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Meghna Lamore

My husband loves to cook. Fortunately - for everyone concerned - so do I. The first time we "officially" met (discounting hurried smiles and murmured words in the hallway), he had just cooked a sumptuous Easter dinner for our neighbours. I strode onto stage a little late, so I only had a bite or two, but even that little much was delicious.



One of my favourite ways to entertain is to host brunch for a small, select group of friends. While I lived in New York, my preferred method of "hosting" was to take everyone to Primitivo, on 14th and 7th: their brunch menu was full of mouth-watering standards like French Toast and Seafood Omelets, but they also had a good selection of their regular menu, including free pastas, for very, very reasonable prices. Like most brunch spots in City, they offered a selection of free alcoholic beverages with the meal. Unlike most brunch spots, they offered unlimited mimosas. Read = "bubbly with a splash of OJ for colour". This made for a very jovial, slightly boisterous crowd, and so when I emigrated to Toronto, this was a tradition I very much wanted to keep up. With a twist. I hosted it at home, in my very own apartment.

This is my standard brunch menu (tweak it as you wish if you want something more elegant):

Goey French Toast

Breakfast Meat

Fresh Fruit Salad

and...

Mimosas!

As you can see, I don't bother with anything too elaborate. Use stale bread to make the French toast, if you have it sitting in your fridge: stale bread holds the egg mixture better than fresh bread. You already know this if you've ever had slice after slice disintegrate on the way from bowl to frying pan. With the resulting goop on the side of the stove which no one ever remembers to clean up afterward! Now, if you happen not to have any stale bread handy, by all means, head on over to a grocery store that sells "day-olds". Even a little age will give you a tremendous advantage. Another tip for goey French Toast (which is the way I like it): Use skim, 1% or 2% milk. I've found that the water contained therein helps the egg fluff the bread up quite nicely (FYI - this works for omelettes as well).

Use fruit that is in season for the salad: it'll be the freshest and the most lip-smacking. I get an organics delivery box which is chock-full of seasonal fruit. Much more, actually, than the hubby and I can reasonably be expected to eat, even though we get it only once every two weeks. But this sort of gathering works beautifully for left-over fruit, as there are no rules for what to put into it. If you like dressing, I suggest juicing some of the fruit and then drizzling that on top as a much healthier alternative for those of you who pour maple syrup on everything as though the country is ceasing all production tomorrow. Yes, you know who you are!!

Any sort of breakfast meat will do. The whole point of this sort of gathering is to keep the meal itself relatively simple in order to focus on the company and the conversation. Kick the elegance factor up a notch by using a crock pot to braise the meat, and dress it with spices that wouldn't ordinarily be used: one of my personal favourites is allspice: it has a lot of kick without necessarily overwhelming the meat.

The *pièce de résistance* is, of course, the mimosa. Please, please don't skimp on the volume of sparkling wine. Since you're mixing it, you're welcome to go with the cheaper varieties, but steer clear of anything that's too sweet. Stick strictly to a 1:1 ratio: the resulting beverage should be moderately translucent. Do experiment with other citruses, though: I've had great success with blood orange juice (just stick to the concentrate and don't ever try to juice a case of those single-handedly without some really heavy-duty cleaner at your side); this remains my favourite variety of mimosa.

Skip the disposables this time around: brunch needn't be a formal dining affair (I don't even own a proper dining table), but ritual and good cutlery count for much more than seating arrangements do. Brunch is meant to be an informal and elegant meal: use cloth napkins (picked up cheaply from any Wal-Mart or, if you're handy with a sewing machine, Fabric Land), real silverware and the nicer plates you have hidden away in the back of your kitchen cupboard awaiting dinner with the Queen. Put some jazzy music on, dress a little more snazzily than you otherwise would (watch the heels, though, if you're going to be cooking with everyone crowded around you), and enjoy!

Oh, and have an extra mimosa for me.

French Toast image courtesy of shugarhigh/stock.xchng

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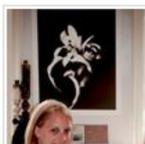
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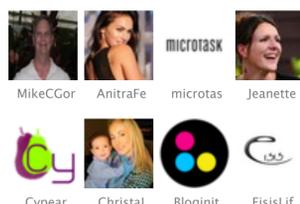


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