

Dinner and A Book

Episode #411

Menu:

Mussels in White wine (Moules au Vin Blanc)
Belgian Endive and Walnut Salad
French Bread
Flaming Apples (Pommes Flambees)
White wine Vouvray
Espresso

Recipes:

Mussels in White wine

48 large mussels - cold and closed
4 sprigs parsley
2 stalks chopped celery
2 medium onions chopped
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon dried tarragon
2 cloves chopped garlic
2 bay leaves
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup white wine (Vouvray)
1/2 cup canned chicken broth
1/4 cup chopped parsley

Wash mussels, making sure all are closed. To a large pot add 1/2 of the butter, the chopped onions, garlic, celery and sauté. Add mussels. Cover and cook about 10 minutes until mussels are open. Discard any that are still closed. Drain the mussel juice (liquor) into a large skillet, keeping the mussels in the colander. To the juice add salt and pepper, all the herbs, the rest of the butter, the wine and broth and then the mussel liquor (juice). Heat up and then add the mussels. Divide into 4 large soup bowls and serve with French bread.

You can divide the recipe into 2 and have a large meal for 2 people.

Belgian Endive and Walnut Salad Serves 4

This is a classic combination, bitter Belgian endive with a smoky walnut oil. Lemon juice balances the flavors. Choose compact heads of Belgian endive.
1/2 cup walnut pieces
3 medium head of Belgian endive

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
4 teaspoons dark walnut oil
1/4-teaspoon sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Spread the walnuts on a cookie sheet, place in the oven and toast until lightly colored, about 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool. Remove and discard any discolored outer endive leaves. Halve the endive lengthwise and cut out the bottom core. Lay the endive cut side down on a work surface and cut crosswise into 1/2-inch pieces. Place the cut endive in a salad bowl, toss with the lemon juice, cover, and place in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

To serve, add the oil to the salad, sprinkle with salt, give a few grinds of the peppermill, and toss.

Flaming Apples (Pommes Flambé) Serves 4

1-cup sugar
4 apples peeled and cored. Sprinkle with lemon juice
4 tablespoons raspberry or blackcurrant preserves
4 tablespoons cognac, warmed

Put the sugar and 1-cup water into a heavy pan and bring to a boil without stirring. Boil for 5 minutes, then add the apples. Cook for 10 minutes. Remove the apples, continuing to cook the syrup, and place them on the serving dish. Fill the holes in the center with the preserves. Reduce the syrup for another 10 minutes until the syrup has thickened but not colored and pour it over the apples. Pour the warmed cognac over the apples and light with a match. Serve.

For a French lunch or evening start off with a glass of champagne. Serve with nuts. The music should be very French, either Edith Piaf or music from Cirque de Soleil. Cover the table with a cloth from Provence or separate placemats. Use dishes that have different patterns for each course. Center the table with a small vase of colorful but not heavily scented flowers that match your table setting. The French love blue and yellow. Begin by serving the mussels with French bread and white wine. Before the first bite, say "bon appetit" to everyone. Then clear the table and serve the Salad on small plates with more French bread. During the dinner everyone can try out favorite French phrases. Clear the table and serve the apples. You can lower the lights and light the apples at the table. Serve more wine. End the meal with a tray of a variety of cheeses like Brie, Camembert and Port Salut with French bread.

Move to the living room and serve decaf espresso in demi-tasse cups accompanied by a very small snifter of cognac or brandy. Et voila, une soiree francaise.