

Canapé Recipes from Darina Allen
of
Ballymaloe Cookery School
for RTÉ Radio 1
Brendan O'Connor Show

Saturday, 2nd December 2023

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Alicia's Cheese Straws

Makes about 12

My friend Alicia Wilkinson from Silwood Kitchens Cooking School in Capetown gave me this fantastic recipe for straws – it is the best I know and a fantastic way to use up puff pastry trimmings and grated cheese.

250g (9oz) puff pastry, trimmings are fine
1 lightly beaten organic egg white
100g (3 1/2oz) Parmesan
100g (3 1/2oz) Cheddar cheese
pinch cayenne pepper

Preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F/Gas Mark 5.

Roll the chilled puff pastry into a large rectangle on a floured marble slab. Brush the lower half of the pastry with lightly beaten egg white.

Finely grate the Parmesan and Cheddar cheese. Mix with a good pinch of cayenne pepper. Sprinkle half of the cheese and spice mixture liberally over the egg white, press down gently.

Fold the upper half of the pastry down over the lower half and press with a rolling pin to seal. Roll out pastry to the original size. Paint the entire sheet with egg white and cover with the remaining cheese and spice mixture.

Chill for approx. 10 minutes. Cut into thin strips 1cm (1/2 inch) and twist into straws. Bake for 10-15 minutes or until golden brown and cooked through. Cool on a wire rack.

Serve in a tall glass or beaker. We use a scalloped zinc pot and children's tin sand buckets depending on the occasion.

Top Tip: The raw prepared cheese straws may be laid on silicone paper and successfully frozen. The silicone paper can be lifted onto a baking sheet with the cheese straws baked off successfully. Allow a little extra cooking time.

Irish Cheddar Cheese Croquettes

Eggs are a first class protein, a good source of calcium, iron, magnesium, zinc and B-vitamins. They are a good energy food and help with bone strength.

We get into big trouble if these crispy cheese croquettes are not on the Ballymaloe lunch buffet every Sunday. They are loved by children and grown-ups and are a particular favourite with vegetarians. They are not suitable for vegans. Make tiny ones for canapés and provide cocktail sticks to eat them and Ballymaloe country relish as an accompaniment.

Makes 25 - 30, depending on size

450ml (15fl oz) milk
few slices of carrot and onion
1 small bay leaf
sprig of thyme
4 parsley stalks
200g (7oz) roux (see recipe)
2 egg yolks, preferably free range
225g (8oz) grated mature Irish Cheddar cheese
a pinch of cayenne
1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon freshly chopped chives (optional)
salt and freshly ground pepper
seasoned white flour, preferably unbleached
beaten egg
fine dried white breadcrumbs

Accompaniment

Ballymaloe Country Relish

Put the cold milk into a saucepan with the carrot, onion and herbs, bring slowly to the boil, simmer for 3-4 minutes, turn off the heat and allow to infuse for about 10 minutes if you have enough time. Strain the flavourings, rinse them and add to a stock if you have one on the go. Bring the milk back to the boil, whisk in the roux bit by bit; it will get very thick but persevere. (The roux always seems like a lot too much, but you need it all so don't decide to use less).

Season with salt and freshly ground pepper. Cook for 1-2 minutes on a gentle heat, then remove from the heat, stir in the egg yolks, cheese, pinch of cayenne, mustard and optional chives. Taste and correct the seasoning. Spread out on a wide plate to cool.

When the mixture is cold or at least cool enough to handle, shape into balls about the size of a golf ball or 25g (1oz) approx. Roll first in seasoned flour, then in beaten egg and then in fine breadcrumbs. Chill until firm but bring back to room temperature before cooking otherwise they may burst. **Just before serving**, heat a deep fryer to 170°C/325°F and cook the Cheese Croquettes until crisp and golden. Drain on

kitchen paper and serve hot with a green salad and perhaps some Ballymaloe Country Relish.

Note: Cooked Cheese Croquettes can be kept warm in an oven for up to 30 minutes. They can also be frozen and reheated in an oven.

Roux

110g (4oz) butter

110g (4oz) flour

Melt the butter and cook the flour in it for 2 minutes on a low heat, stirring occasionally. Use as required. Roux can be stored in a cool place and used as required or it can be made up on the spot if preferred. It will keep at least a fortnight in a refrigerator.

Anchovy and Sesame Seed Straws

Makes 50 approximately

225g (8oz) puff pastry - chilled
egg wash made from 1 beaten egg
2 tablespoons sesame seeds
24 anchovies approx.

Cut the pastry into 2 equal halves. Roll each piece out into 2 pieces measuring 10cm (4 inch) wide and 40.5cm (16 inch) long - use a ruler to measure the pastry. Brush one piece of the pastry with egg wash and put 3 rows of anchovies onto the pastry - leaving a gap of 1/2 inch (1cm) at each edge and 1cm (1/2 inch) between the rows of anchovies. Place the second layer of pastry exactly on top of the first layer and seal tightly with your fingers. Brush the surface with the egg wash and sprinkle with the sesame seeds. Place the pastry on a tray and refrigerate until quite chilled. When chilled cut the pastry crossways into one-third strips. Place on a baking sheet and cook in a hot oven 220°C\425°F\Gas Mark 7 for 8-10 minutes till golden brown and crisp.

Thai Curry Bites

Makes 30 approximately

450g (1lb) skinless and boneless chicken breasts
50g (2oz) butter
45g (1 1/2oz) fresh root ginger, peeled and finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1/4 teaspoon green peppercorns
1 stalk of lemon grass, finely chopped
2 red chillies, finely chopped
2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
400ml (14fl oz) coconut milk (We use Chaokoh Brand)
2 teaspoons freshly chopped coriander (cilantro) leaves
salt and freshly ground pepper
fresh coriander leaves and flowers if available

Cut the chicken in 30 even sized cubes. Heat 25g (1oz) of the butter in a large frying pan and sauté the chicken pieces until lightly browned on all sides.

Melt the remaining butter in the frying pan, sauté the ginger, garlic, peppercorns, lemon grass and chillies. Add the lime juice and ground coriander. Gradually stir in the coconut milk, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 8-10 minutes. Add the chicken pieces.

Warm the sauce gently, stir in the finely chopped coriander leaves and season to taste.

Arrange Chinese or enamel spoons on a plate, spoon a piece of warm chicken and some sauce onto each spoon. Pop a coriander leaf and flowers if available on top and serve.

Hot-Smoked Mussels with Smoked Paprika and Pennywort

The pennywort can be replaced with sprigs of bittercress or watercress or tiny wild garlic leaves

Serve 1 as a starter or small plate

12-15 mussels
1 generous teaspoon mayonnaise
1 pinch of smoked paprika
12 tiny pennywort leaves

Place 2 tablespoons of wood chips in a hot-smoking box. There is no need to have a tray sitting in the bottom of the smoking box. Place the mussels in a shallow bowl or plate and place on the rack in the smoker. (I use an enamel plate and find that it conducts the heat perfectly).

Place the smoking box over a moderate heat with the lid slightly open. As soon as the wood chips start to smoke, close the lid tightly and reduce the heat to low. Cook for approximately 7 minutes. Open the lid and check that the mussels have popped open. If not fully open, close the lid and cook for 2 more minutes.

Remove the plate from the smoker being careful not to lose any of the juices that the mussels have released during the smoking. Pop the mussels onto a serving plate and strain the juices into a little bowl. Whisk in the mayonnaise to achieve a broth type sauce. Pour this over the mussels and finish the dish with a sprinkling of smoked paprika and a scattering of pennywort leaves.

Serve immediately.

Rory O'Connell

Sweet Pea Guacamole on Warm Tortillas

I came across this fresh tasting combination in California served on tiny warm tortillas, but little pancakes are also very good and easier to make! Serve 3 as a starter garnished with a red chilli or serve as finger food.

Makes 16 approx. depending on size

16 warm tortillas, 6cms (2 1/2 inch) approx.

450g (1lb) podded fresh or frozen peas
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice
2 tablespoons parsley, chopped
2 tablespoons fresh coriander, finely chopped
1/2 fresh chilli, finely chopped (seeds removed)
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon salt, approx.
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander

Garnish

crème fraiche or thick natural yoghurt
fresh coriander leaves
finely sliced red chillies

Cook the peas in boiling salted water for 3-4 minutes. Refresh under cold water and drain. Whizz the olive oil with the lime juice, coriander and chilli in a food processor, blend for 1 minute. Add the peas, cumin, coriander and salt and blend until almost smooth. Taste, correct seasoning put into a bowl and cover until needed.

Serve on tiny hot tortillas, blinis or pancakes with a blob of creme fraiche or thick natural yoghurt if liked. Garnish with a sprig of coriander and thinly sliced chillies. This guacamole even tastes delicious on a slice of hot crispy toast.

Oysters with Asian Vinaigrette

Even though Pacific oysters are available year-round, they are best in winter. I love native oysters au nature just with a squirt of lemon juice but this dressing really adds excitement to the gigas oysters.

Serves 4-6 as a starter

24 Pacific oysters

- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon freshly ginger, grated
- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons mirin
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 4 spring onions, cut at an angle
- 1 teaspoon red chilli, cut at an angle
- 3 tablespoons sesame oil
- 6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped chives

To Serve

fresh seaweed (if available)
segments of lime

To make the Asian vinaigrette, mix all the ingredients in a glass jar, seal and shake well. If you can get some, place a little fresh seaweed on each plate. Arrange 4-5 oysters per person on top and spoon a little vinaigrette over each one. Serve on a bed of seaweed with segments of lime.

Top Tip

If you can find some fresh seaweed e.g., bladderwrack, dip the fonds into boiling water for a second or two, they will turn bright green. Drop it straight into a bowl of iced water to prevent it cooking and to set the colour. It will make an attractive garnish, which you could eat if you were very hungry, but it doesn't taste delicious! Use it soon otherwise it will go slimy.

Medjool Dates with Crozier Blue Cheese

We were served this delicious little morsel with a Swedish Blue cheese at Wardshuset Ulla Winbladh beside Skansen in Stockholm. It's become a favourite little nibble with a drink. Serve as a canapé or amuse guile.

Makes 20

Medjool dates
ripe Crozier Blue Cheese

Split the dates lengthways and remove the stone. Arrange on a plate, top each half with a little nugget of cheese.

Ruby Grapefruit and Pomegranate Granita

A grapefruit granita is super versatile. Serve in chilled shot glasses as a canape or at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a meal.

Serves 20 as a canape

500ml (18fl oz) ruby grapefruit juice (5 grapefruit approx.)
160g (scant 5 1/2oz) caster sugar approx.
1 egg white (optional)

Garnish

Seeds from 1/2 - 1 pomegranate
fresh mint leaves

16-20 shot glasses

Put the freshly squeezed grapefruit into a bowl add the sugar and dissolve by stirring it into the juice. Taste. The juice should taste rather too sweet to drink, it will lose some of its sweetness in the freezing.

Make the granita in one of the following ways.

Method 1. Pour into the drum of an ice-cream maker or sorbetière and freeze for 20-25 minutes until completely set and frozen. Scoop out and serve immediately or store in a covered bowl in the freezer until needed.

Method 2. Pour the juice into a stainless steel or plastic container and put into the freezer. After about 4-5 hours when the granita is semi frozen remove and whisk until granular. Return to freezer. Repeat several times. Keep covered in the freezer until needed.

Method 3. If you have a food processor, simply freeze the granita completely in a covered stainless steel or plastic bowl, then break into large pieces and whizz up in the food processor for a few seconds. Add one slightly beaten egg white, whizz again for another few seconds, then return to the bowl. Freeze again until needed.

To Serve

Chill the shot glasses in a refrigerator or freezer.

Put 1 chilled scoop of granita into each glass. Sprinkle a few pomegranate seeds on top. Freeze until needed just before servings. Decorate with fresh mint leaves and serve immediately with a tiny teaspoon for each one.

Chocolate Crisps

These are surprising and good.

2 potatoes

Oil or fat in a deep fryer for frying the crisps, such as sunflower or olive oil or beef dripping

400g (14oz) chocolate, 70% cocoa solids

4g (1/5oz) anise seeds

4g (1/5oz) fennel seeds

Maldon sea salt

Peel the potatoes and slice them very finely, about 1mm thick. I use a mandolin for this purpose. Place in a bowl and allow a cold running tap to run over them to rinse off the starch. When the water runs clear, the starch is gone. Drain the potato slices and dry carefully on a clean cloth.

Heat the oil or fat in a deep fryer to 170°C/ 325°F/Gas Mark 3.

Place the chocolate in a Pyrex bowl. Place the bowl over a saucepan of cold water, making sure the water is not touching the bottom of the bowl. Turn on the heat to bring the water to a bare simmer. Turn off the heat and stir the chocolate with a rubber spatula until completely melted.

Fry the crisps a few slices at a time until golden brown and crisp. Drain on kitchen paper if necessary, dabbing them dry.

Dip the crisps one at a time in the chocolate until they are completely coated. Allow any excess chocolate to drip off and place on parchment paper. I like to move the crisps to a second clean sheet of paper after a few moments to lose any excess chocolate and ensure a good presentation. While the chocolate is still molten, sprinkle the surface of the crisps with a few of the spice seeds.

Allow to cool and set completely before serving with a few flakes of sea salt sprinkled on at the last minute.

Rory O'Connell