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## the perfect dinner



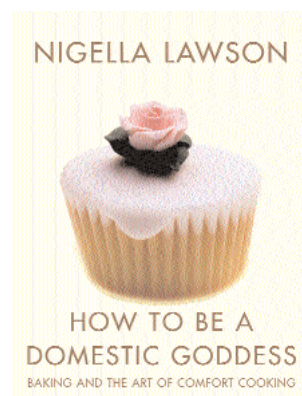
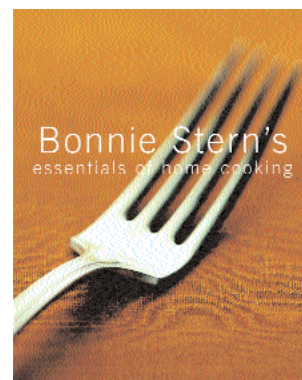
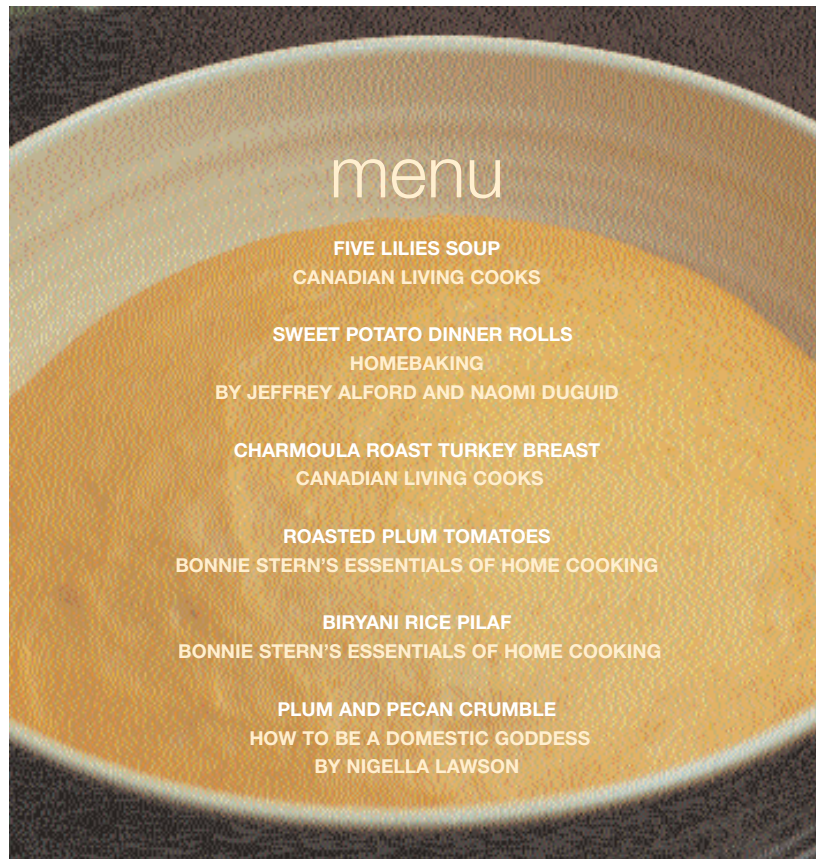
**IT WAS SUNDAY DINNER WE LIVED FOR IN OUR CHILDHOODS.** When Sunday meant the stores were shuttered and the church doors open, those leisurely hours from noon to six were spent cooking. Often there were guests. Even when it was just family, the atmosphere was still festive. The mood was helped along by the aroma of a roast, usually beef, wafting through the house. Our mothers, frugal women that they were, would not want to heat the oven for just the roast so rolls, cake or fruit pie would be tucked alongside to keep the main course company. In summer there would be a bouquet of flowers picked from the cutting garden to grace the table.

Moreover, it was from Sunday dinner that meals for the upcoming week flowed—roast beef sandwiches topped with bread-and-butter pickles, perhaps a meat pie of sliced roast and leftover vegetables bathed in gravy, potato cakes enhanced with ground leftover roast. In truth there was not a lot of variety in those dinners—in rural areas, even as recently as 20 years ago, there were not a great number of food options with which to work. Instead there was freshness: corn picked and husked minutes before hitting the pot of boiling water, beets and potatoes dug within the hour, berries still warm from the sun. One of us remembers an utterly sublime meal that consisted only of hamburger patties, boiled peas, carrots, new potatoes and sliced tomatoes. It sounds boring but the meat had not had a longstanding relationship with a Styrofoam tray. The local butcher ground the meat while his customers waited. The vegetables were straight off the vine or out of the ground. What we try to recreate today is the atmosphere of those dinners: the heady aroma of roasting meat and vegetables,



Alison Fryer (left) and Jennifer Grange of Toronto's The Cookbook Store.

PHOTO: MARY GIULIANO



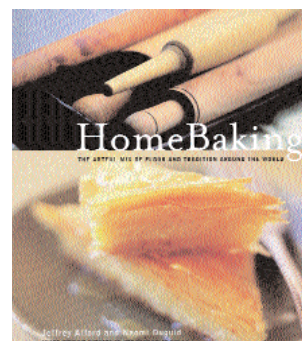
of baking bread, the gem-like colours of a fruit pie or crumble, the steamy warmth of a kitchen at full throttle, the pleasure of sharing a meal with others.

In our cosmopolitan cities, what we have lost in earth-to-table freshness, we have gained in choice: a mind-boggling array of meats, produce, herbs and spices. We may have loved the plain roasted potatoes that surrounded the beef, but roasted potatoes with cumin borrowed from Mexican and Indian cooking are delightful too. Who has to settle for plain white rice when one can have risotto or pilaf? With such a smorgasbord before us we can seek pleasure from our own comfort foods or from those of another culture almost at will.

Elizabeth Baird and her colleagues in the Canadian Living Test Kitchen, cookbook author and cooking school teacher Bonnie Stern, the voluptuous English television cook Nigella Lawson, and globetrotting Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid seem like a rather disparate group. Yet there is more than a love of cooking uniting them. Each writer is highly aware of the importance of other people to one's enjoyment of food. Whether it is the ongoing sharing of food with family members or the brief intimacy of a meal eaten with strangers in an exotic locale, these writers, more than just offering up recipes, give the readers a framework for preserving their own culinary experiences.

This dinner menu brings together the soothingly familiar and the exotically enticing—mouthwatering scents and vivid tastes and colours.

WE CAN SEEK PLEASURE FROM OUR OWN COMFORT FOODS OR FROM THOSE OF ANOTHER CULTURE



## RECIPES THE PERFECT DINNER



### FIVE LILIES SOUP

from **CANADIAN LIVING COOKS**

2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	25 mL
4 cups	chopped onions	1 L
1 cup	finely chopped celery	250 mL
1/3 cup	sliced shallots	75 mL
2	cloves garlic, minced	2
1 tbsp	chopped fresh thyme	15 mL
2 tsp	chopped fresh marjoram	10 mL
1/2 tsp	each salt and pepper	2 mL
5 cups	chicken or vegetable stock	1.25 L
1 cup	sliced leeks (white and light green parts)	250 mL
3/4 cup	dry white wine	175 mL
1	bay leaf	1
1 tbsp	sherry vinegar	15 mL

#### Topping:

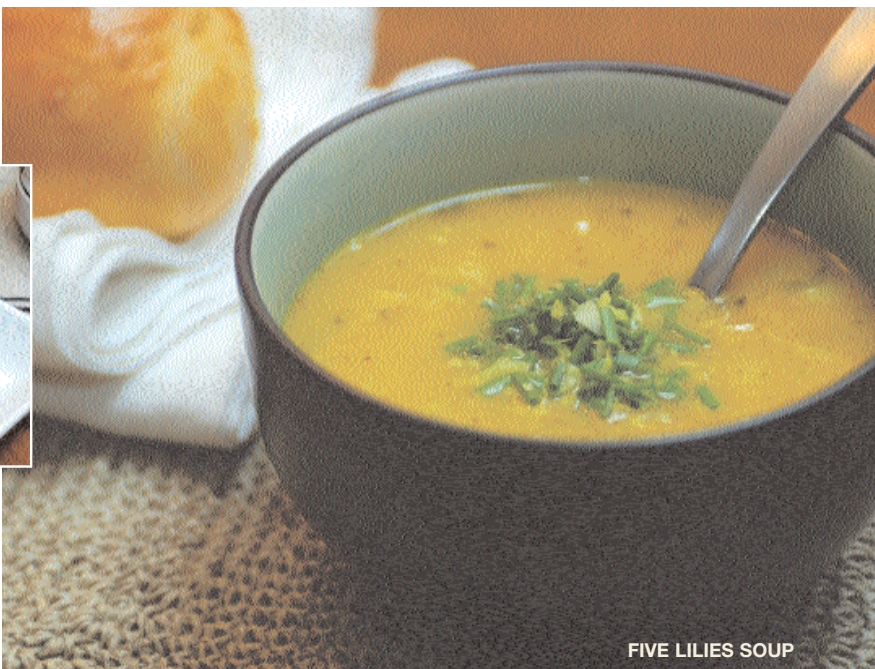
2 tbsp	chopped fresh chives	25 mL
1	clove garlic, minced	1
1 tbsp	finely grated lemon rind	15 mL

1. In saucepan, heat oil over medium-high heat; sauté onions, celery, shallots, garlic, thyme, marjoram, salt and pepper, stirring occasionally, until onions are completely softened and just beginning to turn golden, about 10 minutes.

2. Transfer half of the mixture to blender or food processor; purée until smooth. Return to pan.

3. Add stock, leeks, wine and bay leaf; bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer until leeks are tender-crisp, about 10 minutes. Discard bay leaf. (MAKE-AHEAD: Let cool for 30 minutes; refrigerate, uncovered, until cold. Cover and refrigerate in airtight container for up to 3 days. Rewarm over low heat.) Stir in vinegar. Ladle into warmed soup bowls.

4. TOPPING: Mix together chives, garlic and lemon rind. Place mound in centre of each bowl. Makes 8 servings.



FIVE LILIES SOUP

### SWEET POTATO DINNER ROLLS

from **HOMEBAKING BY**

**JEFFREY ALFORD AND NAOMI DUGUID**

3/4 pound (1 large) sweet potato, peeled and cut into chunks

1 teaspoon active dry yeast

1/4 cup packed light brown sugar

3 1/2 to 4 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

About 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 tablespoon salt

2 large or extra-large eggs

1 egg, whisked, for egg wash

Put the sweet potato in a saucepan with about 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Cook for about 15 minutes, until tender. Drain, reserving the cooking water. Mash or puree the potato (you should have about 1 1/4 cups), and place in a large bowl. Let the potato and cooking water cool to lukewarm.

Measure out 1 cup of the lukewarm

cooking water and stir in the yeast to dissolve thoroughly. Add the yeast mixture to the potato, then stir in the brown sugar and 1 cup of the flour. Add the butter and salt and stir, then add the 2 eggs and mix well. Add 2 more cups of flour, a cup at a time.

Dust a work surface generously with flour and turn out the dough. Knead for about 5 minutes, until soft, smooth, and somewhat elastic.

Place in a clean bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled, about 4 hours.

Pull the dough away from the sides of the bowl and turn out onto a lightly floured surface. Lightly grease an 18-by-12-inch baking sheet with butter.

Use a sharp knife or a dough scraper to divide the dough into 16 pieces (cut it in half, then cut in half again and again). Using your cupped palm, pressing the dough lightly into your work surface, roll one piece into a round roll by rolling it in a short circular motion about ten times. Place the shaped roll on the baking sheet. Continue with the remaining dough, placing the rolls about 1/2 inch apart on the baking sheet (4 rows of 4 rolls each). Cover with plastic wrap and let rise for 30 to 40 minutes.

Place a rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 400°F.

Just before baking, brush the tops of the rolls with the egg wash. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the rolls are a deep brown on top and a golden orange at the sides. They will be nested together, touching.

Let cool for 10 minutes before serving. Store, once completely cooled, in a well-sealed plastic bag.

Makes 16 medium-sized soft dinner rolls.



SWEET POTATO DINNER ROLLS

**CHARMOULA ROAST TURKEY BREAST**

from **CANADIAN LIVING COOKS**

1/2 cup	finely chopped fresh coriander	125mL
1/3 cup	finely chopped fresh parsley	75 mL
2	cloves garlic, minced	2
1/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil	50 mL
2 tbsp	lemon juice	25 mL
1 tsp	each paprika and salt	5 mL
1/2 tsp	ground cumin	2 mL
1/4 tsp	cayenne pepper	1 mL
1/4 tsp	pepper	1 mL
Pinch	cinnamon	Pinch
1	boneless turkey breast (3 lb/1.5 kg)	1

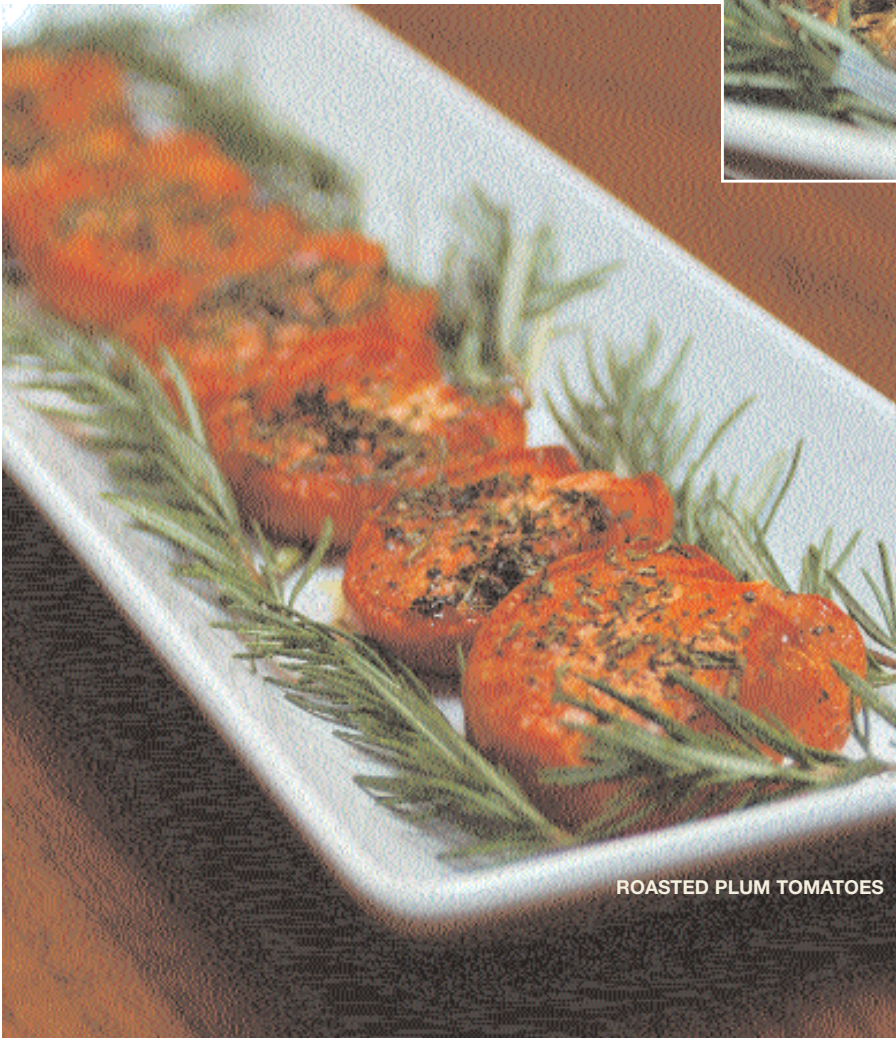
1. In bowl, stir together coriander, parsley, garlic, oil, lemon juice, paprika, salt, cumin, cayenne pepper, pepper and cinnamon.
2. Pat turkey breast dry. Starting at right side

with knife parallel to board, slice turkey breast in half lengthwise just to within 1 inch (2.5 cm) of edge; open flat like book. Spread half of the seasoning mixture over cut surface. Starting at 1 long edge, roll up. Tie kitchen string around each end and at centre to secure. Rub remaining seasoning mixture over roll. Place on greased rack in roasting pan.

3. Roast in 325°F (160°C) oven until juices run clear when turkey is pierced and meat thermometer registers 185°F (85°C), about 2 hours. Transfer to cutting board and tent with foil; let stand for 15 minutes before slicing thinly. Makes 8 servings.



CHARMOULA ROAST TURKEY BREAST



ROASTED PLUM TOMATOES

**ROASTED PLUM TOMATOES**

from **BONNIE STERN'S ESSENTIALS OF HOME COOKING**

3 lb (1.5 kg)	plum tomatoes (12 to 15)
2 tbsp (25 mL)	olive oil
1 tsp (5 mL)	salt
1/2 tsp (2 mL)	pepper
1 tbsp (15 mL)	chopped fresh rosemary, or 1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried
1 tbsp (15 mL)	chopped fresh thyme, or 1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried

1. Remove cores from tomatoes. Cut tomatoes in half crosswise and gently squeeze out excess seeds. Place cut side up on a parchment-lined baking sheet (cut a tiny slice off bottoms if necessary so they will sit upright).
2. Drizzle or spray tomatoes with olive oil and sprinkle with salt, pepper, rosemary and thyme. Roast in a preheated 400 F (200 C) oven for 45 to 50 minutes, or until some juices have evaporated and tomatoes are starting to brown on the bottom. Arrange tomatoes attractively on a serving plate. Serve warm or cold. Makes 24 to 30.

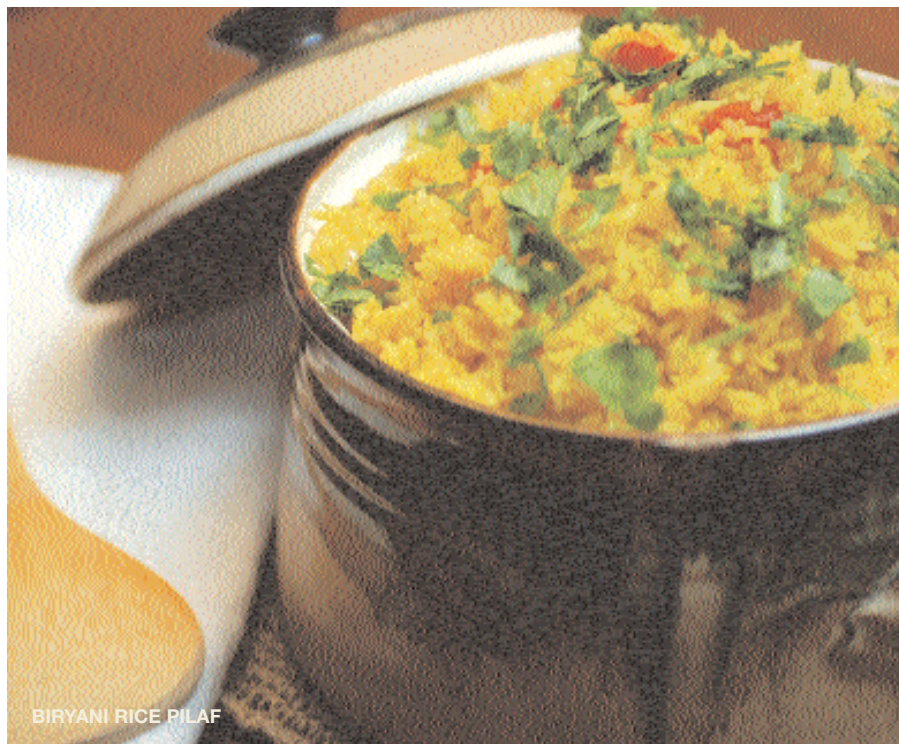
## RECIPES THE PERFECT DINNER

### BIRYANI RICE PILAF

from **BONNIE STERN'S  
ESSENTIALS OF HOME COOKING**

2 cups (500 mL) basmati rice  
2 tbsp (25 mL) ghee or vegetable oil  
1 onion, chopped  
2 tbsp (25 mL) curry paste  
1/4 cup (50 mL) tomato sauce  
2 1/2 cups (625 mL) water  
1 tsp (5 mL) salt  
1 tsp (5 mL) lemon juice  
2 tbsp (25 mL) chopped fresh cilantro

1. Rinse rice well and soak in cold water for 30 minutes. Drain well.
2. Heat ghee in a large saucepan on medium-high heat. Add onion and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, or until tender and slightly browned.
3. Add curry paste and cook for a few minutes. Add rice and cook, stirring, for a few minutes longer. Add tomato sauce and cook, stirring, for another few minutes.
4. Add water and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer for about 20 minutes, or until rice is tender and water has been absorbed.
5. Add salt and lemon juice. Taste and adjust seasonings if necessary. Sprinkle with cilantro. Makes 6 servings.



BIRYANI RICE PILAF

### PLUM AND PECAN CRUMBLE

from **NIGELLA LAWSON'S  
HOW TO BE A DOMESTIC GODDESS**

for the filling:

approximately 1 kg plums  
30g unsalted butter, plus more for greasing  
2-4 tablespoons light muscovado sugar,  
depending on sourness of fruit

1 scant tablespoon cornflour  
20 cm round pie dish, buttered

for the crumble topping:

150g cold unsalted butter, diced  
250g self-raising flour  
150g demerara sugar  
200g pecans, some chopped finely, others  
left larger or whole

Preheat the oven to 190° C/gas mark 5 and put in a baking sheet.

Halve the plums and put them cut-side up in the dish. You may find you don't need all of them, but squeeze in as many as will fit comfortably. Dot with the butter, sprinkle with the sugar and put, uncovered, in the oven for about 20 minutes. I know it's not normal to cook the base of a crumble first, but I find plums need a head start. You want the fruit's juices to have run a little and the fruit itself to be moving towards tender.

While the plums are cooking, make the crumble topping (or you can make this in advance if you prefer). Rub the butter into the flour, either with your fingers or in a free-standing mixer with the flat paddle. I find the processor makes the crumb a little too fine and you want texture, not Caribbean sand, here. But what you can do to make this better is finish off by rubbing the mixture through your fingers for a while—soft pad of thumb fluttering against soft pad of index or first three fingers—to clump up some of the topping. Fork the sugar and nuts into the crumble mixture, and set aside for a moment.

When the plums have had their time in the oven, pour some of the liquid into a little bowl in which you have placed the cornflour. Stir to a paste, then stir into the plum dish. Now add the crumble topping, pressing down lightly around the edges. Put the crumble back on the baking sheet in the oven and cook for 25 minutes or until the crumble is cooked and speckled golden-brown.

Eat, for choice, with custard. Serves 4-6. ■



PLUM AND PECAN CRUMBLE

