

FRITTATA WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATOES,
SWEET CORN AND BASIL



Caterer to the stars Serena Bass does brunch with flair.

BY SERENA BASS

PHOTOGRAPHY METTE NIELSEN FOOD STYLING ROBIN KRAUSE

Brunch Supreme



BEING A CATERER, I feel entirely much better about brunch if I choose platters and serving utensils the night before. I like prepping muffin batter and putting the butter and cream cheese on their little plates and setting up the whole endless coffee thing of sugars, milk pitcher, mugs, spoons and so on way, way ahead of time. I roll knives and forks in napkins and put out plates and glasses. You get the picture.

Sometimes however, when staying with friends there is just no time for all this professional-grade preparation and we do it their way. I am up early and am eventually met with a pajama clad, sleepy-eyed “So, what shall we make?”

You can imagine, there is no right or wrong and both ways work out just fine. People do love to help and willingly pour juice from the carton and offer to run to the store, but it does keep me happy to have just one or two homemade things. These ideas are the little extras that can gild the lily of your brunch into a memorable meal.

Cranberry Bread

SERVES A CROWD; MAKES 2 LOAVES, FOR 24 SLICES

This cranberry bread could hardly be more ordinary looking. You would think it's utterly generic. But it is not. It is damp with juice, tart with berries, crunchy with nuts and sugar, and fragrant with zest. I happened to eat four slices in a row when I first tasted it, so watch out.

- 4 ounces butter, softened
- 2 extra large eggs
- 1 tablespoon orange zest (1-2 oranges)
- 1½ cups fresh orange juice
- 4 cups all purpose flour
- 2 cups white sugar, plus 2 teaspoons per cake for dusting the tops

- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 6 cups fresh cranberries
- 1½ cups slightly chopped walnuts

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 350°F. Grease two 8-inch loaf pans, and set aside. In a bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Set aside. Using an electric mixer beat together the butter, eggs, and zest till creamy. Add the juice and stir well until incorporated (the mix will look curdled, it's OK). Add the dry ingredients and beat just enough to mix well; don't overbeat. Remove the bowl from the mixer and fold in the cranberries and walnuts. Divide the batter evenly between the two pans and dust the tops of the loaves with



APRICOT COMPOTE WITH CROSTINI AND TOMATO, NECTARINE, AND SMOKED MOZZARELLA SALAD



the extra sugar. Bake for 1 hour or until a skewer inserted in the cake comes out just dry. Set the cakes aside until cool then remove from the pans. Can be made the day before, cooled completely, and refrigerated overnight.

Apricot Compote With Crostini

SERVES 12

This compote is more runny and more tart than jam and holds the absolute essence of a late summer afternoon in its golden fruit. The recipe is a fabulous thing to keep on hand in the refrigerator to spoon over chocolate or vanilla ice cream and is wonderful spread on crostini.

Compote

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water
- 10 strips orange zest from one orange, removed with a potato peeler
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds fresh (firmly ripe) apricots, each cut into eight little chunks, not wedges

Crostini

- 1 baguette or country loaf
- Golden (i.e. yellow, not green) olive oil
- Salt

Compote:

Put the sugar, water, and orange zest in a small pan over medium-low heat. Bring to a gentle simmer for 5 minutes then add the apricots and increase the heat to medium. Turn the fruit carefully through the syrup with a rubber spatula and after a couple of minutes, when the apricots have started to relax a bit, cover the pan, reduce the heat, and simmer slowly for 10 minutes, turning the fruit gently a couple more times. Tip the apricots out into a bowl and, when they've cooled, refrigerate for at least 3 hours and preferably overnight.

Crostini:

Preheat your grill or broiler for at least ten minutes. Slice the baguette or bread $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick. Brush lightly with olive oil on both sides and dust with a little salt. Grill or broil, 3 inches from the heat for about 30 seconds to 1 minute, depending on how much oomph your heat source has. Tip the crostini straight into a basket lined with a napkin and either set them aside till serving or serve immediately.

Tomato, Nectarine, and Smoked Mozzarella Salad

SERVES 6 TO 8

This stunning combination is so simple but depends on the very best ingredients. Try looking for organically grown, ripe tomatoes; they could be dark red, yellow, speckled green, or streaked with purple—and might even be misshapen—but will taste real and look lovely when mixed together on the plate. The nectarines should be fully ripe, juicy, and heavily perfumed. If you can't find smoked mozzarella use a plain one, just make sure it's cool but not cold.

- 1 pound tomatoes
- 1 pound nectarines
- 1 pound smoked mozzarella
- 2 tablespoons aged sherry vinegar
- 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 12 fresh basil leaves

Choose a wide shallow bowl and just cut the tomatoes and nectarines straight into a medium mixing bowl quite casually and not too long before you need them. Sprinkle on the vinegar, olive oil, salt, pepper, and basil and toss gently to mix. Cut a slice of mozzarella for each plate, divide the tossed salad on top, and chop some basil leaves to scatter on top.

Sweet Potato Soup with Chilies and Honey

SERVES 12

Sweet potatoes on their own are a bit one-dimensional but they somehow have the ability to both support and enhance the other ingredients, making this easy soup into a super fabulous, quite spicy taste sensation. It can be made the day before, refrigerated overnight, and reheated. Or you could add a couple of ice cubes to thin it and serve it chilled. Very chic. I cut the sweet potatoes into rough wedges to roast them and sometimes skip the peeling and soup making part and just tip the potatoes straight out of the oven into a bowl and serve them as sticky, rustic fries.

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into rough wedges
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon hot pepper flakes
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup golden honey
- 6 cups chicken stock
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream whipped to soft peaks (optional)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh cilantro leaves, chopped (optional)



ROASTED SWEET POTATOES FOR SWEET POTATO SOUP WITH CHILIES AND HONEY



RUBY SANGRIA

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 375°F. Have ready 1 ungreased heavy cookie sheet or shallow roasting pan. Put all the ingredients except the stock (and optional whipped cream and cilantro garnish) in a medium bowl and toss very well. Tip everything onto the baking sheet in an even layer and bake for 40 minutes. Check after 25 minutes, as you don't want the sweet potatoes to actually blacken at the edges, just to brown well in a few spots (if there are a couple that have gone over to the dark side, throw them out). Put the stock in a medium pan over medium heat, add the roasted sweet potatoes and bring to a simmer for 20 minutes. Blend to a smooth purée, either with an immersion blender or in batches in a blender, and check that the soup is thin enough; add water or stock if you desire a thinner soup. Serve with a spoonful of whipped cream and a flutter of chopped cilantro.

Frittata with Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Sweet Corn and Basil

SERVES 6

A frittata is a generous dish; it looks terrifically homemade, can be fully prepped the day before, and requires no last minute fussing. Also—as if you needed more convincing—it is open to endless variation and is easy to serve. Don't we love a frittata? The only potential trouble is over-cooking. The eggs should be delicate and still a little shaky in the middle when they come out of the oven, as the frittata will finish cooking in its own residual heat.

- 10 extra large eggs
- 1/3 cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and chopped medium
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 1/4 teaspoons salt
- 3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups fresh, sweet corn kernels, cooked al dente
- 2 tablespoons sweet butter
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 350°F. Whisk the eggs then add the tomatoes, garlic, salt, pepper, and the sweet corn. Cover and refrigerate. Half an hour before you want to eat, warm a 1 x 9-inch heavy nonstick sauté pan well over medium heat. Add the butter and when it foams, add the egg mixture and the basil. Using a heatproof rubber spatula, pull the edges of the eggs towards the middle a few times, tipping the pan to distribute the egg. Cook for about 4 minutes and finish in the oven for about 6 minutes or until the eggs are just delicately set. Remove from the oven and let the frittata sit for a couple of minutes; then with the help of the spatula, slide it onto a warm plate. Frittatas are very flexible; you can leave it on the back of the stove for 1/2 an hour and it will still be warm-ish, or pop it briefly in the oven to re-warm, or just serve it at room temperature.

Ruby Sangria

SERVES A CROWD; MAKES 12 8-OUNCE SERVINGS

When presented with a great Sangria, asking for the recipe can prompt even a good friend to tap the side of his or her nose and imply, as we say in England, "That's for me to know and you to find out." This recipe is simple, foolproof, and quite strong since you should pour the chilled Sangria into a glass full of ice, which will dilute it. The flavor is better if made the day before and refrigerated, which also turns the oranges a beautiful, garnet red color. If you are met with a chill in the air, you can heat this (don't boil!) and serve it hot as a sort of mulled wine.

- 2 bottles Côtes du Rhône or other full-bodied red wine
- 2 cups strained orange juice
- 1 cup Spanish brandy (see note)
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 oranges, quartered and sliced 1/4-inch thick

Mix everything together and stir occasionally for 30 minutes to make sure all the sugar is melted.

Note: for Spanish Brandy, Fundador, Solera Reserva is a good choice—about \$25 and delicious. ■

NUTRITION

CRANBERRY BREAD:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 249 (84 from fat); FAT 9g (sat. 3g); CHOL 30mg; SODIUM 318mg; CARB 29g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 4g

APRICOT COMPOTE:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 69 (2 from fat); FAT 0g (sat. 0g); CHOL 0mg; SODIUM 1mg; CARB 17g; FIBER 1g; PROTEIN 1g

TOMATO, NECTARINE, MOZZARELLA SALAD:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 279 (181 from fat); FAT 20g (sat. 8g); CHOL 30mg; SODIUM 524mg; CARB 10g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 16g

SWEET POTATO SOUP WITH GARNISHES:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 137 (61 from fat); FAT 7g (sat. 3g); CHOL 14mg; SODIUM 156mg; CARB 17g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 4g

FRITTATA
PER SERVING: CALORIES 234 (134 from fat); FAT 15g (sat. 6g); CHOL 406mg; SODIUM 526mg; CARB 13g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 13g

RUBY SANGRIA:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 262 (93 from fat); FAT 10g (sat. 5g); CHOL 236mg; SODIUM 93mg; CARB 36g; FIBER 0g; PROTEIN 7g