

edible ASPEN



sowing wild oats

the case for dirt

out of the cellar

pandemic promise

Flavors of the Valley



While testing and translating restaurant recipes for *The Aspen Cookbook*, an editor gets into the secret minds of chefs. By Amanda Rae

On a warm August evening, my tiny apartment kitchen is a disaster zone. The cooktop is slicked with oil, cinnamon sugar sticks to the counter (and my bare feet), and a mixing bowl smeared with batter residue begins to crust over. Amid all this, though, is one pretty picture: a half sheet pan holding 40 perfectly round, golden-brown donut holes. I have to get them out of my apartment so I don't eat them all.

Forty-five minutes later, I make my sixth and final delivery, to a colleague from SkyWest Airlines whom I haven't seen since we were furloughed in March due to the coronavirus pandemic. As I hand over a grease-smudged paper bag, a socially distanced smile makes the entire, messy process worth it.

That was my third attempt to perfect the W Aspen cider donut recipe for *The Aspen Cookbook*, a project I'd been working on nearly nonstop since May. Young Professionals Network Aspen, a subcommittee of the Aspen Board of Realtors, had hired me as editor of the cookbook, sales of which benefit a relief fund for restaurants affected by the crisis.

We gathered more than 100 favorite recipes from 69 Roaring Fork Valley chefs. Nobody realized that the recipes would need major work for home-cooking success. Through much research, communication, and trial and error, I was able to fill in the blanks on missing ingredients and incomplete instructions and shrink enormous proportions to yield recipes useful to home cooks.

I was testing Victoria+co's Australian pavlova—a finicky meringue that ultimately made me realize my oven's control board had burned out—when Chef Vinnie Bagford of Bamboo Bear

called. I had inquired about his vegetable pho broth: How might we translate ounces of cinnamon sticks and black peppercorns into measurements a home cook would understand?

"It's less about measuring and more about the ratio of ingredients for a balanced dish," he told me. The timing was ironic. Baking, of course, requires precision, determination, and a bit of luck (especially at high altitude). Yet Bagford's message—that chefs cook by feel and intuition—added to the challenge of the project.

During four months of editing, testing, and packaging recipes, my relationship with each dish progressed. When Caribou Club Chef Miles Angelo sent photos of sheets of notebook paper with his handwritten wild mushroom tamale recipe, I transcribed the copy.

Midway through preparing the masa mixture, I panicked. Salt was absent from the ingredient list! I texted him and got an instant reply. We refined the recipe further. I tested it again, and increased the filling proportion. Finally, he admitted, "I just kind of eyeball it."

Local diners will recognize many dishes: Chef Miguel Diaz's Arrichoke Bruschetta at Ellina; Chef Chris Lanter's inimitable Colorado rack of lamb *au jus*, on the Cache Cache menu for 20 years; and Piñon's Ahi Tuna Tacos, a staple since owner Rob Mobilian helmed the kitchen as founding chef in 1988.

Alone in my apartment, working on this project connected me with the restaurant world more than ever before. Getting into the minds of Aspen chefs and putting their creativity on paper for posterity nourished me through a tough time. As an uncertain winter unfolds, I hope *The Aspen Cookbook* (\$45 at AspenCookbook.com) does the same for our community.



Kristy Bates, director of nutrition services at Aspen Valley Hospital, is one of 69 chefs who contributed recipes to *The Aspen Cookbook*. See next page for Bates's award-winning soup recipe.

PHOTO BY WILL McDONALD



ROASTED CARROT COCONUT GINGER SOUP WITH TOASTED COCONUT AND BASIL

From Aspen Valley Hospital Nutrition Services Director Kristy Bates, this creamy vegan soup has been a staple at the hospital's Castle Creek Café for at least 15 years. In January 2020, Bates's version topped with a tropical-herbal garnish was named champion of Soupsköl 2.0 at the Aspen Art Museum.

SERVES 4-5

- 2 pounds carrots, unpeeled
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 6-7 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 medium yellow or white onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger, divided
- 1 can (about 15 ounces) coconut milk
- 1 quart (4 cups) vegetable broth

TOASTED COCONUT BASIL GARNISH

- ¼ cup unsweetened dried coconut
- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves

ROAST THE CARROTS

Preheat oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or coat with cooking spray.

Chop carrots into 1-inch chunks. Transfer to a large mixing bowl. Drizzle 1 tablespoon oil over carrots, add 1 tablespoon brown sugar, and 1 pinch each salt and pepper. Toss to coat.

Spread carrots evenly onto prepared baking sheet. Add 3 to 4 sprigs thyme. Roast 20 minutes. Toss carrots, rotate sheet, and roast another 15 to 20 minutes.

COOK THE SOUP

Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a Dutch oven or large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. When hot, add onions and cook until translucent. Add garlic and 1 tablespoon ginger. Cook 2 to

3 minutes until aromatics begin to brown. Add coconut milk and vegetable broth. Let flavors meld while carrots finish cooking.

When carrots are browned slightly around the edges, transfer to soup. Simmer 2 to 3 minutes until warmed through.

MAKE THE TOASTED COCONUT BASIL GARNISH

Toast coconut on an ungreased baking sheet in a 400°F oven about 5 minutes. Watch carefully to avoid burning! Cool.

Stack, roll, and slice basil leaves (5 to 6 at a time) to chiffonade.

FINISH THE SOUP

Transfer soup to a food processor or high-powered blender. Add remaining 1 tablespoon ginger and thyme leaves (stripped from sprigs). Carefully blend, venting lid to allow hot steam to escape, until smooth. Taste and season with salt, if necessary. Divide among serving bowls and top with Toasted Coconut Basil Garnish.

Soup may be refrigerated up to 6 days or frozen up to 3 months. Reheat before serving.

WILL McDONALD

WILD MUSHROOM TAMALES

Served with smoked elk, charred leeks, apricot jam, and red wine-garlic sauce, this savory tamale stuffed with wild mushrooms "is a true hunter-gatherer dish," says Caribou Club Executive Chef Miles Angelo, who has been preparing it there for 20 years.

MAKES 14 TAMALES

MASA

- 2 cups water
- ¼ cup diced yellow onion
- 2 large Roma tomatoes, halved
- 1 large jalapeño, seeded, halved
- 4 cups masa harina (Maseca brand preferred)
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 18-22 dry cornhusks, for tamales/ties

WILD MUSHROOM FILLING

- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ¾ cup diced white onion
- 5 cups sliced wild mushrooms
- ¾ cup dry white wine
- 4 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

PREPARE THE VEGETABLE BROTH FOR MASA

Add water, onion, tomatoes, and jalapeño to a medium saucepan over high heat. Once boiling, lower to medium and simmer until vegetables are tender, about 25 minutes. Remove from heat.

Purée vegetables and liquid in a blender or food processor until smooth. Measure 3 cups mixture, adding hot water if necessary. Set aside.

COOK THE WILD MUSHROOM FILLING

Melt butter in a large sauté pan over medium heat. When sizzling, add onions and mushrooms. Cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 10 to 12 minutes.

Raise heat to medium-high. Deglaze pan with wine and cook 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until all liquid is absorbed. Add thyme and season with salt and pepper. Remove from heat and cool completely.

MILES ANGELO

MAKE THE MASA

Soak 18 to 22 cornhusks in a large bowl or roasting pan of warm water for 10 minutes. (If some tear, extras will be needed.)

Combine masa harina, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.

In a stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment, whip butter on medium-high speed until fluffy, about 3 minutes.

Add dry ingredients and mix on low speed until fully incorporated. While mixing, slowly add vegetable purée until a moist, smooth paste forms. (Add more masa, 1 tablespoon at a time, if dough is sticky.)

ROLL AND COOK THE TAMALES

Drain cornhusks and pat dry. Tear 28 thin strips from 4 or 5 husks. Lay out 14 whole husks on a clean, flat work surface.

Using wet hands, spread ½ cup masa in a 4-to-5-inch-long rectangle centered on each husk. Top with mushroom filling, distributing evenly atop masa. Facing long edge, fold/roll husk around masa and filling to create a log. Use cornhusk strips to tie both ends securely. Repeat with all tamales.

Add 1 to 2 inches water to a large stockpot lined with a metal steamer basket over medium-high heat. When boiling, stand tamales upright, leaning against side of pot. Drape a clean, wet kitchen towel over tamales (to trap steam) and cover with a lid. Steam tamales about 80 minutes, replenishing water periodically, until firm and husk peels away easily and cleanly.

Tamales may be refrigerated up to 1 week or frozen (cooked or uncooked) up to 6 months.

