



The Allure of Aphrodisiacs

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Historic Aphrodisiac Recipes

Sweet Renaissance Pasta

From: *Shakespeare's Kitchen* (Random House) by Francine Segan

Serves 4-6

During Da Vinci's lifetime, pasta was served with sweet sauces like this unforgettable blend of wine and prunes, both ingredients considered aphrodisiacs in the Renaissance.

2 cups red wine

9 ounces pitted prunes, chopped

2 tablespoons sugar

4 tablespoons butter, cut in chunks

Salt and pepper

1-pound pasta (any type)

Parmesan cheese, grated, to taste

Place the wine, prunes and sugar in a saucepan and bring to a low boil over medium heat. Simmer for about 40 minutes, or until the mixture is thickened. Allow to cool and puree in a food processor until smooth.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain and place the pasta into a serving bowl and toss with the butter until melted. Stir in the prune sauce and top with grated Parmesan.

Courage Tart

From: *Shakespeare's Kitchen* (Random House) by Francine Segan

Serves 8

This recipe entitled, "To make a Tarte that is courage to a man or woman" is from a 1587 cookbook. The "courage" they are referring to is sexual prowess. Several of the ingredients, including sweet potatoes and wine, were considered aphrodisiacs back then. The original recipes called for sparrow brains, considered a powerful aphrodisiac back then, but one which I clearly omitted in this modern version!

1 large sweet potato, peeled and diced
2 cups white dessert wine (such as Muscat)
2 quince or apples, peeled, cored, and diced
3 dates, chopped
Store bought or home-made pie dough
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground ginger
Pinch of clove
2 tablespoons butter
4 large egg yolks
2 large egg whites

Place the sweet potato and wine in a small saucepan over medium-low heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the apple and dates and simmer for 25 minutes, or until the quince is tender. (If the mixture becomes too dry add 1 or 2 tablespoons of wine.) Purée until smooth.

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Roll out the pie dough to 1/8 inch thick on a floured work surface. Press the dough into a pie pan and trim off any excess.

Place the sweet potato mixture in a large bowl. Add the brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, clove, and butter and stir until well combined. Beat the egg yolk and add to the filling, and mix well. Whisk the egg whites to stiff peaks and gently fold into the filling. Pour the filling into the pie crust and bake for 1 hour, or until the center springs back when lightly pressed.

Assorted Stuffed Figs

From: *Movie Menus*, by Francine Segan

Serves 6

Figs have been considered aphrodisiacs since ancient Greek times. In this recipe, dried figs, plumped in wine and then filled with either prosciutto, mascarpone, or pistachios, make for an irresistible appetizer.

18 dried figs

1 cup white wine

1 tablespoon mascarpone cheese

Zest of 1/2 lemon

2 tablespoons finely chopped pistachio nuts

1 teaspoon honey

2 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut into twelve 1/2-inch wide strips

In a small saucepan, bring the figs and wine to a simmer and cook until the figs are soft, about 5 minutes. Remove the figs and continue cooking the wine until very thick and syrupy, about 10 minutes. Reserve.

Cut about 1/4 inch off the tops of 6 figs and set the figs upright on a serving platter. Top each with 1/2 teaspoon of the mascarpone and sprinkle with the lemon zest.

Remove the stems from 6 more figs and halve the figs lengthwise. Put the pistachios on a plate and dip each fig half into the chopped nuts. Drizzle with a little honey. Arrange on the serving platter.

Remove the stems from the remaining 6 figs and halve the figs crosswise. Make a small indent in each fig center with the tip of your finger or edge of a knife. Roll a strip of prosciutto into a bundle and stuff into each fig half. Drizzle about 1/2 teaspoon of the wine syrup over each fig half and add them to the serving platter.

***Pepatelli* – Italian Black Pepper Cookies**

From: Dolci: Italy's Sweets (Stewart, Tabori & Chang) by Francine Segan

Makes 8 dozen

Pepper, which tingles the tongue, was thought to tingle other body parts too 😊

Popular since the Renaissance, these honey-sweet biscotti have a pleasing peppery bite and hint of orange. Best of all, they're a guiltless treat! Unlike most cookies, there's no butter or eggs and are especially wonderful when made with a strongly-flavored darker honey like chestnut or buckwheat. The yield might sound like a lot, but remember, they're very thin.

8 ounces honey

8 ounces whole almonds, skins on

8 ounces, about 1 cup, all-purpose or cake flour, plus more as needed

Zest of 1 orange

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste

Preheat the oven to 350°. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In the microwave or in a small saucepan over low flame heat the honey until very warm and liquidy. Pour into a bowl along with the almonds, flour, zest, and black pepper to taste. Mix, using your hands or a wooden spoon, until dough forms. It will be very dense and crumbly. Don't worry; it'll come together while it bakes.

Put a little flour in a small bowl or on your work surface and coat your hands with it. Put 1/4 of the dough onto the prepared baking sheet and press into a fairly flat (about 3/4-inch high) rectangle, roughly 1 1/2 inches wide and 6 inches long. Repeat, creating a total of 4 rectangles.

Bake in a preheated oven for 10 minutes. Remove the baking pan from the oven, turn the rectangles over, and bake for 15 minutes, until golden and set.

Remove the pan from the oven and while still hot, cut each rectangle into very thin slices, about 1/4 inch thick. Once the biscotti are cool, they can be stored in a sealed container for several months.