

On Creme Fraiche Sauces

Scented Sauces

When I first started experimenting with creme fraiche sauces for meat, fowl, and fish, the sauces I made were more conventional. I reduced stock and added herbs or other flavoring to the reduced stock. I have since discovered something easier and better: scented sauces, creme fraiche infused with herbs and spices.

Creme fraiche is uniquely suited to sauce making: because it is an emulsion, it can mix with both fat and water. Because it is a natural emulsion, it is a very fine emulsion. Because of this fineness, its absorptive surface is enormous. Herbs and spices contain volatile oils which produce their characteristic flavors and aromas. When herbs and spices are mixed with creme fraiche, these volatile oils are absorbed onto the enormous surface provided by the emulsion. So, the flavors of fresh herbs and spices are delivered to the gustatory senses in all their pristine glory, unaltered. My applications require a minimum of cooking so that the fresh flavors are conserved, not lost to the air.

Modern science tells us that we can experience four basic tastes but that our olfactory sense is unlimited. Scented sauces add a whole new dimension to gustation.

Do not be tempted to use reduced cream in these sauces. The long reduction gives the sauce a cooked flavor. Creme fraiche retains the bright, fresh flavor of cream, balances the acidity, and sublimates the flavor of fresh herbs.

CREME FRAICHE SAUCE FOR MEAT, CHICKEN AND FISH

Saucemaking with creme fraiche is simple.

1. Meat, chicken or fish is cooked; and the pan in which it was cooked is deglazed (with wine, lemon, vinegar, brandy, eau de vie, etc.). The liquid is reduced by half.
2. Stock is added and reduced by half. (Optional step.)
3. Creme fraiche mixed with herbs or other flavoring is whisked into the reduced liquid. Allow the sauce to bubble for a minute or two until everything is well blended.

That is all there is to saucemaking, and the sauce makes the meal. The following three sections contain recipes that repeat these fundamental steps to produce a full range of sauces for fish, fowl, and meat.

“A great meal without a sauce is like a beautiful woman without clothes. It can provoke and satisfy the appetite, but it lacks the coating of civilization that would arouse our fullest interest.”

Brillat-Savarin

“A sauce....adds something, really two things: a taste as well as the opportunity to think about how the thing was made. This is the same kind of pleasure we derive when we look at a painting; the eye is pleased, while the mind explores the esthetic windings of a technique and a willed structure.”

Raymond Sokolov

The Saucier's Apprentice