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JOURNAL ARTICLES

Fit to Eat: Spring Dinner Menu

Benjamin Sims



SPRING DINNER MENU

Herb-Baked Ricotta
with Grilled Asparagus and Lemon

Grilled Halibut
with Artichoke and Chickpea Ragu
and Arugula-Almond Pesto

Fresh Strawberries
with Balsamic Vinegar

Four 4-block servings
Prep time: about 1 hour

There is no reason healthy food shouldn't also be delicious. Staying in the Zone is simple—and can be done with simple foods—but there's no reason it must be bland, uninspiring, or monotonous. Menus and dishes that I create in my restaurant are constructed of the best ingredients at the peak of their ripeness—food that I would serve to my family and food that I eat at home. My dishes are ingredient-driven rather than recipe-driven, meaning that I mostly don't know what the end result will be until I pick up the produce from the farmer's market. This requires a bit of flexibility, knowledge of the seasons, and understanding of flavor combinations. With a little creativity, you can produce similarly appealing meals at home.

The following recipes are straight off my specials board, with a few modifications for the home cook and a little fine-tuning for the Zone. You could find the same dishes on many French or Italian tables. In keeping with the season, this is a typical spring menu, using ingredients that are easy to find right now. The entire menu should take very little time to prepare, and most of the cooking can be done outside on the grill rather than inside over a hot stove.

1 of 3



Herb-Baked Ricotta with Grilled Asparagus and Lemon (Appetizer)

1 cup fresh ricotta
1 egg yolk
6 sprigs of fresh thyme, leaves picked off
Zest of 2 lemons
Dash of olive oil

24 asparagus spears
2 lemons
Olive oil

Preheat oven to 400° and light the grill (medium to hot is the desired temperature for the grill). Whisk together the ricotta, egg yolk, olive oil, and pinch of salt and black pepper. Spread a thin layer, about 1-2 inches thick, of the cheese mixture in a baking dish, sprinkle lemon zest and thyme sprigs over the top, and bake. Depending on the thickness and your oven, it should bake for 10 to 15 minutes; remove from the oven when the top starts to brown. Set aside to cool.

As if you were breaking a pencil, break asparagus spears; they will naturally snap

at the division between the woody stem and tender top. Discard the woody ends and drizzle the tops with olive oil and salt and black pepper. Thinly slice lemons, about 7 or eight slices per lemon.

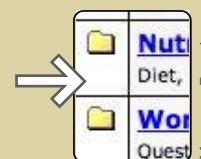
When the grill is hot and you are getting ready to eat, grill the asparagus and lemon slices. When the asparagus is tender, lay the spears on a serving platter, arrange grilled lemon slices over the asparagus, and crumble the ricotta over everything. Serve warm or at room temperature.

For more information on nutrition and the Zone:

• see issue 21 (May 2004) of the CrossFit Journal



• and the "Nutrition Forum" on the CrossFit.com message board.



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Grilled Halibut with Artichoke and Chickpea Ragu and Arugula-Almond Pesto

Pesto:

2 bunches, or 6 cups, of arugula leaves
1 clove garlic, chopped
Juice of 2 lemons
12 toasted almonds, whole or sliced
1/4 cup olive oil

Halibut:

4 four-ounce pieces of halibut fillet, skin off

Ragu:

4 medium artichokes
1 red onion, thinly sliced
6 cups cooked chickpeas with their liquid
2 tbsp olive oil
Crushed red pepper (also known as chili flakes)
Chopped parsley
2 lemons (use the ones you zested for the ricotta and asparagus appetizer)

Start with the pesto, which you can make as early as several hours before the meal. Put half of the arugula in a blender or food processor, add the almonds, lemon juice, garlic, salt, pepper, and olive oil on top of the arugula, and then add the rest of the arugula. Pulse the blender on and off until the mixture starts to catch and form a puree. Once the ingredients start to break down, let the blender run longer to get a finer paste, but do not let the motor run for longer than 5 or 10 seconds at a time (the blade will get hot and cook and discolor the arugula). Taste for seasoning and refrigerate.

To prepare the artichokes, tear off the small leaves attached to the stem, and cut crosswise through each artichoke where it begins to taper in toward the top, about an inch or two above the base. Put the artichokes cut

side down and carefully trim the leaves away, leaving the pale green center. Pare away the deep green part of the head and stem. You will now be left with the heart and stem. Trim off all but an inch of the stem and cut the artichoke in half lengthwise. With a teaspoon, scrape out the thistly choke from the center of the heart. At this point drop the clean artichoke hearts into acidulated water (cool water with the two lemons squeezed into it) to prevent them from oxidizing and turning black. Once all the artichokes are all cleaned, go back and cut each heart into three pieces and drop them back into the water.

Heat the 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a sauté pan. Drain the artichoke quarters and drop them into the hot pan; season with salt and crushed red pepper. Once the artichokes begin to brown, add the sliced red onion, turn

Fresh Strawberries with Balsamic Vinegar

(Dessert)

Simply find the best strawberries you can—about 6 or 8 per person—slice or wedge them, drizzle about 2 tablespoons of your best balsamic vinegar over them, and serve.



down the heat, and cook until the onion and artichoke are soft. Then add the cooked chickpeas and their liquid. Cook over low heat for 10 minutes to thicken and bring the flavors together.

As the ragout is reducing, grill the halibut. Make sure the grill is clean and as close to the heat source as possible. Each side of the fish should take about 3 minutes to cook. When it comes off the grill easily, it is ready to flip. Don't rush and scrape with your spatula; it should lift off the grill readily with a pair of tongs. Taste the chickpeas and artichokes for seasoning, adjust if needed, and add the chopped parsley. Spoon one-fourth of the ragout onto each plate, place the grilled fish on top, and drizzle everything with pesto.

