

FRENCH BREAD STICKS GRATINEE

◦ SERVES 6

6 packaged brown-and-serve French bread sticks (about 9 by 1½ inches each)

6 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

I find French bread sticks at my supermarket, and these long, narrow rolls are handy to have in the freezer in case you run out of bread or have unexpected guests. Before browning them, coat the bread sticks with olive oil and sprinkle them with Parmesan cheese and black pepper—the added flavor and color transform them.



Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Split the bread sticks lengthwise in half. Pour the olive oil onto a rimmed baking sheet or a jelly-roll pan and press the bread sticks, cut side down, into the olive oil so they are well moistened. Turn them over and sprinkle the cut sides with the Parmesan cheese and pepper.

Bake the bread sticks for 10 to 12 minutes, until crisp and brown. Serve warm.

▶ **The addition of olive oil, Parmesan cheese, and pepper turns these store-bought rolls into homemade.**

A great addition to a bread basket and good with soup, this bread takes little preparation time. I combine the ingredients in a food processor, but you can whisk them together by hand if you prefer.



Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Lightly grease a 6-cup (8½ by 4½-inch) loaf pan with the olive oil. Place all the remaining ingredients in a food processor and process for a few seconds to combine, or mix in a bowl with a whisk.

Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan, set the pan on a cookie sheet, and bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the loaf is well set and nicely browned. Cool in the pan on a wire rack for a few minutes, then unmold, slice, and serve warm.

▶ **If you use packaged grated cheese, the batter can be ready for the oven in minutes.**



CORNMEAL AND CHEDDAR BREAD

◦ MAKES 1 LOAF

½ teaspoon olive oil

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 cup yellow cornmeal

2 teaspoons double-acting baking powder

1 tablespoon sugar

½ teaspoon salt

⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper

1 cup milk

¼ cup peanut oil

1 large egg

1½ cups grated cheddar cheese (about 6 ounces)

GARLIC AND HERB BREAD

◦ MAKES 1 LOAF (SERVES 4)

1 French-style baguette
(8 to 10 ounces)

3 tablespoons peanut oil

About 4 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped fine (2 teaspoons)

1 teaspoon Italian seasoning

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper



This bread is especially good with a hearty soup. I use a long, thin French-style baguette, but you can use another type of unsliced bread if you prefer. Although the bread can be prepared ahead, it is best to bake it at the last moment and serve it while it is still warm.



Split the baguette horizontally in half. Mix together the oil, garlic, Italian seasoning, and pepper in a small bowl. Spread this mixture on the cut side of each baguette half.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Just before serving time, arrange the bread halves cut side up on a cookie sheet and bake for 12 to 15 minutes. Cut into pieces and serve while still warm.

▶ **Season the bread ahead, but bake it at the last minute and serve while it's still warm.**

You'll find this simple tart a life-saver when unexpected guests drop in. Although you can certainly use a homemade piecrust, a frozen pie shell works very well and saves time. To give the tart a more rustic look, fold the edges of the flattened pie shell back over the filling.



Remove the pie shell from its foil pan and place it on a cookie sheet lined with nonstick aluminum foil. Set it aside to defrost for about 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Mix the remaining ingredients together in a bowl.

Flatten the softened pie shell against the cookie sheet, creating a flat circle of dough 10 to 12 inches across. Seal any cracks that develop by pressing the dough together gently with your fingers. Pour the ricotta mixture into the middle of the round of dough and spread it out to within 1 to 2 inches of the edge. Fold the border of dough back over the filling, lifting it with the help of the foil, pushing it against the cheese, and then peeling back the foil.

Bake the tart for 30 to 40 minutes, or until the filling is set and nicely browned. Cut into wedges and serve.

CHEESE TART

◦ SERVES 4

One 9-inch frozen pie shell

1 cup ricotta cheese (8 ounces)

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

4 ounces Gouda or cheddar cheese, grated (1 cup)

2 teaspoons Spicy Red Salsa (page 13), or **1 teaspoon Sriracha** or other hot sauce





CREAMY STEWED POTATOES

◦ SERVES 4

4 cups diced (½-inch) peeled cooked potatoes (see Basic Boiled Potatoes, page 170)

½ cups half-and-half

2 cloves garlic, peeled, crushed, and chopped fine (about 1 teaspoon)

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 tablespoon chopped chives, for garnish

In this recipe, I use half-and-half, but this could be replaced with cream if you want the dish to be very rich, or with milk if you want it less rich. Either way, it is delicious with grilled meat or fish.



Place the potatoes in a saucepan and add the half-and-half, garlic, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil, partially cover, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 8 to 10 minutes, until most of the liquid has been absorbed and the potatoes are just moist. Sprinkle with the chives and serve.

When I was a child in France, whenever my aunt made mashed potatoes, she put a few cloves of unpeeled garlic in the cooking water. After the potatoes were cooked, she pushed them—garlic and all—through a food mill to eliminate the skin, and the resulting potato mixture had a delicate garlic flavor, which I recall fondly and have tried to recapture in this recipe. Unlike my aunt's smooth mashed potatoes, though, these aren't pressed through a food mill after cooking, so the garlic should be peeled.



Place the potatoes and garlic in a saucepan, cover with water, add ¼ teaspoon of the salt, and bring to a boil. Boil gently for 20 to 22 minutes, until the potatoes are tender, then drain and return the potatoes and garlic to the pan.

Add the butter, remaining ¼ teaspoon salt, and the pepper and crush with a potato masher into a coarse puree. Add the milk and mix with a whisk until the mixture is as smooth as you desire. Serve immediately.

NOTE: To prepare the potatoes ahead, cover the whisked mixture with 2 or 3 tablespoons milk so the top remains moist and to keep a skin from forming. Set aside, then reheat at serving time.

MASHED POTATOES WITH GARLIC

◦ SERVES 6

1¼ pounds Red Bliss potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes

4 large cloves garlic, peeled

4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 cup milk

POTATO OMELET

◦ SERVES 4

**2 to 3 Idaho potatoes (1 pound),
peeled and sliced thin (about
3 cups)**

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

**½ small leek, trimmed, washed,
and sliced thin (about 1 cup)**

8 large eggs, preferably organic

½ teaspoon salt

**¼ teaspoon freshly ground
black pepper**

**2 tablespoons chopped chives,
for garnish**

▶ **You probably already have
the basic ingredients—eggs
and potatoes—on hand for
this great last-minute dish.**

This is an ideal recipe for a last-minute meal when unexpected guests arrive. I always have potatoes and eggs on hand, so all I need to make this delicious omelet is a bit of leek, which lends taste and color to the dish and enhances its flavor. Served with a salad, the omelet makes a perfect main dish for an informal meal.



Wash the potatoes in cool water, drain, and pat dry with paper towels.

Heat the olive oil and butter in a 10-inch nonstick skillet. When hot, add the potatoes, cover (they tend to splatter), and cook over medium to high heat for 10 minutes, stirring every 3 to 4 minutes. Add the leek and cook, covered, for another 3 minutes, until cooked through and lightly browned.

Meanwhile, break the eggs into a bowl and add the salt and pepper. Mix well with a fork.

When the potatoes and leek are cooked, add the egg mixture to the skillet and, using a silicone or wooden spatula, stir from the sides toward the center of the pan for about 1 minute, allowing the eggs to move between the potatoes and cook. Keep stirring until most of the egg is set, but still be wet in the center. Cover, reduce the heat to medium to low, and cook for about 2 minutes, until a nice crust has formed on the underside. (There will still be some moisture on top.)

Loosen the omelet around the edges by sliding the spatula underneath it and invert onto a serving plate. Cut into 6 wedges and serve sprinkled with the chives.



BAKED CHICKEN LEGS WITH MUSTARD CRUMBS

◦ SERVES 4

4 skinless chicken legs (about 10 ounces each)

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

3½ tablespoons olive oil

2 slices white bread

2 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard

▶ The chicken legs can be prepared ahead through the initial cooking, then finished in the oven just before serving.

I prefer the dark meat of chicken and find the legs remain nicely moist when prepared this way. The initial cooking can be done ahead, then return the legs to the oven just before serving to finish cooking.



Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Using a sharp heavy knife, cut halfway through the joint between the drumstick and thigh of each leg to help the cooking process. Cut off and discard the tips of the drumsticks. Sprinkle the meat with the salt, pepper, and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and arrange the legs on a cookie sheet lined with nonstick aluminum foil. Bake for 15 minutes; the chicken will be only partially cooked.

Meanwhile, place the bread in a food processor and process to crumbs (you will have about 1½ cups crumbs). Gently mix the bread crumbs with the remaining 1½ tablespoons oil to moisten them.

Remove the chicken from the oven, brush the surface with the mustard, and pile the bread crumbs on top, pressing lightly to make them adhere. (You can prepare the chicken ahead to this point.)

Return the chicken to the oven and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the bread crumbs are brown and the meat is tender.

Transfer the legs to individual plates and serve immediately, spooning any spilled crumbs alongside the meat.



CASSOULET WITH SAUSAGES

◦ SERVES 4

1 tablespoon olive oil

¼ cup water

4 sweet Italian-style sausages
(12 ounces)

8 ounces pancetta, cut into
½-inch pieces

1 onion, peeled and sliced thin
(about 1 cup)

5 scallions, cleaned and cut into
½-inch pieces (about ¾ cup)

2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
(about 2 teaspoons)

Two 16-ounce cans white kidney
(cannellini) beans

8 ounces kielbasa, peeled if the
casing is tough, cut into 4 pieces

1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce

1 teaspoon herbes de Provence
(see Note, page 15) or Italian
seasoning

2 slices country bread

2 tablespoons peanut oil

Cassoulet is a famous dish from southwestern France. It always contains white beans and usually duck or goose—as well as roast pork and sausages. This satisfying simplified version is easily made with sausages and canned white kidney (cannellini) beans. I prepare it in large ovenproof soup bowls, but you could also serve it into individual bowls without browning it in the oven.

A simple stew of sausage and beans, the ingredients can be assembled in the individual bowls and refrigerated, ready to cook, the night before serving. The cassoulet will then take slightly longer to cook, since the ingredients will be cold.



Place the olive oil and water in a large saucepan and add the Italian sausages and pancetta. Cook over medium-to-high heat for about 10 minutes, shaking the pan occasionally so the sausages roll over and cook on all sides.

When most of the moisture has evaporated and the sausages are browning, add the onion, scallions, and garlic and sauté for about 30 seconds. Add the beans, with their liquid, and the kielbasa, Tabasco, and herbes de Provence. Cover, bring to a boil, and cook for 10 minutes. Set aside.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Place the bread in a food processor and process to crumbs (you should have 1½ cups crumbs). Lightly toss the bread crumbs with the peanut oil.



Spoon the sausage mixture into four 2½-cup ovenproof soup bowls, filling the bowls to within ¾ inch of the top. Sprinkle the bread crumbs over the top and arrange the bowls on a cookie sheet lined with aluminum foil. Bake for about 30 minutes, until the mixture is bubbling and very hot and brown. If you want the crumbs a little browner, turn on the broiler and place the bowls under the broiler for a few minutes. Serve hot.

▶ **To avoid last-minute work, place the ingredients in the bowls the night before and refrigerate, then finish in the oven the next day.**

NOTES: The cassoulet can be made ahead and refrigerated. Bake it for approximately 40 minutes and then finish under the broiler, if desired. Leftover roast pork, veal, or lamb can be used in place of the sausages.

BLUEBERRY CRISP

◦ SERVES 6

Filling

⅓ cup sugar

1 tablespoon cornstarch

About 5 cups fresh or frozen blueberries (1½ pounds)

Dough

1 cup all-purpose flour

⅓ cup sugar

½ cup walnut pieces

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into pieces

¼ cup half-and-half

1 cup lightly whipped heavy cream or sour cream, for serving

You don't need to wait for blueberry season to enjoy this dessert. Often frozen blueberries cannot replace fresh—in a soufflé or in a fruit mixture, for example—because they will “bleed.” But cooked as they are here, with a crumbly dough topping, they work perfectly well.



Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Prepare the filling: Stir the sugar and cornstarch together in a bowl. Add the blueberries and toss gently to mix. Pour into a 6-cup gratin dish (the mixture should be about 1 inch deep).

Prepare the dough: Place the flour, sugar, and nuts in a food processor and process for 15 to 20 seconds. Add the butter and process for 5 seconds. Add the half-and-half and process for another 5 seconds, or just until the mixture holds together.

Crumble the dough evenly over the berries. Bake for 45 minutes, or until the crisp is nicely browned on top. Serve warm, with whipped cream or sour cream.

▶ The dough topping for this crisp is quickly made in a food processor.

At the end of the summer, Damson plums—the oval variety sometimes called prune plums or Italian plums—are available at my market. They are excellent poached and make an elegant dessert. Prepared ahead, the poached plums will keep in the refrigerator for about a week. I like to serve them garnished with a spoonful of sour cream and a slice of pound cake. Black currant syrup, *cassis* in French, is the classic syrup of Burgundy to make kir, the white wine drink. If it is unavailable, grenadine can be substituted.



Place the plums, preserves, and syrup in a stainless steel saucepan, stir gently, and bring to a boil. Cover, lower the heat, and boil gently until the plums are tender, 7 to 8 minutes, depending on the ripeness of the fruit. Set aside, covered, to cool in the poaching liquid.

When you are ready to serve, trim the pound cake, cut it into ½-inch-thick slices, and cut each slice in half to form 2 triangles. Arrange about 6 plums, with some of the poaching liquid, in each dessert dish and top with a large spoonful of sour cream. Serve garnished with the pound cake triangles.

▶ Refrigerated in their poaching liquid, these plums will keep for about a week.

DAMSON PLUMS IN BLACK CURRANT SYRUP

◦ SERVES 4

1½ pounds damson plums (about 24)

One 12-ounce jar cherry preserves

½ cup black currant syrup (*cassis*)

1 store-bought pound cake (8 to 10 ounces)

1 cup sour cream



CLAFOUTIS OF CHERRIES AMANDINE

◦ SERVES 6 TO 8

A clafoutis is a French country dessert in which cherries are cooked in a batter of milk, eggs, and flour. In this version, I add almonds and rum for a nice flavor combination. A scoop of vanilla or coffee ice cream is good with this. A frangipane is a mixture often made with almond paste, butter, and eggs. In my recipe I use almonds and sugar to replace the almond paste.



Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Place the cherries in a gratin dish or porcelain pie dish (suitable for serving) that is about 1½ inches deep and 10 inches in diameter. Add the preserves, mix, and set aside.

Prepare the frangipane: Place the almonds, granulated sugar, and cornstarch in a food processor and process to a powder. Add the melted butter, eggs, and rum and process for a few seconds, until well mixed.

Pour the frangipane mixture over the cherries and mix gently. Set the dish on a cookie sheet and bake for 40 minutes, or until the top is browned and the custard is cooked through. Allow the clafoutis to cool to lukewarm.

Dust with confectioners' sugar if desired, and serve.

NOTE: Either sweet or tart cherries can be used in this classic French dessert.

One 20-ounce bag frozen pitted cherries, or about 1½ pounds fresh cherries, pitted (see Note)

⅔ cup cherry preserves

Frangipane

1 cup unskinned almonds

½ cup granulated sugar

1 tablespoon cornstarch

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

2 large eggs

2 tablespoons dark rum

Confectioners' sugar, for dusting (optional)

