

The Hysterical Hostess

Tips for Tear-Free Entertaining



HOME ABOUT FUNDAMENTALS

Healthy, Sustainable, and Scrumptious!

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Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could walk into your favorite fine dining establishment, order whatever sounds appealing on the printed menu, and know that you won't be jeopardizing the whole week's healthy food choices? Well, that dream is becoming a reality with the arrival in the United States of Brussels-born SPE Certified, a groundbreaking restaurant certification and consulting program designed to enhance the nutritional quality of meals without compromising flavor. SPE (from the Latin phrase "Sanitas Per Escam," meaning "Health Through Food") is not about dieting or calorie counting but about sourcing, preparing and enhancing food so it's good for us, good for the planet, and-above all-that it tastes good.

Late this summer, I got a taste of that food fantasy at SPE's New York City launch, where I indulged in such delights as a beef slider on whole wheat brioche bun, luscious sweetcorn panna cotta with sea urchin garnish, beet cannelloni brimming with creamy burrata cheese, tempting pork fried rice, and refreshing chilled local blueberry soup with lemon shortbread. And, the best part was that afterward I didn't have to experience even an ounce of guilt about violating my healthy eating regimen, since everything was created according to SPE's nutritionally sound and sustainable principles.

It occurred to me that my friends probably would appreciate having the same kind of assurances when they dine at my home. Instead, since I'm eager to showcase my culinary prowess (such as it is) and give guests the most delicious meal I can muster, I usually abandon my everyday health dictates when entertaining. Too often, I incorporate butter, cream, and salt in the dishes I serve, ingredients that I assiduously avoid when cooking just for myself and my husband.

So I turned to SPE's Culinary Nutritionist, Natalia Hancock, R.D., for some tips that Hysterical Hostess readers could follow to create healthy, sustainable, and delicious meals for their guests at home. Hancock and the company's Executive Chef Anthony Moraes work hand in hand with participating restaurant chefs to help them adapt existing menu items or develop new seasonal dishes to meet SPE's exacting standards. The extensive guidelines are the result of 10-years of scientific research and development by chefs and dieticians and have been validated by a committee of world-renowned nutritional experts representing some of the world's leading research centers.

Here are Hancock's recommendations, followed by a recipe for SPE's satisfying but nutritionally revised riff on the Chinese restaurant favorite, Pork Fried Rice. Truth be told, it's not the addictive salty, greasy diet disaster that we all know and love. But, then, according to SPE, each 1-1/2 cup serving contains 44 percent fewer calories (340 vs. 610), 60 percent less fat (8 g vs. 208), 67 percent less saturated fat (1.5 g vs. 4.5), and 67 percent less sodium (460 mg vs. 1380), among other nutritional advantages. Each serving also contains 21 g of protein, 45 g of carbohydrate, and 640 mg of potassium.

The improvement was achieved largely by increasing the amount of vegetables, substituting whole grain brown rice for white, selecting a leaner cut of pork, adding the tamari at the end of the preparation, reducing the amount of oil employed in sautéing, and using other nutritionally-dense seasonings, such as garlic, ginger, and cilantro.

Rouge Tomate, the Michelin-starred Modern American restaurant in midtown Manhattan, was first in the United States to apply SPE's principles. To find others located all over the country, check out the company's Web site: www.SPEcertified.com.

Tips for healthy cooking at home

- Cook from scratch, use whole food rather than processed ingredients.
- Plan your meals around seasonal produce.
- Cook with heart-healthy plant-based oils rather than butter or cream.
- Experiment with new whole grains.
- Make (and cook with) your own stock using vegetable scraps; add chicken bones if desired.
- Aim for varied color on the plate.
- Have a well-stocked pantry with ingredients like vinegars, herbs, and spices that add flavor without negatively impacting dishes.
- Wash produce well and leave skins on to increase nutrients and fiber (i.e., potatoes, apples, carrots).

- Purchase meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy from trusted farmers who raise animals with a more natural diet and lifestyle.
- Purchase produce from local trusted farmers. The fresher the produce the higher its nutrient content.
- Use appropriate cooking techniques like: steaming, baking, roasting, sautéing, and simmering that maintain or enhance foods nutritional properties.

SPE Certified Pork Fried Rice

Makes Eight 1-1/2 cup servings

Ingredients:

1 lb. pork tenderloin

1 cup white wine

¾ cup Dijon mustard

¼ cup garlic, minced

Black peppercorns

½ cup tamari, low sodium

Pinch salt

Pinch ground black pepper

2 cups long grain brown rice

4 cups vegetable stock (low or no sodium)

2 tbsp. canola oil

½ cup scallions, sliced

2 large eggs

3 tbsp. ginger, grated

2 ½ tbsp. shallots, chopped

2 tbsp. garlic, minced

1 cup carrot, chopped

2 cups Shiitake mushrooms, sliced

1 tsp. sesame oil

2½ cups Napa cabbage, chopped

1½ cups bok choy, chopped

1 cup snow peas, sliced

¾ cup radish, chopped

⅔ cup peas

2 tbsp. tamari, low sodium

1 tbsp. rice vinegar

2 tbsp. cilantro

Black sesame seeds to garnish

Method:

Marinate pork in wine, garlic, peppercorns and tamari for at least one hour. Cook the rice according to package instructions using vegetable stock instead of water. For best results, allow the rice to cool on a sheet pan prior to sautéing.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Remove pork from marinade, season the tenderloin with salt and pepper and place in a roasting pan. Roast for 35 minutes, or until a thermometer inserted in the center registers 145°F and the juices run clear. Let the pork sit for 5 to 10 minutes prior to carving.

Heat 1 tsp. of canola oil in a large sauté pan over high heat. Add eggs and half the scallions, cook for 30 seconds, remove from pan and set aside. Add remaining canola oil to pan and sauté ginger, shallots, and garlic for one minute. Add carrots and continue to sauté. Add the cooked rice, mushrooms, and sesame oil and continue to cook while stirring. Once rice is heated through, add the egg and scallion mixture to the pan. Add the cabbage, bok choy, snow peas, radish and peas. Season the mixture with the tamari, rice vinegar, and sesame oil and stir to combine. Add in thinly sliced pork and garnish dish with cilantro, black sesame seeds and the remaining scallions.