

COOKING

The best of 2004

In a year of great things to eat, here are 10 recipes we'll never forget.

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This year the Food section published 380 recipes. How do we remember them all, much less decide on 10 best?

It's a perennial dilemma. Take Russ Parsons' spiny lobster story (Oct. 20). It offered three lobster recipes that each received an equal number of votes. The recipes were so consistently good that they canceled each other out, and no lobster crawled across the finish line. Is this fair?

Of course not. But we bit the bullet, took all considerations into account and decided on a list that reflects the cooking that most wowed us this year. As usual, it highlights the Southland's culinary diversity and our long love affair with fresh produce.

A number of recipes came very close, and we would have loved to include them all. Regina Schrambling's portabello-arugula sandwich, for example. Donna Deane's plum upside-down cake or her grapefruit curd tartlets. Sarah's Mallomars, concocted by one of our kitchen interns, Sarah Carter, were hugely popular. Russ Parsons' tart of garlicky greens and black olives or his honeydew ice with blackberries and white Port. Susan LaTempa's parsnip flan. Carolyann Carreño's duck ragù.

Then there were the chef recipes that bowled us over but didn't make it onto the list. Eric Klein's *choucroûte*. Oven-braised short ribs from Villa Creek in Paso Robles. *Bollito misto* from the Mendocino Inn. From Govind Armstrong at Table 8, kurobuta pork chops with white bean purée, ham hock *jus* and salsa verde. Hazelnut brown butter cake from Lucques. Fudgy brownies from Recchiuti in San Francisco. Butternut shrimp bisque from Brigtsen's in New Orleans.

And, of course, anything with spiny lobster. Fortunately, you can find all of them in The Times' archives at latimes.com.

Shrimp albondigas with guajillo-chipotle sauce

Total time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Servings: 8

Note: An article by Susan LaTempa about Mexican expatriate and caterer Gina Pacheco included this recipe for an appetizer of unusually light shrimp "meatballs." For the fresh masa, you may substitute dough made by mixing one-half cup corn tortilla mix with one-fourth cup warm water.

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Sauce

4 dried guajillo chiles, cleaned, seeded, deveined
2 dried chipotle chiles, cleaned, seeded, deveined
3 medium tomatoes, left whole (about 1 pound)
1 small to medium onion
4 cloves garlic
1 1/2 cups fish stock
1 1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

- 1. Toast the chiles** in a dry skillet until fragrant, about 3 to 4 minutes. Roast the tomatoes, onion and garlic in a 450-degree oven for 15 minutes.
- 2. Bring one-half cup water** to boil in a saucepan, add the toasted chiles and simmer for 5 minutes. In a blender, mix the chiles with their cooking water, the roasted tomatoes, onion, garlic and the fish stock. Strain.
- 3. Cook the sauce** over low heat for 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Simmer over low heat while you prepare the albondigas.

Shrimp albondigas

1 1/2 pounds uncooked shrimp, peeled and deveined
1/2 onion, roughly chopped
2 cloves garlic
1/2 cup fresh corn masa dough
2 eggs, slightly beaten
3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons finely chopped cilantro
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper

- 1. In a food processor**, mix the shrimp, onion, garlic, corn masa dough and eggs until well blended. Add three-fourths cup cilantro, salt and pepper and pulse briefly.
- 2. Lightly oil your hands** and form small (three-fourths-inch) meatballs with the shrimp mixture.
- 3. Drop the meatballs** into the sauce and cook at low heat without stirring until the meatballs are firm, about 5 minutes. If the sauce thickens too much, add more stock.
- 4. To serve**, place three albondigas with sauce in each ramekin or small bowl and sprinkle with cilantro.

Each serving: 158 calories; 18 grams protein; 15 grams carbohydrates; 3 grams fiber; 3 grams fat; 1 gram saturated fat; 175 mg. cholesterol; 672 mg. sodium.