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Prize Pears

By Susie Iventosch



Julia Hoang with Pear-Gruyere biscuits Photo courtesy J. Huang

We have a winner! Dr. Julia Hoang took First Place at this year's Moraga Pear & Wine Festival recipe contest on Saturday, September 29. Her delicious pear butter made with star anise, cardamom, and nutmeg is the perfect complement to her sweet-savory pear-Gruyere biscuits.

Since I have never been a "canner," I was a bit reluctant to make the pear butter, but it was really quite simple, and extraordinarily good. The spices are unusual for a fruit butter, which makes it unique. I think Hoang's pear butter would also make a fabulous glaze for chicken or pork.

"I've never entered any sort of recipe contest before ... too scary," said Hoang. "But, I consider myself a very serious cook AND eater! This contest seemed a little less intimidating, and I wanted to participate because I am in love with this town and wanted to get involved with the community outside of my work!"

Hoang, who currently lives in Walnut Creek, recently opened her dental office in Moraga and hopes to make Moraga her home soon.

This was also her first time canning anything and she said, "I sort of had no idea what I was doing, but when I heard the 'ping' I realized I had successfully canned for the first time!"

She spent about three weeks researching what types of pears were best for her recipe.

"I tried Bosc, Bartlett, and Comice, before deciding that D'Anjou worked best for this recipe," she said. "To tell you the truth, I am kind of tired of pears at this point!"

Still, Hoang definitely wants to take part again next year, even though she was really sad right before they announced her name, because she thought she had no chance and would have to do something better for next year.

"I was extremely surprised and pleased when my name was called," she remarked. "It was a little hairy right before submitting my entry. Because I was very concerned about presenting warm biscuits, I cut it a little too close and ended up running across the street, through the parking lot and then right up to the table!"

The panel of judges consisted of chefs Penny Porter and Thama Brentano from Back to the Table cooking school in Lafayette, Moraga Royale Recreation Director Loto Rickman, and Brad Noggle, Manager at 5A Rent a Space, Moraga's Business Person of the Year.

"The Pear Recipe Contest was a success this year with even more entries than last year," said Kim Burrowes, Recreation Assistant for the Town of Moraga. "The contestants were excited, judges took their jobs seriously and prizes were generously donated from local businesses. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the event and we look forward to even more recipe participants for next year's contest!"

Four-year-old Sebastian Serrano won first place for the youth division with his Apple Pear Sauce. I particularly like his addition of chocolate chips to this recipe! Madeline Weber, 10, finished second with a pear sorbet. The runners up for the adult division were: Karen Reed, (2nd Place-Pear Carrot Cake), Ellen Beans, (3rd Place-Orange Glazed Pears), Karen Reed, (4th place-Asian Salad with Pears), and Julie Weber, (5th Place-Pear Mini Cream Tarts). These recipes are available on our website, www.lamorindaweekly.com.

Pear Butter with Pear and Gruyere Biscuits

Julia Hoang, 2012 First Place

Pear Butter, yields about 4-6 half-pint jars

INGREDIENTS

4 lbs D'Anjou pears, roughly chopped, do not peel or core them

1 star anise

2 tablespoons fresh ginger, roughly chopped

1 3/4 cup water

1/4 cup lemon juice

2-3 cups sugar

1/3 cup brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom

1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1 teaspoon lemon zest

DIRECTIONS

1. Put the chopped pears, star anise and ginger into a large pot. Add the water and lemon juice. Bring to a boil and then reduce to simmer, cover and cook for about 25-45 minutes until the pears are completely soft. Remove from heat.

2. Remove and discard the star anise. Ladle the entire pear mixture into a chinois, food mill or fine sieve. Force the mixture through into a large bowl to collect all the liquids and puree. Discard all the remaining solids.

3. Measure the puree and pour into a large, heavy bottom pot. For every cup of puree, add 1 1/2 cups of sugar. Add the brown sugar, cardamom, nutmeg and lemon zest. You may season to taste and adjust if necessary.

4. Cook on medium heat, stirring often. Take care not to allow the puree to stick to the bottom of the pan and burn. Cook between 45 minutes - 2 hours until the mixture is quite thick, the consistency of applesauce.

5. When the pear butter is ready, store into airtight jars and refrigerate, or follow proper canning techniques for longer term storage.

Pear and Gruyere Biscuits



Photo Susie Iventosch

(Yields about one dozen biscuits)

INGREDIENTS

3 3/4 cups bread flour

1 1/2 tablespoons baking powder

1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda

1 1/4 teaspoons Kosher salt

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter: cold, cut into 1/2 inch cubes, stored in refrigerator until ready, plus melted butter for brushing

3/4 cup grated Gruyere cheese

1 cup diced fresh D'Anjou pears

1 3/4 cups chilled buttermilk

1/4 cup pureed fresh D'Anjou pears

DIRECTIONS

Position rack in center of oven and preheat to 425 degrees. Line heavy baking sheet with parchment paper and lightly flour.

You may use a food processor or make the dough by hand. If in a processor combine flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt and blend for 5 seconds. If doing by hand, in a large bowl, sift the same ingredients using a fine

mesh sieve. Add butter cubes and pulse for 30 seconds or use a handheld pastry blender and cut in the butter until coarse meal forms. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl at this point if you have been using a processor. Add the cheese, pears and toss to blend. Add the buttermilk and pear puree and stir to moisten evenly.

Using lightly floured hands, drop entire dough mixture on floured parchment paper and shape into a rectangle. Use a knife or biscuit cutter to cut into the appropriate portions. Space each biscuit 2 inches apart.

Bake until biscuits are golden and tester comes out clean, 18-20 minutes. Brush biscuits lightly with melted butter. Serve warm or at room temperature with pear butter.

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