



T E A M

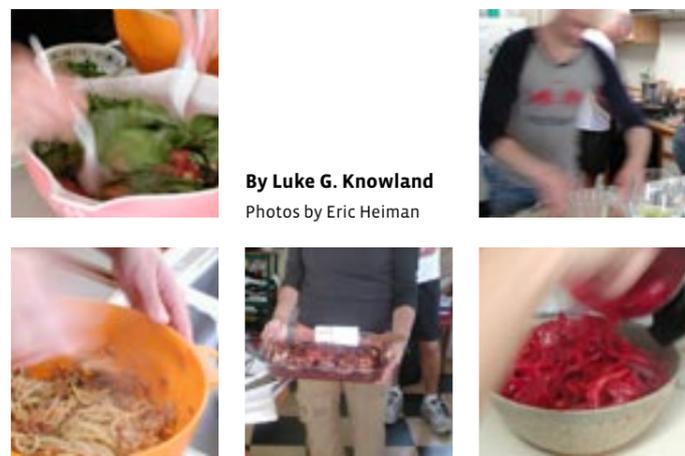


C O O K



I N G

Too many cooks is a heck of a lot of fun



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By the time a guest asks if there's anything he can do to help—which is really nice, don't get us wrong—it's usually too late. You've spent the day in the kitchen, and everything is pretty much under control. But what if you did let the guests help? What if you really let them into the kitchen and put knives in their hands? What if you made an evening of it?

We call our exercise in group culinary adventure Team Cooking. Think of it as group entertainment, like a day of river rafting, except without the life vests. Everyone collaborates on everything—the prepping, the cooking, the serving. And then, everybody eats. Doesn't matter if it looks good; it's an achievement.

Here's how it works. Invite four or five friends and make five plates: a salad, a pasta dish, a vegetable dish, a main course, and a dessert. But how do you coordinate six people in one kitchen?

The answer is teams. Break down all the prepping and cooking into segments that make collaboration more natural, so that each participant has a hand in all parts of the meal but no one person is the sole owner of any single dish. Clearly some of the teams have less difficult tasks (mix drinks, put on music, clean dishes) at certain points in the game, but all parts really are important. You can't dress the salad if the bowl is still dirty from the cake mixture, and someone has to make sure everyone has a fresh beverage and the evening's soundtrack is playing. Oh, and you'll also want to have someone watching the clock to keep teams on schedule.

One final word of advice: relax. Nothing creates stress like stress. One team didn't chop the onion fine enough for you? Consider the coarseness

“added texture.” Is it taking longer than planned to whip the cream? Mix up another round of drinks.

GO, TEAM!

Here's how to start off an evening of Team Cooking:

The ingredients are laid out, the equipment is handy. Everyone has a copy of the recipes and the timeline.

Now count off, gym-class style, and separate into three teams. Remember that this is supposed to be fun. Team Cooking is meant to be a way for some friends to get together and have a good time and wind up with a decent meal at the end of it all.

Ready? Then let's start Team Cooking.

THE TIMELINE

The timeline is loosely based on a 2 1/2 hour schedule from start to finish, from clean counter to having the cake cooled and frosted. We've color coordinated the grid so you can more easily see what dishes are being worked on at a glance. Our timeline assumes guests will arrive around 5:30 and sit down to eat at 8:00. The timeline also assumes you've gone to the store and procured all the ingredients already.

Use the timeline as a rough countdown to when you want to plate up and eat. Don't forget the holding patterns (see sidebar), or to have fun.

Actions here are abbreviated. See the recipes for full instructions.

THE MENU	Baby Arugula Salad with Persimmons and Toasted Hazelnuts	Chicken Breasts with Shallots, Chèvre Cheese, Figs, and a Port Reduction Sauce
	Fettuccini with Porcini and Pancetta Cream	Chocolate Cassis Cake with Whipped Cream and Raspberries
	Herbed Beets with Fennel	

BABY ARUGULA SALAD WITH PERSIMMONS AND TOASTED HAZELNUTS

You can substitute mixed baby greens for the arugula and frisée.

20 mins

ACTIVE TIME: 10 mins

SERVES: 6

SALAD

- ½ cup shelled and unsalted hazelnuts
- 1 head frisée
- 3 fuyu persimmons
- 6 ounces baby arugula

VINAIGRETTE

- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon sherry vinegar
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons olive oil

01 Preheat your oven to 400°.

02 Spread the hazelnuts on a baking sheet, or in a small pie tin, and place in the oven to toast. After about 5 minutes, give the pan a good shake to prevent the nuts from burning on one side. After another 3 minutes, give the nuts another shake. Remove from oven after another 2 minutes and pour the nuts into a bowl to cool.

03 With a knife, remove the stems and dark ends from the frisée. Cut what remains into bite-size pieces.

04 Rinse and peel the persimmons, and cut them into slices. Wrap the cooled hazelnuts in a dish towel and rub them vigorously to remove the majority of the skins. Chop the nuts coarsely.

05 Combine both vinegars, add salt and pepper to taste, and slowly whisk in the olive oil.

06 Place the arugula in a bowl with the frisée, persimmon slices, and toasted hazelnuts.

07 When ready to serve, pour the dressing over the salad and toss using your hands.

PERSIMMONS

There are two main types of persimmons—Fuyu and Hachiya. Hachiya are more commercially available, and are astringent until they're soft and ripe. Fuyu are non-astringent, and can be eaten while still firm. Both are tasty, but if you can get Fuyu, get them, they are better with the salad.



FETTUCCINI WITH PORCINI AND PANCETTA CREAM

TOTAL TIME: 1 hr 15 mins

ACTIVE TIME: 35 mins

SERVES: 6

- 3 Fresh Porcini Mushrooms, (or 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon dry vermouth
- ¾ pound pancetta, 1/8-inch slices
- 8 cloves garlic
- ½ medium yellow onion
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- Kosher Salt [for the pasta water]
- 1 pound fettuccini
- 6 ounces parmesan cheese
- 4 tablespoons chopped italian parsley (plus some florets for garnish)

If using fresh mushrooms, rub the dirt and pebbles from the cap (both top and bottom) and stem of each mushroom. Cut off and discard the very bottom of the stems. Cut the caps from the stems, and slice the caps

thinly (about ¼-inch slices), then dice the stems. Combine the sliced caps and diced stems in a bowl and add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and the dry vermouth. Toss and set aside for at least 30 minutes.

For dried mushrooms, put them in a bowl with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and the dry vermouth. Add enough warm water to cover the mushrooms, and mix with your fingers. Let sit 30 minutes to reconstitute the mushrooms.

Chop the pancetta into ¼-inch cubes. Mince the garlic. Chop the onion into medium dice.

In a large sauté pan over a medium-high flame, add 1 tablespoon olive oil. When the pan is hot, add the pancetta and cook until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Stir frequently so the pancetta doesn't burn to the pan.

Add the mushrooms (liquid and all), the garlic and onion to the pancetta,. Let this simmer until it is slightly reduced and the

garlic and onions are soft. While cooking, grate half the parmesan cheese and reserve.

Once the mixture has reduced, lower the flame to medium-low heat, add the cream, and let it simmer about 5 more minutes.

HOLDING PATTERN

This is a fine place either to drop the heat down to low or to kill the heat entirely.

Fill a large stock pot with water and bring to a rolling boil. Once the water is boiling, salt it generously, add the fettuccini and cook according to the directions on the package.

Warm the sauce over low heat while the pasta is cooking. Drain the pasta when it's ready, then return it to the stock pot. Pour the sauce over the top, add the grated cheese and mix it with tongs.

Serve the pasta in bowls and top with shards of parmesan cheese and the chopped parsley.

HERBED BEETS WITH FENNEL

TOTAL TIME: 40 mins

ACTIVE TIME: 20 mins

SERVES: 6

This recipe also works well with potatoes in place of the beets.

- 6 medium red or chiongia beets
- 2 large fennel bulbs
- 1 bunch chives
- ½ bunch tarragon
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup white wine v
- 2 tablespoons whole-grain dijon mustard
- 1 medium lemon, juiced

In a pot, cover the beets with cold water and bring to a boil. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes, until a knife easily goes into them. Drain, then peel under cold running water. Set the beets aside to cool.

Cut the green tops off the fennel and slice the bulbs in half lengthwise. Remove the cores, slice the bulbs lengthwise in ¼-inch strips, and reserve. Chop the chives and reserve (about 3 tablespoons). Remove the tarragon leaves from the stems, chop, and reserve (about 3 tablespoons).

Put the olive oil and butter in a medium stock pot and set over medium heat. Add the fennel, salt, and pepper, and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the white wine, mustard, and lemon juice. Let simmer. Slice the cooled beets ¼-inch thick.

Add the sliced beets to the stock pot and cook for another 5 minutes.

Add the chopped chives and chopped tarragon. Salt and pepper to taste, and spoon into a bowl.

HOLDING PATTERN

You can finish this ahead of time, let it cool, and simply warm it up when you're ready to eat.

CHICKEN BREASTS WITH SHALLOTS, CHÈVRE CHEESE, FIGS, AND A PORT REDUCTION SAUCE

TOTAL TIME: 1 hr

ACTIVE TIME: 30 mins

SERVES: 6

- 10 fresh figs
- 4 shallots
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ bunch fresh thyme
- 2 cups port (tawny or reserve)
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 6 ounces chèvre cheese
- 6 chicken breasts (about 3 pounds)
- salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Toothpicks (if wooden, soak them in water for 30 minutes)

Preheat oven to 400°F. Rinse the figs and, with a knife, remove the stems and slice in half. Reserve.

THE TIMELINE

Actions here are abbreviated. See the recipes for full instructions.

TIME	TEAM ONE	TEAM TWO	TEAM THREE
-5:30	CAKE STEP 02	Mix Drinks, queue music	CAKE STEP 01
-5:35	CAKE STEP 03	CAKE STEP 04	PASTA STEP 01
-5:40		PASTA STEP 02	
-5:45	CHICKEN STEP 01		BEETS STEP 01
-5:50		CAKE STEP 05	
-5:55			CAKE STEP 06
-6:00	CAKE STEP 07		
-6:05		CHICKEN STEP 03	CHICKEN STEP 02
-6:10	PASTA STEP 03	Wash cake dishes	Check beets
-6:15			
-6:20		PASTA STEP 04	Clean knives
-6:25	Wash dishes in sink	Check drinks and music	SALAD STEP 01
-6:30	CAKE STEP 08		PASTA STEP 05
-6:35	SALAD STEP 03	SALAD STEP 02	
-6:40			
-6:45			SALAD STEP 04
-6:50	CHICKEN STEP 04	Play tricks on teams 1 and 3	
-6:55			CHICKEN STEP 05
-7:00	SALAD STEP 05		
-7:05			
-7:10			
-7:15	Get plates and bowls and silverware ready		Check on pets
-7:20		BEETS STEP 02	
-7:25			CAKE STEP 09
-7:30	CHICKEN STEP 06	CAKE STEP 10	
-7:35	CHICKEN STEP 07		CAKE STEP 11
-7:40		PASTA STEP 06	
-7:45		BEETS STEP 03	
-7:50	BEETS STEP 04		SALAD STEP 06
-7:55	CHICKEN STEP 09	PASTA STEP 07 CHICKEN STEP 10	BEETS STEP 05 CHICKEN STEP 08
-8:00	SALAD STEP 07	BEETS STEP 06 PASTA STEP 08	CHICKEN STEP 11

