

Matthew May's TEACHING KITCHEN

“Vertical Port Wine Tasting”

April 5, 2025

MERLOT-POACHED PEARS WITH GOAT CHEESE

- 4 bartlet, Anjou or bosc pears, peeled**
- 1 bottle good merlot wine**
- ½-bottle of water (using the same wine bottle)**
- 1 cinnamon stick**
- 1 TBSP. sugar**
- 4-ounces goat cheese, softened**
- 4-ounces cream cheese, softened**

In medium-size saucepan (large enough to fit all 4 pears), add wine, water, sugar, and cinnamon stick. Bring to a boil. Add peeled pears and bring wine back to a low simmer. Once the liquid has returned to a boil, turn heat down to medium low. Place a round plate or small bowl on top of the pears to help keep them submerged in the wine. Simmer pears on low heat for 40 minutes, remove from heat, remove plate/bowl, and allow to cool to room temperature on the countertop, about three hours. Cover and refrigerate until cold (about 3-4 hours) until ready to use. The longer the pears remain in the poaching liquid, the darker and more vibrant the color! Pears can be poached up to three days in advance. When ready to serve, remove pears from wine. Cut pears in half, lengthwise through the stem. Using a melon baller or small spoon, remove the seeds/core from all the pear halves, leaving a neat, small cut-out oval hole in the pear. Remove the hard flower-end of the bottom of the pear. In a small mixing bowl, combine goat cheese and cream cheese until smooth. Spoon about 1 TBSP. goat cheese mixture into each pear. Serve immediately. You may prepare the pears ahead of time but spoon the goat cheese mixture into the pears right before serving. (You do not want to refrigerate the pears with the goat cheese already in them, as the goat cheese mixture will become too firm for serving, and the acid from the wine will begin to break down the cheese.) You want the pears cold, and the goat cheese mixture at room temperature. In my cooking classes, I top each pear with my candied pecans, coarsely chopped. Candied pecans can be found at www.matthewmay.org. Sweet and savory!

CRISPY BACON WRAPPED DATES & SMOKED ALMOND

- 1-pound dried dates, pit removed**
- 18-20 smoked almonds**
- 9-10 slices smoked bacon, cut in half**
- Optional: blue cheese crumbles**

Preheat your oven to 350°F.

Cut bacon slices in half, widthwise. (If the bacon is 9" long, cut it in half so you have two 4.5" slices.) Spray a cookie sheet tray with vegetable spray. Using a small paring knife, make a cut along the side of each date. Carefully, open the date to reveal the inside. Remove the pit if it has not already been removed. Insert a smoked almond and a small piece of blue cheese (optional). Bring the two sides of the date back together to enclose the almond and blue cheese inside the date. Wrap a half-length piece of bacon around each date, overlapping the bacon to ensure a tight and secure fit. Lay each wrapped date onto the sprayed cookie sheet tray with the overlapped end of the bacon facing down. Bake for 15 minutes then turn the dates over and bake an additional 10-15 minutes, or until bacon is brown and crisp. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly before serving. Option: Drizzle with honey, honey hot sauce, or balsamic syrup. I love this appetizer!

BLUE CHEESE SAUCE FOR DATES

4-TBLS. unsalted butter

1-TBLS. chopped red onion or shallot

1-cup blue cheese, crumbled

1-tsp. Worcestershire sauce

Cracked black pepper

In a small saucepan, add butter and onion. Stir and cook for 2-3 minutes over medium heat until onion is tender and translucent. Add blue cheese, Worcestershire sauce, and black pepper. Stir until combined. Serve this delicious sauce under your bacon-wrapped date. Other suggestions: serve with BBQ chicken, chicken wings, or BBQ pork chops.

PAN-SEARED or SOUS VIDE DUCK BREAST

W/ CHERRY-PORT WINE

1 whole duck breast, split, skin on, cut in half (resulting in two half-breasts)

½-tsp. "Herbs de Provence" Sea Salt (found at www.eastcoastsaltcompany.com)

1/8-tsp. cracked black pepper

½-cup red or white port wine

½-cup blood orange juice OR ¼-cup dark sweet cherries, pitted

1 cinnamon stick

1 sprig fresh thyme

1 sprig fresh rosemary

Preheat oven to 250°F. Place a baking sheet pan or cookie sheet pan in the oven to get hot. Score (cut shallow cuts) diagonally on the fat-side of each duck breast. Turn each breast 45 degrees, and then score again, creating a 'diamond pattern' on the fat-side of the breast. Season both sides of the breast with black pepper and sea salt. Lay each duck breast, fat-side down, in a cold skillet or fry pan. Turn burner on low heat and render the fat from the breasts. This process can take 30-40 minutes. Take your time. Do not let the rendered fat get too hot. It should sound like gently sizzling bacon. The amount of rendered fat will increase in the pan, while the thickness of fat on each duck breast will decrease. Do not let the rendered fat come above the layer of fat on the duck breast. You will need to pour off some of the rendered fat as you go along. Save it! As duck fat is amazing to cook with potatoes! (You can store duck fat in your freezer

up to 6 months.) When most of the fat is rendered and has become golden brown, carefully remove the breasts from the pan and place on heated cookie sheet (already in the oven) fat-side down. Finish cooking in oven for about 15 minutes, or until the internal temperature has reached 135°F. Remove duck from oven and remove from hot pan and allow to rest skin side up for about five minutes. The internal temperature will continue to climb to about 140°F. While duck is in the oven, combine port wine, cherries, cinnamon stick, and herbs in a small saucepan. Cook on medium heat for about 15-30 minutes, allowing the wine to reduce in volume by half.

Place each duck breast on a cutting board, fat-side up. Allow the breast to rest for about 5-7 minutes. Slice each duck breast about ¼-inch thick. Transfer sliced duck to a serving plate or platter. Serve with the port wine cherry sauce on top. Sweet and savory.

SOUS VIDE: After rendering the fat from the duck breasts, season the duck breasts and place in a gallon-size zip-lock bag. Seal the bag almost all the way and slowly lower the bag into the water. Continue lowering the bag into the water until all the air gets pushed out of the top of the bag. Sous vide at 135°F for two hours. After two hours, remove the duck breasts from the bag and either finish the breasts under a broiler, use a torch to re-crisp the duck fat, or place each breast into a hot skillet to re-crisp the fat. Slice and serve with cherry port wine sauce or blood orange port wine sauce over the top.

CHOCOLATE CRÈME BRÛLÉE

¾-cup heavy cream

2-ounces dark or bittersweet chocolate chips

1-tsp. cocoa powder (unsweetened)

4 egg yolks

2-TBSP. sugar (divided)

***Optional fruit/peanut butter on the bottom:**

1-TBSP.: raspberry jam, orange marmalade, or any other jam, jelly, preserve, peanut butter.

2 6 or 8-ounce ramekins or glass dessert dishes

(Makes two desserts)

Preheat oven to 300°F, with rack positioned in center of oven. For custard, add cream to saucepan, along with chocolate chips and cocoa. Bring to a low boil, stirring. In a medium sized bowl, whisk egg yolks and 1 TBSP. sugar together. Slowly whisk in hot chocolate cream, a little at a time, until smooth. (If adding a jam, jelly, or peanut butter: place 1 TBSP. into the bottom of each ramekin before pouring in the custard.) Divide mixture evenly among 2 custard cups (6–8-ounce custard cups or ramekins). Add the filled custard cups to a deep baking dish and pour enough water in baking pan to come halfway up sides of the ramekins. Bake until custards are JUST set, about 40 minutes. (Remember that chocolate is in a liquid state when hot, so it will appear that it is not cooked all the way). Remove from oven and cool on counter before refrigerating. May be prepared 1 day ahead; cooled, tightly wrapped, and stored in refrigerator. When ready to serve, evenly sprinkle sugar on top of each custard. Preheat oven broiler. Place ramekins on baking sheet pan and place 2 inches under broiler, just until the sugar melts and begins to caramelize. Keep a close eye on this process, as the sugar will burn quickly. Rotate sheet pan if needed, to caramelize all the ramekins. Let stand about five minutes before serving.