

Private Chef, Catering & Cooking Classes

I'd be delighted to help you with any and all of your celebrations.

Join Me Around the Table for an Eat Well-Do Good Dinner!

Support the fight against Alzheimer's Disease & Enjoy delicious food & fun!

Treat Yourself to an Around the Table Chef's Apron

Cook like a chef or just look like one!

You can find lots more information on the web at www.susannye.com and www.susannye.wordpress.com

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What can you say about bacon? Well, how about ...

Your grandfather loved it and enjoyed bacon and eggs every morning for, oh let's say, eighty-something, oops, make that ninety-something years. Not just granddad, you love it and wish you could have it every morning for the rest of your life. Not only that, if there's bacon for breakfast you fervently hope to live to be one hundred. In fact, you'd be more than happy to find ways to sneak it into lunch and dinner.



You are not alone. Bacon is hot right now and getting hotter. News anchors get positively giddy when visiting chefs fry up a slab. Des Moines, Chicago, Los Angeles and, now, Baltimore have an entire festival dedicated to the salty strips. William and Kate passed out bacon sannies in the wee hours of their wedding reception. Okay, the beaming bride and groom didn't actually do the passing. They had waiters for that.

So, here's a strange confession. I wouldn't actually swear to it but I don't think I've eaten a strip of bacon in nearly thirty years. As far as I can figure, I more or less stopped eating bacon for breakfast when I moved to Switzerland. Maybe it's because the French word for bacon is lard. Or maybe because it didn't look or taste the same. Oh, I'm sure I might have nibbled a slice or two during visits to the States or indulged at one of those big hotel buffet breakfasts. I traveled a lot on business when I lived in Geneva. I guess I should amend my statement, I don't remember eating a strip of bacon in nearly thirty years.

Anyway, about the time I moved to Switzerland, I stopped thinking of bacon as breakfast food. That's also when I discovered lardons. Living *en Suisse* opened my eyes to a variety of new-to-me ingredients and dishes. Lardons were among those new ingredients. Lardons are less fatty, smaller than bite-sized pieces of bacon. Swiss and French butchers even chop them up for you. They are a key ingredient in many French stews. And let's face it, lardon sounds a lot more appetizing than lard.

Particularly in cold weather, I have a special affinity for what I like to call peasant food. Think Coq au Vin, Beef Bourguignon and Cassoulet plus hearty soups like Lentil, Bean or Potato. Some foodies try to dress them up and complicate things but for the most part, peasant food is simple, cheap and made from scratch. Oh, and if it's French, there is a good chance bacon is involved.

Bacon doesn't just add flavor to these dishes, the rendered fat comes in handy to sauté the veggies or sear the meat for your wonderful stew or soup. After all, no self-respecting peasant would let anything go to waste; especially if it will enhance the flavor of the dish. It's best to start with a cold pan and gently cook on medium heat to maximize the release of fat. Remove the lardons and drain on paper towels. Then drain any excess fat from the pan, leaving just enough for your sauté or sear.

If you are worried about cooking with bacon, new research suggests that there is no clear link between heart disease and the so-called bad fats (bacon, cream, butter, etc.). When in doubt, cook and eat like the French – everything in moderation! If you are really concerned, forget about bacon as the king of breakfast food and enjoy it in beautiful French casseroles at dinner. It's easier than you think and really delicious.

Bon appétit!

White Beans Provençal with Bacon & Baby Kale

A delicious side dish, try it with lamb, pork, poultry or seafood. A great money-saver, you can also serve beans as the main event. Penny-pinching never tasted so good. Enjoy!

Serves about 12 as a side dish

1 pound dried small white or cannellini beans (about 6 cups cooked beans)
 1 piece Parmigiano-Reggiano rind (optional)
 1 1/2 large onion, cut the half onion in half again and finely chop the whole
 5 stalks celery, cut 1 in thirds, finely chop the remaining 4
 4 carrots, cut 1 in thirds, finely chop the remaining 3
 3-4 sprigs fresh thyme
 2 bay leaves
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
 6 ounces thick cut bacon, chopped
 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh rosemary
 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
 1 cup dry white wine
 2-3 cloves garlic, minced
 3 cups crushed tomatoes
 2-3 cups chicken stock
 1 pound baby kale*



Soak the beans overnight. Drain and rinse the beans. Put the beans, Parmigiano-Reggiano rind, half onion, celery and carrot chunks, 1 sprig thyme and 1 bay leaf in a large pot, add cold water to cover plus 2 inches and bring to a boil on medium heat. Reduce the heat to very low, cover and simmer until the beans are tender 1 – 1 1/4 hours. Remove the onion, carrot, celery, thyme twig and bay leaf, drain the beans and season with salt and pepper. (Can be done ahead or use canned beans, rinsed and drained.)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Meanwhile, put the bacon in a large casserole and cook over medium heat until crispy. Remove the bacon from the pot, drain and reserve. Leaving just enough to coat the pot, drain any excess fat.

Add the chopped onion, celery and carrots to the pot, season with salt and pepper and sauté over medium heat until the onion is translucent, 10-15 minutes. Add the garlic, and continue cooking for 2-3 minutes. Stir in mustard and wine, add the remaining thyme, rosemary and bay leaf and simmer until the wine has reduced by half.

Add the cooked white beans, crushed tomatoes and 1-2 cups chicken stock. Bring the beans to a simmer, cover and transfer to the oven. Cook for about 45 minutes, adding more chicken stock if the beans seem dry. For a thicker dish, mash about 1 cup of the beans with a fork.

If you have the time, cool the beans to room temperature and refrigerate for several hours. Remove the beans from the refrigerator and return to a simmer on medium-low heat.

Stir the kale into the beans, return the pot to the oven and continue cooking until the kale is tender, about 10 minutes, and serve.

** If you can't find baby kale, you can use regular kale. Remove the tough ribs, cut in julienne and cook until tender, about 15 minutes.*