

Blue cheese apples

Sara Lee Chef Catherine DeOrio shares her warm and hearty winter entrées

Mark Bittman

Serves 6 to 8

Prep and cook time: About 1 hour

INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons butter, melted

6 medium red or green apples, like Pippin, Gala, or Jonathan

1/4 cup apple juice or water

1 cup port, red wine, or more apple juice

1 1/2 cups crumbled blue cheese (about 6 ounces)

1 tablespoon minced fresh sage leaves or 1 teaspoon dried

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 375 F. Grease a 9 x 13-inch baking pan or large gratin dish with 1 tablespoon of the butter. Cut the apples in half lengthwise and remove the seeds and core, creating a little “cup” in each half. Put them in the prepared pan or dish, cut sides down so that the skins face up. Drizzle with the remaining butter and pour the apple juice over all. Bake until they just begin to get tender, 15-20 minutes. (You can make the apples to this point up to a day in advance; just cover and refrigerate. Bring them to room temperature before proceeding.)

Carefully turn the apples over and pour the port over all. Use a spoon to baste them again with some of the juices in the pan. Fill the cup in each apple half with crumbled cheese. Sprinkle with sage, salt and pepper. Return the apples to the oven and bake until the cheese is hot and bubbly and the apples are tender, about 20 minutes more. Serve the apples hot or at room temperature and pass the pan juices at the table. (If you have the energy, boil some the liquid out of the pan juices first, to make them syrupy and more saucelike.)

Mascarpone Apples with Almonds

Creamier and milder, with crunch from the nuts: Use 1 cup (4 ounces) mascarpone cheese instead of the blue cheese and thyme instead of the sage. When the apples come out of the oven, sprinkle with 1/2 cup chopped almonds.

Cheddar Apples with Hazelnuts

The sharper the cheese, the better: Use grated cheddar instead of the sage. When the apples come out of the oven, sprinkle with 1/2 cup chopped hazelnuts.