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FOOD & HOME

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FISH STORIES

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Persimmon, persimmon...

*It's FUYU
to the rescue*

BY LYNETTE LA MERE

Pure Joy Catering Executive Chef

Some years ago in the fall I came across a sign up against a well used wooden fruit crate on a rickety table at the Saturday Farmer's Market written by the farmer that read "Were you traumatized as a child by eating an unripe persimmon? Fear not! Fuyu persimmons are always yummy! Regain your happy childhood!" I felt for the guy! Persimmons do have an awful reputation and he's fighting an uphill battle just getting people to even *try* one. I have learned to love the taller acorn-shaped, Hachiya persimmons *once* they're ripe, but before they turn into little water balloons of yummy pudding they have a way too high level of tannin and can be horrible.

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I couldn't believe he expected me to *eat* a hard persimmon. Persimmons are plentiful and so beautiful; they do happen to be my favorite color; we use them a great deal as décor but I admit I hadn't even considered eating one because I thought they weren't ripe; the little flat bottomed pumpkin shaped ones never seemed to get soft; or in my mind, *ripe*... The farmer held out the little taste he'd cut for me with such conviction, he wasn't backing down, I couldn't say no and gave the little hard fuyu persimmon chunk he offered me a try. I was so impressed!! They are delicious, it was love at first bite, I had no *idea* there was such a dramatic difference in the two kinds of persimmons.

Outside of being a unique snack item the hachiya persimmons have limited culinary use. The squat, rounder fuyu however has proven to be a fantastic addition to our fall menus and I've had such fun finding ways to incorporate them into my cooking and sharing my discovery of this bright, cheerful little representative of the fall season. Crisp like an apple, sweet like a pear the fuyu persimmon has taken over about 80% of the persimmon market so apparently the word is spreading, however, the crops are primarily funneled into ethnic markets where the demand is higher.

There is no need to peel a fuyu (pronounced 'FOO-you') persimmon and there is no core, seeds or pit. With very little fussing required they are a cinch to add to salads, make gorgeous fruit salsas for grilled fish and cook beautifully into cobbles. The ones grown locally here are incredibly sweet and pair well with cheeses; they almost have a nutty flavor which is offset by soft hints of honey and apricot so they're a natural combination with nuts too.

Tossed Baby Greens with Fuyu Persimmons, Goat Cheese and Toasted Pecans

(4-6 servings)

Striking, yummy & easy; this salad is a great introduction to persimmons.

- 8 loosely packed cups **salad greens**, triple rinsed and dry
- ½ cup **toasted pecan** (recipe follows)
- 4 oz **goat cheese**, crumbled
- 3 **fuyu persimmons**, wedge sliced; like tomatoes
- ½ cup **balsamic vinaigrette** (recipe follows)

Toasted Pecans

This will yield more than you need for one salad, they make great cocktail munchies and store well for the next salad.

- 1 **egg white**
- ¼ cup **sugar**
- Pinch of **salt**
- 4 ½ cups whole shelled **pecans**

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and spray a large sheet pan with vegetable oil. Whisk the egg white until foamy add the rest of the ingredients and toss to coat. Spread evenly on the sheet pan and bake 6 minutes. Pull out and flip them around with a spatula, bake again until fragrant and toasted. I prefer them whole in the salad. Store left over toasted nuts in an air tight jar or bag.

Balsamic Vinaigrette

- 1 small **shallot**, minced
- 1 clove **garlic**, minced
- ¼ cup great **balsamic vinegar**
- 1 heaping Tb. **Country style Dijon mustard**
- Juice of half a **lemon**
- ¾ cup **olive oil**

Whisk, shake or whirl all the ingredients in the blender, as you choose.

Warm Bay Scallops and Persimmon Salad

(4 servings)

Pure heaven, a really clean and refreshing, delectable meal; the scallops are rich and sweet and the Orange Dressing lights up the flavor of the persimmons.

- 8 cups loosely packed **baby spinach leaves**, triple rinsed and dry
- 3 **fuyu persimmons**, diced
- ½ cup diced **red onion**
- 1 lb. **fresh bay scallops**, dried with paper towels
- 1 Tb. **olive oil**
- Fresh Orange Dressing**, (recipe follows)
- 3 Tb. **pine nuts**, toasted

Plate the spinach and top with the diced persimmons & diced red onion. Heat a sauté pan over high heat until nearly smoking. Add the olive oil and the bay scallops, season with a bit of salt & fresh ground pepper and toss till no longer opaque.

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ENTERTAINING

Grill those bugs!

Lobster for all...

BY PURE JOY CATERING

EXECUTIVE CHEF,

LYNETTE LA MERE

I thought this was interesting; did you know lobster is considered low in saturated fat and calories, and lower in cholesterol than turkey or chicken?! Wow!! Not to mention it is the definition of special fare. But lobster, especially when in season locally, makes perfect friends over food and can be rather effortless and fool proof freeing you up to socialize & enjoy the evening too. Lobster is the quintessential coastal fare all over the world. One of our favorite get-a-ways is still renting a house in Baja and having a big lobster BBQ.

Like most great food, lobsters don't need a lot of work and the days of rich, cheesy, béchamel laden complicated dishes like Lobster Thermidore are long gone. That said, they're pricy little crustaceans, or "bugs" as the fishermen like to call them, and many hesitate to cook them at home for fear of messing them up, but they couldn't be simpler to prepare.

There are a few basic tips to cooking lobsters, that, once known will make you anxious for the lobster season to begin. Don't drown them; they don't want to be in your tap water. Live lobsters are fine kept a couple days in the bottom refrigerator drawer covered in a damp towel. Being caught is a shock to the lobsters and if you're buying them right off the boats or catching them yourself the French believe they require several days in a salt water tank or in the refrigerator to recover before eating them. Theory goes you can kill them painlessly by putting them in the freezer for 2 hours. Cutting off the tips of the claws with kitchen shears and draining out the excess water after boiling is a good idea. Kitchen shears and a good butcher knife make splitting them a breeze, I sacrifice a clean hot pad to hold them as well.

Lobsters can be broiled, boiled, baked or steamed. Timing depends on the size and volume you're cooking, but generally, 8-12 minutes is ideal boiling or steaming your average lobster; however, the 2 ½ pounders can take up to 20 minutes. To bake them, split them in half raw, crack the claws and remove the gills, season with salt & pepper and bake meat up 15 to 20 minutes at 350. When I grill them I like to par boil them in salted water (1/2 a cup to every 5 qt. water), then split them (this is a good holding point) and then finish them off on the grill or under the broiler when ready to serve.

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ENTERTAINING

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Grilled Lobster Tails with Lemon Tarragon Sauce

A play on the classic French recipe, Lobster Thermidore or Homard Thermidore, which also relied on the compliment of tarragon; after all, there's a reason recipes become classics. This, however, is much lighter, simpler and flawlessly yummy.

Preheat grill for medium-high heat. Cut lobster tails in half lengthwise. Brush the exposed meat with olive oil, salt & pepper to taste. Place lobster onto grill and cook 5 to 7 minutes, depending on the size of the lobster tails. Make sure to turn once during cooking process. Remove from heat and serve.

Lemon Tarragon Sauce

(About 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups, recipe doubles well for a larger group.)

This sauce is wonderful, just delicious, I love it served on the side. It holds well in a double boiler and is quite forgiving for those not used to making sauces.

Saute;

2 oz. **butter**

3 large or 4 smaller **shallots**, diced

Add and reduce 20-30 minutes;

3 oz. **lemon juice**

1 pint **cream**

Add and reduce again;

4 oz. **chicken or vegetable stock**

2 oz. **fresh tarragon**, stemmed

Thicken & finish with;

1 oz. **butter** (whisked in)

pinch of **cayenne**

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. more **fresh tarragon**,
to add before serving

Sauté shallots in butter, add the cream and lemon juice. Reduce over high by half the volume. Add the stock and the tarragon and continue reducing by a quarter more or until thickened. If it's not thickening enough for you (depending on the amount of the recipe you're making) you can thicken it with a bit of cornstarch dissolved in more of the stock. Finish by whisking in the butter and cayenne and the rest of the tarragon. Salt to taste. Holds well in a double boiler or refrigerate & gently reheat later, whisking.

Lobster Steamed in Vodka with Coral Aioli

Steaming is a tidy way to cook the lobsters and the anesthetizing effort does not discriminate between animal orders and is said to relax them, it does impart a nice flavor as well. The coral is the unfertilized eggs inside the female, not to worry, once fertilized the eggs are on the outside, the coral is on the inside.

A steamer with a lid
Vodka, about 1 inch in the bottom
of your steamer
One 1 to 1.25 lb. **female lobster**
per guest
Coral Aioli (recipe follows)

Bring the vodka to a boil in the covered steamer, add the lobsters, cover tightly & cook about 8 minutes. Remove the lobsters and split them belly side down on a cutting board, remove the intestinal vein and the tomalley to serve.

Coral Aioli

(About 1 ½ cups)

If you don't want to bother with aioli from scratch you can just mash the coral and add it to mayonnaise with a squeeze of lemon or try the aioli with 1 ½ tsp. curry powder or roasted garlic as both also go very well with lobster.

2 or 3 Tb. **lobster coral**, room temperature
(cool a minute in the frig if needed)
1 tsp. **sea salt**
2 ½ Tb. fresh **lemon juice**
2 **egg yolks**, room temperature
1 cup **good olive oil**

Put the coral and salt in a processor, whirl a bit then add 2 Tb. of the oil, process till creamy, then the yolks, whirl those for a while till pale, then add the lemon juice and the rest of the oil in a slow stream while processing.

LYNETTE LA MERE is the proprietor of PURE JOY CATERING INC (805) 963-5766 (www.PureJoyCatering.com) and a freelance writer who lives in Santa Barbara.

Shopping hints: All ingredients appear in bold-faced type and can be found at Farmer's Market (for info call 805-962-5354), Santa Barbara Fish Market, Tri County Produce and Lazy Acres

COOKING AT HOME

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Spoon hot scallops over the salad plates and finish with the fresh orange dressing and a sprinkle of pine nuts.

Fresh Orange Dressing

(Yield 1 1/2 cups)

1/2 cup **fresh squeezed orange juice**
1/4 cup **rice wine vinegar**
2 Tb. **frozen orange juice concentrate**
2 Tb. **honey**
1Tb. **Dijon mustard**
1/2 t. **allspice**
1/2 t. **salt**
1/4 t. **pepper**
5 oz **vegetable oil**
1t.**orange zest** (optional)

If you are squeezing the orange yourself it is easier to take off the zest with a micro plain zester first before cutting and squeezing the orange. Put all the ingredients in a jar and shake.

Fuyu Persimmon Salsa

Delicious and colorful; perfect for grilled salmon.

4 **fuyu persimmons**, diced
1/4 cup **red onion**, chopped
1 **jalapeño** grilled, seeded, minced
1 **Anaheim chili**, grilled,
seeded, minced
2 Tb. **fresh chopped basil**
3 Tb. **fresh cilantro**
2 Tb. **lemon juice**
1/2 Tb. **olive oil**

To grill the chilies, just use tongs and the open flame on your stove, when charred on all sides put them in a plastic bag to steam a bit. Once cool to the touch you can push off the charred skin, seed and chop them. Toss together the rest of the ingredients and salt & pepper to taste.

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