

CANAL HOUSE COOKING, VOL. N° 6, THE GROCERY STORE is a collection of our favorite recipes, the ones we cook for ourselves, our friends, and our families, using the best that grocery stores have to offer. It is filled with recipes that will make you want to run straight to the grocery store to stock up and start cooking.

We are home cooks writing about home cooking for other home cooks. Our recipes are easy to prepare and completely doable for the novice and experienced cook alike. Good cooking relies on good shopping, so we buy smoked fish to make a delicious creamy stew, and plump organic chickens to roast right on the oven rack over potatoes and vegetables. Bunches of fat local asparagus go into our shopping cart—we cook them simply and bathe them in a luscious lemon-butter sauce. We choose hearty escarole and tender young spinach and stock up on bags of frozen peas and fava beans to use in so many ways. We buy succulent rhubarb for an early spring tonic or for an Easter dessert, roasted and spooned over crisp meringues. Take a peek at the pages to the right to see what we've cooked up for you.

*Canal House Cooking*, Volume N° 6, The Grocery Store, is the sixth book of our award-winning series of seasonal recipe collections. We publish three volumes per year: Summer, Fall & Holiday, and Winter & Spring, each filled with delicious recipes for you from us.

Cook your way through spring, and all that The Grocery Store has to offer, with *Canal House Cooking!*

Christopher & Melissa

CANAL HOUSE



COOKING

VOLUME N° 6

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With great appreciation to Colman Andrews  
for "The Best Grocery Store in the World"



# CANAL HOUSE COOKING

Volume N° 6

Hamilton & Hirsheimer

**Welcome to Canal House**—our studio, workshop, dining room, office, kitchen, and atelier devoted to good ideas and good work relating to the world of food. We write, photograph, design, and paint, but in our hearts we both think of ourselves as cooks first.

Our loft studio is in an old red brick warehouse. A beautiful lazy canal runs alongside the building. We have a simple galley kitchen. Two small apartment-size stoves sit snugly side by side against a white tiled wall. We have a dishwasher, but prefer to hand wash the dishes so we can look out of the tall window next to the sink and see the ducks swimming in the canal or watch the raindrops splashing into the water.

And every day we cook. Starting in the morning we tell each other what we made for dinner the night before. Midday, we stop our work, set the table simply with paper napkins, and have lunch. We cook seasonally because that's what makes sense. So it came naturally to write down what we cook. The recipes in our books are what we make for ourselves and our families all year long. If you cook your way through a few, you'll see that who we are comes right through in the pages: that we are crazy for tomatoes in summer, make braises and stews all fall, and turn oranges into marmalade in winter.

*Canal House Cooking* is home cooking by home cooks for home cooks. We use ingredients found in most markets. All the recipes are easy to prepare for the novice and experienced cook alike. We want to share them with you as fellow cooks along with our love of food and all its rituals. The everyday practice of simple cooking and the enjoyment of eating are two of the greatest pleasures in life.

**CHRISTOPHER HIRSHEIMER** served as food and design editor for *Metropolitan Home* magazine, and was one of the founders of *Saveur* magazine, where she was executive editor. She is a writer and a photographer.

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*Melissa and Christopher in the Canal House kitchen*



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*it's always five o'clock somewhere*



## RHUBARB SYRUP

makes 4 cups

One of the first edible plants up in the spring is mighty rhubarb, with its heart-shaped leaves and long succulent bright red or green stalks. Rhubarb is known and relied on for its purgative powers—it's a natural spring tonic. If you want to make this before the season, frozen rhubarb works just fine. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall turned us on to rhubarb syrup in his *The River Cottage Year* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2003).

4 pounds fresh rhubarb, cut into pieces, or 4 pounds frozen rhubarb  
1½ cups superfine sugar  
2 cups (10 blood oranges) fresh blood orange or orange juice

Put the rhubarb and sugar into a pot and bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 50 minutes. Add the orange juice and cook for 10 minutes. Use a fine sieve to strain the juice into a bowl. Return the juice to the pot, bring to a gentle boil, and cook for about 20 minutes, until it has reduced to a light syrup. Measure the syrup and, if necessary, continue to cook over medium heat until it reduces to about 4 cups. Store in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to 1 month.

## AMANTE

This drink borrows elements from two great classics: a sugary rim from the sidecar and tequila from the margarita. Deliciously tart rhubarb and sweet orange juice stand in for limes. We prepare our glasses ahead of time, first by wetting the rim with a little rhubarb syrup or orange juice, then rolling the edge of each glass in superfine sugar. We stash the glasses in the freezer for a while so they get frosty. They won't stay that way for very long once you take them out, but they look so beautiful and appealing while they do.

For each drink we mix together 3 ounces Rhubarb Syrup, and 2 ounces tequila, then pour it into sugar-rimmed glasses filled with lots of ice. We garnish the drink with a slice of orange. Or if you prefer your drink “up”, sugar the rim of a stemmed glass and put it in the freezer until it is frosty, then pour in the cocktail. — *makes 1*

## PRIMAVERA

Spring, with all its glories—its lightness, its frothiness—deserves to have a drink created in its honor. Normally we don't like to mess with, or muck up wine—how can you improve on a vintner's miracle? But in the spirit of the season we add (give or take) 2 ounces Rhubarb Syrup (page 12) to a Champagne flute, then pour in about 4 ounces ice-cold Prosecco. Spring has sprung! — *makes 1*

For a nonalcoholic drink, pour 3 ounces Rhubarb Syrup into a stemmed glass. Add cold bubbly water. Serve over ice, if you like. — *makes 1*

## WHISKEY SOUR

makes 2

Early bartending guides mention this classic, whiskey made tart with lemon juice, sweet with sugar, and sometimes frothy with egg white or seltzer, but the classic recipe is rarely what bartenders follow these days. Bastardized over the years with bottled and powdered sour mixes, it is overly sweet and tangy—a shame when the real thing is so simple to make.

Our version is simpler still. We forgo the egg white and mix our citrus juices, focusing on freshness rather than texture. Instead of the classic garnish of an orange slice and a maraschino cherry, we opt for a slice of lemon to match what's in the glass.

3 ounces whiskey or bourbon whiskey  
1½ ounces fresh lemon juice  
1½ ounces fresh lime juice  
1 ounce Simple Syrup, below, or 2 tablespoons superfine sugar  
2 thin lemon slices

Put the whiskey, lemon juice, lime juice, and simple syrup, into an ice cube-filled cocktail shaker, cover, and shake vigorously. Divide the cocktail between 2 rocks glasses, adding a few more ice cubes to each. Garnish with lemon.

**SIMPLE SYRUP** 🍷 Put 1 cup superfine sugar and ½ cup water in a heavy-bottomed saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat, gently swirling the pan to help dissolve the sugar as it melts. When the sugar comes to a boil, cover, and cook for about 1 minute. Let the syrup cool to room temperature. Store in the refrigerator for up to 6 months.

## BROTHY BEEF SHORT RIBS

serves 4

There are a few cuts of beef that are particularly well suited for boiling, beef short ribs is one of them. It takes a while for the meat to become tender, but while it simmers, it releases its rich beefy flavor without drying out like some pieces of beef can. The meat is as enjoyable to eat, sprinkled with salt, as it is to drink its flavorful ginger-infused broth, which may just be an aphrodisiac.

3–4 pounds beef short ribs  
1 hand-size piece fresh ginger,  
unpeeled, cut in half crosswise  
2–3 cloves garlic, optional

Salt  
1 bunch fresh cilantro, chopped  
2–3 scallions, chopped

Put the short ribs, ginger, and garlic, if using, into a large heavy pot and add enough cold water (about 16 cups) to cover the meat by 2–3 inches. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, skimming any foam that rises to the surface. Reduce the heat to low and simmer very gently until the meat is tender, about 5 hours.

Remove and discard the ginger and garlic and any loose bones. Season the broth with salt. Trim any fat and gristle from the meat. Serve the meat and broth in deep soup bowls, garnished with lots of cilantro and scallions. Pass salt around the table for seasoning the beef.

BROTHY BEEF SHORT RIBS & ROOT VEGETABLES ♥ Follow the directions above for boiled beef short ribs, omitting the ginger in the first step. One hour before the meat is finished cooking, add 2 each quartered and peeled carrots, parsnips, and turnips to the simmering broth. Substitute a half bunch fresh parsley leaves, chopped, for the cilantro and scallions at the end.







## 🍷 NOTES ON DRIED BEANS 🍷

We cook beans all the time, but we do it instinctively. To verify that our methods are up to scratch, we asked our colleague Julia Lee to dive in and do a little bean research. Turns out our instincts were right. Here's what she found out.

**BUYING** 🍷 Choose beans that have been **recently harvested and dried**; this may be the most important factor in cooking a good pot of dried beans. As beans age, their outer shell becomes tough and impermeable. Sometimes **really old beans will never get tender**, even after hours and hours of cooking. Shop at a store that moves a lot of beans off their shelves, ensuring that you're buying from a current crop. Though it may be hard to spot, **look for an expiration date** on the package.

**SOAKING** 🍷 To soak or not to soak, that is the question. **Soaking** hydrates and softens the dried beans, giving them a jump start. But you have to think ahead and remember to soak them in the first place. If you choose to soak your beans, they only need about 4 hours (the oft-used phrase "soak the beans overnight" is more about convenience). Or you can use the **"quick" soak method**: put the beans in a pot, cover them with cold water, bring the water to a boil, and remove the pot from heat. Cover the pot and let the beans soak for 1 hour. Drain, then cover the beans with fresh cold water and gently simmer them until tender. This method will shorten the cooking time a bit and leach out some of the indigestible carbohydrates that cause flatulence (unfortunately, some of the beneficial vitamins and minerals will also get poured down the drain). If you forgo soaking, just put the **unsoaked beans** right in a pot, cover with cold water, and onto the stove they go. But be sure that you cook them at the **gentlest simmer** so their skins don't break.

**SALTING** 🍷 Kitchen lore has it that adding salt to beans while they cook will inhibit them from ever becoming tender, but it's just not true. In fact, salt accelerates the cooking time by tenderizing the bean skins.

**COOKING** 🍷 For plump, creamy beans that hold their shape, cook them slowly over low heat in plenty of water. See our recipe for cooked beans on the next page.

## BASIC COOKED DRIED BEANS

makes 6 cups

It is your preference whether to soak or not to soak. MH likes to hydrate the beans before cooking; CH believes that with the gentlest cooking you can jump right in without a soak.

2 cups dried beans, unsoaked or  
soaked for 4 hours or overnight  
1–2 cloves garlic

1 branch fresh thyme, optional  
2 bay leaves  
Salt

Drain the beans and put them into a medium, heavy-bottomed pot. Cover them with cold water by 2 inches or so. Add the garlic, thyme, if using, and bay leaves. Bring the beans just to a simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Reduce the heat to low and very gently simmer them until they are swollen and tender, 30–90 minutes (or more), depending on the freshness of the dried beans. Remove the pot from the heat. Stir in a generous pinch of salt. Let the beans cool to just warm or to room temperature in the cooking liquid. (The beans will keep in the refrigerator for up to 4 days.)

## LENTILS WITH ROASTED BEETS

Earthy beets and lentils were made for each other—dirt on dirt in the very best sort of way.

Preheat the oven to 375°. Wrap **4 small beets** individually in aluminum foil and put them in a baking pan. Roast the beets until tender, about 1 hour. While the beets roast, rinse **1½ cups lentils** in cold water. Put the lentils in a medium pot with **3 cups water**, **1 small peeled onion**, **2 garlic cloves**, and **1 bay leaf**. Bring to a boil over medium heat, reduce heat to low, and gently simmer until all the water has been absorbed and the lentils are tender, about 1 hour. Add more water if you need to. Use a slotted spoon to fish out the onion, garlic, and bay leaf. Remove the beets from the oven, unwrap, and when cool enough to handle, slip off the skins. Dice the beets, then add them to the lentils. Season to taste with **salt and pepper**. Transfer to a serving dish and drizzle generously with a **really good extra-virgin olive oil**, and garnish with **lots of chopped parsley and scallions**. — *serves 6*

*Overleaf: left, pots of beans; right, Lentils with Roasted Beets*



## FISH STICKS

makes about 20

Some years ago, while on vacation in northern California with my family, we stopped in Sacramento to visit Corti Brothers (it is, after all, “the best grocery store in the world”, page 7) and say hello to owner Darrell Corti. He insisted we join him for a quick lunch, so off to The Waterboy we went. We ordered fish sticks, drank wines that Darrell had brought along, and shared conversation I didn’t even know I was capable of keeping up with. Our quick lunch lasted for hours. What we drank and all that we talked about is a little foggy to me now, but my family never forgot those real (and really good) fish sticks.

It turns out that we weren’t the only ones crazy for chef-owner Rick Mahan’s fish sticks. They’d started out nine years before as a staff meal favorite, and then turned into a popular menu item he still offers half a dozen times a year. Rick uses a local fish called rock cod, similar to Atlantic cod, but any good firm, flaky white fish will do. Goodbye, Mrs. Paul’s. Hello, Mr. Mahan’s! —MH

1½ cups panko

1 cup flour

3 eggs

1 pound cod filet, preferably center cut

Salt and pepper

Canola oil

Pulse the panko in a food processor until the crumb is fairly fine, then transfer it to a wide dish. Put the flour in another wide dish. Beat the eggs in a third wide dish. Set aside.

Cut the fish into fat, evenly thick sticks about ¾ inch thick by 3 inches long. Season them all over with salt and pepper. Dredge the fish, one piece at a time, first in the flour, then in the eggs, then in the panko. If you like, set the fish sticks on a wire rack to rest as you bread them, up to an hour before frying them.

Add enough oil to a large cast-iron skillet to reach a depth of 1–2 inches. Heat the oil over medium heat until it is hot but not smoking, ideally to a temperature of 350° (use a candy thermometer to check the temperature).

Working in batches to avoid crowding the skillet, fry the fish sticks in the hot oil until golden brown all over, 5–6 minutes. Transfer the fish sticks with metal tongs or a slotted spatula to a wire rack set over paper towels to drain. Season with salt while still hot. Serve with lemon wedges and/or Tartar Sauce (page 73).

*Left: above, Fish Sticks; below, Fried Fish (page 73)*



## CHICKEN CORDON BLEU

serves 2

Our variation on this classic—we make a little pocket in the chicken breast and slip in the ham and cheese—will make any home cook a blue-ribbon winner.

2 thin slices boiled ham	1 whole boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut in half to separate it into 2 lobes
2 thin slices melting cheese, such as Munster, Fontina, or Gruyère	Salt and pepper
½ cup flour	Canola oil
1 cup panko	
1 egg	

Lay each slice of ham on a cutting board, put a slice of cheese on top of each, and fold the ham around the cheese as you would fold up a business letter. Set aside. Put the flour in a wide dish, put the panko in another, beat the egg in a third dish, and set them aside.

Lay each chicken breast half on the cutting board, smooth side facing down. If the breasts are big and fat, you can remove the tenderloin, if you like, and use it for another meal, but if the breasts are smaller and thinner, leave the tenderloins in place. They'll cover up any accidental nicks that may happen when cutting out the pocket in each breast. Using a narrow sharp knife with a pointed tip, make an incision in the side of the breast, then carefully cut out a long deep pocket without puncturing the rest of the breast. Repeat with the other breast. Tuck the ham and cheese into each pocket and gently press the breast to close up the pocket. Season the chicken with salt and pepper.

Add enough oil to a medium skillet to reach a depth of 1–2 inches. Heat the oil over medium heat until it is hot but not smoking, ideally to a temperature of 350° (use a candy thermometer to check the temperature).

Dredge one piece of chicken at a time in the flour, tapping off the excess, then dip it in the egg, then dredge it in the panko. Fry the chicken in the hot oil until golden brown all over and cooked through, about 5 minutes per side depending on the thickness of the breasts. Transfer the chicken to a wire rack set over paper towels to drain. Season with salt while still hot.

*Right: above, Chicken Cordon Bleu; below, Chicken Kiev à la Canal House (page 84)*





A  
Celebration  
of  
Spring



## SAVORY ASPARAGUS BREAD PUDDING

serves 8

We use fat asparagus for this cheesy bread pudding, because the spears stay nice and plump. You can assemble this a day in advance. Keep it in the refrigerator overnight, then pop it into the oven to bake the next day.

1 loaf challah, sliced

3½ cups milk

Salt

2 pounds fat asparagus, trimmed  
and peeled (page 40)

4 tablespoons butter

6 eggs

Pepper

2 cups grated Gruyère

½ cup freshly grated parmigiano-  
reggiano

Arrange the slices of challah in a single layer on a sheet pan. Save or discard the end pieces. Pour 2½ cups of the milk over the bread and set aside until the bread has absorbed the milk.

Bring a medium pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the asparagus and boil until just tender, 2–3 minutes. Drain, then plunge the spears into a bowl of ice-cold water to stop them from cooking. Drain the asparagus, slice them in half lengthwise, and set aside.

Preheat the oven to 350°. Butter a large baking dish with 2 tablespoons of the butter. Beat the eggs with the remaining 1 cup of milk in a medium bowl. Season well with salt and pepper.

Line the bottom of the prepared baking dish with half the bread in a single layer. Cover the bread with half the asparagus. Scatter half the Gruyère then half the parmigiano-reggiano over the asparagus. Season with salt and pepper. Make another layer with the remaining slices of bread and the asparagus. Pour the beaten eggs and milk over the layers, scatter with the remaining cheeses, and dot the top with the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter.

Bake the bread pudding until puffed and golden brown, and set in the center, 45–60 minutes.





## BOSTON CREAM PIE

makes 2 “pies”

This pie is actually a delicate cake and should be served “with plenty of good hot coffee”, according to Alan Hooker, from whose recipe in *California Herb Cookery* (Edwin House Publishing, 1996) we adapted this one.

FOR THE CAKE	1/2 cup sugar
5 large eggs, at room temperature	4 tablespoons cornstarch
1 cup sugar	2 egg yolks
1 cup cake flour, plus more for the pan	1/8 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup pastry flour	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon salt	1 tablespoon Grand Marnier, optional
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg	1 tablespoon unsalted butter
2 tablespoons milk	FOR THE CHOCOLATE ICING
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract	1 cup chocolate chips
FOR THE CUSTARD	1/2 cup heavy cream
2 1/2 cups milk	

For the cake, preheat oven to 400°. Put the eggs and sugar in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a whisk, and beat for 15 minutes. (Be patient; this long beating is what makes this cake so light and delicate.)

Sift together the cake flour, pastry flour, salt, and nutmeg. Gradually add the dry ingredients to the beaten eggs while continuing to whisk. Add the milk and vanilla.

Grease two 8 1/2-inch round cake pans and dust them with flour, tapping out any excess. Divide the batter between the 2 pans and bake until the tops are golden and a skewer poked into the center of the cakes comes out clean, 17–20 minutes. Unmold the cakes onto wax paper or parchment paper that has been sprinkled with sugar.

For the custard, heat 1 1/2 cups of the milk and the sugar in a heavy saucepan over low heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Whisk together the remaining 1 cup milk, cornstarch, egg yolks, salt, vanilla, and Grand Marnier, if using. Gradually add it to the hot milk, stirring with a wooden spoon until the custard is thick and

smooth, about 20 minutes. Keep heat low and stir from the bottom of the pan so the custard doesn't scorch. Stir in the butter then set aside to cool.

For the chocolate icing, heat the chocolate and cream in a small heavy pan over low heat, stirring until melted and smooth (or heat for about 1 minute in the microwave, then stir the cream and chocolate together).

To assemble, split each cake into 2 layers, spread the bottom layers with cooled custard, put on the top layers, and spread chocolate icing evenly over the tops.

## BROWNIES

makes 2 dozen

Heating the butter and sugar together gives these brownies their distinctive taste and look—rich and fudgy, with a shiny, tissue paper-thin top crust.

14 tablespoons butter	1 teaspoon instant espresso powder, optional
1 cup flour, plus more for the pan	1/4 teaspoon salt
2 cups sugar	4 eggs
4 ounces semisweet chocolate, chopped	2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped	1 cup walnuts, chopped, optional

Preheat the oven to 350°. Grease a 9-inch square baking pan with 2 tablespoons of the butter, then dust it with flour, tapping out any excess.

Melt the remaining 12 tablespoons butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the sugar, stirring until it has the consistency of very soft slush and just begins to bubble around the edge of the pan, 1–2 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the chocolates, espresso powder, if using, and salt, stirring until the chocolate melts completely.

Put the eggs in a medium mixing bowl and beat them at medium speed with an electric mixer. Gradually add the warm chocolate mixture, about a quarter cup at a time, beating constantly until smooth. Stir in the vanilla. Add the flour and walnuts, if using, stirring until just combined. Pour the batter into the prepared pan.

Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 45–60 minutes. Put the pan on a rack to cool. To serve, cut the brownies into 2-inch squares.



For more information, email us at