

A GOOD MEAT LOAF

YOU CANNOT BEAT MEAT LOAF for a family meal, so long as you don't overcook it. Watch that internal temperature closely! If you're nervous going into the process, add fat and flavor: some strips of bacon across the top of the loaf, say, or a glaze of maple and mustard. I've cooked this recipe with Italian sausage cut into the mix; with a small dice of ham; with shredded prosciutto or diced mortadella; even with soft-boiled eggs baked into the center of the meat. Meat loaf is by its nature a meal you can stretch. Try this basic recipe, easily doubled into two loaves if you've got more than ten people coming, then make it your own.

1/2 cup bread crumbs

1/2 cup whole milk

2 pounds ground beef or a mixture of beef, veal, lamb, or pork (if you're using chicken or turkey, you might want to add a few slices of chopped bacon or pancetta for fat)

1 large egg, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon soy sauce or Worcestershire sauce

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

1 small bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley, leaves only, roughly chopped (about 1/4 cup)

2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced

1 medium yellow onion, peeled and cut into small dice

1 medium carrot, peeled and cut into small dice

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into cubes

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the oven to 350°F. Put the bread crumbs in a large bowl and pour the milk over them, then mix to combine.

2. When the milk has absorbed into the bread crumbs, which takes about 5 minutes, add the meat to the bowl, along with the egg, soy sauce, Parmesan, parsley, garlic, onion, and carrot, and mix carefully to combine. Shape the mixed meat into a loaf and place on a greased baking pan. Dot with the butter and season the top with salt and pepper.

3. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, basting a few times with the rendered pan juices, until the meat loaf is well browned and an instant-read thermometer inserted into its center reads 155°F. Allow the loaf to rest, loosely tented with aluminum foil, for 10 minutes or so before slicing.

MEAT LOAF *for* NORA

A FEW YEARS BEFORE SHE DIED IN 2012, I was invited to a dinner to celebrate the journalist, filmmaker, and cooking icon Nora Ephron. Not the idea of her. The actual woman, for whom each guest was to make a dish inspired by her work. I drew meat loaf. I made a very fancy one, run through with whispers of pancetta, the Italian cured bacon. The guy at the deli sliced it for me, but left the plastic sleeve on the outside of the meat, something I did not notice until I pulled the meat loaf from the oven in advance of heading up to the Upper West Side, which is of course where a dinner celebrating Nora Ephron would be held. There were little plastic hairs all over the thing. It looked like a dandelion loaf. I had two hours to improvise a replacement. This is the recipe I came up with, adapted on the fly from a meatball recipe the chef Mark Ladner used to cook at Lupa restaurant in Manhattan. Ephron was given to party games and competition, so of course there was a vote at the end of the dinner to determine the winning dish. Here is your champion.

8 cloves garlic, peeled and minced

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary

Red pepper flakes

1 cup fresh bread crumbs

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup whole milk

1 pound ground turkey

1 pound sweet Italian pork sausage, crumbled

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 ounces bacon, chopped

1 medium red onion, finely chopped

One 28-ounce can whole

tomatoes, preferably

San Marzano, seeds removed

1 cup dry red wine

1/4 bunch fresh mint, roughly chopped

1. Heat the oven to 450°F. Combine two-thirds of the garlic, the rosemary, red pepper flakes to taste, the bread crumbs, and liberal amounts of salt and black pepper. Add the milk and mix. Add the turkey and sausage and mix once more to combine; don't overmix. Transfer onto a board and shape into a fine meat loaf, about 9 inches long and 4 inches wide.

2. Place on a greased baking pan with high sides, drizzle with about 2 tablespoons of the oil, and bake for 25 minutes, turning the loaf halfway through to brown evenly. Remove the pan from the oven and reduce the heat to 325°F.

3. Meanwhile, fry the bacon in the remaining 2 tablespoons oil until it starts to curl and its fat is rendered. Add the onion and the remaining garlic, cooking until the onion is translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the tomatoes and wine and bring to a boil.

4. Pour the sauce over the meat loaf, cover tightly with aluminum foil, and bake until a meat thermometer inserted at the center reads 150°F, 20 to 30 minutes. Remove the foil and allow the loaf to rest for 10 to 15 minutes before slicing. Spoon sauce over the slices and scatter with the mint.

BOSTON BAKED BEANS

RECIPES FOR BOSTON BAKED BEANS are as varied as those who make the dish and call it their own. James Beard cooked his version with ribs. Some old sharpies prefer salt pork. Mine was, for years: Crank open a can of B&M baked beans and cook it, in the can, over an open fire, for a taste of Maine that goes back more than a hundred years, a comfort food that binds generations. All those make for excellent dinners. But for years now I've been returning to a recipe I learned from the Rhode Island chef Steve Johnson, who goes whole hog with his beans, using pork butt to run the dish through with fat and flavor. You could easily cut back on the amount of meat or, as Beard did, use four or five pork ribs instead, nestling them into the bottom of the pot, below the beans. (I use navy beans here because they're widely available, but if you can get your hands on some heritage pebbles from New England, some Yellow Eyes or Jacob's Cattle, go to!) Traditionally the accompaniment for the dish is steamed Boston brown bread. I prefer crackers and cheddar. As with any bean preparation, you can pull a cup of the mixture from the pot just before serving, mash it with a fork in a bowl, and return it to the pot to increase the overall creaminess of the dish.

1 pound dried navy beans, rinsed and picked over to remove any stones

2 tablespoons neutral oil, such as canola or grapeseed

1/2 pound slab bacon, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

3 pounds boneless pork butt or shoulder, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 2-inch cubes

Kosher salt

2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste

2 large yellow onions, peeled and diced

4 cloves garlic, peeled and diced

1 tablespoon tomato paste

2 teaspoons dry mustard powder

2 tablespoons maple syrup

2 tablespoons molasses

2 bay leaves

1 1/2 cups chicken stock, ideally homemade, or low-sodium if store-bought

1. Place the beans in a large bowl and cover with cold water, then allow to sit out on the countertop overnight; or if pressed for time, simmer over medium-low heat, covered, until the beans are tender, about an hour. (Or if really pressed for time, substitute three 15 1/2-ounce cans navy beans, drained.)

2. Heat the oven to 350°F. On the stovetop, put the oil in a large casserole or Dutch oven, and turn the heat to medium-high. When the oil begins to shimmer, add the bacon and cook, stirring occasionally. When the

bacon is nicely browned, add the pork, a bit at a time, and cook until nicely browned, sprinkling with salt and pepper as it cooks.

3. Add the onions and garlic and cook until they soften and begin to turn translucent, then add the tomato paste, mustard powder, maple syrup, molasses, bay leaves, and the 2 teaspoons pepper. Stir to combine, then add the drained beans and the stock. Stir and add water barely to cover the beans, then bring to a bare simmer on the stove.

4. Cover the pot and place in the oven. Cook for 2 hours, the first hour with the lid on, the second with the lid off. Check occasionally, adding a splash of water, if necessary. When the beans are creamy and cooked through, check for seasoning, adding salt, if necessary. Remove and discard the bay leaves. Serve immediately, or keep warm in a low oven or over a low flame, or refrigerate and reheat when you're ready to serve.

ROASTED POTATOES *with ONIONS and ROSEMARY*

I WAS NINETEEN AND WORKING AS A PREP COOK in a fancy restaurant when the chef asked me to roast some potatoes for a staff meal. I made these and was not fired. I have been making them ever since. The onions will come close to burning but not quite, and the caramelized result plays off the creaminess of the potatoes. Generally speaking, a little rosemary goes a long way. This is not one of those times.

3 pounds potatoes, ideally Yukon gold or red-skinned (6 to 8 large), quartered
2 large Spanish onions, peeled and quartered
6 cloves garlic, peeled
1 tablespoon fresh rosemary leaves, roughly chopped
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the oven to 425°F. In a large roasting pan, combine the potatoes, onions, garlic, rosemary, and oil. Stir them around, then spread them evenly across the pan.
2. Place the pan in the oven and roast until the potatoes are golden brown and crisp, 45 to 60 minutes. (The more crowded the pan, the longer the potatoes will take to cook.)
3. Remove the pan from the oven and tip its contents onto a warmed serving platter. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve.



CORN PUDDING

THERE IS NOTHING FANCY AT ALL about this pudding, and it pairs excellently with grilled or barbecued chicken or indeed with anything slightly salty and crisp. Add a diced jalapeño pepper to the mix if you like a little extra pop.

4 cups fresh or frozen corn kernels, from about 8 ears of corn or one “family-size” bag of frozen organic corn
4 cups whole milk, warmed slightly
4 large eggs, beaten together
8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted, plus 1 tablespoon unmelted
A few dashes of hot sauce, such as Frank’s, or to taste
2 teaspoons sugar
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat the oven to 350°F. Combine the corn, milk, eggs, melted butter, hot sauce, sugar, salt, and pepper in a large mixing bowl and stir to mix well.
2. Use the remaining 1 tablespoon butter to grease a large, oven-safe casserole dish, then pour the pudding batter into the dish. Place the casserole in a large roasting pan and fill it with enough hot water to come about halfway up the sides of the casserole dish.
3. Carefully place the roasting pan with the casserole in it in the oven and allow the pudding to bake until firm but still shiny with moisture, and a little jiggle at its center, about 45 minutes to an hour. Remove the roasting pan from the oven and the casserole dish from the roasting pan, and allow the pudding to sit for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

SIMPLE SAUTÉED GREENS

HOT SALAD, MY CHILDREN USED TO CALL this dish when I served it alongside roasted birds or beside a pile of chops. You can add smokiness by dialing back a little on the olive oil and using it to fry a little bacon with the garlic, before adding the greens, or by adding a tablespoon or two of tomato paste and healthy shakes of smoked paprika before the greens go into the pot. At the end, taste and taste and taste again. You may desire a little more vinegar, red pepper flakes, salt, or black pepper. I like making this dish with kale, but it’s terrific with mustard greens, Swiss chard, or turnip greens, with any substantial, sturdy leaf.

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
2 large bunches kale or other sturdy greens, trimmed, with leaves coarsely chopped and stems cut into 1-inch-long segments
1/2 cup vegetable stock, dry white wine, or water
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Red pepper flakes
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1. Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven with a lid over medium-high heat until it shimmers. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant and soft.
2. Add the kale to the pan, turn the heat to high, and add the stock. Use tongs to toss the greens in the oil and stock, then cover and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until the greens are soft and wilted but still quite green. Remove the lid and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until all the liquid has evaporated, another 2 to 3 minutes. Season to taste with salt, black pepper, and red pepper flakes. Add the vinegar and toss to combine.

SIMPLE GREEN BEANS

THERE IS NO REAL PERCENTAGE IN TRYING to improve on simplicity. Here the beans are cooked off in boiling water, then tossed with butter and lemon juice. A huge pile of them served next to a tray of roasted chicken or grilled pork chops or sautéed fish is a great pleasure.

3 pounds fresh green beans, tailed and topped

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice or dry white wine

Zest of 1 lemon

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Bring a large pot filled with salted water to a rolling boil over high heat. Add the green beans and cook for 3 to 4 minutes, until they are bright green and just tender.

2. Drain the beans and toss them in the still-hot pot with the butter, lemon juice, and lemon zest, until the butter has melted. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve in a warmed bowl.

PEAS WITH BACON *and* MINT

ONE OF THE BEST LARGE-PARTY COOKS of my acquaintance is the painter Tim Lovejoy, who runs his kitchen in Hadlyme, Connecticut, with the flair and precision of Fred Astaire dancing. I once saw him cook, serve, bus, and officiate a dinner party for more than a dozen without once appearing to sweat, save for a brief moment of panic at the notion of having an unlucky thirteen at his table. (As I remember it, he added an extra place setting and put a stuffed animal in the chair to ward off bad luck.) A version of these peas was served as part of that meal, a song to summer. (Frozen organic peas will do almost as well as fresh ones.)

1/4 pound bacon, cut into bâtons

2 pounds fresh or frozen peas

1 small bunch fresh mint, the leaves stripped from the stalks and minced

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. In a large sauté pan set over medium heat, cook the bacon until it is crisp. Remove the bacon from the pan and set aside.

2. Return the pan to the stove and add the peas, sautéing until they are bright green and completely heated through.

3. Transfer the peas to a warm serving bowl, toss with the mint and reserved bacon, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

TOMATO *and* WATERMELON SALAD

IN A RESTAURANT, AT THIS POINT IN HISTORY, tomatoes and watermelon can seem a dated preparation, the salad-station equivalent of fried calamari with lemon aioli. But we're not running a restaurant here, and this is still one of the best summertime salads in existence. It makes a fine accompaniment to any warm-weather family feast; it makes a terrific centerpiece if it's very, very hot, before a dinner of sweet potatoes. Get the best tomatoes you can find, and go lighter on the dressing than you might think. If you can find Bulgarian feta, which imparts an amazing creaminess along with its salty bite, so much the better. But the feta you can find will still be great.

4 to 6 large tomatoes, ideally heirloom varieties, cut into 1 1/4-inch cubes
1 small seedless watermelon, cut into 1 1/4-inch cubes
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
Freshly ground black pepper
1 cup crumbled feta cheese

1. Combine the cubed tomatoes and watermelon in a large nonreactive bowl and toss gently to combine. Add the salt and let stand for 5 to 10 minutes while you prepare the dressing.
2. Whisk together the oil and vinegar in a small bowl and season to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Add the cheese to the tomatoes and watermelon, then the dressing, and toss gently to combine.

POTATO SALAD

IHARDLY EVER PEEL POTATOES, BELIEVING both that there are a lot of nutrients in the skin and that the time spent peeling them is better used for making other dishes. But you certainly could do so here if you'd like the salad to be what restaurant cooks call *soigné*—elegant in the extreme.

3 pounds Yukon gold or red potatoes, scrubbed and cut into eighths
2 tablespoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
1 cup mayonnaise, homemade or store-bought
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
Freshly ground black pepper
2 celery stalks, trimmed and diced
1 small red onion, peeled and diced
2 slices bacon, cooked crisp and crumbled (optional)
2 scallions, both green and white parts, thinly sliced

1. Place the potatoes in a large pot and cover with water, then add 2 tablespoons salt. Set the pot over high heat and bring to a boil, then turn down the heat slightly and cook until the potatoes are just barely tender when pierced with a fork, 10 to 15 minutes. Save about 1/2 cup of the potato cooking water, then drain the potatoes well and return to the pot. Cover the pot with a clean kitchen towel and allow the potatoes to steam for an additional 15 to 20 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, combine the mayonnaise, vinegar, mustard, and pepper to taste, and whisk to combine. Thin the mixture slightly with a little of the reserved potato cooking water, then taste it and adjust the seasonings to your liking. (If you're well and truly American, you may want to add a little more mayonnaise.)
3. Put the warm potatoes into a large bowl along with the celery and onion, and add the dressing to the bowl, folding everything together carefully with a rubber spatula. Add the crumbled bacon, if using, and toss. Taste and adjust the seasonings again.
4. Cover the bowl and place in the refrigerator for an hour or so to allow the flavors to meld, then remove and serve at or a little below room temperature, garnished with the scallions.

GRILLED FINGERLING POTATOES *with* CHIPOTLE

A VINEGARY POTATO SALAD WITH BACON is one of the great Germanish summertime traditions. Here I've added a Mexican accent in the form of the canned smoked jalapeño known as chipotle chile en adobo. (A small can, well covered, will keep for months in the refrigerator.) Its smokiness echoes the bacon, and the spiciness is a welcome addition to the mix.

2 pounds fingerling potatoes
1 tablespoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
4 slices slab or thick-cut bacon
2 medium red onions, peeled and thinly sliced
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Freshly ground black pepper
4 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 chipotle chile en adobo, or to taste, mashed and minced

1. Put the potatoes in a large pot and cover with 2 inches of water and the salt, then set over high heat until it comes to a boil. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes. Drain the potatoes, place on a baking sheet, and allow to cool slightly, then cut the potatoes in half lengthwise. (You can do this ahead of time, if you like, up to a day ahead. Just store, covered, in the refrigerator.)

2. Meanwhile, cook the bacon in a sauté pan set over medium-high heat until crisp. Reserve the bacon and, in a small bowl, a few tablespoons of the rendered fat.

3. Light a fire in a charcoal grill, or set a gas grill to high. If you have a strong vent in your kitchen, you may use a grill pan set on your stove over high heat. If using live fire or a gas grill, cook over medium heat.

4. Put the potatoes and the sliced onions in a large bowl and toss gently with 2 tablespoons of the oil, and salt and pepper to taste. Working in batches, grill the potatoes, cut side down, on the grill until they have developed a light char, 2 to 3 minutes. Grill the onions until they are charred, 4 to 6 minutes per side. Return the potatoes and onions to the bowl.

5. For the dressing, combine the remaining 3 tablespoons oil, a tablespoon or more of the bacon fat to taste, the vinegar, and the chipotle in a small bowl, then whisk to emulsify. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add the dressing to the potato-and-onion mixture and toss gently to combine. Let sit for 20 minutes to allow the flavors to penetrate the potatoes. Crumble the bacon over the top and serve.

CHICKEN SALAD

I SPENT MY COLLEGE YEARS WORKING in a restaurant and in the small take-out shop the kitchen ran alongside the dining room. The clientele ran to professors and actors from the repertory theater down the street, local professionals with little time on their hands for cooking. One of the best dishes I made there was for the shop: chicken salad, a righteous, old-line WASP version of it, down to the use of grapes, jarred mayonnaise, and roasted walnuts. It was and remains a perfect summertime picnic dinner. What differentiates it from the chicken salad most of us make (apart perhaps from the grapes and walnuts) is that it is a purpose-made chicken salad. It contains no leftovers. Instead, you poach a whole chicken—poach two if it's to be dinner for more than six, and double the dressing—then strip the cooled bird down to the bone: moist, flavorful meat from breast to thigh. The poached meat reduces the need for mayonnaise and allows the chicken flavor to sing. Discard the skin and save the poaching liquid as stock. (You can omit the Bibb lettuce serving cups if that feels too fancy, and just make a raft of sandwiches instead.)

FOR THE CHICKEN

1 whole chicken, 3 to 4 pounds
1 bay leaf
1 carrot, peeled and cut in half
1 celery stalk, trimmed and cut in half
10 to 12 black peppercorns

FOR THE SALAD

2 celery stalks, trimmed and finely chopped
1 small bunch green or red grapes, rinsed and cut in half
1 handful roasted walnuts, roughly chopped
1 cup mayonnaise (store-bought is fine), or to taste

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (juice of 1/2 lemon)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
Bibb lettuce leaves
1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon leaves

1. Make the chicken. Combine the chicken, bay leaf, carrot, celery, and peppercorns in a heavy pot with a lid and just cover with water. Cover the pot and bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 30 to 35 minutes. Remove the chicken to cool, then strain the stock and reserve for another use.

2. When the chicken has cooled sufficiently to touch, remove the skin and discard, then tear the meat from the carcass. Roughly chop the meat into chunks and place it in a large bowl. Cover and place in the

continued on next page

refrigerator to cool some more, or until you're ready to prepare the salad.

3. Make the salad. To the chicken in the bowl, add the celery, grapes, and walnuts, then the mayonnaise and lemon juice and stir well to combine. Add salt and pepper to taste (and a touch more mayonnaise, if necessary). Serve in cups of lettuce leaves, garnished with tarragon, or in sandwiches.

MAYONNAISE

You can certainly make your own mayonnaise—homemade mayonnaise is excellent, and here is a recipe for it. But my chicken salad relies on the jarred stuff from the supermarket, by which I mean Hellmann's, which is labeled as Best Foods west of the Rocky Mountains. In southern states you will find devotees of Duke's. Elsewhere you may find people who cook with Miracle Whip, a salad dressing condiment developed by Kraft as a less expensive alternative to mayonnaise. But Miracle Whip is not mayonnaise. It is, in my opinion, a terrible addition to chicken salad.

1 large egg yolk

1 heaping teaspoon Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

3/4 to 1 cup neutral oil, such as canola or grapeseed

Put the egg yolk, mustard, lemon juice, salt, and 1 teaspoon cold water into a medium bowl and whisk until frothy. Continue whisking while you add the oil, drip by drip, until the mixture begins to emulsify and turn thick and mayonnaise-like, at which point you can begin to add the oil in a thin stream until the mixture has achieved the consistency of actual mayonnaise.

COLESLAW

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A RECIPE for a basic coleslaw, which means different things to different people. Mine has a mayonnaise-based dressing. For a lighter version, you could reduce the amount of mayonnaise by half and bring in a half cup of buttermilk or sour cream to replace it. Those who enjoy a tarter slaw might increase the amount of cider vinegar. To shred the vegetables, you can use a food processor or have at them with a sharp knife. I love this salad with fried fish and chicken, and on sandwiches of all kinds. What, no celery seeds? You can add a spray of them if you wish.

2 large carrots, trimmed and shredded

1 head green cabbage (about 2 pounds), outer leaves discarded, cored and shredded

1 cup mayonnaise (store-bought is fine)

1/4 cup cider vinegar

1 tablespoon sugar

2 teaspoons kosher salt, or to taste

1. Toss the shredded carrots and cabbage together in a large bowl.

2. Combine the mayonnaise, vinegar, sugar, and salt in a small bowl and whisk to combine. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

3. Pour most of the dressing over the carrots and cabbage and toss gently to spread the coating throughout the slaw. Add the rest of the dressing and toss again. Refrigerate for an hour or so before serving.

BACON-ONION JAM

THIS PARTNER FOR THE CHICKEN LIVER PÂTÉ (see page 322) comes from Fort Defiance in Brooklyn. It's a recipe I learned as the line cooks there do, interpreting the scratched accounting of Steve Linares, who was a cook there and who came up with it. You can use it here with the pâté, or as a topping for pizza (see page 306), with crumbled blue cheese.

3/4 pound slab bacon, diced into cubes

4 medium white or Spanish onions, peeled and diced

1 1/2 teaspoons mustard seeds

2 1/2 tablespoons dark brown sugar

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Set a Dutch oven or heavy pot over medium heat and add the bacon. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the fat is completely rendered and the bacon has started to crisp, 12 to 15 minutes.
2. Drain all but 1 tablespoon of the fat from the pot and add the onions, mustard seeds, brown sugar, balsamic vinegar, and 3 tablespoons water. Stir to combine, then cover the pot, lower the heat, and allow the mixture to cook, undisturbed, for 15 to 20 minutes. Remove the top, stir again, then partly cover the pot. Allow the mixture to cook until most of the liquid is gone and the onions have achieved a dark brown jamminess, 1 hour to 1 hour and 10 minutes. (Add a little more water as needed.)
3. Taste the jam, and add salt and pepper to taste.
4. Remove the mixture from the heat and allow to cool slightly. Spoon the jam into a jar or bowl, then allow to cool completely. Store, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

A FAMILY SALAD

IMAKE A LARGE VERSION OF this salad with almonds and blue cheese for company sometimes, but as my children don't like blue cheese, and prefer pecans, and always ask for croutons, this is the version we make for ourselves. The leaves hold up beautifully to the creamy saltiness of the goat cheese dressing, which itself is intensified by the sweetness of dried cranberries. The croutons and toasted nuts add further texture and taste, and if you want to throw some lardons of bacon into the mix as well, go to: The point is not to create a side dish but a meal in itself. As an added benefit, this is the rare salad that improves over the course of thirty minutes or so, as the acidity of the dressing softens the kale while turning it a brighter, more vibrant green.

1 cup shelled pecans

1/4 pound slab or thick-cut bacon (optional)

1 cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 slices good country bread, cubed

1 cup loose dabs of creamy goat cheese

2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced

1/3 cup red wine vinegar

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 bunches kale, washed, stems removed, and cut first into ribbons, then squares (10 to 12 ounces); if using

precut washed kale in a bag, use 2 bags

2/3 cup dried cranberries

1. In a toaster oven or skillet, toast the pecans until they begin to brown and grow fragrant. Set aside to cool.
2. If using, cut the bacon into 1/4-inch strips, or lardons (if using slab bacon, cut slices first, then the strips). Set a large sauté pan over medium-high heat and add the bacon to it. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the lardons are crisp at the edges, 5 to 7 minutes, then remove and set aside.
3. Drain off all but 2 tablespoons of the bacon fat or, if not using bacon, add 2 tablespoons of the oil to the pan. Return it to the stove and allow the fat or oil to heat, then add the bread cubes to the pan. Sauté them until they are toasted and crisp, tossing often, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove the croutons and set aside.
4. Put 1/3 cup of the goat cheese in a large salad bowl, then add the garlic and the remaining oil. Use a fork to mash the cheese into the oil and whisk the mixture around to combine. Drizzle the vinegar slowly into the cheese and oil and use the fork to whisk it together. Add salt and pepper to taste and set aside.
5. Add the kale to the salad bowl and use tongs or your hands to toss it with the dressing, massaging the leaves lightly as you do. Add the cranberries to the salad bowl, the croutons, and, if using, the lardons of bacon. Toss the salad again and serve, dabbed with the remaining goat cheese, or allow to sit for 30 minutes and up to an hour.

BANANA PUDDING

MY FRIEND RAHSAAN BETTS TAUGHT me to make banana pudding, telling me I didn't need a recipe, just milk and eggs and a little cornstarch and sugar. Heat that through to make a custard, he said, and pour over Nilla wafers and a lot of sliced bananas. That worked and was delicious, and I thought maybe banana pudding was a great freestyle affair. But many subsequent attempts at improvisatory pudding did not work and were not delicious, so I went back to the kitchen with notebook and pen, measuring implements and timers, and nailed down a proper set of directions. They follow here, along with a beautiful meringue for the top. (If you'd like to make the dish a slightly more adult affair, add a shot of bourbon or dark rum to the custard.) If you can't find Nilla wafers or don't want to use them because they're processed junk cookies and you're not the sort of person who cooks with that sort of ingredient, fairly crisp vanilla-scented shortbread cookies would work in their place. That makes the dish fancy. Which is sometimes just what you want.

1/4 cups sugar
1/3 cup cornstarch
4 cups whole milk
4 large eggs, separated
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
One 11-ounce box Nilla wafers
3 or 4 bananas, depending on size, sliced into coins

1. Heat the oven to 350°F. To make the custard, whisk 3/4 cup of the sugar, the cornstarch, milk, and egg yolks in a pot set over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until it just begins to bubble, 10 to 15 minutes. Turn down the heat slightly, allow the mixture to simmer, still stirring constantly, for 1 minute, then remove the mixture from the heat. Whisk in the vanilla, salt, and butter.

2. Make a meringue. Put the egg whites, cream of tartar, and the remaining 1/2 cup sugar in the heatproof bowl of a stand mixer, and set over a medium saucepan of simmering water, making sure that the bottom of the bowl does not touch the water. Whisk until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is hot to the touch, about 3 minutes. Transfer to the stand mixer fitted with the whisk, and beat until stiff, 5 to 7 minutes.

3. Line a 13-by-9-inch oven-safe casserole dish with one layer of Nilla wafers and one layer of banana slices.

4. Pour the custard over the bananas and cookies, then use a spatula to spread the meringue. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until the peaks are the color of a toasted marshmallow. Allow to rest until you're ready to serve.

GRILLED PEACHES *with* MOLASSES *and* RUM

THIS IS A RECIPE TO MAKE OVER the dying embers of the grill you used for steaks or chops or burgers or brats, a simple and elegant dessert that is simultaneously wild and untucked. What follows serves eight, but you can easily ramp up production by making more sauce. All you need is a few teaspoons per peach. Or, failing peaches, per slice of pineapple. Or, failing pineapple, per peeled banana. The idea is simply to apply a little smoke and caramelization and a warming bite of rum to the fruit you have on hand.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1/2 cup molasses
1 tablespoon dark rum
4 ripe peaches, cut in half and pitted
2 teaspoons neutral oil, such as canola or grapeseed
Ground cinnamon, for dusting

1. Melt the butter in a small pot set over medium heat, then add the molasses and rum and stir to combine. Cook for a few minutes, then turn off the heat and set aside.

2. Put the cut peaches on a sheet pan and drizzle the oil over them.

3. On a charcoal grill with coals that are medium-low heat and falling, or on a gas grill heated to medium-low, place the peaches, cut side down, and allow to cook for 3 to 4 minutes, until browned. Turn them over and spoon a teaspoon or two of the molasses mixture onto the fruit, then cook for an additional 3 to 4 minutes. Carefully remove the peaches to a sheet pan. Dust with cinnamon. Serve after a few minutes, or at room temperature, with ice cream.