

## GOURMET RECIPES

**Small Party Time**

We love fall, as everyone is back in town, the weather can be glorious, and the holiday push hasn't quite started. Time to get together with friends! Small dinner parties are elegant, manageable and fun, and – given this last year – won't break the bank. For a more interesting menu, go ethnic! We've got some terrific new cookbooks that we've been using, and will keep on doing so. They're full of new flavours and ideas, and we know you'll love them too.

*The Lebanese Cookbook* by Hussien Dekmak is the first of what we hope will be a series; Dekmak was born in Beirut and has been cooking since his teens. He trained at La Hamra in London's West End, and opened the celebrated Le Mignon in 1997, described by critics as "An outpost of classic Lebanese cooking."

The book is a treat; all your favourites are here, plus many others that you didn't know about and wish you had! Patricia Wells said of Dekmak's cooking: "Some of the finest Lebanese food I have ever tasted!" Can't beat that!

Jonny Haughton's *Cooking Without Fuss* is such a marvelous, convenient cookbook; we turn to it for "just the right" recipe, and find one every time. Haughton is head chef and joint owner of The Havelock Tavern in London, and has worked everywhere important in the field. He believes that cooking doesn't have to be stressful as long as you are organized. He gives terrific advice throughout the book on how to stock and equip the kitchen, traditional cooking principles, and how to put balanced menus together. "A-list" for sure.



Ah, the cookbook that so many have been waiting for: *Blackbird Bakery Gluten-Free* by Karen Morgan, proprietor and blogger of Blackbird Bakers in Austin, Texas. Whether you have a wee (or huge) problem with gluten or not, you won't with these 75 perfect recipes, which are decadent and delicious. From Brownies for Lovers to Hummingbird Cake, you can serve these recipes to your most discriminating friends and they'll never know what's not in there.

We've had such fun with *Skinny Dips* by Diane Morgan in the last couple of columns that we just wanted to give you a bit more! She's the award-winning author of both the *The New Thanksgiving Table* and *The Thanksgiving Table, Grill Every Day* and *Salmon*. They're all perfect for finding just the right beginning to any party or meal. Thank you again, Diane Morgan!

*On today's menu:*

- [Pomegranate, Orange and Avocado Salsa](#)
  - [Broad Bean, Asparagus, Feta and Spiced Couscous Salad](#)
  - [Makloubeh Batinjan](#)
  - [Pineapple Upside-Down Cake](#)
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## **Pomegranate, Orange and Avocado Salsa**

From *Skinny Dips*, Diane Morgan says to get a calorie wise dip with the properly creamy mouth feel means kicking up the flavor with wintry fruits. Chunks of navel orange add a tropical zest, while the pomegranate seeds add sparkling colour and an appealing crunch. It's a great starter for any cool weather meal.



*Makes about 4 cups*

- 1 tsp fresh lime juice
- 1 tsp kosher or sea salt
- 1/8 tsp freshly ground pepper
- 3 large navel oranges
- 1 pomegranate
- 1 large Hass avocado, halved, pitted, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch dice
- 2/3 cup diced red onion
- 1 jalapeño chile, seeds and ribs removed, minced
- 2 green onions, including green tops, cut on the diagonal into thin slices
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

**Skinny Dippers:** Baked tortilla chips, baked wonton crisps, poached shrimp

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the lime juice, salt and pepper until the salt dissolves.
2. Working with one orange at a time, cut a slice from the top and bottom to reveal the flesh. Stand the orange upright and slice away the peel from the sides in wide strips, cutting downward, following the contour of the fruit, and removing all the with pith. Holding the orange over a bowl, use a sharp paring knife to cut along both sides of each segment, releasing the segments and allowing the juice and segments to drop into the bowl. Discard any seeds that might adhere to the fruit or drop into the bowl. Repeat with the remaining oranges. (This technique is called "supreming.") Drain the juice into a measuring cup and set aside. Cut the orange segments into 1/2-inch pieces and add to the bowl containing the lime juice.
3. To extract the seeds from the pomegranate, cut the fruit into quarters. Fill a large bowl with cold water and place it in the kitchen sink to contain any squirting pomegranate juice. Using your fingertips, break the seeds away from the pith under water. (Morgan says she wears disposable surgical gloves from the pharmacy to prevent staining her fingers red.) The seeds will sink to the bottom of the bowl. Discard any pith, drain the water, blot the seeds lightly with paper towels and add to the bowl with the orange segments.
4. Add the avocado, red onion, jalapeño, green onions and cilantro to the bowl. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold the ingredients together, being careful to not mash the avocado. Add the reserved orange juice, 1 Tbsp at time, until the salsa is moist but not soupy. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Transfer to a serving bowl, cover and set aside for at least 1 hour to allow the flavors to meld.

*Dip Do Ahead:* This salsa can be prepared up to 8 hours in advance. (If prepared too far ahead of time, the avocados will begin to discolor.) Cover

and refrigerate. Remove from the refrigerator 45 minutes before serving.

***Tony's wine recommendation:***

chilled Beaujolais or Tavel Rosé

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## **Broad Bean, Asparagus, Feta and Spiced Couscous Salad**

Oh yum. The salty creaminess of the feta goes terrifically well with the crisp, sweet vegetables. And better, this salad can be made in advance and is therefore handy for gatherings! From *Cooking Without Fuss*, where Jonny Haughton suggests that unless you grow your own broad beans, as store-bought can be mealy, it's better to use frozen.



*Serves 4*

- 2 red onions, cut into 1 cm wedges
- 1 tsp finely chopped thyme
- 1 garlic clove, finely sliced
- 4 Tbsp olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- Salt and pepper
- 50 g couscous
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 1/2 tsp ground coriander
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon
- 1/2 tsp ground, dried red chili
- 1/2 garlic clove, grated
- 200g feta cheese, cut into 1 cm cubes
- 200 g asparagus, cooked and cut into 3 cm slices
- 200 g broad beans, cooked and peeled
- 2 Tbsp chopped mint
- 2 Tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small Cos lettuce

Preheat the oven to 220°C/425°F.

Place a heavy-bottomed roasting tray in the oven to heat up. Put the onions, thyme and garlic into a bowl. Pour in a little olive oil, season with salt and pepper and toss thoroughly. Place the onions into the hot tray and return to the oven. Check after 15 minutes and turn the onions if necessary. They will take 30 minutes in total.

Cook the couscous. Put in a bowl, season with salt and pepper and cover with boiling water. Stir with a fork to break up any lumps as they form. Leave to cool. Heat the olive oil in a small saucepan. When it is hot (not quite smoking point) add the spices, lemon zest (only), chili and garlic, stir briefly and immediately through into the couscous. Add the red onions and mix.

To assemble the dish, place the feta and salad ingredients into a bowl. Add the lemon juice retained from the couscous. Stir in the couscous and serve in a large bowl on a bed of Cos lettuce leaves.

***Tony's wine recommendation:***

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc

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## **Makloubeh Batinjan**

*(Aubergine with Meat and Rice)*

*Makloubeh* means "upside-down," but you'll be over the moon with this one. It's so good and such a fun presentation; simply prepare in a bowl and then turn out on a plate to give it a dome shape. Use one big bowl or 4 small ones. From *The Lebanese Cookbook* by Hussien Dekmak.



*Serves 4*

- 4 large aubergines
- Vegetable oil, for deep-drying
- 2 Tbsp olive oil



- 1/2 onion, finely chopped
- 250 g lamb shoulder, chopped into 3 cm chunks
- 300 g basmati or American long-grain rice, soaked for 20 minutes
- Salt and black pepper
- 200 g peeled peanuts, almonds or cashews

Peel the aubergines lengthways with a potato peeler, leaving long stripes of skin. Cut one into cubes and the other three into thin slices.

Heat the vegetable oil in a deep-fat fryer or deep, heavy-based saucepan. Deep-fry the sliced aubergines until browned, then drain and set aside. Repeat with the cubed aubergine.

Heat the olive oil in a pan and fry the onion until softened. Stir in the meat and cook until browned, then add the cubed eggplant and 700 mL of water. Cook over a low heat for about 15 minutes until the water colours.

Add the rice, salt and pepper and cook for a further 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, deep-fry the nuts until golden. Drain and place in a serving bowl.

Line a large bowl with the aubergine slices. Pack the rice mixture in firmly, then place a large flat dish on top of the bowl. Turn out the aubergine "cake," being careful to keep its dome shape.

Serve the bowl of nuts alongside the aubergine cake. Serve with any type of salad.

***Tony's wine recommendation:***

Oregon or New Zealand or Californian Pinot Noir

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## **Pineapple Upside-Down Cake**

A hands-down favourite with everyone, and at last a version that everyone can enjoy. This gluten-free version is such a winner that you'll never go back to the original

recipe! Serve with whipped cream on the side... Karen says, "I grew up on this magnificent pineapple upside-down cake, and some of my fondest memories are of my mother inverting the cake, unveiling the caramelized and glistening fruit, bathed in a wash of syrup and pure buttery beauty!" Don't even try to resist...



From *Blackbird Bakery Gluten-Free* by Karen Morgan.

*Serves 6*

*Ingredients:*

- Non-stick cooking spray

*Topping:*

- 1 cup water
- 3/4 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 1 ripe pineapple, peeled, cut into ten 1/4-inch thick crosswise slices, and cored
- 1 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 Tbsp coconut rum

*Batter:*

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup sorghum flour
- 1/4 cup glutinous rice flour
- 1/4 cup cornstarch flour
- 1/4 cup tapioca flour
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 3/4 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 7 Tbsp unsalted butter at room temperature
- 2 large eggs
- 3/4 cup organic buttermilk
- 1 1/2 tsp pure vanilla extract
  
- 10 maraschino cherries

- Vanilla ice cream or (we say) whipped cream for serving

Position an oven rack in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly coat an 8-inch round cake pan with nonstick cooking spray.

For the topping: *in a 12-inch skillet, combine the water, light and dark brown sugars, and vanilla bean. Bring to a gentle boil over medium-high heat and cook, stirring until the sugar is completely dissolved. Reduce the heat to medium-low, add the pineapple slices and sauté each side for about 3 to 5 minutes, or until lightly browned. Using a slotted metal spatula. Carefully transfer the slices to a plate and let cool. Cook the sugar mixture in the pan to reduce to about 1/3 cup. Remove from the heat and stir in the butter and coconut rum. Remove the vanilla bean and set the syrup aside.*

*For the batter:* In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine all the dry ingredients and mix on low speed to blend. Add the butter and mix on low speed until blended. Add the eggs and beat on medium-high speed for 1 minute, or until light and fluffy. With the machine running, gradually add the buttermilk and beat until blended, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl once or twice. Add the vanilla and beat for 1 minute more. Set aside.

Arrange four of the pineapple slices in the bottom of the prepared pan. Cut the remaining slices in half to make half-moons and arrange them around the edges of the pan, curved side up, gently pressing the slices so they stick to the sides. Place a maraschino cherry in the center of each of the four pineapple slices lining the bottom of the pan. Cut the remaining cherries in half. Place one half in the arch of the half slices, being careful to have the cut side of the cherries facing the inside of the pan. Pour the sugar syrup over the pineapple slices lining the bottom of the pan. Quickly pour the batter over the pineapples and cherries. Smooth the surface with an offset spatula. Bake for 45 to 55 minutes or until the cake is lightly browned and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Remove from the oven and let cool for 2 to 3 minutes. Gently run a knife around the edge of the pan. Unmold onto a serving plate and let cool for 15 minutes before slicing. Cut into wedges and serve warm or at room temperature with vanilla ice cream.

Note: Store, lightly covered on the counter for up to 2 days or refrigerate for up to one week.



***Tony's wine recommendation:***

Orange Muscat or Beames-de-Venise

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We wish to thank the following for permission to publish photographs and material:

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Raincoast Publishers, Vancouver, and Chronicle Books, San Francisco, for *Blackbird Bakery Gluten-Free* by Karen Morgan. Text © 2010 by Karen Morgan. Photographs © 2010 by Knox Photographics.

Happily enjoyed by Helen Hatton and Ron Morris.

