

Grilled Fresh Figs with Prosciutto and Blue Cheese Mousse

This is the home cook's version of a recipe in "Not Afraid of Flavor," by Ben and Karen Barker (UNC Press, 2000). The James Beard award-winning couple used to own Magnolia Grill in Durham and now help their son, Gabe, at his restaurant, Pizzeria Mercato in Carrboro. The original recipe served these figs on a green salad.

4 ounces good blue cheese, at room temperature

4 ounces mascarpone, at room temperature

Freshly ground black pepper

16-18 fresh figs

6 ounces prosciutto, sliced paper-thin

Balsamic glaze

Combine blue cheese, mascarpone and black pepper together in a medium bowl. Set aside.

Starting at the stem end, cut the the fig almost in half, leaving bottom intact. Stuff each fig with about 1 teaspoon cheese mixture. Cut prosciutto slices lengthwise. Wrap a strip of prosciutto around each fig.

Prepare charcoal or gas grill for grilling. Grill figs bottom-side down over medium heat until prosciutto is crisp and figs are warm. Remove to a platter. Drizzle with balsamic glaze.

Yield: 6-8 servings.

Figgy Demerara Snacking Cake

You can substitute 2 pounds sour cherries or plums (quartered or thickly sliced) for the figs. Recipe tester's note: This batter was a bear to spread out in the pan. Be patient and use water-dipped fingers instead. From "Cook This Now," by Melissa Clark (Hyperion, 2011)

2 dozen fresh figs, halved lengthwise through stem

2 1/4 cups whole wheat flour, divided, plus more for the pan

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened, plus more for the pan

1 1/4 cups granulated sugar

3 tablespoons brandy

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 large egg

1 tablespoon baking powder

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 cup milk

2 tablespoons Demerara or raw sugar

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Toss figs with 1/4 cup flour in a bowl and set aside.

Grease an 18-inch-by-13-inch-by-1-inch baking sheet with butter and dust with flour; set aside.

Beat together butter, sugar, brandy and vanilla with hand mixer or standing mixer on medium speed until pale and fluffy. Add egg and beat until incorporated.

In medium bowl, whisk together remaining 2 cups flour, baking powder and salt. With mixer running on low speed, alternately add flour mixture and milk in 3 batches to make a batter. Spoon batter onto the baking sheet and smooth evenly; try water-dipped fingers if it is a struggle. Nestle the figs into the batter evenly all over the top. Sprinkle with the Demerara sugar. Bake until the cake is golden brown, 45 to 50 minutes. Let cake cool for 30 minutes before serving.

Yield: 12-14 servings.

Fig Salad with Sticky Date Dressing

You can find date syrup at most Middle Eastern grocery stores or whole dates in the produce section of most grocery stores. From “A Modern Way to Eat: 200+ Satisfying Vegetarian Recipes (that will make you feel amazing)” by Anna Jones (Ten Speed Press, 2014)

1 shallot, peeled and very finely chopped

1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons date syrup or 2 dates, seeds removed, chopped and blended with a little oil

Juice of 1 lemon

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

a small bunch of fresh mint

8 big handfuls of mixed salad leaves

6 fresh figs, quartered

A small bunch of fresh basil

3 1/2 ounces fresh goat cheese

Put chopped shallot, mustard, date syrup or chopped dates blended with oil and lemon juice into a bowl. Season with salt and pepper and drizzle in the oil, whisking as you go. Chop the mint, add to the bowl, and set aside.

Put the salad leaves into a bowl and scatter with figs. Stir dressing and drizzle over the salad. Pick the basil leaves off the stems and scatter over the salad; then toss everything together. Dot with goat cheese and serve.

Yield: 4 servings

More Fig Recipes

Fig Preserves: My shorthand recipe is 1 cup sugar per pound of figs. I never make a batch with more than 5 pounds because it doesn't set correctly. I add 1 whole lemon, thinly sliced, seeds removed, to increase acidity level and make the preserves safe to eat. I cook the fig preserves over medium-low heat until it reaches about 220 degrees on a candy thermometer. I follow instructions for water bath canning on freshpreserving.com, leaving 1/4-inch headspace in half-pint jars and processing for 10 minutes. For a more complete recipe, go to: nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_07/fig_preserves.html

Fig Pecan Fondue: Combine 1/2 cup white wine, 1/2 cup fig preserves, 1/4 cup ground, toasted pecans and 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice in a medium saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until preserves are melted. Combine 2 cups grated Gruyere cheese and 2 cups grated Emmentaler cheese, 2 tablespoon cornstarch, 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper and grate of whole nutmeg in a medium bowl. Add one handful at a time to saucepan, make sure each melts before adding more. The fondue can bubble, but not boil. Transfer to a warm fondue pot or keep warm on the stove. Serve with cubes of sourdough or pumpernickel bread for dipping.

From Andrea Weigl, and "A Southerly Course," by Martha Hall Foose (Clarkson Potter, 2011)

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