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 Chef's Apron

Contact Susan Nye at
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More information the web at
www.susannye.com

It's a question I get asked from time to time, "What's your specialty?" I'm never sure if they're expecting me to name a specific dish or a style of cooking. In any case I normally answer with something vague like Mediterranean cuisine. Which is true but I'm not sure it answers the question. Sometime I think they want me to bounce back with a proud and definitive answer like the world's best linguine with clam sauce or roast duck with plums or even that New England standby, pot roast. From my Chicken Provençal* to a wonderful Couscous Salad* with citrus and mint and my oft-requested Death by Chocolate Cake* and Peanut Butter Brownies*, I have too many favorites (and my friends and family have too many favorites) to name just one. With so many interesting recipes, I can't imagine narrowing it down to a single dish.

There are cooks who have a claim to fame, a specialty which makes them renown with family, friends and acquaintances. Well maybe not renowned, but at least everyone knows what they will bring to the next potluck. My grandmothers were like that.

My Father's mother was a traditional New England cook. She lived on Cape Cod so she cooked a lot of fish. She steamed clams, broiled scallops and cooked haddock in milk topped with buttery cracker crumbs. She won a prize for her fish chowder*. At least once a week, she baked hermit bars or molasses cookies, usually by the gross. She baked blueberry pies in the summer and apple in the fall. In winter, she made Indian pudding. I haven't had it in years but it was very tasty in an old fashioned, New England-y sort of way. If I had to pick Nana's specialty, it'd be a tie between her chowder and her hermit bars.

My Mother's mother hated to cook. If she absolutely had to make something, Nana Westland made little individual Jell-O molds. She always used lemon Jell-O. She added bottled orange and grapefruit slices as well as canned black cherries which she bought S.S. Pierce's. Nana used a muffin tin to make her little molds and the Jell-O always got stuck. Sometimes she lined the muffin tins with wax paper which didn't help much. Mostly, she avoided the kitchen and had my grandfather stop at Hazel's Bakery for chocolate chip cookies or Captain Marden's for shrimp.

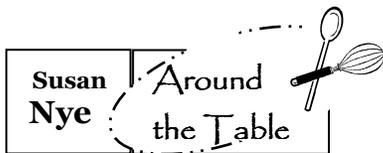
My Mother did not hate to cook, or at least not as much as her own mother, but she was never a culinary enthusiast. She was a young wife and mother when Julia Child became the first celebrity chef but Mom was never a fan. She had no interest in mastering the art of French cooking so when Julia wrestled chickens on PBS, Mom found something else to watch or something else to do.

Mom's specialty was doctoring things. In the summer, she doctored potato salad and coleslaw from the deli counter at Cricenti's. When company was expected she doctored Duncan Hines cake mixes with Jell-O pudding and chocolate chips. I don't know how long it's been since she made it, but Mom's signature dish has got to be the chicken that she doctored with cream of mushroom soup, sour cream, sherry and pearl onions*.

Now that summer is here, families and friends will be spending lots of time together. There'll be family cookouts and neighborhood block parties. There'll be fun and festive picnics on the beach and burgers on backyard grills. Casual is the key to summer entertaining. Let everyone lend a hand and bring their favorite summer dish. My Mom no longer cooks so she'll bring herself and I'll bring the Couscous Salad!

Enjoy and Bon appétit!





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Mediterranean Shrimp

These shrimp are very popular at cocktail parties, so much so that guests ask for them, whether they are on the menu or not. Could it be a trademark dish in the making??? Enjoy!

About 36 pieces, enough for 8-12 people

2-3 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 cup dry white wine
Juice of 1/2 lemon
4 cloves garlic, minced
Pinch red pepper flakes or to taste
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1 1/2 pounds large shrimp, shelled and deveined
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh oregano
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves

Combine the olive oil, wine, lemon juice, garlic, pepper flakes, salt and pepper in a large skillet. Bring to a simmer over medium heat and continue to cook until reduced by about 2/3rds.

Raise the heat to medium high, add the shrimp, sprinkle with herbs and and toss to coat.

Cook the shrimp for 2-3 minutes or until pink. Do not overcook. Serve warm or at room temperature.

** You can find these dishes in my recipe archives on my website
www.susannye.com. Recipes are listed by publication date: Chicken Provencal
(April 2009), Couscous Salad (August 2008), Death by Chocolate Cake (December
2006), Peanut Butter Brownies (July 2007), Nana Nye's Fish Chowder (August
2008) and my Mom's Mushroom Soup Chicken (April 2008).*