

Rice-free, healthy take on an Asian classic

ITALIAN STIR-FRY

- Start to finish:** 15 minutes
Servings: 4
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into thin strips
 - Kosher salt and ground black pepper
 - 1/2 pound small broccoli florets
 - 2 1/2-pound head cauliflower, trimmed, cored and cut into small florets (about 1 1/2 pounds florets)
 - 1 tablespoon grapeseed or other neutral oil, divided
 - 1/2 medium yellow onion, chopped
 - 1/4 cup low-sodium chicken broth or stock (or water)
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes
 - 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
 - 1 cup marinara sauce, warmed
 - 2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts (optional)

Season the chicken strips with salt and pepper, then set aside.

In a food processor, pulse the broccoli until finely chopped. Transfer to a large bowl. Working in batches, repeat this step with the cauliflower, adding the chopped bits to the broccoli. Have all remaining ingredients prepped.

In a medium nonstick skillet over medium, heat 1 teaspoon of the oil. At the same time, in a large wok over high, heat the remaining oil.

In the skillet, brown the chicken on all sides until golden, 6 to 8 minutes, depending on how thick the strips are.

Meanwhile, add the broccoli, cauliflower and onion to the wok. Cook, stirring constantly and spreading the vegetables up the sides of the wok, until the vegetables start to brown, about 5 minutes. Add the broth, then cover and let steam for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove the cover and let the remaining broth evaporate. Add the garlic, red pepper flakes and a pinch of salt. Continue to cook another minute, stirring.

Add the cooked chicken and Parmesan cheese, stir, then remove from heat. Serve with pine nuts sprinkled on top, if desired, and the marinara either drizzled over the top or served on the side.

Nutrition information per serving: 290 calories; 80 calories from fat (28 percent of total calories); 9 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 90 mg cholesterol; 610 mg sodium; 19 g carbohydrate; 7 g fiber; 7 g sugar; 33 g protein.



AP Photo/J.M. Hirsch

Italian stir-fry with seared chicken breast and marinara.

Italian stir-fry

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN
Associated Press

Somewhere in the repertoire of every healthy-minded cook is a stir-fry. You chop up a bunch of veggies, cook them quickly at high heat, add meat or tofu, maybe a flavorful sauce or a sprinkle of chopped cashews or peanuts. Easy, healthy and versatile. And usually Asian in flavor profile.

But one day, I got to wondering: Why not try an unexpected flavor slant, such as Italian, southern French, Greek or Mexican? The plug-and-play skeleton

of a typical stir-fry is just begging to be mixed up a bit. I love a cooking blueprint that grants me not just one dinner, but plenty of possibilities. With stir-fries being so healthy — due to their reliance on oodles of veggies — it's a perfect model to expand beyond the tasty Asian box we have it in.

So let's start with a few stir-fry tips. First, always prep all your ingredients in advance and have everything right there at the stovetop before you begin. Nowhere is mise en place more important than with a stir-fry (also true for grilled pizza, but that's a column for another day).

Second, use high heat. You want to sear the ingredients, and that requires lots of heat. If you are using firmer vegetables

such as broccoli and cauliflower, and you prefer them softer than a quick roll in the wok will make them, either blanch them briefly as part of your prep, or use a quick saute-steam method.

Third, don't crowd your wok (or frying pan), which will lower the temperature and result in a steamed stir-fry (not a good thing). If you don't have a sufficiently large wok, cook the protein in a separate frying pan to get a nice sear, then add to the vegetable skillet at the last minute, along with the sauce. Finally, top the entire thing with something crunchy, such as a few chopped almonds. You won't even need rice.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget.

The secret to the richest chocolate cake ever? Think Irish!

By ELIZABETH KARMEL
Associated Press

For me, St. Patrick's Day isn't just an excuse to drink Irish whiskey and Guinness. It's also an excuse to bake with them!

Not too long ago, I had an idea to bake a chocolate cake spiked with Guinness, then topped with a whiskey glaze. The affinity between the chocolate and the Guinness was amazing.

When I created the recipe, I started with my aunt's chocolate pound cake, which my mother had remembered as spectacular. My aunt's basic cake was good, but tastes have changed and I thought it was a bit reserved. I wanted this cake to be luscious and moist and very chocolatey! So I increased the cocoa to a whole cup, substituting an additional 1/2 cup of cocoa for an equal amount of the flour.

For additional richness, I mixed Guinness with an equal amount of half-and-half. And to tie all the flavors together — a hint of freshly grated nutmeg. You don't really taste it, but it highlights all the other flavors.

The first time I made the cake, I made the Irish whiskey glaze and it was good. But I thought that it was wasteful to have to buy both Guinness and Irish whiskey if you didn't already have it on hand. So I changed the glaze to a Guinness glaze. You can buy a single can of Guinness in almost every grocery store, and having Guinness in both the cake and the glaze is not only delicious but economical, as well.

The glaze is an essential part of the cake, as you poke holes in the cake when it is still warm and slowly spoon the glaze over the cake until the holes are filled with it. That way, once the cake is cooled and sliced, each piece has rivets of deep chocolate glaze set into the top of the cake.

For anyone who is nervous that the cake will taste like beer... It does not. The Guinness adds a stouty richness that makes the cake the best chocolate cake you have ever eaten. It is so good that I had to make it three times when I visited my sister and her large family because each time I made it, it was gone before everyone could have a slice. This is the best way I know to celebrate St. Paddy's Day, the Ides of March, or anytime you want a great piece of chocolate cake.

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pitmaster at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and author of three books, including "Taming the Flame."



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Chocolate Guinness cake with chocolate Guinness glaze.

CHOCOLATE GUINNESS CAKE WITH CHOCOLATE GUINNESS GLAZE

- Start to finish:** 2 hours (15 minutes active)
Servings: 12
- For the cake:**
- 1 cup cocoa powder, plus extra for the pan
 - 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
 - 2 1/2 cups granulated sugar
 - 4 large eggs
 - 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
 - 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
 - 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
 - 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
 - 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
 - 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
 - 1/2 cup half-and-half
 - 1/2 cup Guinness, room temperature

- For the glaze:**
- 2 cups powdered sugar
 - 3 tablespoons cocoa powder
 - 6 tablespoons Guinness
 - 2 tablespoons half-and-half or heavy cream
 - 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - Pinch of kosher salt
- Heat the oven to 325 F. Coat a 12-cup Bundt pan very well with cooking spray. Sprinkle in a bit of cocoa powder, turning to coat evenly, then overturning to discard any excess.
- In a large bowl, use an electric mixer to beat together the butter and sugar. Add the eggs, one at a time, and beat until smooth. Set aside.
- In a large bowl, whisk together the 1 cup of cocoa powder, the flour, baking powder, baking soda,

salt and nutmeg. In a 2-cup liquid measuring cup, stir together the vanilla, half-and-half and Guinness.

With the mixer running on low, alternate adding the liquid and dry ingredients to the sugar-butter mixture, mixing just until everything is mixed and smooth. Transfer to the prepared Bundt pan, tapping it gently on the counter to release air bubbles. Smooth the top, then bake for 1 hour 10 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted at the center comes out clean.

Meanwhile, prepare the glaze. In a medium bowl, whisk together all ingredients until smooth. Set aside.

When the cake is done, let it cool in the pan for 25 minutes. Set a wire cooling rack over the pan, then invert it so the cake stands on the rack. For ease of cleanup, set the rack over a rimmed baking sheet or a sheet of kitchen parchment. Use a tooth pick to poke deep holes all over the top of the cake.

Spoon glaze over the top of the cake and wait until it seeps into the holes. Spoon more glaze into the holes, then wait 10 minutes. Spoon the remaining glaze all over the top so it covers the holes and drizzles down the sides.

Nutrition information per serving: 500 calories; 180 calories from fat (36 percent of total calories); 20 g fat (12 g saturated; 0.5 g trans fats); 115 mg cholesterol; 190 mg sodium; 76 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 50 g sugar; 7 g protein.



AP Photo/Nasser Nasser, File

In this May 19, 2013 file photo, a young man walks in the Ahmed Ibn Tulun mosque in Cairo, Egypt.

Ancient mosque offers respite from Cairo chaos

By ARON HELLER
Associated Press

CAIRO — Amid Cairo's cramped mass of humanity and traffic, with its incessant honking and haggling, visitors will be hard-pressed to find some solitude. But if you're willing to go off the beaten tourist track a bit, serenity can be found.

The expansive Mosque of Ahmed Ibn Tulun is not as famous as Al-Azhar Mosque or the Mohamed Ali mosque inside the Citadel fortress, but it's a rare oasis of silence in one of the world's busiest, and loudest, cities. The mosque, completed in 879, is considered the oldest in Cairo that has survived in its original form, and the third largest in the world by area. Local legend claims it was built on the hill where Noah's Ark landed after the flood.

Upon entering, you encounter the huge square plaza, surrounded by four shaded pathways that include patches of green rugs for prayer and long lines of hanging lanterns. The arches between the columns showcase a variety of sculpted patterns. If the backdrop looks familiar to movie buffs, it's because Roger Moore confidently strolled down these pathways as James Bond in a memorable scene from "The Spy Who Loved Me."

It's not unusual to find only a handful of other visitors on site and the unexpected quiet allows one to observe the various formations of shadows and the rays of light creeping through the intricately carved stone windows. The only noise here is that of the birds chirping from the rafters.

Once you've absorbed the calming karma of the courtyard, you can ascend the minaret's exterior stone staircase where a panoramic,

albeit hazed-by-pollution, view of Cairo is revealed and you can take in the sheer expanse of the sprawling metropolis. From this vantage point it's easy to see why Cairo is known as "the City of the Thousand Minarets." The vista of mosques, broken roads, bumper-to-bumper traffic and roofs littered with satellite dishes will remind you of the intensity from which you have just escaped.

Entrance to Ibn Tulun mosque is free but donations are gladly accepted and actively encouraged from the men who attach cloth bags to your shoes in deference to the site's sanctity.

Within the same compound one can include a visit to the Gayer-Anderson Museum, which boasts an impressive collection of Egyptian artifacts and relics. It provides a glimpse into the life of history-obsessed retired British officer John Gayer-Anderson — who made it his home — and offers perhaps the best example of domestic Cairo architecture. The museum is built from two houses dating back to the 15th and 16th century and is connected by a bridge supported by the outer wall of the mosque. Highlights include an internal well, rooms devoted to the varied Chinese, Turkish and Syrian oriental styles and a courtyard that has another unlikely feature for Cairo — green grass. The rooftop terrace is impressive and has been used as a set for several movies, including the Bond one where Moore battles a henchman on it and then flings him off the roof.

The museum, too, can be quite empty, with an accompanying guide turning on the lights of each room for a lone visitor. Entrance costs 40 Egyptian pounds (about \$5). But it's worth a visit if only to prolong a relaxed outing before heading out once again into the hectic streets of Cairo.