

May 6, 2012

No-Rules Brunch

A simple weekend brunch is a great way to spend time with friends and family. This versatile meal offers an easy way to entertain, whether you're celebrating a special occasion like Mother's Day or a child's recital, or you're hosting a book-club meeting or a quick get-together after a sporting event. Our No-Rules Brunch allows you to incorporate some of your favorite flavors into traditional breakfast recipes so you can create your own special meal.

Brunch Menu Basics

Beverages: Most people drink orange juice and mimosas are certainly popular. Why not shake up breakfast beverages with sparkling fruit juices, exotic smoothies, espresso and coffee drinks, or with non-traditional milks like soy, almond or even goat milk.

Main courses: Breakfast casseroles are featured on most traditional brunch buffets, but did you know that many brunch items served in restaurants are made a day or two in advance? We'll show you some great tips on how to streamline breakfast service at home.

Sides: When ham and eggs are not enough, try grain salads, grilled vegetables, or fruit soups and cheese platters.

Sweets: French toast, pancakes and crepes will always be regulars on brunch menus, but feel free to riff on those sweet classics and transform them into dishes that are suited to any brunch theme.

Getting Organized

These tips will help you plan your menu and make meal prep easier:

- Choose a variety of recipes that can be made ahead and some that can be prepared the day of the event.
- Balance a rich main course with a fruit or vegetable salad or other light side dish.
- For a large gathering, consider doubling a make-ahead recipe, such as a strata or individual quiches.
- If your main course features meat, chicken or seafood, offer a vegetarian option, especially for large gatherings.
- For recipes that cannot be made entirely in advance, wash, peel and chop raw ingredients the night before and store them in separate airtight containers in the refrigerator.
- Be sure to have plenty of ice in your freezer for drinks.
- Assemble as much tableware as you can the night before, including serving dishes, platters and serving utensils. Set the table or buffet with plates, utensils and napkins. If you are serving the meal outdoors, organize the tableware on trays so it's ready to go.
- If you are hosting an outdoor event, have a back-up plan in case the weather changes.

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Frittata with Baby Broccoli and Cheddar

Suzanne Goin, award-winning chef/owner of four Southern California restaurants, created this frittata recipe, which makes a wonderful centerpiece for a brunch. Combining tender baby broccoli and sharp cheddar cheese, it's finished with a crispy bread-crumb topping.

Preheat an oven to 350°F.

In a small bowl, stir together the bread crumbs and 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Spread the crumbs out on a small baking sheet. Bake, stirring once halfway through, until the crumbs are golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer the pan to a wire rack and let cool.

Position a rack in the upper third of the oven and increase the temperature to 500°F.

Bring a small saucepan of water to a boil over high heat. Add the baby broccoli and cook until just tender, about 2 minutes. Drain and rinse with cold water. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate.

In a large bowl, stir together the eggs, ½ cup of the cheese, the ¾ tsp. salt and black pepper, to taste. Set aside.

In the deep half of a frittata pan over medium heat, warm 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Add the rosemary and shallot and cook, stirring constantly, until the shallot is translucent, about 2 minutes. Add the baby broccoli, garlic and red pepper flakes, and season with salt and black pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 2 minutes. Remove the rosemary and discard.

Reduce the heat to medium-low and pour in the egg mixture. Cook, using a rubber spatula to lift the cooked edges and allow the uncooked eggs to flow underneath, until the eggs are just beginning to set, about 8 minutes.

In the shallow pan over medium-low heat, warm the remaining 1 tsp. olive oil. Place the shallow pan upside down on top of the deep pan and flip the frittata into the shallow pan. Cook, covered, until the eggs are set, 7 to 8 minutes. Uncover the pan and sprinkle the frittata with the remaining ½ cup cheese and the bread crumbs. Transfer the pan to the oven and cook until the cheese is melted, about 1 minute.

Slide the frittata onto a plate and let rest for 5 minutes before serving. Serves 8.

Recipe by Chef Suzanne Goin.



Shaved Rhubarb Salad with Almonds and Cheese

In a small fry pan over medium-low heat, toast the almonds, stirring, until fragrant and lightly golden, 3 to 4 minutes. Pour onto a plate to cool.

In a small bowl, stir together the orange zest, orange juice, vinegar, sugar, and a pinch *each* of salt and pepper. Add the olive oil in a thin stream, whisking constantly until the vinaigrette is well combined.

Using a mandoline or a very sharp knife, shave the rhubarb into paper-thin slices. Put it in a bowl with the mesclun and almonds. Add half of the vinaigrette and toss to combine. Add more vinaigrette as needed to lightly coat the lettuces (you may not need it all). Crumble the cheese over the top and serve immediately. Serves 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Salad of the Day*, by Georgeanne Brennan (Weldon Owen, 2012).

½ cup slivered almonds
Grated zest of 1 orange
1 Tbs. fresh orange juice
1 Tbs. white wine vinegar
Pinch of sugar
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 rib rhubarb, trimmed
6 cups mesclun
4 oz. fresh goat cheese

For the waffles:

2 eggs

1 cup milk

8 Tbs. (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted, or ½ cup canola oil

1 cup ricotta cheese

1¼ cups all-purpose flour

¼ cup cornmeal

1 Tbs. baking powder

¾ tsp. salt

1½ cups frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry (see note at right)

¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

½ cup pine nuts

For the eggs Benedict:

8 slices ham

8 poached eggs

1 cup hollandaise sauce

Chopped fresh herbs, such as parsley, chives or chervil, for garnish

Eggs Benedict on Spinach and Ricotta Waffles with Pine Nuts

With ribbons of spinach, crunchy pine nuts, fluffy ricotta and a hint of Parmesan, these waffles are not only full of flavor but are pretty, too. Serve as a base for eggs Benedict, as in this recipe, or enjoy the waffles on their own accompanied by a savory chutney.

To prepare the waffles, preheat a waffle maker on medium-low according to the manufacturer's instructions.

In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk and butter. Stir in the ricotta cheese until smooth.

In a large bowl, stir together the flour, cornmeal, baking powder and salt. Make a well in the center of the flour mixture and pour in the egg mixture, stirring until just combined. Gently fold in the spinach and Parmesan cheese.

Sprinkle 1 to 2 Tbs. pine nuts into the waffle maker (use 2 Tbs. for large Belgian-style waffles), then ladle in the batter using ½ to ¾ cup batter per batch. Spread the batter so that it almost reaches the edges of the waffle maker. Cook until the waffles are crisp and browned, 4 to 6 minutes. These waffles tend to be slightly wet, so cook them a little longer than usual.

Using a spatula, remove the waffles from the waffle maker and serve immediately, or place in a single layer on a baking sheet in a 200°F oven for up to 20 minutes before serving.

To assemble the eggs Benedict, place each waffle on a plate. Top with 1 slice ham, 1 poached egg and 2 Tbs. hollandaise sauce. Garnish with chopped herbs and serve immediately. Serves 8.

Note: To squeeze the spinach dry, place the thawed spinach in a colander and squeeze handfuls at a time until almost all of the liquid is gone.

Adapted from Waffles—Sweet & Savory Recipes for Every Meal, by Tara Duggan (Weldon Owen, 2011).



Strawberry Bellini

For a nonalcoholic version of this cocktail, substitute sparkling water for the sparkling wine.

Pour the balsamic vinegar into a small saucepan, set over medium-high heat and simmer until reduced to ¼ cup, about 10 minutes. Let cool to room temperature.

In a blender, combine the reduced balsamic vinegar, the 1 lb. strawberries, the lemon juice and the 6 Tbs. simple syrup and puree until smooth. You should have about 2¼ cups puree.

For each cocktail, fill a cocktail shaker with ice and add 2 oz. strawberry puree and 4 oz. sparkling wine. Shake gently, then adjust the sweetness with more simple syrup as needed. Strain into a flute or a double old-fashioned glass and garnish with a strawberry. Makes 9 cocktails.

Recipe by Chef Suzanne Goin.

½ cup balsamic vinegar

1 lb. strawberries, hulled, plus more for garnish

¼ cup fresh lemon juice

6 Tbs. simple syrup, plus more, to taste

Ice cubes as needed

Sparkling wine for serving



Bagel Strata with Sausage and Spring Vegetables

In our delicious twist on the classic strata, we swap in diced bagels for the usual bread cubes. As with other stratas, this one needs to be refrigerated up to overnight before baking, so it's ideal for entertaining. Just pop the baking dish in the oven the next morning and when your guests arrive, brunch will be ready to serve.

Preheat an oven to 350°F.

In a bowl, stir together the bagel cubes, melted butter, salt and pepper to coat well. Spread the cubes in a single layer on a baking sheet. Transfer to the oven and bake, stirring the cubes several times halfway through, until golden and toasted, about 25 minutes. Let cool.

In a sauté pan over medium-high heat, warm 1 Tbs. of the oil. Add half of the mushrooms and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until browned and tender, 5 to 6 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Repeat with 1 Tbs. of the oil and the remaining mushrooms.

In the same pan over medium-high heat, warm the remaining 1 Tbs. oil. Add the asparagus and cook, stirring occasionally, until just tender, about 4 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate.

In a bowl, stir together 6 cups of the bagel cubes, the mushrooms, asparagus, peas, sausage and 4 oz. of the cheese. Transfer to a 2-quart baking dish. In a bowl, beat together the eggs and half-and-half and pour over the bagel mixture. Cover the dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to overnight.

Preheat an oven to 350°F.

In a food processor, pulse the remaining bagel cubes into coarse crumbs. Remove the plastic wrap from the strata, transfer to the oven and bake for 50 minutes. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 oz. cheese and the bagel crumbs, then bake until the cheese is melted, about 10 minutes more. Serves 8 to 10.

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1 cup quinoa, well rinsed and drained

3 cups water

2 lemons

2 small avocados, peeled, pitted and cut into thin slices

2 garlic cloves, minced

2 bunches radishes, trimmed and halved lengthwise

½ cup crumbled feta cheese

Leaves from 1 bunch fresh basil, torn into pieces

1 Tbs. ground coriander

¼ tsp. red pepper flakes

⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil

½ tsp. salt

¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Lemony Quinoa Salad with Radishes, Avocado and Basil

Drain the quinoa and combine it in a pot with the water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer until the grains are tender and the water is absorbed, about 15 minutes. Remove from the heat, fluff the quinoa and let cool completely.

Juice the lemons into a bowl. Add the avocado slices and toss to coat with the lemon juice. Transfer the quinoa to the bowl and add the garlic, radishes, cheese and basil and toss gently to mix well without breaking up the avocado.

In a small bowl, whisk together the coriander, red pepper flakes, olive oil, salt and black pepper. Pour the dressing over the salad, toss gently and serve. Serves 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Salad of the Day, by Georgeanne Brennan (Weldon Owen, 2012).