

California
Cooking
and
*Southern
Style*



California Cooking and *Southern Style*

100 Great Recipes, Inspired Menus,
and Gorgeous Table Settings

Frances Schultz
recipes by Stephanie Valentine



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*A Cottonwood-lined road at Rancho La Zaca after a rain,
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Menu

Chilled Cucumber Soup

*Olive Oil Poached Halibut
with Sauce Verte*

*Green Spring Vegetables
with Mint and Dill*

Melon Sorbet

Ricciarelli Cookies

Chapter 7

Ladies' Lunch

A “ladies’ lunch” sounds almost nostalgic, a special occasion rather than a regular weekday meal. These days it seems that the ladies who could be “ladies who lunch” are too busy being something else. Even life in small country towns like ours seems to brim with commitments that leave little room for a leisurely, midday meal. Perhaps that is why exactly such a meal is a luxury, a gift, and sometimes a moral imperative.

And yet, I sometimes catch myself complaining about having agreed to a lunch, how it wrecks the day, how I could be doing this or that and now cannot, and yadda yadda yadda. You know? Therefore I am as selective about attending a lunch as I am about hosting one, mindful of constraints both timely and caloric. As to menu, particularly at midday, one would like not to feel one has swallowed an elephant. Keep it light. Our chilled cucumber soup and poached fish with sublime vinaigrette is substantial without being heavy. Melon sorbet is the perfect, fruity finish, and feel free to purchase it if your own time constraints disallow its making at home. Stephanie’s friend’s ricciarelli cookies were a revelation to me, a sweet treat with sweet story behind them too.

Setting a table in linen and silver is such a pleasure—old-fashioned, a bit prissy, civilized, and satisfyingly atavistic, as I imagine my mother



and grandmother using these very things, handed on by their mothers and grandmothers. Setting a table is also setting an intention to gather together and to hear and be heard, to talk about everything and nothing, to indulge in the very sort of aimless and yet purposeful activity that behavioral experts today call “play,” and they strongly encourage it. Like play, a lovely lunch with friends can leave us relaxed, refreshed, and reconnected—to ourselves and to one another.

Chilled Cucumber Soup

Serves 4

A flavorful and refreshing cucumber soup that is an ideal first course for a summer meal, and also good as hors d'oeuvres served in demitasse cups. Allow for an hour or more of chilling time before serving, or make it the day before. To boost the chilling on a hot day, put the soup in a metal container and put in a larger bowl of ice water.

3–4 cucumbers (about 3 cups), peeled, seeded, and chopped
1 cup plain yogurt or buttermilk
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 tablespoon chopped basil
1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
1 tablespoon chopped mint
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 jalapeño, seeded and chopped (optional)

For garnishing

¼ cup chopped red onion
¼ cup chopped cucumber
½ avocado, chopped
Olive oil for drizzling
Chopped cilantro

Combine cucumber, yogurt or buttermilk, and lime juice in the blender and blend well. Add basil, cilantro, mint, salt, pepper, and jalapeño, and blend another 10 to 15 seconds. Chill in the refrigerator for an hour before serving.

Garnish with red onion, cucumber, avocado, a drizzle of olive oil, and chopped cilantro.

Olive Oil Poached Halibut with Sauce Verte

Makes 4 servings

Any firm fish can be substituted for the halibut. Buy what looks best that day. The poaching oil can be infused with spices and herbs as you like, such as peppercorns, red pepper flakes, and sprigs of mint or dill. Your poaching pot should be large enough to hold the fish in one layer. Leftover bits of poached fish make a lovely salad tossed with Persian cucumbers and cherry tomatoes.

4 (5–6-ounce) halibut filets
Salt and pepper
2 cups olive oil
1 sprig thyme or rosemary
1 clove garlic, peeled

Remove the halibut from the refrigerator 30 minutes before poaching. Sprinkle with 1 teaspoon of the salt and ½ teaspoon of the pepper.

Preheat the oven to 250°F.

In a 12-inch oven-proof pot or pan over medium heat, add the olive oil, the thyme, and clove of garlic, and warm for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and add the fish. There should be enough oil just to cover. If not, add a bit more. Place the pan in the oven and bake for 10 to 15 minutes or until the fish is just cooked through. While the fish is cooking, make the sauce.

Sauce Verte

A classic and versatile sauce that needs no cooking and is good on so many things, from fish and chicken to beef and vegetables.

1 cup fresh parsley leaves
½ cup fresh dill sprigs
½ cup fresh mint leaves
¼ cup tarragon leaves
1 small shallot, peeled and minced
1 clove garlic, peeled and minced
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
½ cup olive oil
¼ cup capers, drained and chopped



6 anchovy fillets, drained and chopped
Pinch of red pepper flakes
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon pepper

Chop the parsley, dill, mint, and tarragon together and place in a bowl. Add the shallot and garlic to the herbs along with the mustard, lemon, red wine vinegar, and olive oil. Stir in the chopped capers and anchovies. Season with red pepper flakes, salt, and pepper.

On Cooking Fish

The 10-minute rule for cooking fish calls for 10 minutes of cooking time per inch of thickness at the fish's thickest point, turning it halfway through. If the fish is 2 inches thick at its thickest point, you cook it for 20 minutes, and so on. Estimate the in-between sizes. If the fish is $\frac{1}{2}$ inch or less, cook it just a minute or two on the second side. Add 5 minutes if cooking in liquid.



Menu

Watermelon and Tomato Salad

*Grilled Chicken & Shrimp Kabobs
with Lemon Yogurt Vinaigrette*

Stuffed Grape Leaves

Toasted Pita Chips with Hummus

Deviled Eggs with Anchovy

*Freekeh
with Lemon and Herbs*

*Quinoa
with Citrus Tahini*

Fattoush

Pistachio Almond Butter Cake

Chapter 9

A Shooting Party Picnic

Picnics are great because food tastes better outdoors. It just does. Even though all the schlepping and prepping and what-not is kind of a pain, it is such fun in the end. With the availability nowadays of wonderful tin and Melamine plates, bamboo utensils, and other attractive unbreakables, your settings can be quite stylish despite the ruggedness of locale.

It isn't often we have lunch at the Rancho La Zaca shooting range (because like I said, it's kind of a pain) but it is such a treat when we do. The view is glorious and there is the sense of being in another place, like being in the bush, almost. Shooting sporting clays is a favorite activity at the ranch and one we especially like to share with friends. We'll have instructors a couple of times a year and invite the neighbors, usually organizing a gathering around that time, including a spirited competition or two. Despite the macho allure of shooting sports, testosterone *per se* does not confer success. It is a game of finesse, hand-eye coordination, and calm under pressure. In other words, girls can kick ass at it, too, and do. After the scores are tallied, future challenges issued, oaths sworn, and egos bolstered or bruised, the shooting of bull continues with lunch.

Lunch at the range is somewhat a glorified picnic, and a jauntily set table greeting shooters at the end of their rounds is a delightful surprise—even to me, sometimes, as I often don't know what it's going to look like until it is finished, as was the case on this day. Bright dahlias and zinnias from our garden in simple glass bottles were easy to do but made a big visual splash with colorful napkins and pillows nicked from the breakfast room. There is



an outdoor kitchen of sorts, but mostly the meal is prepared at home and toted to range, in true picnic fashion. The menu is one that can be prepared in advance and holds well at room temperature, qualities well suited to Middle Eastern food, which we love and which beautifully comprises the best of California comestibles. Savory kabobs, stuffed grape leaves, hearty grain salads, and pistachio-almond-cake are as satisfying as they are easy to prepare. This is the sort of meal meant to be grazed upon, lingered over, nibbled at, and—forgive the pun—reloaded time and again.

In conjuring last-minute schemes, raid your own rooms and cupboards for decor. I plucked these pillows from our breakfast room, a beloved painted terra cotta bird from a bookshelf, and a handful of fig leaves to liven up the table.





Grilled Chicken & Shrimp Kabobs with Lemon Yogurt Vinaigrette

Serves 4 to 8

Kabobs can be cooked on the grill or broiled in the oven. If using wooden skewers, soak them in water for at least 30 minutes before grilling. We say this serves 4 to 8 depending on your menu and what else is on offer.

Grilled Chicken Kabobs

1½ pounds boneless chicken breast cut into ¾-inch cubes

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano

1 teaspoon turmeric

½ teaspoon ground cumin

Pinch of cinnamon

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon pepper

Mix together the chicken cubes, olive oil, lemon, oregano, turmeric, cumin, cinnamon, salt, and pepper. Cover, and refrigerate at least 30 minutes or up to overnight. The longer the better. When ready to cook, skewer the chicken and season with salt and pepper.

Preheat a grill to medium-high heat, or preheat the oven broiler and position the rack about 3 inches from the top. If grilling, cook for 8 minutes, turning every 2 minutes. If oven broiling, place kabobs in a pan and cook about 6 minutes, turning every 2 minutes or until done. Serve with Lemon Yogurt Vinaigrette (page 98).

Grilled Shrimp Kabobs

Serves 4 to 8

The 16/20 count shrimp means there are 16 to 20 shrimps per pound. Allow $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of shrimp per person. If you are cleaning the shrimp yourself, reserve the shells to make Shrimp Stock (page 88). The shrimp can be cooked on the grill or broiled in the oven.

Note: Shrimp from Kauai have a sweet, true shrimp flavor. Ask your fishmonger about availability.

1½ pounds (16/20 count) shrimp, peeled and deveined
3 tablespoons olive oil
3 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano
1 clove garlic, minced
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
Salt and pepper

Combine the peeled shrimp with the olive oil, oregano, garlic, and smoked paprika. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or as long as overnight. The longer the better. When ready to cook, skewer the shrimp, 3 or 4 per skewer, “spooning” them together. Season with salt and pepper.

Preheat the grill to medium, or pre-heat the oven broiler and position the rack 3 inches from the top. Grill the kabobs about 3 minutes per side or until cooked through, or place on a broiler pan and broil for 3 minutes on the first side and 1 minute on the other, just until the shrimp are reddish pink and opaque. Serve with Lemon Yogurt Vinaigrette.

Lemon Yogurt Vinaigrette

Makes 1 cup

With swirls of yogurt and bright yellow olive oil, this dressing is quite pretty. You will want to put this on everything—salads, grains, vegetables, chicken, and fish. Doubles easily and can be made several days ahead.

6 tablespoons olive oil
4 tablespoons lemon juice
4 tablespoons chopped parsley
2 tablespoons chopped dill
1 clove garlic, minced
1 small shallot, minced
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup plain Greek yogurt
1 teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper

Whisk together the olive oil, lemon, herbs, garlic, and shallot. Stir in the yogurt, salt, and pepper. Adjust seasoning and refrigerate until you are ready to serve.

Watermelon and Tomato Salad

Serves 6

If preparing ingredients ahead, drain the cut watermelon on paper towels or in a colander.

Persian cucumbers are great as a substitute for the regular variety and there is no need to peel or seed them.

6 cups cubed watermelon
3 cups arugula
1 cup chopped heirloom or cherry tomatoes
1 cup peeled, seeded, and diced cucumber
 $\frac{1}{4}$ red onion, thinly sliced
1 heaping tablespoon each basil, mint, and dill, leaves picked and torn to small pieces
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped Kalamata olives
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup crumbled feta cheese
3 tablespoons lemon juice
5 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Just before serving, toss all ingredients together in a large bowl, and season with salt and pepper.





Chapter 15

A Month of Sundays

Sunday night suppers at Rancho La Zaca have become a ritual in themselves, a lovely way to end one week and begin a new one. We almost always have company, almost always including St. Mark's rector the Reverend Randall Day and his husband and tenor extraordinaire Bill Hurbaugh, hence my prevailing upon them to write the foreword for this book. The suppers, Randall, Bill, and whomever else comes along, are a regular thing we look forward to like seeing a favorite painting. Every

stroke is familiar, and yet there is always something new. Sometimes I make a fuss over the table, most times I don't. Our Sunday night menus are the same way. Most times they are our simple, comfort food favorites, a pot of pasta or stew, in a quantity ample to accommodate the last-minute invitees that I am infamous for. That Stephanie has not come after me with a rolling pin is a wonder, bless her. Here are menus for a month of Sunday suppers, and even more good news: They work for weekdays, too.

Menu 1

New Potatoes
with *Mushrooms and Arugula*

Pan Seared Salmon
with *Lemon Caper*
Olive Vinaigrette

Bread and Butter Pudding

Menu 2

Chicken Country Captain

Broccoli Salad

Buttermilk Biscuits

Persimmon Pudding

Menu 3

Blue Cheese Pecans

Warm Escarole Salad
with *Pancetta and Egg*

Mushroom and Asparagus
Busiati

Ricotta Almond
Chess Pie

Menu 4

Frisee, Fennel, and Green
Bean Salad

Lamb and White Bean Stew
with *Pistou*

Poached Pears
with *Crème Fraiche*

Menu 1

New Potatoes with Mushrooms and Arugula

Serves 4

Choose the smallest new potatoes you can find. If they are too big to be bite-sized, cut them in half or quarters.

1½ pounds new potatoes
1 small head of garlic, cloves separated but not peeled
½ cup olive oil, divided
Kosher salt
½ pound mushrooms such as shiitake, chanterelle, portobello, oyster, or combination
1 teaspoon grainy mustard
1 tablespoon red or white wine vinegar
2 cups arugula leaves or mixed greens
Freshly ground pepper

Preheat oven to 300°F.

In a roasting pan, toss potatoes and garlic with 2 tablespoons of the oil and 2 teaspoons kosher salt. Bake 1 to 1½ hours, or until tender. Reduce the heat if they are cooking too fast and stir them occasionally to prevent sticking.

While the potatoes cook, sauté the mushrooms in a 12-inch sauté pan over high heat with a tablespoon of the oil. Cook just until they begin to brown and release their juices. Set aside.

Whisk together the mustard and vinegar, continue whisking in the remaining olive oil in a thin stream so the dressing emulsifies.

Remove the potatoes from the oven and set aside the garlic. Toss the potatoes and mushrooms together with the dressing. Before serving, toss with the arugula. Season with pepper and more salt if needed. You will have none of this leftover.

Note: Bring the roasted garlic to the table in a separate little bowl. It is wonderful squeezed onto bread or toast.

Pan Seared Salmon with Lemon-Caper-Olive Vinaigrette

Serves 4

Salmon

4 (6-ounce) salmon filets, prepared as on page 112

Lemon-Caper-Olive Vinaigrette

No cooking required for this splendid, all-purpose Lemon-Caper-Olive sauce for fish, chicken, or vegetables. It is ready in the time it takes to chop the ingredients. Can be made ahead and refrigerated for several days. Let it come to room temperature, or warm it gently, before serving. Use best-quality, flavorful olives, such as Kalamata, Lucques, or Castelvetrano.

4 tablespoons sliced olives
2 tablespoons finely chopped red onion
2 tablespoons chopped capers
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme or oregano
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
6 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Whisk together all ingredients, and season further to taste.

Opposite: If you don't have the correct size tablecloth, improvise, as I did here. A cloth smaller than your table may be treated as a sort of runner or coverlet. A too-big cloth can often be folded, draped, or "hemmed" with duct tape (yes!) at the last minute.





Bread and Butter Pudding

Serves 6

Our famous Valley neighbor, writer and crooner Shaun Cassidy said this was the best dessert he ever had. We like the recipe's simplicity and ease of scaling down for 2 or 4. It is also a good use for less-than-fresh bread.

1 French baguette, cut into ¼-inch slices
8 ounces unsalted butter, at room temperature,
plus 3 tablespoons for buttering the ramekins
½ cup chopped bittersweet chocolate
1¼ cups whole milk
1 cup half-and-half
3 whole eggs
3 egg yolks
4½ tablespoons sugar, plus 4 tablespoons for
the ramekins
1 teaspoon vanilla
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon turbinado sugar, optional
Whipped Cream (page 148) or Vanilla Ice Cream
(page 23) for serving, if desired

Butter six 8-ounce ramekins and sprinkle each ramekin lightly with about 2 teaspoons of sugar.

Lightly butter both sides of each baguette slice. Place a single layer of buttered baguette onto the bottom of the ramekins, cutting and trimming as necessary to fit. Sprinkle half of the chocolate over the bread. Add another layer of baguette slices and chopped chocolate, and end with a layer of baguette slices. Whisk together the milk, half-and-half, whole eggs, yolks, sugar, vanilla, and salt. Strain and pour evenly among the ramekins, just covering the bread. Sprinkle with the turbinado sugar if using, and let sit for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Bake the puddings for 30 to 40 minutes, until lightly browned.

Serve warm with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

