



Smorrebrod, inspired by a trip to Denmark. (Remember travel?)

Photos by Kevin Phelan



HOMEFRONT

WHAT MAINERS
ARE COOKING

A sandwich from Denmark, with ingredients from Maine

In the Phelan household, we’re surviving the winter/pandemic by reliving great food we tasted during past family vacations. Last year we went to Copenhagen and fell in love with Smorrebrod. Our recipe is Wheat Boule from Rosemont (market), Scratch’s cream cheese, smoked salmon, dill, capers and our own pickled red onions.” — *KEVIN PHELAN, Cape Elizabeth*

TELL US WHAT YOU’RE COOKING

MAINERS, WHAT ARE YOU COOKING this winter while you hunker down at home to wait out this virus? Your mom’s chicken soup for comfort and consolation? Have you joined the sourdough brigade? Or has pandemic fatigue set in so you’re making the fastest, simplest meal you can devise? **SEND US YOUR RECIPE** and a simple snapshot of the dish. Let us know where the recipe came from and why you chose to make it now. Send recipes and photos to pgrodinsky@pressherald.com for possible publication and the chance to share dinner virtually until we can get back to sharing it actually.

GREEN

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strains of rice that are drought-resistant and don’t need to be planted in paddies. Fifty of those varieties are being tested in Africa. Growing rice on relatively dry land could help alleviate food insecurity on that continent and reduce the pressure to open precious wetlands up to farming. Closer to home, more sustainable rice farming techniques are cropping up in Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Texas, where farmers produce more rice than Americans can eat and therefore it is exported. Although the practice is not yet widespread, a growing number of farmers are flooding their paddies for shorter amounts of time. Studies have shown that the practice, depending on the frequency and duration, can reduce methane emissions by as much 90 percent.

There’s an old Chinese saying that goes, “Every grain of rice is a drop of sweat from a farmer’s brow.” It’s typically interpreted as a food waste management ideal. It’s a hopeful prospect that scientists, financial backers and those fighting hunger and gender inequity are sharing in rice farmers’ burden worldwide.

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Making traditional tahdig can take hours. Chef Samin Nosrat calls this quick version Persian-ish Rice.

Ben McCanna/Staff Photographer

PERSIAN-ISH RICE

This recipe for Middle Eastern style rice dish is adapted from one cookbook author Tieghan Gerard posted on her visually stunning Half Baked Harvest blog last March. Her version was adapted from one published on Food52.com, which itself was pulled from chef Samin Nosrat’s celebrated cookbook “Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat.” Nosrat, the daughter of Iranian immigrants, writes that most Persians

have a special relationship with rice, particularly with tahdig, the crispy crusted dish by which every Iranian mamas’s culinary prowess is measured. Making it can take hours and perfecting it, a lifetime. So Nosrat calls her quick version, Persian-ish, thereby signaling that no recipe is ever truly original, and all recipes should give cultural credit where it is due. *Serves 4*

FOR THE RICE:
2 cups basmati rice

Kosher salt
Pinch of saffron
3 tablespoons plain yogurt
3 tablespoons butter
3 tablespoons olive oil
½ cup fresh mint or cilantro

FOR THE CHICKPEAS:
¼ cup olive oil
2 cups cooked chickpeas, drained and patted dry
4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
2 shallots, thinly sliced
1 teaspoon ground

turmeric
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 pinch crushed red pepper flakes
2 cups roughly torn winter greens

Bring 6 cups of water and about ¼ cup salt to a boil in a large pot. Rinse the rice under cold running water. Once the water is boiling, add the rice, and stir. Cook, stirring occasionally until al dente, 6 to 8 minutes. Drain into a sieve and rinse with cold water.

In a bowl, combine saffron with a tablespoon warm water and the yogurt. Let sit 2 minutes until the yogurt is yellow. Stir in 1½ cups of the par-cooked rice. Melt butter into oil in a 10-inch skillet set over medium heat. When the butter foams, add the yogurt-coated rice and level it out in the pan with the back of a spoon. Pile the remaining rice into the pan, mounding it toward the center. Using the handle of a wooden spoon, gently dig 5-6 holes into the rice down to the bottom of the skillet. There should be enough oil in the pan so that you can see it bubbling up the sides. Add more oil if needed. Cook the rice over medium heat, turning the pan a quarter turn every 5 minutes to ensure even browning. Cook until you start to see a golden crust begin to form at the sides of the pan, about 15 minutes. Then reduce the heat to low and continue cooking another 15 to 20 minutes. The edges of the crust should be golden, 35-40 minutes total. Meanwhile, to make the chickpeas, heat a large, high-sided skillet over medium heat. Add oil, chickpeas, garlic, shallots, turmeric, paprika, red pepper flakes and salt. Cook, stirring occasionally until the chickpeas are crisped all over, 8-10 minutes. Add the greens, tossing to combine. Cook 2 minutes and remove from the heat. Run a spatula along the edges of the pan with the rice to release the tahdig. Carefully flip the tahdig onto a platter. It should come out in one piece, but if not, reassemble it with the crispy rice on top as best you can. Serve topped with chickpeas, fresh cilantro, or mint.

GARDEN

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lars and other wildlife. I devoted a column to this tree last summer, after I discovered some on our property. Don’t park a car under the tree when it is in fruit, though, he warned, lest your car be covered in bird droppings. Elderberry, another fruit known for its health benefits, grows 6 to 7 feet tall, produces white flowers that bees love, and a lot of fruit that both people and birds love. In fact, if you want the berries for yourself, Brand recommended you put a net over the plants to keep the birds away. He praised native viburnums, especially

Viburnum nudum, or the wild raisin. We planted some of those a few years ago and have enjoyed the blossoms but haven’t yet seen any fruit. Maybe animals are getting to it first. Wintergreen, which takes full sun but prefers shadier locations, has a lot of benefits in the garden. An attractive evergreen ground cover, its shiny leaves can be used for tea and the berries eaten straight from the plant. Not so much the May apple, or Podophyllum. It is an attractive plant, growing about 14 inches tall, with nice white flowers, and is sometimes used as a ground cover. But all parts of the plant are poisonous, including the fruit – at least until it is so ripe that it is almost rotten. Brand showed a picture of what he

insisted were tasty, non-poisonous May apples, which looked like regular apples that had been sitting at the bottom of the barrel for too long. We planted some May apple last year, so I will watch it carefully, but we’re not planning on eating the apples. Sumac is another plant that I wasn’t sure was edible, but Brand said its fruit makes tasty juice known as Rhus juice or Sumacade. It is an aggressive native, that can grow as trees but usually grows as thickets. The fruit is small, and surrounded by small thorn-like prickles that can cause a rash. (You can also dehydrate the fruit and turn it into a spice that’s used in much Middle Eastern cooking, my editor told me.) A couple of nuts he mentioned are hick-

ories, which can be harvested from the ground, but which grow huge, and hazelnuts. The latter are surrounded by leaves with spines that will scratch your hands, so wear gloves to pick them. Groundnuts, Apios americana, is an interesting vine that produces two kinds of fruit. It needs support and space and can be aggressive, Brand warned, but it creates both tasty tubers underground and beans above ground. As long as you leave some of the tubers when you harvest, the vine will come back each year. These are just a few things to think about as we wait for gardening season. Tom Atwell is a freelance writer gardening in Cape Elizabeth. He can be contacted at: tomatwell@me.com