

Soup ... On the Grill?

By Dan Leff

After some late rains and cold snaps, warm and sunny days are finally here. And with such beautiful weather, can the time for outdoor grilling be far off?



Grills are surprisingly versatile instruments. To throw a big chunk of meat onto a grill and cook it is to use a grill, effectively, as a blunt instrument. But grills can be wielded more like scalpels, too. Here's a recipe that uses the joy of outdoor grilling to prepare an unexpectedly upscale dish.

Grilled Vegetable Soup

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- Extra-virgin olive oil
2 quarts of chicken or vegetable stock
2 onions (white are preferable)
3 red bell peppers
3 zucchini
2 carrots
2 celery ribs
2 ears of corn
4 roma tomatoes
1/4 cup Arborio rice
1/4 cup heavy cream
Salt and pepper



This recipe is available on our web site. Go to: http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/html/read.html

About Chef Dan Leff...

After graduating from the California Culinary Academy in 1995, I've worked in venues around the Bay Area. Having worked with Bradley Ogden at the Lark Creek Inn, I specialize in Classic American cuisine, using seasonal ingredients, with a fine dining emphasis.

Chef Dan Leff Catering focuses on intimate, elegant sit-down dinners and small corporate events.



To prepare:

Start the coals on the outdoor grill. This recipe does NOT require a great amount of charcoal. Starting the coals by using a chimney-type lighter is preferable to dousing them with lighter fluid; also, use mesquite or all natural briquettes whenever possible.

Place the stock in a stockpot over low heat. The stock should simmer very lightly at most, do NOT let it come to a boil.

While the coals heat, prepare the vegetables:

- Cut the onions into thick rings, crosswise - toss them in a bowl with extra-virgin olive oil, and lightly season with salt and pepper
Wash the bell peppers, and toss them in a bowl with a small amount of olive oil to coat
Cut the zucchini lengthwise into strips; place in a bowl, toss with a small amount of olive oil, season lightly with salt and pepper
Cut the carrots in half lengthwise. Season in the same fashion as the zucchini.
Celery ribs can be kept whole; they should also be seasoned with a small amount of olive, salt, and pepper
Remove husks and silk from the corn. Season in the same manner as the carrots, zucchini, and celery
Wash the roma tomatoes and cut them in half, lengthwise. Season in the same manner as the other vegetables.

When the coals are hot, begin cooking the vegetables:

- Place the carrots on the grill so that they aren't directly over the goals. They will take a while to cook, and should be removed only when they've begun to soften.
Roast the bell peppers. When they are blackened on all sides, remove them to a bowl and cover them tightly with plastic wrap. Let them sit while you cook the other vegetables - they need time to steam in their own heat.
Roast the corn on the grill. Keep a careful eye on the ears; remove them when they are lightly browned on all sides. Set them aside (in a bowl, or on a plate) to cool a bit so they're easier to handle.
While the corn cools, place the onions on the grill. Carefully turn them with tongs - when they just start to brown, remove them and place them in the simmering stock
Put the zucchini strips on - brown them lightly, then immediately remove them to the stockpot. Add the Arborio rice to the pot at this time, stir just to mix in the grains.
Cook the celery quickly on the grill - like the zucchini, it should be browned lightly then quickly be removed to the stock pot
Roast the roma tomatoes on both sides. When they are dark brown (not scorched!) remove them to the stockpot.
By now, the carrots should be done, and ready for the stockpot.

Turn the heat on the stockpot up to medium. Stir lightly, just to mix

Remove the skins and seeds from the peppers. Running them under cold running water helps if you're really having trouble. Put the peeled and seeded pepper in the stockpot.

Cut the corn of the kernels - use a large bowl or platter to catch the kernels. Discard the cobs and put the kernels into the stockpot.

Cook all the soup mixture for another 10 minutes over medium heat. By now, the vegetables should all be soft and the Arborio rice should be plumping up quite a bit. Turn off the heat and let the mixture sit for another 5-7 minutes.

Get a large pot (at least large enough to hold the contents of the stockpot), a mesh strainer (the finer the better), a ladle, and a blender. Ladle the soup mix into the blender; process over high speed until smooth, then strain through into your 2nd pot - use the ladle to push as much of the mixture through as you can. Be patient - it'll be a thick mix!

Continue to blend and strain the mixture until it's all processed into the 2nd pot.

The soup can now be cooled down, or used immediately; before serving, reheat over low heat (too hot and it'll start to scorch on the bottom!) and mix in the cream just before serving. Season with salt and pepper carefully - those roasted flavors are strong, and may not need much more seasonings.

CHOCOLATE: Food of the Gods, Fact or Fiction?

Life in Lamorinda just keeps getting better! For those who aren't drawn to the live music frequently offered at local eateries, as part of the local section of the American Chemical Society's efforts to make science more approachable to the general public, CalACS is initiating a Science Cafe in Orinda. Chocolate will kick it off with a presentation on the subject at 7:00pm on May 22 at Shelby's Restaurant, Theatre Square.

Howard and Sally Peters, Bay Area chemists and chocolate experts will tell you all you ever wanted to know on the subject and want to hear your questions. Can't sleep at night wondering about what the Aztecs thought about chocolate, the chemistry of theobroma cocoa, current health study results on chocolate, or who owns Godiva chocolate? They've got the answers.

There is no cover charge or minimum order, but come early to get a table, have a meal or relax with a drink. Samples for taste testing will be given out and a free raffle of a 10 lb Guitard is included.

What is a Science Cafe? Science Cafes were initiated in the UK as a forum to bring science topics to the general public in a casual setting where discussions can take place. Since then, Science Cafes have sprung up all over the world. As the Science Cafe at Columbia University says: Eat. Drink. Talk Science.

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