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SPIRITED AWAY

Those in the know have already got the memo: booze isn't just for drinking. Next time you want to up your cooking game, reach for the drinks trolley

COOKING WITH... FORTIFIED WINE

Sherry, Madeira, Marsala, port... those frequently underappreciated bottles offer a world of culinary possibilities. All are fortified wines, which means that their alcohol content is bolstered by the addition of a spirit (often grape brandy) to 18-20% alcohol. They come into their own in winter, a treat for fireside sipping or alongside cheeseboards. But they are similarly effective in the kitchen – a secret weapon for transforming a simple sauce into something magnificent or adding that cheffy edge to a wintry stew.

Which one to use? All fortified wines offer a variety of styles and price points, each providing something different. When it comes to port, keep the aged vintage for drinking and reach for a ruby variety instead – it's a great all-rounder for giving dishes that sleek, velvety complexity.

Roast beef with port & blackberry sauce

Port is a particularly good match for richer meats such as beef or duck. Here, it combines with inky blackberries to create an elegant, fruity sauce.

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| Serves 6-8 with leftovers | • 2kg British beef topside joint* | • 2 tbsp vegetable oil |
| Prepare 20 minutes + brining + resting | • 3 tbsp fine sea salt | • 4 tbsp plain flour |
| Cook 2 hours 25 minutes | • 1 pack fresh bay leaves (10 leaves) | • 250ml ruby port |
| | • 2 large red onions, trimmed (skin on) and halved widthways | • 500ml fresh beef stock |
| | | • 1 tbsp redcurrant jelly |
| | | • 300g frozen blackberries, defrosted |

1 The evening before cooking (up to 2 days ahead), brine the beef. Whizz the salt and 5 bay leaves in a small food processor until finely ground to a pale green shade. Put the beef in a large, rimmed glass or ceramic baking dish and coat evenly with the salt mixture. Cover loosely with foil and chill until ready to cook.

2 Preheat the oven to 150°C, gas mark 2. Put the remaining 5 bay leaves in the centre of a deep roasting tin with the onions, cut-side down. Wipe off and discard as much brine as possible from the beef and pat dry with kitchen paper. Rest the beef on top of the onions and coat with the oil.

3 Roast for about 2 hours for rare (50°C on a meat thermometer), 2 hours 5 minutes for medium-rare (55°C) and 2 hours 10 minutes for medium (60°C). Transfer to a serving platter and rest for at least 30 minutes, loosely covered with foil.

4 Meanwhile, make the sauce. Put the roasting tin on the hob over a high heat. Sprinkle in the flour and cook, whisking constantly, for 3-4 minutes until just starting to catch. Pour in the port and boil rapidly, scraping the base of the pan as you go, until thickened again (2-3 minutes). Add the stock and redcurrant jelly, whisking for another 1-2 minutes, then pass the sauce through a sieve into a medium pan, pressing to extract as much juice as possible (discard the onions but keep the bay leaves for decoration, if liked). Add any resting juices from the beef, along with the blackberries. Simmer briskly for 2-3 minutes until the sauce is thickened to your liking and the berries have burst a little; season if needed. Thinly slice the beef and serve with the sauce plus your choice of sides.

*AVAILABLE FROM THE MEAT SERVICE COUNTER

Per serving (with leftovers) 2319kJ/554kcal/23g fat/7.7g saturated fat/25g carbs/13g sugars/4.3g fibre/48g protein/1.5g salt »

COOKING WITH... BRANDY

Christmas just wouldn't be the same without the quirky British tradition of dousing a pudding in brandy, then dramatically setting it alight. In fact, the festive period is reliably brandy-soaked on all fronts, from 'feeding' the Christmas cake to that jug of eggnog. While often used in sweet recipes, it's also delicious in savoury cooking, particularly cream or seafood sauces.

Brandy is distilled from fermented fruit – most often grapes (Cognac and Armagnac are two of the best-known examples), but other fruit can be used. Calvados is distilled from apple cider and aged for two years in oak barrels. With its distinct orchard-fruit flavour, it gives a heady autumnal hit to your cooking.

Calvados & cream pot-roast chicken

An impressive riff on the French classic, poulet à la Normande. Serve with lots of bread for mopping up the outrageously delicious sauce.

Serves 6

Prepare 15 minutes

+ resting

Cook 1 hour 45 minutes

• 200g smoked bacon lardons

• 1 tbsp olive oil (optional)

• 1.5kg whole chicken

• 5 shallots, halved

• 3 Cox apples, peeled and cut into quarters

• 5 tarragon sprigs

• 100ml fresh

chicken stock

• 1 tbsp cider vinegar

• 75ml Calvados

(or other brandy)

• 4 tbsp double cream

1 Heat a large casserole dish over a medium heat, add the bacon lardons and fry for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until golden. Scoop out onto a plate, leaving the fat behind; set aside. If there is not much fat in the dish, add the olive oil.

2 Turn up the heat slightly, season the chicken and add to the dish, breast-side down so it's leaning to one side. Fry for 10 minutes until the skin is deep golden, then turn and cook on the other breast for another 10 minutes. Turn over and brown the underside for 5-10 minutes, then lift the chicken from the dish and set aside on a plate. Preheat the oven to 160°C, gas mark 3.

3 Add the shallots and apples to the casserole dish and fry for a couple of minutes until taking on a little colour. Add 2 tarragon sprigs and the stock, then simmer for 1 minute, scraping up any bits from the base of the dish. Sit the chicken on top, breast-side up, cover with the lid and cook in the oven for 1 hour until the juices run clear and no pink meat remains.

4 Remove the dish from the oven, lift out the chicken and rest on a plate under a loose sheet of foil for at least 15 minutes. Meanwhile, discard the tarragon from the dish, return to the hob and add the vinegar and Calvados. Bring to the boil and simmer for 3-4 minutes to cook off some of the alcohol. Strip the leaves off the remaining tarragon sprigs and roughly chop. Stir in the cream, lardons and most of the tarragon leaves (reserving some) and warm until heated through; season. If liked, return the chicken to the dish, then scatter over the remaining tarragon leaves.

5 Return any resting juices from the chicken to the casserole dish or pan and bring the bird to the table in the casserole dish or on a serving platter. Carve, then serve with steamed greens plus crusty bread, rice or mashed potato, if liked.

Per serving 2134kJ/512kcal/31g fat/11g saturated fat/8.6g carbs/7.8g sugars/1.3g fibre/42g protein/1.1g salt »



COOKING WITH... WINE

Almost as soon as we learned to turn grapes into wine, we started cooking with it. Not only does it impart inimitable flavour, it also brings acidity, sweetness and tannins (astringent compounds in red wine with a taste like cold tea) to the party. Add a splash to deglaze pans and scrape up those cooked-on bits for maximum flavour. Wine breaks down protein, too, making it a great marinade for meat, while a high-acid white wine (such as Sauvignon Blanc) acts like lemon juice, adding instant brightness. Tannic reds such as Malbec, meanwhile, work wonders in slow-cooked braises, especially with beef, pork or lamb.

Don't want to buy a whole bottle every time? Take a leaf out of Nigella's book(s) and use vermouth – a fortified wine flavoured with roots, spices and herbs. Dry white vermouth makes an excellent alternative to white wine, plus it will keep for longer (at least a few months in your fridge).

Saffron risotto with roasted carrots

Burnished, aromatic carrots add a welcome note of brightness to this sunshine-yellow risotto, which has a hum of wine underneath.

Serves 4

Prepare 15 minutes + standing

Cook 50 minutes

- 500g carrots, scrubbed, halved and cut on the diagonal into 2cm chunks
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp coriander seeds, crushed
- 45g unsalted butter
- 1 onion, finely chopped

- 500ml fresh vegetable or chicken stock
- Large pinch of saffron
- ¼ tsp sea salt flakes
- 350g carnaroli risotto rice
- 125ml white wine (or dry white vermouth)
- 25g Parmigiano Reggiano, finely grated, plus extra for serving

1 Preheat the oven to 190°C, gas mark 5. In a large roasting tin, toss the carrots with the oil and coriander; season. Roast for 35-40 minutes until tender, tossing halfway.

2 Meanwhile, in a large, high-sided frying pan, melt 30g butter over a medium heat. Fry the onion with a pinch of salt for 15 minutes until soft but not golden. Pour the stock into a separate pan with 900ml water and bring to a gentle simmer; keep warm. Using a pestle and mortar (or a rolling pin and bowl), grind the saffron and salt flakes to a fine powder, then pour over 2 tbsp warm water; set aside.

3 Once the onion has softened, add the rice and cook, stirring, for 1 minute until glossy and turning translucent. Turn the heat up to medium-high, pour the wine over the rice and let it bubble until it has evaporated (about 1 minute). Lower the heat back to medium and add a ladle of stock to the pan, along with the saffron water, stirring until the liquid has been absorbed. Repeat this, adding a ladleful of stock at a time and stirring frequently until all the stock has been absorbed and the rice is tender (25-30 minutes). If the stock runs out, add hot water.

4 Stir the remaining 15g butter, the cheese and ½ of the carrots into the rice, then cover with a lid or foil and leave to stand for 5 minutes. Divide among 4 bowls, spoon over the remaining carrots with any oil from the tin, then top with extra cheese and freshly ground black pepper.

Per serving 2541kJ/606kcal/20g fat/10.1g saturated fat/82g carbs/13g sugars/7.8g fibre/13g protein/0.9g salt »

COOKING WITH... LIQUEURS

We often buy sticky, sweet liqueurs on a whim at Christmas or on holiday, then abandon them to languish unloved in the drinks cabinet for years. But these forgotten treasures become an amazing asset when you want to make a fancy dinner-party dessert.

Liqueurs are a family of drinks based on distilled spirits that are sweetened and flavoured with one or more fruits, herbs, nuts or spices – even coffee and chocolate. Heat slightly reduces their flavour impact; they're best used in recipes that aren't 'cooked', such as mousses, or added at the end of the cooking process. It's important to remember that a little liqueur goes a long way when it comes to boosting flavour. Try a capful added to whipped cream, swap for vanilla extract in a cake, or mix into sugar syrups – these are lovely drizzled over cakes. More bitter liqueurs, such as Campari, are a superb contrast to very sweet, creamy desserts such as panna cotta. And, of course, you can't beat a splash of liqueur in an old-school chocolate sauce.

Iced berries with hot limoncello sauce

The easiest, prettiest dinner-party dessert imaginable – frozen berries in a puddle of warm sauce, all the colours melding and melting together as the berries thaw. We opted for white chocolate and limoncello, but dark chocolate with Cointreau and orange zest is equally glorious.

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| Serves 6-8 | • About 1kg frozen mixed berries |
| Prepare 5 minutes | • 135g white chocolate |
| Cook 5 minutes | • 5 tbsp (75ml) limoncello |
| | • 200ml double cream |
| | • 1 unwaxed lemon, zest (optional) |

1 Arrange the fruit on a large platter. In a food processor, whizz the chocolate until very finely chopped, then tip into a heatproof bowl. Heat the limoncello, double cream and a pinch of salt in a pan over a medium heat until bubbles appear on the surface (about 5 minutes).

2 Pour the hot limoncello cream over the chocolate, leave to sit for 1 minute, then stir together until smooth and runny. Transfer to a jug. To serve, pour most of the chocolate sauce over the fruit, scatter over the lemon zest (if using) and serve immediately with the rest of the sauce on the side.

✓ **Per serving** (for 6) 1554kJ/374kcal/24g fat/15g saturated fat/26g carbs/26g sugars/4.5g fibre/3.7g protein/0.3g salt/gluten free »



**'A LITTLE LIQUEUR
GOES A LONG WAY
WHEN IT COMES TO
BOOSTING FLAVOUR'**

'RUM CAN WORK
MAGIC IN THE KITCHEN'



COOKING WITH... RUM

Made from fermenting, then distilling, sugar cane juice, rum offers an amazing spectrum of colours and flavours to play with, from white to dark to spiced. While it makes many of us think longingly of holiday cocktails such as piña coladas, it's also a supreme chill-chaser and has worked magic in the kitchen for centuries.

White rum is fresh and delicate – lovely in creamy, light desserts – but dark rum (aged in wooden barrels) is where you'll unlock rich, caramelly intensity. In the Caribbean, dark rum is used to soak fruit for 'black cake', an essential part of the festive season. It also brings fiery depth to mincemeat and is fabulous in custards and ice creams.

Tiramisu ice cream

It's no surprise that booze adds flavour to ice cream, but did you know it also improves the texture? The low freezing point of alcohol makes a no-churn ice cream softer and more scoopable.

Serves 6

Prepare 25 minutes + freezing

- 2 tbsp instant espresso powder
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder
- 1 tbsp caster sugar
- 4 tbsp dark rum
- 250g mascarpone
- 300ml whipping cream
- 397g can condensed milk
- 8 Cooks' Ingredients Sponge Fingers (about 50g)

1 Bring $\frac{1}{2}$ a kettle of water to the boil. In a shallow bowl, use a fork to mix the espresso powder, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cocoa, the sugar and 2 tsp rum with 100ml just-boiled water; set aside. In a large bowl, use an electric hand mixer to beat the mascarpone and whipping cream to soft peaks (2-3 minutes). Gradually beat in the condensed milk, then the remaining 2 tsp rum until the mixture reaches soft peaks again (2-3 minutes more).

2 Break each sponge finger into 3 bite-sized pieces. Dip each quickly into the coffee mixture (using a teaspoon is helpful), then transfer to the bowl with the cream mixture. Carefully fold the mixture together (along with any coffee liquid that is left in the bowl). Pour into a 900g tin or freezerproof container and securely cover with baking parchment or a lid. Freeze for at least 6 hours or overnight. To serve, leave the ice cream at room temperature for 15 minutes, then dust with the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cocoa powder.

V Per serving 2723kJ/654kcal/43g fat/29g saturated fat/50g carbs/47g sugars/2.3g fibre/8.9g protein/0.3g salt

A QUESTION OF PORT (and other alcohol)

Q Does alcohol really 'burn off' when you cook it?

A Yes, but a small amount will always remain. "It's impossible to cook out all the alcohol," says scientist Harold McGee. Dishes will retain 40% of the original amount of alcohol after 15 minutes of cooking and 25% after an hour. After two and a half hours, about 5% will remain – but even with longer cooking, some alcohol molecules will persist.

Q What quality alcohol should I use for cooking?

A The basic rule is: if you wouldn't drink it, don't cook with it. Equally, there's no point in cooking with anything that's rare or expensive. Feel free to use wines that have been opened for a few days; they may have oxidised with exposure to air but they will still taste fine in cooking. Flat beer or no-longer-sparkling wine is all right, too.

Q What else can I use if I don't drink alcohol?

A Try pomegranate juice or sour cherry molasses instead of red wine or port in stews and sauces, or add a squeeze of lemon juice or vinegar instead of white wine. The tannin in black tea can add colour and depth, too. Alcohol-free wines and beers can also lend a unique flavour to your cooking.