

The Humble Plum Tomato

When we talk about the Joy of Cooking, I like to think of it as taking something simple, like a humble Plum Tomato and doing things to it so it goes from humble to spectacular. That is what the following recipes do. We take the simple Roma tomato and turn it into Tomato confit. We then take the Tomato confit and dress it up to Tomato confit with arugula and zucchini. We continue to go forward and we now present Tomato confit and crab napoleon. Moving forward again, we now present Shrimp cocktail with tomato confit. And finally, we end up with a spectacular dish of Potato Salad with Tomato confit and scallops.

Tomato confit

Sweet and garlicky - double the recipe if your oven is big enough, there is no question you will find uses for these.

12 plum tomatoes, ripe but not too soft
1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
6 cloves garlic, peeled and lightly crushed
6 spring's thyme
1 teaspoon coarse salt – Kosher salt

Preheat the oven to 275-degrees. Cut the hard core of each of the tomatoes and make an X in the smooth flower end. Plunge into boiling water for about 15 seconds, or until the skins loosen, then plunge into ice water: drain. Peel the skin off and cut the plum tomatoes in half. Now remove all the seeds and pulp.

Cover a baking sheet with aluminum foil and brush with the olive oil. Place the tomatoes cut side down on the pan. Scatter the garlic and thyme around and sprinkle with the salt.

Bake for 2 hours or more, turning the tomatoes every 30 minutes or so to make sure they are not browning (if they are, lower the heat) and turn the baking sheet so the tomatoes cook evenly. The tomatoes are done when they are very soft and shriveled. They will keep, refrigerated, for a few days.

Now, let's start to dress things up, improving on what we have already done.

Tomato confit with Arugula and Zucchini

A lovely midsummer salad smacking of strong, fresh flavors

6 cups arugula, trimmed, washed and dried
1 zucchini (4 to 6 oz.) washed and trimmed
1 summer squash (4 to 6 oz.) washed and trimmed
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
12 paper thin slices Parmesan
12 pieces Tomato Confit
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Make a bed of arugula on each of four plates. Slice the squashes into long thin ribbons (a mandolin is ideal for this). Toss them with the olive oil and lemon juice, then lay the strips on the arugula; pour any remaining dressing over them.

Garnish with the Parmesan and tomato confit; drizzle with a little of the confits oil if you still have it. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and serve.

Moving on once again...

Tomato confit and crab Napoleon

Little cakes with alternating layers of tomato confit (that's the "crust") plus crab salad - An impressive and tasty summer dish

1 pound crabmeat, picked over for shells and cartilage
1¼ cups sour cream
Juice of 2 fresh lemons
¼ cup minced cilantro
Salt and cayenne pepper
24 pieces Tomato Confit
½ cup minced chives
Tabasco sauce to taste
1 teaspoon good balsamic vinegar (optional)

Mix together the crabmeat, ¼ cup of the sour cream, the lemon juice, cilantro, salt and cayenne to taste. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary.

On a flat work surface such as a cutting board, make a layer of 2 pieces of tomato slightly overlapping; top with a spoonful of the crab mixture, then another layer of tomatoes, another of crab and another of tomatoes. That's one napoleon. Repeat three more times.

Combine the remaining 1 cup of sour cream with the chives, tabasco, salt to taste. Make a small pool of the sauce on each plate and top with a napoleon. Drizzle with a little balsamic vinegar, if desired and serve.

Moving forward once more...

Shrimp cocktail with tomato confit

Most shrimp cocktail sauce is watery and insipid; this one is anything but!

8 pieces tomato confit plus some of the confited garlic
1 medium ripe tomato, peeled and seeded
¼ cup olive oil (that from the confit is best but a good quality extra-virgin is fine)
Grated fresh or prepared horseradish to taste
1 small chili, stemmed and minced
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
16 to 24 large shrimp, peeled and deveined
2 teaspoons thyme leaves

Combine the tomato confit, ripe tomato, 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, the horseradish, chili, and salt and pepper to taste in the container of a blender and puree. Taste and adjust the seasoning; let rest while you prepare the shrimp.

Preheat a grill or broiler. Toss the shrimp with the thyme, the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, and salt and pepper to taste. Grill or broil for about 2 minutes per side, or until done. Serve hot, warm, at room temperature, or chilled, with the cocktail sauce.

And finally.....

Potato salad with tomato confit and scallops

This can be as simple as a fine potato salad (if you omit the scallops and truffle) or about as elegant a dish as you can find; especially if you use bay scallops (in season only in the winter months) and the truffle.

1½ pounds of potatoes, preferably fingerlings or other small potatoes, scrubbed
1 stalk celery
4 sprigs thyme
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
16 bay scallops or 8 sea scallops (cut sea scallops horizontally in half)
¼ cup minced scallions
2 teaspoons sherry vinegar
1 truffle, or 1 porcini mushroom, or 4 button or cremini mushrooms, trimmed
12 to 16 pieces Tomato Confit

Cook the potatoes, along with the celery and thyme, in boiling salted water to cover. When they're tender, drain, let cool a bit, and peel them; cut into thin slices.

Put 1 tablespoon of the olive oil in a large skillet and turn the heat to high. Sear the scallops on both sides, just a minute on each, seasoning with salt and pepper as they cook; remove the scallops and set aside. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil to the pan, add the scallions, season with salt and pepper, and cook until they are limp. Turn off the heat and stir in the sherry vinegar.

To make the salad, thinly slice the truffle or mushrooms. Make a layer of these on each of four plates. Top with a layer of the tomato confit, then a layer of the potatoes, and finally the scallops. Spoon the scallions and their liquid over everything and server.

And that, my friends, is The Joy of Cooking!