

Taste

FOOD / WINE / DINING OUT

Sage Advice

THIS HERB'S WARM, COMPLEX FLAVOR IS A WISE ADDITION TO MANY SEASONAL DISHES.

By Jaime Lewis

As a college student in New York, I couldn't make it home for Thanksgiving on the Central Coast. Instead, I enjoyed the generous hospitality of my friends' families and the crisp eastern weather. But if I'm perfectly honest? All I wanted was my own family, our outdoor Thanksgiving table, and a golden California afternoon. One year, I managed to surprise my parents by flying home for the holiday. As I exited the plane at Santa Barbara Airport, I drank in a lungful of coastal air: It smelled of wild sage and ocean spray. It smelled of home.

Salvia apiana is the white, fuzzy sage found in native scrub throughout the area, but any time I cook with culinary sage (*salvia officinalis*), its pungent

aroma triggers my memory of that moment. It also reminds me that the word "sage" also describes a wise, esteemed person; not one who gains smarts from books or classes, but one who pays attention to life's lessons and takes them deeply to heart.

Here, three Central Coast chefs share a recipe featuring sage: a decadent sage-hazelnut cookie comes from Santa Barbara baker Lori Stern (loriastern.com); a Southern-style savory bread pudding from Aleta Parrish of Choux Choux Events (chouxchouxevents.com) in Malibu; and a classic pumpkin ravioli with butter and sage sauce from the chefs at Olio e Limone Ristorante (oliocucina.com) in Santa Barbara.

Here's to wisdom this season, to golden California afternoons, and to sharing them with the ones we love most.

HAZELNUT SAGE COOKIES DIPPED IN SALTED CACAO GANACHE

Santa Barbara baker Lori Stern has always loved plants and the outdoors, but it wasn't until she enrolled in a class on edible and medicinal plants while simultaneously working as a pastry chef that she got the idea to combine botanicals and pastries to develop her now-signature baking style. These nutty, herbal cookies are vegan, gluten-free, and free of refined sugar, making them a somewhat virtuous dessert after a long day's feast. To ensure that the ganache ingredients integrate for a smooth texture (especially in a cold room), Stern suggests placing them in a heatproof bowl on a preheated oven-stovetop or over a pot of steaming water while whisking.

Makes approximately 25 cookies

COOKIES

- 1¼ cup blanched almond flour
- ½ cup chopped hazelnuts
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ cup grape-seed oil

- 2½ tablespoons raw honey or maple syrup
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 25 dried sage leaves

SALTED CACAO GANACHE

- ¾ cup maple syrup
- ¾ cup raw cacao powder
- ⅓ cup coconut oil
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon salt

To make cookies: In a large bowl, mix together almond flour, hazelnuts, sage, salt, and baking soda. Make a well in the center of the ingredients and add oil, honey or syrup, and vanilla. Stir until dough forms a ball. Place dough between two parchment sheets, pat it down, and roll out into a ½-inch-thick rectangle. Place in freezer until very cold and firm, about 30 minutes.

Remove dough from freezer and transfer to a countertop. Using a cookie cutter or the rim of a glass, cut cookies into desired shapes. Place cookies on rimmed baking sheet or flexible pastry mat and freeze overnight.

Preheat oven to 350°F and line a baking

sheet with parchment. Place frozen cookies on parchment-lined sheet and bake about 8 minutes or until golden brown. Cool while preparing ganache.

To make ganache: Heat a pan of water until water is hot and steaming. Place a heatproof bowl over it and combine all ingredients in the bowl, mixing until completely combined and smooth. On a countertop, set a rack over a baking sheet. Dip each cookie partway into the ganache and place cookies on a rack over baking sheet. While ganache is still wet, push one sage leaf into it. Enjoy cookies immediately or place in the freezer for 5 minutes to harden ganache before serving.

SAGE CHICKEN BRIOCHE PUDDING

"Growing up on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, my family used to make Chicken 'n' Dressin', as we called it," says caterer and event designer Aleta Parrish of Choux Choux events in Malibu. Instead of using canned cream of mushroom and cream of celery soups, Parrish opts for a fresh mushroom sauce, cream, homemade stock, and pillowy brioche for her modernized pudding. Sage, she notes, is "the queen" of >



this dish, making an appearance in the chicken stock (via the poultry seasoning) and in the mushroom sauce and fried for the garnish.

Serves 6 as a main; 8 as a side dish

CHICKEN AND STOCK

- 1 small whole chicken, about 2½ pounds
- 4 stalks celery, cut into large pieces
- 1 carrot, chopped
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon poultry seasoning
- 1 tablespoon salt
- ½ tablespoon pepper
- Water

MUSHROOM SAUCE

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup peeled, chopped yellow onion
- 4 garlic cloves peeled, chopped
- 8 ounces cremini mushrooms, sliced
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon poultry seasoning
- 1 tablespoon dried sage
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper

BRIOCHE PUDDING

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 8 cups brioche, cut or torn into 2-inch pieces
- ½ cup canned roasted red peppers, drained, diced
- 4 eggs, beaten

GARNISH

- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 12 fresh sage leaves
- 1 jalapeño, thinly sliced (optional)

To cook chicken and stock: In a large stockpot set over high heat, add whole chicken, celery, carrot, onion, poultry seasoning, salt, pepper, and enough water to cover ingredients. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer until chicken is fully cooked, about 30 to 40 minutes. Transfer chicken to a cutting board and set aside to cool. Strain stock through a sieve set over a large bowl and discard solids. Set stock aside.

To make mushroom sauce: Melt butter in a sauté pan over low heat. Add onion and garlic and sauté over medium-high heat for about 1 minute. Add mushrooms and sauté, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Sprinkle flour over mushroom mixture and stir to combine. Add poultry seasoning, sage, and 2½ cups reserved chicken stock (save remaining stock for another use) and cook for 3 minutes. Add cream and allow mixture to thicken for 1 minute, then add salt and pepper. Remove from heat.

To make brioche pudding: Preheat oven to 350°F and coat a 13x9-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Cut reserved chicken

into 2-inch-thick pieces. Place brioche in a large bowl. Add chicken and chopped red peppers and gently stir to combine. Transfer to baking dish and slowly pour eggs over the mixture. Cover with foil, and bake for about 30 minutes. Remove foil and continue baking until eggs are set and top is golden brown, about 30 minutes more. Remove from oven and let rest at least 10 minutes before serving.

To prepare garnish: Pour oil into a small saucepan or skillet and bring to frying temperature, about 365°F. Place sage leaves in oil, about 4 at a time, and fry for 30 seconds on one side until leaves are crisp. Using tongs, turn over leaves and fry for another 30 seconds, then carefully transfer to paper towels to drain. Continue frying remaining sage.

Scatter jalapeño slices over top of baked pudding, if desired. Top with fried sage leaves. Serve using a large serving spoon or spatula.

WINTER SQUASH RAVIOLI WITH BUTTER AND SAGE SAUCE

The combination of pumpkin or squash with butter and sage has its spiritual home in northern Italy, where the flavors blur the line between sweet and savory. Proprietors of Santa Barbara's Olio e Limone Ristorante, Olio Crudo Bar, and Olio Pizzeria, Elaine Andersen Morello and executive chef Alberto Morello walk that line with this dish, one of their signature raviolis, in which crumbled amaretti cookies top the finished pasta. For another of Morello's sage-enhanced creations, visit Olio Pizzeria this November and December to try Pizza con Zucca, the dish the restaurant is serving to participate in this year's 805 Living's Dishing It Out for Charity challenge (see page 57).

Serves 4

FILLING

- 1¼ pounds fresh pumpkin or butternut squash
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg, freshly ground
- 2 ounces amaretti cookies, crumbled
- 1¼ cups Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated
- 1 pound fresh ricotta cheese
- Sea salt and white pepper to taste

FRESH RAVIOLI

- 1½ cups finely ground semolina flour
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for rolling out pasta
- 4 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons Italian tomato paste, if desired for color
- Pinch of sea salt
- ½ teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large egg, beaten

SAGE CREAM SAUCE

- ¼ cup unsalted butter, softened

- 8 fresh sage leaves
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- Sea salt, to taste

GARNISH

- Amaretti cookies, crumbled
- Grana Padano cheese, grated

To make filling: Preheat oven to 400°F.

Cut the pumpkin or squash into large slices, remove seeds and fibers, and bake until soft on a rimmed baking sheet, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven and cool. Remove rind from flesh and transfer flesh to a kitchen towel or cheesecloth. Place towel with pumpkin or squash into a colander and allow it to drain, about 10 minutes. Sprinkle with nutmeg.

In a large bowl, combine crumbled cookies with cheeses. Add pumpkin or squash, salt, and white pepper, stirring until combined and smooth. Refrigerate filling at least one hour or up to overnight.

To make fresh ravioli: In a food processor, combine flours, 4 eggs, tomato paste, if desired, salt, and oil and pulse until mixture forms a ball of dough. Transfer from food processor to a lightly floured surface, and knead for about 10 minutes until dough is smooth and elastic. Roll into a smooth ball and let rest at least 1 hour at room temperature or up to 1 day in the refrigerator. If refrigerated, let dough stand at room temperature for at least 1 hour before rolling and shaping. Using a pasta roller or rolling pin, roll out dough into two sheets, each about ⅛-inch thick, dusting with flour as needed to prevent dough from sticking to surface or rolling pin. Place about 1 teaspoon of filling at regular intervals about 3 inches apart on one pasta sheet, brushing spaces around filling with beaten egg. Cover with second sheet of dough. Using fingers, press down between each mound of filling, then use cutter or an inverted glass to cut into 3- to 4-inch circles, sealing ravioli edges with fingers.

To make sauce: In a medium-size saucepan, melt butter over medium heat until gently sizzling. Lay sage leaves in pan and toast for about 1 minute. While stirring, add heavy cream and salt to taste. Simmer for about 2 minutes. Remove saucepan from heat and set aside.

To cook ravioli: Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a rolling boil. Add ravioli, cooking until it rises to the surface, about 6 minutes. Taste to see if properly al dente. When al dente, drain, reserving about 2 cups of cooking water. Transfer ravioli to saucepan with sage cream sauce and gently toss to coat. Add small amount of reserved cooking water as needed to thin sauce.

To serve, warm large, flat dinner plates in oven. Place warm ravioli on warmed plates. Sprinkle with crumbled amaretti cookies and grated Grana Padano cheese; serve immediately. ♦