

Does sex begin in the kitchen?

The old saying “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach” is true for more than one reason. How often did the “wow- now-that’s-what-I-call-a-hunk-and-it seems-he’s making eyes at me ...” feeling not start in your heart, but with butterflies in your tummy?

But it’s also true as far as seduction through food is concerned. No, that’s not quite right, it should be “seduction through the act of cooking with love and imagination”.

It’s the career women who have often lost sight of this simple creative act of love over so many other important issues they have had to face, solve, confront, overcome. Well, now that we have faced, solved, confronted and overcome, and now that we’ve seen that not everything “out there” is heaven, and after having paid many a high price for our achievements, it’s time to take stock.

No, it’s not fun to stay at home and cook, wash, iron and watch TV, but I know some women who have come “back home” with great ideas and are blissfully happy, blowing their horrible boss a loud and most satisfying raspberry.

Others can’t do this for psychological or financial or any other reasons. But that doesn’t mean we can’t take a step back, look again, and become creative! Yes, I mean CREATIVE – and I mean in the kitchen.

What about men? Well, many men stay out of the kitchen because they either don’t know how to cook or don’t do the “soft stuff”. Then again, many men are excellent cooks. Especially when they want to impress that lovely chick they’ve just met who has absolutely the most glorious legs you ever did see but how do you approach her without looking obvious – yes, there you are, they cook!

Love is sensual. Cooking is sensual. Eating is sensual. As we all know by now, sensuality, lived and thoroughly enjoyed, is essential to our wellbeing and our physical and spiritual development, and let no jealous spoilsport tell you otherwise.

Enough said. This is about cooking, after all.

So let’s look at three recipes to get you going. I have chosen three easy ones that offer as first recipes something for absolutely everybody: from out-of-work millionaires to those who can barely hold a can opener or have the time to learn! We said “sex in the kitchen”, didn’t we ... well, it’s up to you. Taking this literally will hardly give you time to open the drawer; on the other hand, you may well prefer a languid, passionate yet tender dessert to the main course you are about to provide.

Let’s get on with it. It’s recipe time.

From the island where Greek goddess Aphrodite was born from sea foam, a paradise endowed by nature with the mildest and healthiest climate in the world, Cyprus, comes the first seductive recipe. This recipe belongs to the group of fish and sea food that grows in Aphrodite's bath water and is therefore often reported to be an aphrodisiac, a love-inducing sensual food you can't resist.

Octopus with onions

Have you ever made an octopus dish? Most of us have eaten it but never dared to attempt it ourselves. Have a look at how easy it is. This recipe allows you to share with more than one other person. I leave it to your imagination whom you want to share it with!

1 hour

The octopus novice ought to reckon one hour from beginning the preparation to the cooked meal that's ready to be served.

- ½ kg of octopus (well beaten to soften the meat)
- 1 kg of small, whole, peeled onions
- 1 cup of olive oil
- ½ cup of cider or wine vinegar
- cloves of finely chopped garlic
- bay leaves
- black peppercorns
- small piece of cinnamon
- 1 kg of peeled, finely chopped or grated tomatoes
- salt to taste (before you put the dish to simmer, literally taste your mixture from time to time until you've got the salt just right ... start carefully!)

Get your sharpest knife and cut the octopus into thin(ish) slices. Wash well and drain the water. Put in a pan without water (the octopus is going to produce its own broth) and turn the heat – whatever you use, gas or electric – to the high end of medium. Add the oil. When it begins to sizzle, telling you it's hot enough, add the whole onions and the finely chopped garlic. Now add the vinegar, tomatoes, garlic, bay leaves, salt, pepper, and cinnamon.

Stir it well and taste. Add whatever you think is still missing – possibly a little more salt – put on the lid, lower the heat to minimum and simmer for about half an hour. Works best with rice.

Voilà, there is your “octapodhi stifadho” ... no, it does not mean “stiff octopus”!!!

Then there is France, of course. Who hasn't thought of laborious cooking and “cordon bleu” when France is mentioned. However, here is one French recipe that doesn't keep you hours preparing and cooking.

Dijon Filet Steak

This one is definitely a recipe for the lazy cook or the cook that's caught on the hop - bound to seduce male and female, old and young.

45 minutes

Take your time by all means, especially when you don't have the experience that comes with cooking regularly. 45 minutes should be enough even for the beginner. But that's not really all cooking time. 30 of those 45 minutes are waiting time. You leave the steaks to marinade while you pretty yourself up. Read on, this is truly simple and scrumptious:

- 4 medium size fillet steaks (around 1 ½ cm thick)
- salt to taste
- black pepper to taste
- 4 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons of balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons of red wine (optional)
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons of rosemary (fresh or dried)
- 1 tablespoon of butter
- 2 cups of cubed or sliced onions
- ½ teaspoon of brown sugar
- 85 g of Gorgonzola cheese (or other blue cheese if unavailable)

Before you start frying your steaks, put them on a large, deep plate or into a large(ish) baking dish and season them on both sides with salt and black pepper. Take a bowl and whisk together two tablespoons of olive oil, the balsamic vinegar, the mustard and the rosemary. Pour this mixture over the seasoned fillet steaks, cover them with a tea towel or a lid and leave them to marinate for 15 minutes. After 15 minutes come out of the shower, turn your steaks and leave to marinate for another 15 minutes.

This is the perfect moment to melt the butter in a frying pan that's big enough for the four steaks. Pour in the onion slices and fry them over medium heat until they begin to get brown - add a pinch of salt and the sugar. Turn off the heat and put the onions on a plate. Get back into the shower, make sure you're absolutely irresistible and put on the glad rags. Wait for that bell to ring. Answer the door. Smile. Leave your guest with a drink on the sofa and get back into the kitchen (don't forget to don an apron - at this stage that's a MUST!). It's showing off time.

Pour the rest of the olive oil in your frying pan and start to heat it on "high". Stand by, this won't take long. As soon as the oil is truly hot, put in your steaks, turn down the heat to the high end of medium and stand by. The steaks are soon for turning - give them around three minutes on one side then turn and cover with the onions you prepared earlier, topping it all by crumbling the Gorgonzola or blue cheese over them. After three more minutes turn off the heat and cover the lot with a lid. Leave for about one more minute - until the cheese has melted.

Serve with rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes (even pasta) – anything you happen to have and know how to prepare. Even whole-grain toast will do!

Well, there you are. Fillet steaks à la French and lovely they be. By now your guest has nosed around your living room, glass in hand, checked out your reading habits and can smell that “je ne sais quoi” wafting in from your kitchen. Good luck with the rest of the evening.

Ok – still too much effort? Here is a real quickie – it’s pasta *and* it’s vegetarian.

For this recipe we go to Italy, the Land of pastrami, pizza, pasta, popes, sparkling wine and medieval architecture, Tuscany and the most attractive ruins in all of Europe.

Fusili alla Zuchini

Isn’t that lovely? The words already melt on the tongue ... Fusili, that’s the cork-screw type pasta, about 2 cm long.

30 minutes

Again, this is not 30 minutes of cooking time, but preparation, thinking, wondering, looking again at the recipe ... let’s look at the ingredients so that you know what to buy when you have a moment to spare:

- 90 ml extra virgin olive oil
- 125 g of finely sliced onions
- 1 small teaspoon with finely chopped garlic (you can use granulated or powdered garlic or none at all – but rest assured that when both parties eat garlic, you don’t smell “garlicky” at all)
- 1 tablespoon of finely chopped parsley
- 500 g zucchini (no need to peel, just take off ugly bits, spots etc) and cut into fine slices -around 4 cm long and 6 mm wide)
- 500 g fusili
- 2 teaspoons of finely sliced fresh basil
- 1 teaspoon of finely chopped mint
- salt to taste
- black pepper (ideally in pepper mill) at hand
- 4 tablespoons of grated cheese (parmesan is normally easiest to come by)

Here we go. Let’s start with the sauce. Pour the olive oil into a generously-sized frying pan and add the onions. Hang around because you have to fry the onions slowly, on medium to low heat, turning them from time to time until they are a lovely golden brown.

Between turning the onions you have a moment to fill a big sauce pan with four litres of water and put it to boil on “high”, add a teaspoon of salt.

While the water for the pasta is heating, you can go back to the sauce and turn the heat up. Now add the garlic and stir constantly for about one minute. Add the parsley and zucchini slices, never quite letting the mixture out of your sight. Let it all get golden brown, stirring from time to time. That'll take you around eight minutes. Now put in the basil, the mint and season the lot with the salt you have waiting and the black pepper.

By now the water should be boiling. Pour in the 500 g fusili in one go and stir from time to time until the water with the pasta is boiling again. Cook the pasta until it's "al dente". What's that I hear you ask? That's "just right" - not too soft and not too hard. It normally tells you the cooking time on the packet. When you get near the correct cooking time, try one and judge for yourself how much longer you ought to leave the pasta to boil.

Drain pasta in a colander, pour into a big bowl and mix with your zucchini. Serve with grated cheese and perhaps some more black pepper. Delicious!

There you are. At least one of these recipes must be right for you. Happy cooking and seducing ... you could try out your preferred recipe on a good friend before the all-important big première!