

# Birthdays and fennel compote

There is much excitement in our family today - emails, texts, phone calls, everything! Tomorrow is my husband's birthday and our boys want to make him a huge Sunday lunch. The menu will be a surprise to him. At first we were going to celebrate tonight as Zach has to go back to Yale Sunday evening, but no, they wanted to keep it to the day and do a multi-course nice long lunch and each person is in charge of one course. Our oldest is organizing this. He is taking over the main course - short ribs with polenta garnished with fennel fronds. I have been assigned the pasta course, Zach is doing the salad and Agata is handling dessert. So we're talking back and forth, determining the menu, recipes and food buying. I point out and ask, "Why are we having a pasta course if we're having polenta with the main?" Our oldest says, "I want the pasta course too. I want this to be over the top. You know, this will be a long, paced out affair." This is just like they do in Italy on a special Sunday. He did live there for six months.

So I have decided to make a Union Square Café recipe that is one of my all time faves. It is a little tricky and detailed at the end so it's the perfect dish to make if I'm only responsible for it and not the whole rest of the meal too. It is Linguine with Spinach, Garlic and Olive Oil. This dish produces a whole lotta mmmmm's and there are broiled bread crumbs on top - just a touch, not too much. I love crunchy bread crumbs on top of pasta.

So hopefully I'll remember to take lots of pictures tomorrow to share with you what I know will be a fabulous meal. But meanwhile, I'd like to share with you our dinner last night. I made a Mark Bittman fennel tomato compote to put on some oven roasted cod and it was fantastic! I can see putting this on lots of things - steamed eggplant, pasta, chicken, swordfish, I could keep going.



Our dinner - oven roasted cod topped with the fennel compote, steamed coarse bulgar and [kale salad](#)

Once again I changed the recipe so I'll give you mine, and I forgot to add the parsley at the end, which would have been prettier, so that doesn't show up in the pictures.

**FENNEL COMPOTE WITH TOMATOES AND OLIVES** - adapted from Mark Bittman

- serves 4

1/4 cup of olive oil

1 bulb fennel (or 2 smaller ones), trimmed and chopped

Salt and pepper

1 tbs. chopped thyme leaves

1 tbs. minced garlic

6 plum tomatoes, chopped (canned are fine, but drain excess liquid)

Heaping 1/2 cup big, plump olives, green or black or a combination, preferably unpitted

1/4 cup capers, optional

1/2 cup chopped parsley leaves, for garnish

Put the oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the fennel and some salt and pepper, and without browning (adjust the heat as necessary), cook it down, stirring occasionally, until it's quite soft, about 20 minutes. Add the thyme and garlic, and cook 1 minute, stirring.

Add the tomatoes, olives and capers, raise the heat a bit, and cook until the mixture is saucy, about 15 minutes. Serve as a side dish or to top a portion of cooked fish. Garnish with parsley.



Sauteing the fennel





The compote complete