3-5 minutes, until translucent. Stir in the rice and sauté for 2-3 minutes.
2. Add 1/2 cup wine, 1/2 teaspoon each of salt and freshly ground pepper; simmer, stirring often, over medium heat until the wine is absorbed. One-half cup at a time, add the hot chicken stock and the rest of the wine and continue to simmer and stir. After simmering and stirring for 15 minutes, add the asparagus and combine. Continue to add stock and stir until rice is al dente, tender but still firm. Total cooking time is about 20-25 minutes.
3. Stir in parmesan cheese and butter. Taste for seasoning. Serve immediately.

Salad of Mixed Baby Greens, Lemon Vinaigrette & Goat Cheese Croutons

Serves 8-10

1 pound mixed baby lettuces, torn into bite-size pieces

1. In a large bowl, combine lettuces; toss lightly with a few tablespoons of Lemon Vinaigrette. Serve immediately with Goat Cheese Croutons.

Lemon Vinaigrette

Makes 1 cup



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1/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1. Put lemon juice, mustard, salt and pepper in bowl, whisk to dissolve salt. Add the olive oil, whisk to combine. Check for seasoning.

Goat Cheese Croutons

8-10 thin slices of baguette
6-8 ounces fresh goat cheese, cut into slices
Butter

1. Preheat oven to 450°.
2. Butter one side of the bread slices. Place the slices butter side down on a baking sheet. Top each slice of bread with goat cheese.
3. Bake for 8-10 minutes until the cheese is warm and soft and bread is crispy

Lemon Tart

Serves 8

5 whole eggs
2 cups sugar
Grated rind of 2 lemons
1 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
2-3 tablespoons melted butter
4 tablespoons heavy cream
9-inch unbaked flakey pie crust, recipe follows

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Whisk together the eggs, sugar, lemon rind and juice, butter and cream.
3. Pour into the pie shell and bake at 350°F for 1 hour until firm.
4. Let cool and serve.

Flakey Pastry:

1 cup all purpose flour
1 teaspoon sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) chilled butter, cut into pieces
3 tablespoons solid vegetable shortening, cold
2-4 tablespoons ice water

1. Blend flour, sugar and salt a food processor. Add butter and shortening; and process until mixture resembles coarse meal.
2. Sprinkle with ice water, 1-2 tablespoons at a time, and process until dough comes together in a ball. Flatten into disk. Wrap dough in plastic; chill until firm enough to roll, at least 30 minutes.
3. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to a thickness of 1/8 inch, and gently press it into a 9-inch pie plate. Crimp the edges decoratively. Chill until firm.