

*Cooking*



*for Couples*

*Lauren Blacker*

My name is Lauren and I live in the Boston area with my wonderful boyfriend Ryan, my fat cat Isabella, and two amazing roommates Deana and Erin. I love to cook, decorate, explore new places and ride horses – I am a horseback riding instructor (riding for almost 20 years now).

Ryan is a fisherman and a blogger, so naturally we both share a love for all things outdoors. On the weekends I'm going for a hike, exploring a new town or trying new recipes in the kitchen.

My cooking philosophy is to eat healthy, clean foods with simple ingredients that make you feel good. I believe that exercise, a well-balanced diet and a positive attitude can change everything for the better, and I hope to share this philosophy with you as well!

Over the past 3 years, I have changed my entire life by using this philosophy, and I have never felt better about myself. Through this lifestyle change, I have learned to use whatever ingredients I have in my kitchen to create delicious and nutritious meals for Ryan and I.

Of course I make mistakes, but I am excited to share my fails and triumphs and hopefully inspire you to start cooking too!

Happy Cooking Couples!

Lauren



*Ready, Set, Cook!*

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## *Shrimp and Asparagus Pasta*

Working outside in the dead of winter in New England can be a little tough. Thankfully the horses keep me happy and busy, but it makes for a lot of convincing for me to be cooking when I get home.

And really, all that shivering can leave a girl hungry and tired!

So as I was driving home I started cataloging the ingredients I had in my fridge and started craving pasta with a garlic white wine sauce....interesting craving, right? Well lucky me, I had a fresh bunch of asparagus and some leftover mushrooms that work so perfectly in a lighter sauce. I added the tomatoes for a little color and some extra juice, and the dish just really came together.

Shrimp, asparagus and a few mushrooms lightly simmered in a garlic white wine sauce tossed with whole wheat pasta – a simple, quick and easy dinner that can be prepared in about 20 minutes with very little effort...perfect for nights when I want to face plant onto my pillow as soon as I arrive home!



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## Quick Weeknight Shrimp & Asparagus Pasta



Prep time: 5 mins    Cook time: 20 mins    Total time: 25 mins  
Serves: 2

### Ingredients

- Pasta or penne cooked according to directions
- about 20-24 uncooked, peeled and deveined shrimp (10-12 per person)
- 1 C mushrooms, sliced
- 1 C asparagus spears, ends trimmed off then cut in half
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 C white wine
- olive oil for cooking
- juice of 1 lemon
- cherry or plum tomatoes, quartered
- parmesan cheese, shredded

### Instructions

1. In a large pan, warm oil and add mushrooms and asparagus. Cover and let cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Add garlic, white wine, tomatoes and shrimp then cover and let it simmer until wine reduces by half and shrimp is cooked through (about 5 minutes)
3. Stir in cooked pasta to let juices combine, then squeeze lemon juice over and stir again.
4. Season with salt and pepper to taste, then serve with parmesan cheese.



## Roast Chicken Provençale

Imagine that you are sitting in your own French villa, overlooking the lavender fields while sipping wine with friends. The sun is setting with a warm breeze whipping through the fields. Soft music plays in the background and the smell of fresh lavender fills the air.

That is how I can describe this dish, pure and simple....heaven.



It's one of my favorite dishes and has convinced me that traveling is in my future...especially to sample real French cuisine. My Mom made this a long time ago and I still haven't forgotten about it, so what better time to make it again than on New Year's Day.

The pan juices mixed with the roasted garlic make for the most ridiculous dressing over the chicken and the brininess of the olives give it an extra kick of flavor.

When I was at the olive counter, I picked up some marinated sundried tomatoes to add, but this was not part of the original recipe. Adding fennel, roasted and marinated mushrooms or anything else that catches your eye at the olive counter would be a wonderful addition to this recipe.

Chefs Note: If you are using chicken breasts and not a whole chicken, the cooking time will vary, so be careful not to overcook the meat.





## Roast Chicken Provencale



Prep time: 10 mins    Cook time: 2 hours    Total time: 2 hours 10 mins  
Serves: 4

### Ingredients

- 8 large shallots, peeled
- 6 ripe plum tomatoes, quartered
- 1 can artichoke hearts, drained
- 1 garlic head, cloves separated
- ½ C brined olives (I used a mixture)
- ¼ C sundried tomatoes
- ¼ C fresh lemon juice
- ¼ C olive oil
- 2 TBS chopped fresh rosemary, or 2 tsp dried, crumbled
- 2 TBS chopped fresh thyme, or 2 tsp dried, crumbled
- 1 C low sodium chicken broth
- 1 4lb chicken or 4 boneless skinless chicken breasts, trimmed

### Instructions

1. Position rack in the center of the oven and preheat at 350.
2. Place shallots, tomatoes (both kinds), artichoke hearts, garlic, and olives in a large roasting pan.
3. Pour lemon juice and oil over, stirring to combine evenly.
4. Season with salt and pepper, then pour ¼ C chicken broth into pan. Cover and bake vegetables for 20 minutes.
5. Season chicken with salt and pepper, then add chicken to the vegetables in the pan. Cover and roast 45 minutes – 1 hour.
6. Baste chicken and vegetables with pan juices and increase temperature to 450.
7. Roast uncovered until chicken is brown and crisp and juices run clear, then baste frequently while cooking 20 minutes longer.
8. Transfer chicken to platter. Using a slotted spoon, remove all veggies except 6 garlic cloves.
9. In a food processor, combine garlic and pan juices. Process until sauce is smooth. Thin sauce with remaining broth is necessary. Season with salt and pepper.
10. Serve chicken and veggies, spooning sauce over as wanted.

## Heirloom Tomato Crostini with Whipped Feta

I made this appetizer for a New Year's Eve party, straight from one of Ina Garten's wonderful cookbooks which I adapted into my own little recipe, Heirloom Tomato Crostini with Whipped Feta.

These little pieces of heaven were so good, with so many flavors packed onto one crostini; everyone at the party couldn't put them down-even Ryan and the guys!

We had a great time making this the morning of the party, especially because it's just so easy to nibble on everything as you cook!



Chef's Note: Be sure not to assemble the crostinis too far in advance because the bread will become soggy and no one wants that!

### Heirloom Tomato Crostinis with Whipped Feta

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Serves: 6-8

#### Ingredients

- 6 oz crumbled feta
- 2 oz ¼ less fat cream cheese
- ½ C olive oil, divided
- 2 TBS fresh lemon juice
- salt & pepper
- 2 TBS minced shallots
- 2 lbs heirloom tomatoes. ½ in diced
- 3 TBS julienned fresh basil leaves
- 20-25 diagonal baguette slices, brushed with olive oil and toasted at 425 for 8-10 mins
- 2 TBS pine nuts – toasted over low heat in a pan until slightly browned

#### Instructions

1. For the whipped feta, combine feta and cream cheese in a food processor until mixed. Add ½ cup olive oil, the lemon juice, ½ tsp salt and ¼ tsp pepper and process again until smooth. This can be made a day in advance.
2. For the tomatoes, combine with shallots and basil. Set aside.
3. To assemble crostinis, spread each slice with a generous amount of whipped feta, then top with tomatoes. Sprinkle toasted pine nuts over crostinis and serve.



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## Spicy Sesame Beef and Broccoli Stir Fry

The day I made this for Ryan, he had joined me on a trip to Home Goods. This was not his smartest move.

My main intentions were to find the pillows I saw in South Carolina while visiting my parents over the Holidays (which of course they didn't have), a new baking sheet (Ryan ruined our last one beyond repair LOL) and to get a case of good wine glasses (which of course they didn't have).

Those *were* my intentions.

Instead, I visited the candle and cookware aisles roughly 3 or 4 times, just circling the store and poor Ryan trying to find any little chair or bench to sit on. He was asked his opinion on bathroom rugs and the smell of candles, all of which were not intended for my purchase, but I mean really, once you see them on the shelf that light bulb goes off and you say, "Oh yeah! I *need* a bathroom rug!" And now that their new spring stuff is out, you can't blame me for wanting to smell every candle in the whole darn store!

I will say though that Ryan never once uttered a word, but is that good or bad??? Nonetheless I had to make it up to him, so I cooked him a perfect Sunday night stir fry. We love stir fry in every way possible – peanut sauce, sweet or spicy sauce – and no matter what it always comes out delicious...and it's so easy to make!

I had some lean beef, shredded carrots, baby bella mushrooms and a head of broccoli on hand, so that is what I used *today*. Other times I throw in onion and pepper, or baby corn and water chestnuts, but we always serve ours with brown rice which I recommend.

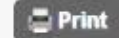
Tonight's stir fry sauce was a little bit spicy *and* a little bit sweet, but with loads of fresh ginger and garlic, it turned into a sweet and savory meal perfect for yet another New Year's Resolution Healthy Dinner!



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### Spicy Sesame Beef & Broccoli Stir Fry



Prep time: 15 mins   Cook time: 25 mins   Total time: 40 mins  
Serves: 2-3

#### Ingredients

- Sauce:
- 3 TBS low sodium soy sauce
- 1/4 tsp sesame oil
- 1 TBS hoisen sauce
- 1 TBS Srirachi Hot Sauce
- Dash of honey (about 1 tsp)
- 1 TBS sesame seeds
- 1 lb lean beef, sliced into thin strips
- 1 head of broccoli
- 1/2 carton of baby bella mushrooms, washed
- 1 handful shredded carrots
- olive oil for cooking
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 TBS fresh ginger, chopped
- scallions for garnish

#### Instructions

1. Sear beef on both sides, then set aside.
2. Steam broccoli in a little olive oil and water until broccoli is partially cooked through
3. Add beef back to pan along with other veggies, ginger and garlic.
4. Combine all ingredients for sauce and stir into pan.
5. Cover and let cook again until beef is cooked through
6. Serve with brown rice

## Easy Lemon Chicken

Typical night: You get home from a looooooong day, tired, cold and starving (I know, poor me ☺), and you need something quick and easy.

Sound about right?

Yep, I know the feeling. So might I recommend Lemon Chicken???

With just a few ingredients, you get a great meal full of flavor, cooked in lightning speed time!

Ok I've sold you on the idea...you're welcome.

Lemon Chicken has been a staple in my diet since the day I was able to chew food. My Mom would make this almost on a weekly basis, served with cous-cous and steamed broccoli.

When I moved out on my own in college, it was one of the first things I ever learned to cook. I like to make mine extra lemony, and if I'm feeling fancy I'll add some fresh (and I mean only fresh) rosemary and thyme sprigs, with garlic, white wine and olive oil.

My Mom and I are huge fans of Panko, which is a larger bread crumb that gives it a little extra crunch. If you like to spice it up like I do, add some red pepper flakes to the Panko. I also tried some lemon zest in there too which gave it a little extra kick of lemon when it was pan seared.

I'm getting hungry just looking at this!





## Easy Lemon Chicken



Prep time: 10 mins   Cook time: 15 mins   Total time: 25 mins  
Serves: 2-4

### Ingredients

- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed and halved lengthwise
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 TBS olive oil
- juice of 2 lemons
- ½ lemon, sliced thin
- ½ C dry white wine
- 1 egg
- 1 C Panko
- 1 TBS red pepper flakes & 1 tsp lemon zest (optional)
- salt & pepper

### Instructions

1. Place a large pan with oil and garlic over medium heat.
2. Get 2 bowls – in one, whisk egg, in the second mix Panko with red pepper flakes and lemon zest
3. Dredge chicken in egg then in crumbs
4. Pan sear both sides of the chicken (brown both sides)
5. Pour in lemon juice and wine and garnish with s&p and let simmer for 10 minutes or until chicken is cooked through
6. Serve with lemon slices

## Balsamic Roasted Brussels Sprouts and Carrots

Yum!!!!

What could be more exciting on a Friday night than Brussels sprouts and carrots?!

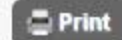
But seriously, this is one heck of a side dish. I paired it with Lemon Chicken, however this would go great with chicken, beef, fish, sausage.....you name it – it's delicious.

I love to roast veggies, and pretty soon you'll be seeing much more in the name of roasting. What's great about it is you can pair so many different varieties of vegetables, spices, sauces and herbs, and besides – who doesn't love the smell of roasting *anything* in the oven??? The only hard part is being patient for it to cook just right, which is something I lack – thankfully Ryan is slowly teaching me patience.

The Brussels come out perfectly soft while the carrots are crisp with a hint of softness – nothing overcooked, just pure vegetable goodness!



### Balsamic Roasted Brussels Sprouts & Carrots



Prep time: 20 mins   Cook time: 1 hour   Total time: 1 hour 20 mins  
Serves: 3-4

#### Ingredients

- 1 head fresh brussels sprouts, plucked with ends cut off
- 1 LB carrots, peeled & quartered
- 4 TBS olive oil
- 2 TBS minced garlic
- salt & pepper
- dash of cajun seasoning
- 6 TBS balsamic vinegar

#### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 400 while cutting veggies
2. Tip: Preheat the baking dish in the oven for 10 minutes before placing veggies in – it gives them a nice searing before they go in to be baked
3. Toss veggies with all ingredients except balsamic vinegar in baking dish.
4. Cover and let veggies roast for 45minutes to an hour, or until carrots are slightly soft – stir occasionally
5. Pour balsamic vinegar over veggies, cover and continue roasted for 10 minutes more.
6. Remove from oven, stir then serve

## Twice Baked Potatoes

These are done the real way and they are heavenly.

Every Christmas my parents and I make a roast served with Twice Baked Potatoes - yet another dish that I couldn't live without.

Have you figured out that my family and I are foodies at heart? Our plans revolve around good food, good drinks, and great conversation...but nevertheless, food.

My Mom puts a mixture of fresh chives, shredded cheddar cheese, a little butter and her little secret...Creme Freche. If you haven't heard of it, it's much like sour cream but with a sharper cheese taste to its creaminess. A little salt, pepper and paprika finish it off for a delicious side dish perfect for the holidays...or any day for that matter!

The real point of this dish is to take your time with it. To actually bake the potatoes in the oven rather than quick cook them in the microwave makes a big difference. Of course I've been guilty of doing this once or twice when home by myself, but for the real taste you have to just let it take its course naturally.





## Twice Baked Potatoes



Prep time: 5 mins    Cook time: 2 hours    Total time: 2 hours 5 mins  
Serves: 5

### Ingredients

- 5 Baking Potatoes, scrubbed
- 2-4 TBS butter
- 3-4 oz creme fraiche
- shredded cheddar
- 2-3 TBS fresh chives, sliced thin
- salt & pepper
- paprika for topping

### Instructions

1. Bake the potatoes at 400 for about 1 hour or until potato is slightly soft
2. Cut the potatoes in half lengthwise and scoop out the insides into a bowl.
3. Mash the potato and all ingredients except for paprika
4. Spoon mixture back into potato shell, then sprinkle with paprika
5. Bake the potatoes for a second time with fillings at 350 for 30 minutes or until slightly browned on top.

## Maple Roasted Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes have been close to my heart for a *long* time now. When I was a baby, my Mom told me I *refused* to eat anything else, just sweet potatoes, and things certainly haven't changed!

This recipe came from a Whole Foods Market chef. She was giving out samples of this along with roasted Brussels sprouts and I was addicted, and since I was just in VT last weekend and picked up some REAL Grade A Dark Amber VT Maple Syrup, I figured this would be the best time to make these babies.

I love this recipe for so many reasons – baking them gives that slightly crispy, maybe even a little bit “sticky” texture on the outside with a perfectly cooked inside, and the sauce has a sweet yet bitter flavor to it. It has been served to my roommates many times and they are quite the hit.



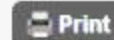
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## Roasted Maple Sweet Potatoes



5.0 from 1 reviews

Prep time: 5 mins    Cook time: 45 mins    Total time: 50 mins  
Serves: 2

### Ingredients

- 2 large sweet potatoes, washed then cut into bite size cubes
- olive oil – enough to cover the potatoes in for baking
- salt & pepper
- Sauce:
  - ¼ C olive oil
  - 2 tsp Pure Maple Syrup
  - ½ TBS balsamic vinegar
  - ½ tsp Dijon mustard

### Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 400.
2. In a bowl, combine potatoes with s&p and coat in olive oil.
3. On a baking sheet, spread potatoes out and bake for 35-45 minutes, or until cooked through, turning them with a spoon once.
4. In a small bowl, whisk together the ingredients for the sauce.
5. After potatoes are cooked, let them cool and pour into a bowl or a serving platter.
6. Drizzle sauce over potatoes and enjoy!

## Mom's Pecan Pie

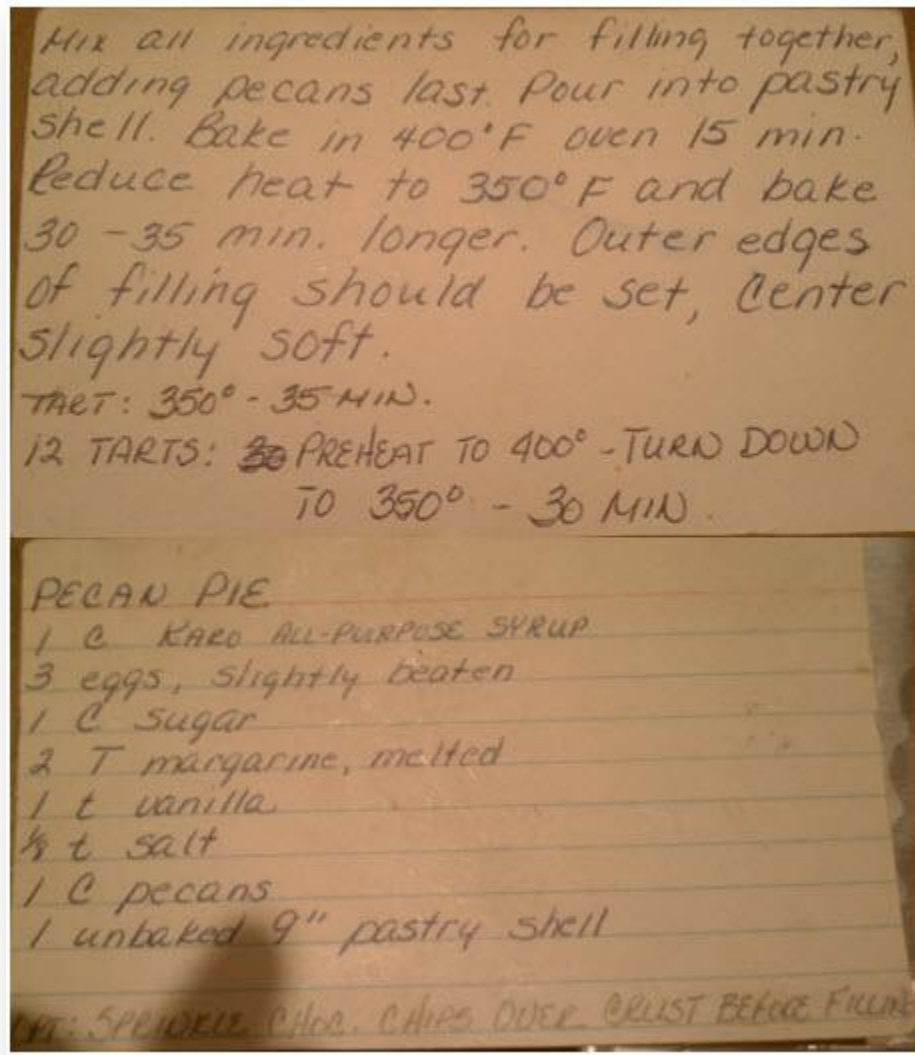
For as long as I can remember, and definitely since before then, we have always had my Mom's Pecan Pie for Christmas Eve and my Dad's birthday. We aren't huge on traditions, but this is one thing that never changes. The heavenly smell of toasted pecans wafting from the oven is more than I can handle. Most years I try really hard to pick off a piece before it's ready to be served, but my Mom always catches me.

It's a simple recipe with lots and lots of sugar, but really who cares - Isn't that the point of pecan pie?! If you're looking to impress your mother-in-law or get some guy to fall in love with you, this would be the pie to make...trust me ;)





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*Thank you and happy cooking!*

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