

Cooking Adventures in Prague

A few easy recipes for an uncomplicated life

From Dan and Audrey's kitchen

Prague, 2004

So you might be asking the question “why is cooking in Prague” an adventure. Simple – most ingredients taken for granted in San Francisco, New York, London, Munich, etc. – cannot be found in Prague easily. This is changing year by year, but shopping here normally takes many trips to different shops for different kinds of foods, vegetable, spices, imported good. In the last 3 years, we’ve seen celery, limes, fresh herbs, cumin and cherry tomatoes go from luxury goods only found at the French shop to regular things we can find at the Vietnamese vegetable place up the street. The recipes in this little book can be pieced together just about anywhere, as long as you can get your hands on some spices.

So, enjoy!

Dan and Audrey

Soups

Broccoli Soup

This soup is creamy and tasty, but it is really healthy at the same time since the creaminess comes from the potato. We have a friend who abides strictly by certain “food rules” including nothing blended. Whenever we make this soup using our blessed hand blender, we are certain not to invite him over.

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 large onion, chopped
3 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
2 (10 ounce) packages chopped
frozen broccoli, thawed
1 potato, peeled and chopped
4 cups chicken broth
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
salt and pepper to taste

Directions

- 1 Heat olive oil in a large saucepan, and saute onion and garlic until tender. Mix in broccoli, potato, and chicken broth. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 15 minutes, until vegetables are tender.
- 2 With a hand mixer or in a blender, puree the mixture until smooth. Return to the saucepan, and reheat. Season with nutmeg, salt, and pepper.

Minestrone with Pesto

A great soup that’s hearty enough to be a whole meal. This is no ordinary minestrone...the secret is the pesto.

3 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped
6 cups chicken broth
2 carrots, peeled, cut into ½ inch thick pieces
2 celery stalks, cut into ½ inch pieces
4 small potatoes, quartered
¼ kilo green beans, trimmed, cut into 1-inch pieces
3 small zucchini, cut into ½ inch pieces
1 can of cannellini (white kidney beans), drained
2 tomatoes, peeled, crushed (or 1-2 cans of tomatoes)
2 cups fresh spinach leaves, chopped
6 tablespoons classic basil pesto
Freshly grated parmesan cheese
it’ also possible to add other vegetables that you have on hand or add small pasta

Heat oil in heavy large pot over medium heat. Add onion and sauté until soft, about 4 minutes. Add broth and next 7 ingredients and 1-2 tablespoons of pesto. Increase heat to high and bring soup to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, partially cover pot, and simmer until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes. Stir in spinach; simmer 3 minutes longer. Season soup to taste with salt and pepper. Ladle soup into bowls and add a spoonful of pesto and grated parmesan cheese to each bowl.

Salmon and Vegetable Chowder

Thyme and fennel are the keys to this soup. Easy and quick for cold, lazy winter nights. Serve with some crusty and hearty bread.

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 leek (white and pale green parts only), sliced
1 teaspoon fennel seeds
1 large potato, peeled, diced
1 large zucchini, diced
1 cup frozen corn kernels
1 carrot, diced
2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme or 2 teaspoons dried
3 cups chicken broth
½ cup dry white wine
1 pound skinless salmon fillet, cut into ¾ inch pieces
1 cup whipping cream

Heat oil in heavy large pot over medium heat. Add leek and fennel seeds and sauté until leek is tender but not brown, about 5 minutes. Add potato, zucchini, corn, carrot and half of thyme. Stir 2 minutes. Add broth and wine; simmer until potato is tender, about 15 minutes. Add salmon and cream. Simmer until salmon just opaque in center, about 5 minutes. Season chowder to taste with salt and pepper.

Ladle chowder into deep bowls. Sprinkle with remaining thyme.

Hint: For an even easier version of this soup without all the chopping, use bags of frozen vegetables. You can mix and match several different kinds and the result is still great.

Main Dishes

Turkey Chili

Cocoa in chili?! It sounds weird to add cocoa to chili, but it really gives it a rich and great taste.

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 onion, chopped finely
5 cloves of garlic, minced
½ - 1 kilo ground turkey
Chopped peppers, celery or other vegetables
1 teaspoon salt
3 tbsp. chili powder
1-2 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. ground marjoram
¼ tsp. ground red pepper/cayenne pepper
½ tsp. black pepper
½ tbsp. sugar
½ tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder
1 ½ tbsp. paprika
1-2 cans of kidney beans
1- 3 tbsp. cornmeal or flour, to thicken

Heat oil in a large pot. Add ground turkey, onions and garlic and cook over high heat until onions are tender and the turkey starts to turn grey. Add spices and 2 cups of water or chicken broth. Simmer for around 30 minutes and add in kidney beans. If you want to thicken the sauce, add in the cornmeal or flour.

Serve either plain or over rice. Top with grated cheddar cheese, fresh cilantro and chopped tomatoes on top.

Pizza Sauce

This sauce is easy to make and is great on a baguette for french bread pizzas or over normal pizza dough.

1 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
6 fluid ounces warm water
(110 degrees F/45 degrees C)
OR
1 box of tomato puree or passata

3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon minced garlic
2 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoon anchovy paste (optional)
¾ teaspoon onion powder

1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
1/4 teaspoon dried marjoram
1/4 teaspoon dried basil
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/8 teaspoon dried red pepper
salt to taste

Directions

1. In a small bowl, combine tomato paste, water, Parmesan cheese, garlic, honey, anchovy paste, onion powder, oregano, marjoram, basil, ground black pepper, cayenne pepper, red pepper flakes and salt; mix together, breaking up any clumps of cheese.
2. Sauce should sit for 30 minutes to blend flavors; spread over pizza dough, top with mozzarella cheese and whatever other toppings you like.

Braised Ligurian Chicken

This has also become a favorite and easy dish for us. We normally serve it with mashed potatoes (recipe follows) and a vegetable like broccoli and spinach.

2 heaping tablespoons flour
Salt and ground black pepper
1 2-kilo chicken cut into 8 pieces or 4-5 chicken breasts, cut into medium-sized strips
¼ cup olive oil
4-5 fresh rosemary sprigs
6 cloves garlic, peeled and thinly sliced
1 ½ cups white wine
2-4 tablespoons butter
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
4 anchovy fillet (optional)
½ cup calamata olives or black olives (with pits)
3 ripe tomatoes, halved, seeded and coarsely chopped

1. In a large bowl, combine flour with salt and pepper to taste. Add chicken pieces and toss until evenly coated.
2. Place a large flameproof casserole dish over medium-high heat and heat olive oil. Add chicken pieces, and fry until golden underneath, about 5 minutes. Turn chicken, and add rosemary and garlic. Continue to fry until garlic is softened but not colored, about 3 minutes. Add wine. When it comes to a boil, add anchovies, olives and tomatoes.
3. Partly cover pan, and reduce heat to medium low. Simmer until chicken is cooked and tender and broth is reduced to a rich sauce, 15 to 20 minutes. To serve, discard rosemary sprigs and season well with salt and pepper to taste. Place a piece or two of chicken on each plate, and top with a spoonful of sauce.

Roasted Garlic Mashed Potatoes

Whole head of garlic

7-9 large baking potatoes, peeled and cubed

½ cup cream/milk

¼ cup grated parmesan cheese

1. Heat oven to 175 degrees. Slice off the top of a head of garlic, to expose the top slightly. Place head of garlic in a double layer of aluminum foil and drizzle 2 tablespoons of olive oil on top. Bring sides of the aluminum foil up and twist to seal tightly. Cook in the oven for 1 hour, until soft.
2. Let it cool and squeeze the garlic cloves out of the skin – they will be soft and tender.
3. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to boil. Add potatoes, and cook until tender but firm. Drain and transfer to a large mixing bowl.
4. Warm the milk/cream. Place roasted garlic cloves, warmed milk/cream, parmesan cheese and butter into the bowl with the potatoes. Season with salt and pepper. Beat to a desired consistency with a potato masher or mixer.

Easy Refried Beans

This is another one of our favorite, easy dishes. You can use the beans for vegetarian burritos or to eat alongside other Mexican dishes.

2-3 olive oil

1-2 onions, chopped

2-3 cloves of garlic, minced

3 tablespoons chili spice*

1 tablespoon ground cumin

1-2 teaspoons oregano

ground black pepper

cayenne pepper to taste

1 chicken or vegetable bouillon cube

3 cans of kidney beans, drained

1 can of tomatoes, chopped

*In Prague, this means chili con carne spice (i.e., a mixture of other spices)

1. Heat the olive oil and cook the onions and garlic until soft. Add the spices, bouillon, beans and tomatoes. If the mixture is a little thick, add a tablespoon or so of water. Cook around 15-20 minutes.
2. Put the mixture in a blender or use a hand blender to make the mixture smooth.

**Adjust spices to taste to make it as spicy as you want.

Chicken and Bean Enchiladas

2 tablespoons oil or butter
2 cloves garlic, minced
4 scallions or 1-2 onions, chopped
2 cans of black beans or kidney beans, drained and rinsed
1 chipotle chili pepper in adobo sauce, finely chopped
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 lime, squeezed for juice
1 cup diced, cooked chicken
4-6 large flour tortillas
1-2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

Preheat the oven to 350 F or 150 C.

1. In a large skilled over medium heat, heat the oil/butter and add the garlic and scallions/onions. Stir for about 5 minutes, until tender. Add the beans and cook until heated through, about 5-10 minutes. Use a potato masher or the back of a wooden spoon to mash the beans. Add the chipotle pepper, salt, cumin and lime juice and cook, stirring constantly, for around 10 minutes. Add the chicken and cook for around 5 minutes.
2. Spoon the bean and chicken mixture into a flour tortilla, along the center of the tortilla. Sprinkle with cheese and roll up the tortilla. Place in the baking dish, seam-side down.
3. Pour enchilada sauce (see recipe below) over the top of the tortillas and sprinkle remaining cheese on top. Bake around 20 minutes.

Enchilada Sauce

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 very small onion, chopped into small pieces
½ teaspoon dried oregano
2 ½ teaspoons chili powder
½ teaspoon dried basil
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/8 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried parsley
¼ cup salsa
1 (6 ounce) can tomato sauce
1 ½ cup water

1. Heat the oil in a large saucepan and sauté the garlic and onion for around 5 minutes. Add the oregano, chili powder, basil, ground black pepper, salt, cumin, parsley, salsa and tomato sauce.

2. Mix together and then stir in water. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat to low and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until it has the desired consistency.
3. Pour over the chicken and bean tortillas above and bake.

Lentil Curry

Easy comfort food. This is an adapted original from the Bean Cookbook. You can adjust and play with it to get it as spicy or creamy as you'd like.

I. Easy Lentil Curry

- 1-2 onion, chopped
- 3-4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2-3 tablespoons butter or olive oil
- 2-3 tablespoons cumin (ground or whole, crushed)
- 2-3 tablespoons coriander (ground or whole, crushed)
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper (to taste)
- 1.5 – 2 cups quick cooking lentils
- 1-2 vegetable or chicken bouillon cubes
- ½ cup water
- 1-2 cups plain yogurt

1. Cook the lentils (we use easy cook variety) until tender, around 15-20 minutes. Drain the water.
2. At the same time, heat the butter/olive oil in the pan and sauté the onions and garlic.
3. Add the spices. It may be necessary to add some more butter/oil so that the mixture doesn't stick too much. Cook until tender (3-5 minutes).
4. Add the lentils, bouillon cubes and some water. Stir together and let simmer for around 15-20 minutes. Add more water if necessary, to avoid sticking.
5. Add the yogurt and stir together. Cook for another 5-10 minutes, depending upon the texture and creaminess you desire.
6. Eat with rice or Indian bread (naan).

II. Even Easier Lentil Curry

Cooking the lentils and rice in the same pot will make the curry even creamier. Eat with plain yogurt on top.

- 1.5 – 2 cups quick cooking lentils
 - 1.5 – 2 cups basmati rice
 - 4-5 cups water
 - 2 vegetable or chicken bouillon cubes
 - 1-2 onions chopped
 - 3-4 cups garlic cloves, minced
 - 2-3 tablespoons butter or olive oil

 - 2-3 tablespoons special spices for lentil curry
- OR

2-3 tablespoons cumin
2-3 tablespoons coriander
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper (to taste)

1. Add the lentils to boiling water (around 2-3 cups) and cook for around 15-20 minutes, or until mostly tender. Add rice to the same pot with extra water and bouillon and cover. Cook over low heat around 20 minutes until rice is fully cooked. Stir frequently to make sure the rice doesn't stick and that there is enough water.
2. At the same time, heat the oil/butter and cook the onions and garlic with the spices around 5-10 minutes until tender.
3. As the rice and lentil mixture is almost ready, add the onion and garlic mixture and stir well.
4. Serve on plates with plain yogurt on top.

Shrimp and Vegetable Risotto

This is a great recipe from Audrey's mom. The key is the fresh vegetables and cooking them so that they are still crisp.

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 ½ cups fresh green beans (cut into ½ pieces)
1 ½ cups freshly diced carrots
¾ cup finely chopped onion
3 cups lightly packed chopped fresh spinach
1 cup sugar snap peas or snow peas, sliced into ½ inch pieces
16 medium shrimp (or a comparable amount in small shrimp)
¼ teaspoon salt
2 cup chicken broth
1 ½ cup water
1 cup Arborio rice, uncooked
¼ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon fresh ground pepper
1/3 cup grated Romano cheese

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add green beans, carrots, and onion, and sauté 10 minutes or till tender.
2. Add spinach and snow peas; cover and cook 3 minutes. Stir in shrimp and ¼ teaspoon salt; cover and cook 1 minute. Transfer to a small bowl and set aside.
3. In a small saucepan, bring broth and water to a simmer, but do not boil. Keep warm over low heat.
4. In a large saucepan, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil over medium-high heat, and add rice. Cook 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Pour in 1 ½ cups hot broth; reduce heat to medium and cook until liquid is nearly absorbed, stirring occasionally (about 8-10 minutes). Add the remaining broth mixture in 3 batches, stirring constantly till each portion of broth is absorbed before adding the next (about 20 minutes total).
5. Stir in vegetable and shrimp mixture, ¼ teaspoon salt and pepper. Cook 3 minutes or until hot. Stir in cheese. Serve immediately.

Note: To spice this up a bit, flash fry for around 2-3 minutes the shrimp in pepper infused olive oil.

Chicken with Vegetable, Paprika and Herbed Cheese

This recipe came to us by way of some Estonian friends who picked up some Italian cooking while living in Copenhagen. The world is a small place...

2-3 tablespoons olive oil
2-3 onions, diced
3-4 garlic cloves, minced
2 medium zucchini, chopped
500 gram plum or cherry tomatoes, chopped into quarters
2 big red peppers, chopped
8-10 sun dried tomatoes, chopped
4-6 big celery sticks, chopped
3-4 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1-2 teaspoons oregano
1-2 teaspoons basil (fresh, if possible)
2 teaspoons thyme
2-3 teaspoons paprika
salt and fresh pepper to taste
4-6 chicken breast filets
1 container of herbed cream cheese (like Bonjour)

1. Preheat oven to 175 C or 350 F. Heat the olive oil in a large pot and sauté the onions and garlic. Add the rest of the vegetables, balsamic vinegar and spices. Simmer 15 minutes.
2. Pour all ingredients into a deep glass or other over proof dish. Place the chicken breasts on top and cover the chicken with the herbed cream cheese.
3. Bake in the oven for approximately 45 minutes, until chicken is thoroughly cooked. Serve with French or Italian bread to mop up the juices.

Dips - Hummus

Dan's famous hummus recipe. Friends have even bartered food to take home extras with them after tapas nights at our place.

2 cups canned garbanzo beans/chick peas, keep juice in separate bowl
1/3 cup tahini
¼ cup lemon juice
1 teaspoon salt
2-3 cloves garlic, halved
1 tablespoon olive oil
½ teaspoon cumin

½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
½ teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon minced fresh parsley

1. Place the garbanzo beans, tahini, lemon juice, garlic and spices (except paprika) in either a blender or a deep bowl (to use with a hand blender). Blend until smooth.
2. Drizzle olive oil on top and sprinkle with paprika and parsley. Serve with pita bread.

Breakfast - American Pancakes

Although hard to believe, Bisquick is not necessary to make pancakes. This super easy recipe makes great pancakes.

1 egg
1 cup flour
¾ -1 cup milk
2 tablespoons margarine, melted
1 tablespoon sugar
3 teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt

1. Beat egg until fluffy. Add milk and melted margarine.
2. Add dry ingredients. It may be necessary to add additional milk to get it to the desired consistency.
3. Use a big spoon or ladle to drop the batter onto a hot frying pan. Makes around 10 medium sized pancakes.

Desserts

Apple Crisp

I must give credit to the real author of this recipe, the Honorable Gaston Caperton, Former Governor of West Virginia. Somehow, when I was searching for apple crisp recipes on the internet, this one popped up! This is a big hit and very easy to make.

Insides

4-6 cup apples, peeled and sliced
1 tablespoon lemon juice (if apples are quite sweet)
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon nutmeg
½ cup sugar
2 tablespoons flour

Topping

1/3 cup flour
½ cup brown sugar

1 cup oatmeal
½ teaspoon alt
2 teaspoons cinnamon
¼ cup melted butter (1/4 of a 250 gram stick of butter)

1. Preheat oven to 175 C or 375 F. Stir together apples and remaining ingredients in a large bowl. Pour into a 9-inch pie pan.
2. Combine all topping ingredients together. Sprinkle evenly on top of apple mixture. Bake in the oven for around 30 minutes.

Triple Berry Crisp

1 ½ cups fresh strawberries
1 ½ cups fresh raspberries
1 ½ cups fresh blueberries
4 tablespoons white sugar
3 tablespoons cornstarch or flour

Topping

2 cups oats
1 cup brown sugar
½ cup flour
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon nutmeg
¼-1/2 cup butter (1/4 to ½ of a 250 gram stick of butter)

1. Preheat oven to 350 F or 175 C. In a large bowl, gently stir together berries, sugar and flour/cornstarch. Pour into 9 inch pie pan or 9x13 baking pan.
2. In a large bowl, stir together all the dry ingredients. Cut in butter until the mixture is crumbly. Sprinkle topping over the berries.
3. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until fruit is bubbly and topping is golden brown.

Magic Bars

A friend once told me that he “wanted to roll around” in these cookies and another friend even made up a dance for these bar cookies. They are super easy to make, but are great. The “magic” is the condensed milk...

1 ½ cups crushed graham crackers
note: In Prague, the closest thing to this is the Bio Honey Biscuits in the orange package.
½ cup melted butter (125 grams of butter)
1½ -2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips*
½- ¾ cups walnuts, broken into pieces
1 can of sweetened condensed milk
1 cup shredded coconut

1. Mix the crushed graham crackers and melted butter in the bottom of a 9x13 baking pan. Pat down on the bottom of the pan to make a graham cracker crust.
2. Layer the chocolate chips, walnuts, condensed milk and coconut on top of the graham cracker bottom.
3. Bake at around 375 F or 175 C for around 30 minutes, until the coconut is slightly brown on the top.

Audrey's Banana Bread

It may sound a little strange to add chocolate chips to banana bread, but after eating this you can never go back! Eat as a decadent breakfast or as a regular dessert.

- 1/3 cup butter (1/3 of a 250 gram stick of butter)
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1-2 eggs
- 1 - 1 ¼ cups mashed bananas (about 3-4 bananas)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 ¾ cup flour
- 2 ¼ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup chopped walnuts
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips*

1. Preheat oven to 375 F or 175 C. Mix together the butter and sugar until well blended. Add the eggs, mashed bananas and vanilla and mix well.
2. Add in the dry ingredients and stir well. Stir in the walnuts and chocolate chips.
3. Pour into a greased bread pan or a 9 inch cake pan. Bake for around 45-60 minutes, until top is browned and a knife comes out clean from the center.

*If you don't have chocolate chips, then cut up a semi-sweet bar of chocolate into 1 centimeter pieces.

Helpful hints:

- Use a mortar and pestle to grind fresh cumin and coriander. The freshness of the spices is great this way and very fragrant.
- Make flavored olive oil. Just add garlic or hot red peppers or fresh basil to olive oil. The hot pepper oil is great on pizza.
- Put old bananas in the freezer when they start to go brown. They are perfect later on for banana bread.