



Romantic Evening-In Recipes for Two



These delectable recipes make just enough for two people and comprise the perfect menu for a quiet evening at home. So, light some candles and whip up your scrumptious meal, sharing the cooking between you. After dinner, cuddle up on the couch to watch a movie, documentary or television show together—just the two of you. But before you power up the screen, start making your show-stopping dessert for the evening—homemade nutty chocolate caramel corn! You can stir it in the oven as you watch your show. It will be done in no time. Enjoy your romantic evening in!

CRANBERRY-PEAR SPINACH SALAD

Ingredients:

5 cups fresh spinach

3/4 cup diced fresh pears (can substitute apples if you don't care for pears)

2/3 cup dried cranberries

3/4 cup crumbled feta cheese

A few pieces of thinly sliced purple onion (optional)

2/3 cup coarsely chopped walnuts or pecans, toasted

Your favorite poppy seed, honey mustard or balsamic vinaigrette store-bought dressing

Layer the salad ingredients, split between two bowls, in the order listed. Before adding the nuts, lightly toast them in a dry cast-iron or non-stick skillet. To do so, heat the pan over medium heat and then lightly stir the nuts for 3-5 minutes, watching carefully so they do not burn. Transfer them to a cookie sheet to cool slightly before adding to the salad. Top the salad with dressing just before serving.

HERBED CHICKEN-VEGETABLE PARMESAN

Ingredients:

Extra-virgin olive oil
2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cubed
4 ounces fresh mushrooms (optional—may use sliced zucchini or summer squash instead)
1/2 cup chopped white or yellow onion
1/2 cup sliced black olives
3/4 cup canned, chopped artichoke hearts, well drained and squeezed between paper towels to remove as much moisture as possible
2 14.5 ounce cans petite diced tomatoes
6 ounces canned tomato paste
2 tablespoons fresh basil, finely chopped (or 1 teaspoon dried)
1 tablespoon fresh oregano, finely chopped (or 1/2 teaspoon dried)
1 teaspoon fresh garlic, chopped
1/8 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 dashes of ground nutmeg and a tiny pinch of brown sugar—trust me!
1/3 cup fresh grated parmesan cheese (splurge to get the fresh and grate it yourself!)
8 ounces of your favorite dry pasta—any shape and any type such as wheat, corn or rice pasta

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, sauté the chicken, mushrooms and onion, in just enough olive oil to keep them from sticking, until the chicken is no longer pink inside, about 10 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients except the cheese and pasta. Let simmer over medium-low heat, uncovered, for 20-30 minutes, stirring occasionally until slightly thickened. Prepare pasta according to directions. Drain. Split pasta between two plates, ladle with sauce and top with fresh parmesan cheese.

TRI-COLORED BLISTERED MAPLE CARROTS

Ingredients:

1 lb. tri-colored carrots (also called rainbow carrots), peeled and cut into 1/2 inch slices (NOTE: You may also use a 1 lb. bag of baby-cut tri-colored carrots.)
3 tablespoons salted butter
1-2 tablespoons real maple syrup—not imitation pancake syrup
salt and pepper to taste

In a medium-sized cast iron (preferred) or non-stick skillet, sauté the carrots in the butter over medium high heat until they begin to darken slightly and caramelize, about 10 minutes or more. Watch them closely and stir every 2 minutes or so. Drizzle maple syrup on top, turn heat up to high and sauté 2-3 minutes longer until blistered, sticky and caramelized, stirring constantly. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

WHOLE-GRAIN GARLIC BREAD

For a simple addition to your meal, purchase a small loaf of whole grain artisan bread. Slice off a few 1/2 inch slices and wrap them in foil. Warm them in the oven at 350 degrees for 10-15 minutes. Serve with olive oil for dipping, fresh garlic and Italian seasonings. Pour some oil on a plate and top with the garlic and spices. Soak up that deliciousness in your bread before eating

HOMEMADE NUTTY CHOCOLATE CARAMEL CORN

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup unpopped popcorn kernels (I buy the white, hullless kind)
- 1/2 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1 tablespoon molasses
- 1/4 cup salted butter
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 cups of your favorite salted nut (We love cashews)
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips (I think Ghirardelli brand is best)

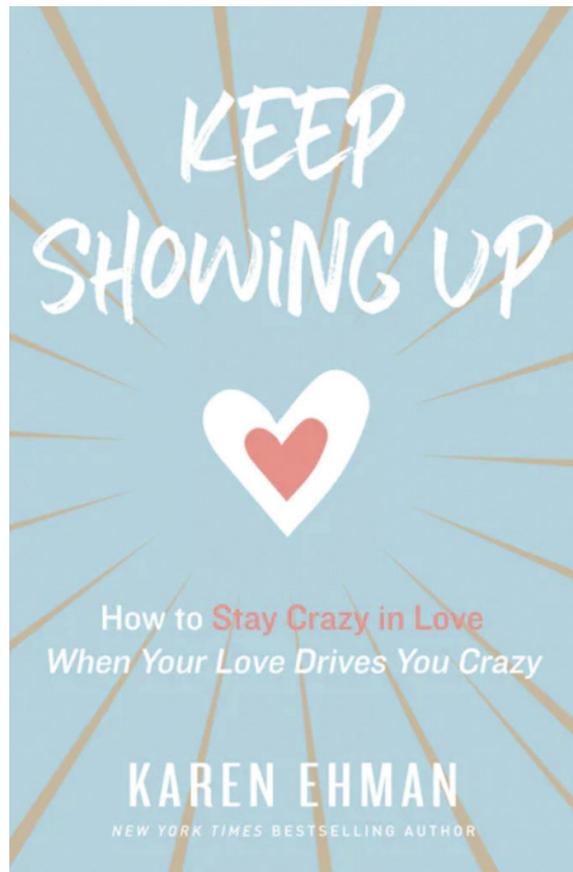
Preheat the oven to 200°F and line a large cookie sheet with sides with parchment paper. Pop the corn and place in a bowl large enough to leave plenty of room to stir later. In a large saucepan over medium-high heat warm the brown sugar, molasses, butter, and corn syrup until the sugar completely dissolves. Bring the syrup to a low boil and then stir often, retaining the boil, for 5 minutes. The syrup will darken up slightly.

Remove the pan from the heat and quickly add the baking soda. Stir briskly as the mixture foams. Immediately pour the hot syrup over the popped corn and stir until the corn is well coated.

Pour and spread the coated corn onto the parchment-lined cookie sheet. Bake at 200°F for 45 minutes, stirring the corn about every 10 minutes. Sprinkle the nuts onto the pan and bake 15 minutes longer, continuing to stir. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.

Then, melt the chocolate chips in a small saucepan over very low heat. Drizzle over the corn and nuts and allow to set up. (You can hasten this by placing the pan in a freezer or out in a cold garage if it is winter and very cold where you live!)

Ta-da! A wonderful sweet ending to your meal. If you have any left, it may be stored at room temperature in a covered container.



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