

Comfort food doesn’t have to be guilty pleasure

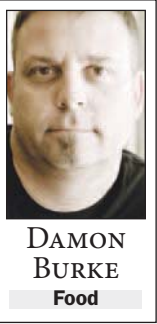
In our last article we were discussing the need to move to a healthier diet for the New Year (some of you are obsessed with this every January) and balancing the desire for “comfort food” this time of year as well. I am one of those people that believe (and not without plenty of research to back up my beliefs) that healthy eating is a year-round pursuit and does not have to eliminate all of your favorite foods.

Quite honestly, moderation is really the key to a healthier diet and lifestyle. The biggest issue is usually portion size. A dinner-sized portion of pasta is way too much, to the tune of triple what you should be eating. A 2 oz. to 4 oz. portion of dry pasta, per person, is plenty. Pasta was never meant to be a “main” course, it was filler to take up that empty feeling in your belly. Greens and vegetables were the mainstay of the Italian diet and still are. You don’t have to give up your pasta, just reduce the amount you eat in one sitting.

An example, if you will indulge me. I love fried chicken. Love it. It’s not really “healthy,” though. So, a few times a year, two or three max, I indulge myself and make fried chicken. I use the best chicken I can find and cook it in pure peanut oil. This cuts down on the corn-based products (and other questionable ingredients) I am consuming as well as raises the overall nutritional value of said fried product. I usually have a bunch of friends over and make some classic potato salad, too. This way I get my fix and am usually limited by how much I can stuff in my face by either social convention or just distraction. Either way, it works and I am satiated.

Think about your diet for the year like my fried chicken dilemma. You want “x” but know it’s not a good choice on a regular basis. So set limits for yourself. Eat those things that you love but only a few times a year. This way you get your fix, keep yourself in a healthier lifestyle and you have something to look forward to, something to celebrate. And as much as possible try to use the best possible ingredients when you do indulge. This way you will help maximize the end nutritional value for yourself and limit the downsides.

If you can get free range, organic chicken that was raised on a small farm by someone you know, that chicken will be much better for you than a store bought, factory farmed, pre-packaged and pre-cut “chicken,” simply because it’s closer to what nature intended. If you can get some friends to help and make it a party, do it. You will find that the end result is much more satisfying. Sharing something you love



DAMON BURKE Food



Photo by Damon Burke for the East Oregonian

Fried chicken, commonly considered a comfort food, can fit into a healthy diet with the right ingredients and proper moderation.

Perfect Fried Chicken

- 2 whole fryers cut into pieces, legs, thighs, breasts, etc.
- Peanut oil for frying, 1 gallon
- Salt, kosher, about 2 cups total
- Flour, 4 to 6 cups
- Pepper, fresh ground, about ¼ cup
- Paprika, ½ tsp.
- Garlic powder 1 ½ Tbsp.
- Onion powder 1 Tbsp.
- Ground oregano, ¼ tsp.
- Ground sage, ¼ tsp.
- Cayenne, 1/8 tsp.

In a large bowl combine flour, garlic, onion, oregano, sage, paprika, cayenne, most of the pepper and 2 Tbsp. of the salt. Set aside. Rinse and dry your chicken parts. Sprinkle all chicken, both sides, with salt, about 1 to 1.5 cups worth. Don’t be shy about this. Some salt

will fall off, no worries. Place chicken into gallon zip top bags and place in fridge for 3 to 6 hours.

Meanwhile, get your peanut oil up to 350 to 375 degrees using a deep heavy bottom pot and a fry thermometer. Remember NOT to add oil more than 2/3 up the side of the pot as the volume will increase once you add the chicken and you could risk a fire or worse.

When your chicken has reached its saturation point and the fry oil is up to temp, remove your chicken 3 to 4 pieces at a time and dredge in flour, shake off excess and add to oil, carefully, and let cook 8 to 12 minutes per batch, turning frequently to avoid uneven cooking. Remove cooked chicken to a sheet pan with a cooling rack and let drain. Finish off the cooking and keep all chicken uncovered or it will become soggy. Once it’s hot and ready, eat up. It’s that easy.

Brussels sprouts

- 1 to 2 lbs Brussels sprouts, washed and outside layer of leaves removed, ends trimmed and split top to bottom.
- Extra virgin olive oil, 2 Tbsp.
- Apple cider vinegar, ½ cup
- Sugar, 1 tsp.
- Salt, 1 tsp.
- Garlic powder ¼ tsp.
- Cayenne pepper, ground 1/8 tsp.
- Bacon, 2 thick cut slices, chopped into matchsticks

In a large pan over medium flame cook bacon for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. After 5 minutes, lower heat to medium-low and add 1 cup of water. Deglaze pan by scraping any crusty bacon matter from bottom of pan with a wooden spoon. Allow water to boil away. What you should be left with is a bunch of crunchy bacon bits and a pan full of bacon fat. Remove bits and then spoon off oil into a separate ramekin. Add 1 to 2 Tbsp. bacon fat back into pan and set over medium flame. Add sprouts, season with salt and pepper, garlic powder and cayenne. Toss to coat with fat. Reduce heat to low and add vinegar and sugar and toss to coat. Allow to cook until fork tender, about 5 to 10 minutes. Spoon out sprouts and add bacon bits, serve hot.

Damon Burke is the Head Chef and Owner at Salumiere Cesario, Walla Walla’s Gourmet Grocery. damon@salumierecesario.com

with people you care about does a lot for your mental state, which can greatly affect your physical state. And let’s face it — happiness is contagious. For things like red meat, which we all know we should be eating less of, try reducing your portion size or having it in different ways. Last article we shared a great recipe for steak

salad that is both satisfying and healthy. If you double up on your greens, say, some of those Brussels sprouts that I mentioned alongside that salad, you can have your 4 oz. of red meat once a week and not feel too guilty. Cut back on the burgers and fries, and try burger and salad. Any time you can get leafy greens

and cruciferous greens in a meal you are doing wonders for yourself. Making that beef grass fed does wonders too. Cheers.

As prices drop, home cooks get immersed in sous vide cooking

By MICHELLE LOCKE Associated Press

Call it the tender trend. Sous vide cooking, once strictly the province of professionals, is spreading to home kitchens as cheaper equipment puts the once avant-garde technique within reach.

Sous vide, which means “under vacuum” in French, is a so-called modernist method of cooking in which food is sealed in plastic bags (often vacuum sealed, though that’s not mandatory) and submerged in hot (but not boiling) water for long, slow cooking. The result is juicier food because no moisture is lost and cooking temperatures can be maintained within tenths of a degree.

“You’ve condensed these flavors: the chicken, the turkey, the salmon, the asparagus. Whatever it is that you’re cooking, the flavor is not dehydrated because there hasn’t been this war going on between heat and the food,” says Barb Westfield, a strategic director for SousVide Supreme, a pioneer in home sous vide cooking equipment. “Everything is protected; the flavors are intensified, the textures sublime. It really is love at first bite.”

That love used to come at a high price. Though the Internet abounds with DIY plans for building sous vide cookers (usually digitally controlled heaters and water circulators submerged in large basins), for



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

This Jan. 5 photo shows the cooking technique sous vide. Cheaper and more readily available equipment is behind the spread of the trendy technique of cooking in warm water.

a long time the only commercially available equipment was aimed at professional kitchens and cost thousands of dollars.

That started to change in 2009, when Broomfield, Colorado-based SousVide Supreme introduced a home model for around \$450 (it now lists for \$429 on the company website). Since then, they’ve added a second version, the smaller SousVide Supreme Demi, at \$329. Meanwhile, companies such as Anova and Sansaire have introduced even smaller immersion-style models for

around \$200.

SousVide Supreme appliances are self-contained; you fill them with water, set the temperature and close the lid. Immersion models combine a heating element with a water circulator in a wand-style device (they resemble immersion blenders) that you set into your own water-filled container.

Though sous vide cookers may be an emerging niche, they fit into the larger and longer standing trend of companies adapting professional kitchen gear — everything from

trophy cooking ranges to powerful blenders and massive refrigerators — for home cooks, says Dinesh Kithany, a senior analyst covering the home appliance industry for IHS, Inc., a U.S.-based global business information and analytics provider.

The rise of sous vide cookers, however, has run parallel to growing interest in the science of food and cooking, says Michael Tankenoff, spokesman for Anova.

The company started with an immersion cooker, the Anova One, that costs \$199. Then they ran a Kickstarter campaign and raised \$1.8 million for a second model, the Anova Precision Cooker. The newer model costs \$179 and uses Bluetooth to communicate with a companion app that allows you to select and control recipes and get cooking updates.

Home cook Jason Logsdon became a convert to sous vide cooking after trying it out on just two things, a chicken breast and pork tenderloin. “Right after doing that I was convinced it was a great way to cook food,” says Logsdon, who runs the website modernistcookingmadeeasy.com and wrote the recently released cookbook “Modernist Cooking Made Easy: Sous Vide.”

Though simple in principle, sous vide cooking is more involved than conventional techniques. In addition to taking far longer, it also requires greater care. Because the

food is cooked at low heat, time and temperature guidelines must be followed carefully to ensure any pathogens are killed. It also usually requires more steps.

For example, food won’t brown in a sous vide cooker. So getting a good sear on a steak requires cooking it first in the water bath, then transferring it to a broiler or skillet to briefly brown the exterior. Also popular: blasting the cooked food with a blowtorch, a technique Logsdon says is “always fun at parties.”

Westfield spent Thanksgiving in France where she pitted two turkeys against one another — one cooked the traditional way, the other cut up and cooked sous vide.

“My American friends were, ‘How are you going to fix the skin? Is it going to be crispy?’ It was as if I was committing a crime against the turkey,” Westfield says with a laugh. She cooked the meat before the big day, giving the dark meat extra time, then chilled it. Before serving she reheated it, then pulled out “the coolest new blowtorch” to brown the bird.

“People were amazed and out of the 13 people I had as guests, three voted for traditional and 10 voted for sous-vide turkey,” she reports. “Even on the leftovers the sous vide turkey outperformed the roasted 90 percent.”

Michelle Locke tweets at https://twitter.com/Locke—Michelle

Want Valentine’s Day ease that still impresses? Try fondue

By ALISON LADMAN Associated Press

Worried your kitchen skills may not be up to pulling together something impressively decadent for Valentine’s Day? Fear not. A pricey restaurant meal isn’t your only option.

We created this delicious, yet simple pair of fondue sauces to be easy for even the most clueless cook. But we didn’t sacrifice the wow-factor in the process. Warm chocolate-mango and five-spice caramel sauces are anything but ordinary. For ease, we pair them with purchased items for dipping — biscotti, pound cake, fresh berries, whatever inspires you.

And while fondue pots are nice, they aren’t essential. You also can offer these sauces in small serving dishes. If they get too cool, just pop them in the microwave for a few seconds.

The only slightly unusual ingredient on this menu is the mango puree. It’s usually sold in the grocer’s freezer section alongside the Hispanic ingredients. If you can’t find it, it’s

easy to make your own. Add about 1 cup of fresh or frozen (thawed) mango chunks to the blender and puree. Strain the puree, then proceed with the recipe.

Fondue duo of chocolate mango and five-spice caramel sauces

Start to finish: 40 minutes Servings: 4

- For the chocolate fondue:**
- 1/2 cup mango puree
 - 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
 - 4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped

- For the caramel fondue:**
- 1/2 cup half-and-half
 - 5 ounces caramels (about 17 to 18 pieces)
 - 1/2 teaspoon five-spice powder

- For dunking:**
- Wafer cookies
 - Fresh berries
 - Biscotti
 - Marshmallows
 - Pound cake, cut into cubes or sticks



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

This Jan. 5 photo shows a fondue duo of chocolate mango and five-spice caramel sauces.

- Angel food cake, cut into cubes or sticks

In a small saucepan over medium, heat the mango puree and butter until simmering and the butter has melted. Remove the pan from the heat and add the chocolate and honey. Allow to sit for 2 minutes, then stir with a rubber spatula until smooth. Set aside, but keep warm.

In another small saucepan over medium, heat the half-and-half until it simmers. Add the caramels and five-spice powder, then cook,

stirring constantly, until the caramels are melted and the mixture is smooth.

Transfer the two mixtures to 2 small serving bowls. Set on a platter surrounded by the various items for dunking. Alternatively, set up 2 heated fondue pots according to product directions and pour the dipping sauces into those. Serve immediately.

Chocolate sauce nutrition information per serving (based on 4 servings): 260 calories; 140 cal-

ories from fat (54 percent of total calories); 16 g fat (10 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 15 mg cholesterol; 33 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 28 g sugar; 2 g protein; 0 mg sodium.

Caramel sauce nutrition information per serving (based on 4 servings): 170 calories; 60 calories from fat (35 percent of total calories); 6 g fat (3 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 15 mg cholesterol; 29 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 25 g sugar; 3 g protein; 100 mg sodium.

This Jan. 5 photo shows a fondue duo of chocolate mango and five-spice caramel sauces.

AP Photo/Matthew Mead

It’s a hoot hanging out with owls at this Tokyo cafe

By LINDA LOMBARDI Associated Press

TOKYO — In the U.S., hanging out in a cafe with animals is such an exotic concept that people can’t get enough of it. A pop-up cat cafe in New York last year had lines down the block. Online reservations for another Manhattan cat cafe are almost fully booked more than two months ahead.

But in Japan, cat cafes are just the start. You can hang out in rabbit cafes or have coffee in Tokyo with two goats. And you’re not limited to domestic animals. You can also spend an hour at a cafe holding a great horned owl.

Judging by how complicated it was to get a reservation at Tokyo’s Fukuro no Mise (“Shop of Owls”), the owl cafes there are just as much of a hoot there as cat cafes are here.

To get a spot, visitors are supposed to line up an hour before Fukuro no Mise opens. But when I showed up an hour early, I was lucky to get the last seat for a session two hours later. There are no refunds on the 2000 yen (\$17) fee. If you’re late, you lose your slot.

Inside, I was given a list of detailed English instructions. For example, only touch the owls on the head or back. And while the owls are very tame, “they can’t be potty trained like dogs. So please be generous when they potty on you!” The woman in charge also gave a long talk and demonstration in Japanese before allowing each guest to hold a bird.

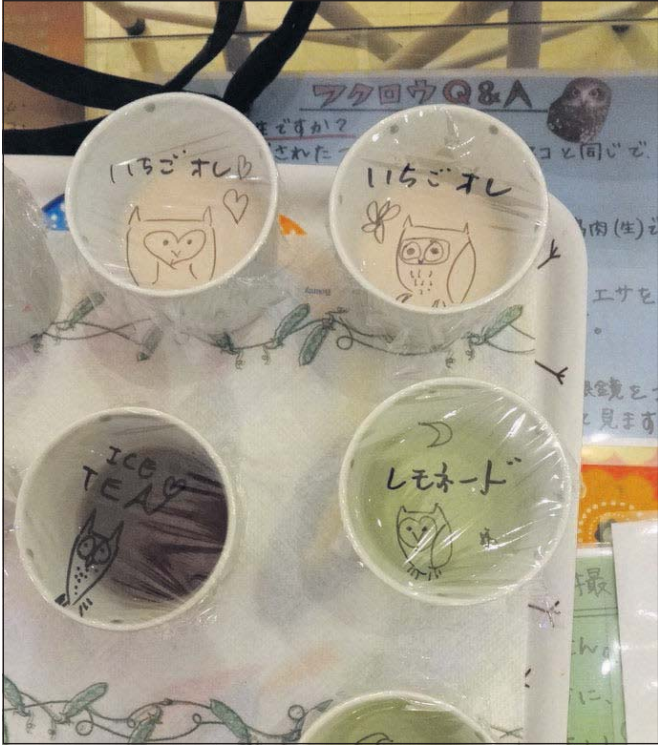
The owls come in various sizes and species, from tiny to quite large, including a great horned owl with large sharp claws and impressive beak. Each bird has a tether around one foot, which you hold in your hand as they perch on your arm. Sleek and clear-eyed, the owls seem calm despite the fact that the small room is crowded.

The attentive staff will place the owl on your shoulder or head if you like (I declined in light of the warning about the lack of potty-training). Staff can also help if your owl starts to flap. Raising your hand in the air usually settles them down, but apparently I was holding my arm wrong, so a worker repositioned it. If you’ve had enough and want to just watch everyone else’s owls, they’ll relieve you of the bird.



AP Photo/Linda Lombardi

This October 2014 photo shows an owl perched on the arm of a visitor at Fukuro no Mise, which means Shop of Owls, in Tokyo. The cafe allows visitors to hold and interact with owls. It’s one of a number of cafes in Japan where you can spend time with animals ranging from rabbits to goats.



AP Photo/Linda Lombardi

This October 2014 photo shows a tray of beverages ready to be served to visitors at Fukuro no Mise, which means Shop of Owls, in Tokyo. Each cup is covered in plastic wrap with a hand-drawn owl.

Photography is forbidden in some of the oddest places in Japan, but this isn’t one of them. No flash is allowed (and no video) but posting a shot of yourself on social media holding an owl is clearly a goal for many visitors.

Unlike some other animal cafes in Japan, this place is only nominally a cafe. There’s no food but a small drink is included (alcohol costs extra). The drink arrives covered in plastic wrap, decorated with a magic marker illustration of an owl. But no one pays attention to their beverage until the final activity,

owner’s, four Harris hawks and a peregrine falcon that can’t be petted, only watched. But hawk owners also come to the shop with their birds, and some may allow you to touch them. This one’s a proper cafe, with dishes on an English menu named after raptors, including Harris Curry and Eagle Ginger pork.

There are other owl cafes in Japan. All have different hours and procedures, so it’s best to have a Japanese speaker help navigate websites and make calls. Fukuro no Mise also had limited and somewhat erratic hours, so you’ll want to check its website — also in Japanese — for current information: <http://profile.ameba.jp/fukuruonmisse/>.

And while the cafe is off the beaten tourist path, it’s easy to find from exit 10 of Tokyo Metro Tsukishima Station — just cross and head up the street lined with oddly pruned trees and you’ll see its storefront on the right, covered with posters in Japanese and English explaining the reservation system. Once you have your reservation, if there’s time, you can head up to the next cross street and stroll an old shopping street with lots of monjayaki restaurants. Monja is the Tokyo version of okonomiyaki, the meat, seafood and vegetable pancake that’s cooked on a griddle on your table.

The cafe suggests English speakers come on Fridays when they have English-speaking staff, but I had no difficulty on a different day.

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