

Collations - Four Recipes in Verse

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Close Shave

[<https://alteritas.net/pastis/>]



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1 - Warm Cranberry Bean Salad

These marbled pinkish beans are beautiful to look at raw and not that tedious to hull. Once free of their pods, they need a parboil. As usual when boiling any liquids except those to be sweetened, throw in garlic cloves with sprigs of your favourite herbs. Mine for the moment: Thai basil (the one with the purple stems which explode into packets of flower), bay leaf, thyme and tarragon. Let all that linger in the pot to the tenderness you want, most importantly the beans, keeping an eye on the garlic. Cool them to a state of warmth, serve the beans on a bed of greens dressed with pepper, salt, oil, vinegar, a dab or two of mustard. Retrieve any garlic you put in the boil, pulp it and serve it as one condiment among others. Shelling beans fit naturally into a festive *mezze* lunch, accompanied by a slightly chilled low-alcohol red. If you have luck enough to have rosé in the fridge, put it on the table and invite your guests to blend their own ideal red-rosé to go with the beans.

[online at <https://alteritas.net/pastis/inventory/warm-cranberry-bean-salad-26-july-2015/>]

2 - Tomatillo, Gooseberry, and Persimmon Salad

Tomatillo in Nahuatl was *tomātl*, 'fat thing'. When Aztec farmers found a fatter cultivar, one we call tomato, they called it *ji-tomatl*, 'fat thing with navel', comparing its snarled stem scar to the one left when the scab of an umbilical cord drops off leaving a symbolic link to the womb. They have similar thoughts about corn silk, flaxen threads sewn back into phloem, conduit of sap between the nourishing sun and the soil into which kernels were sown back when they were seeds. Roasted corn might thus be aptly scattered on this salad. Tomatillos resemble gooseberries but persimmons spring from the same branch. Just look at them side-by-side on a cutting board awaiting the advent of a keen knife. Chances are slim that these same fruit fall to hand all at the same time, so this dish is speculative, which leaves us free to entertain a serendipitous dressing, say *pico de gallo* with pomegranate juice.

[online at <https://alteritas.net/pastis/inventory/tomatillo-gooseberry-and-persimmon-salad/>]

3 - Petits pois à la française w Purslane & Shiso

Young, I hadn't the faintest notion of purslane, though knew of watercress. Purslane has less crunch, more moist munch. As for chewy shiso, decoratively as garnish or rolled into a temaki cone, it appears often in sushi (すし, 寿司, 鮓 as variously transcribed).

I found some the same morning in the next stall in the market. Hyssop could have served as well, but serendipity rules, especially in the kitchen, and in the writing of poems. You are supposed to imprison the shelled baby peas in a cage of lettuce, which is related to daisy, this to infuse them with vegetal fumes and flavour. If the peas are tender enough, skip steaming them. Just sizzle in butter, adding the hand-picked lobes of purslane. Then you have to decide: do you want to tear the shiso into unrecognizable bits, letting wait until its distinct taste imposes cognizance of what it is upon your guests? Or would you rather show off its bright-green fractal leaves by inserting them whole at angles around the dish of peas?

[online at <https://alteritas.net/pastis/inventory/petits-pois-a-la-francaise-w-purslane-shiso/>]

4 - The Best Part of the Fish

For Nasrin

When you feel like a fish, check the weather to see whether it's better to bake indoors or grill out. Small ones can be poached. Small fry can be fried whole. Any place you buy fish should smell fresh, no trace of bleach or antiseptic, instead should exude the very attar of the sea, shore, river or shoal which was their home. Eschew asphyxiated fish, those with glaucous eyes and limp flesh. Buy them scaled, gutted, extracted from crushed ice. Once you have your catch, wash, pat dry. Salt and pepper the cavity, stuff with smashed garlic and aromatics, relying on your own counsel and taste — I have a weakness for basil and thyme and have taken to sumac, the dark vermilion grains ground from the berries of the tropical shrub related to mango and cashew; not the southern US bush with its toxic resin, the poison of the same name. Sumac, *rhus coriaria* to be precise, is harmless, though far from innocuous. Its pungence lays out a canvas on which aërian savours, here those of fish, can be feathered or brushed in. In this case what was aquatic transforms into a wingèd essence which, like a kite, flies best in a steady wind tethered to the tang of the earth. If, at this stage, you need lemon, maybe this was not the right fish. Many like citrus to veil such miasma. On this point, accomodate your guests. Quarter a couple with your sharpest knife once the sumptuous fish, after fifteen minutes in an intensely hot milieu (flesh at the thickest point showing 145 F) is deposited with a flourish on a trivet centerpiece — but only after a short rest, so its juices can seize. Slide off portions from the top half with a spatula, ostentatiously detach the bone structure from the tail, then dangle the head before the gathered assembly, whose eyes should still look out intact, alert to their fate.

This is when you learn who likes fish, as opposed to pescatarians from principle. The former will put dibs on the eyes and those delectable morsels behind the cheeks. The latter will avert their eyes, praising a choice filet.

[online at <https://alteritas.net/pastis/inventory/the-best-part-of-a-fish-for-nasrin/>]