

GRETCHEN'S TABLE

FULL OF FLAVOR

Cauliflower 'steaks' are tender on the inside and crispy on the outside

GRETCHEN MCKAY

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

Like a lot of shoppers, I look for bargains when it comes to choosing which fruits and vegetables to cook each week.

Even in winter, when selections can be slim if you're not a fan of root veggies and brassicas like cabbage, broccoli and kale, I tend to buy not what looks the yummiest or most interesting, but what's on sale — or at least has a price I can live with.

When it comes to cauliflower, I won't spend more than \$3 for a head of the nutritious crunchy vegetable my kids called "brains" when they were little. As adults, they love cauliflower after learning how good it tastes when slow-roasted or processed into "rice" for a gluten-free pizza crust.

This flavor-packed plant-forward recipe is another winner for brassica lovers. Instead of breaking the white head into florets or boiling and mashing it like you would potatoes, I sliced the cauliflower into thick "steaks." Then, after seasoning the slabs with salt, pepper and smoked paprika, I fried it in butter with minced garlic until it was crispy on both sides.

The steaks then went into a hot oven and were slow-roasted until they were tender enough to be pierced with a fork.

The coup de maître? After plating the cauliflower on a swoosh of lemony white bean puree, I topped it with a bright and herbaceous (and garlicky) chimichurri made with fresh parsley and cilantro.

If eating more veggies is a new year's goal, I succeeded brilliantly with this dish — and you can, too!

When choosing cauliflower, look for creamy white heads that feel heavy, with tightly packed florets. There shouldn't be any black spots on the curds — that's a sign the veggie is getting old and on a road to being tossed (though you can still eat it if you cut the spots off).

You can use any mix of fresh herbs for the chimichurri. Just be sure to add some vinegar along with the garlic and crushed red pepper to brighten the flavor.



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CAULIFLOWER 'STEAKS' WITH WHITE BEAN PUREE AND CHINICHURRI

For steaks

- 1 large cauliflower
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped

For chimichurri

- 1 cup packed fresh parsley leaves, including thin stems
- 1 cup packed cilantro leaves, including thin stems
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 2 or 3 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 1/2-1 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

- 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, or more to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, or more to taste

For bean puree

- 2 (14-ounce) cans great northern or cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
- Juice 1 1/2 lemons
- 1 large garlic clove, minced
- 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Prepare the chimichurri. In blender or food processor, combine parsley, cilantro, shallots, garlic, 1/4 cup olive oil, vinegar, oregano, black pepper, red pepper flakes and salt. Process until the ingredients are minced and combined, adding more olive oil until you reach the desired consistency. Season to taste with more

salt or pepper, as desired, then transfer to a small bowl. (Sauce should be more like salad dressing than pesto.)

Prepare beans. Place beans into a blender with the juice of 1 1/2 lemons, 1 minced garlic clove, nutritional yeast and a generous pinch of salt and pepper. Blend, adding a little bit of water at a time, until you get a creamy consistency. If you like, add a little garlic powder or white miso for extra oomph.

Chop 2 or 3 thick flat steaks out of the middle of the cauliflower by slicing from the stalk up to the top. Save the florets that fall off for another recipe or add to a pan with a little salt, pepper, paprika and olive oil and stir-fry until brown and crispy to serve on top of the finished dish.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Season steaks with salt, pepper and paprika on both sides. Add butter to a large cast-iron or other oven-proof pan (mine measured 12 inches) and heat over medium-high heat.

When butter is sizzling, add cauliflower slices and garlic and allow to cook for about 5 minutes until you get a good sear on one side of the steaks. (You will want to press it down with a spatula.) Then flip and cook the other side until seared and golden brown.

Place pan in preheated oven and roast until the cauliflower is tender and deeply golden brown, about 20 minutes. (You will be able to easily pierce it with a fork.)

To serve, spoon 1/2 cup bean puree into the middle of a plate and spread it in a circle with a spatula. Place cauliflower steak on top, drizzle with chimichurri and scatter over the fried reserved cauliflower bits, if using.

Serves 3-4.

— Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette

ON THE MENU

These ugly chocolate chip cookies are super tasty

JESS FLEMING

Pioneer Press (TNS)

Are you in need of some comfort food? I can hardly think of anything more cozy than a home-made chocolate chip cookie.

My ideal cookie is not for everyone. I like my cookies thin — they spread out almost to the point of being a lace cookie. Almost. They are crisp outside, chewy inside and have a deep, rich flavor.

I spent many hours honing this recipe — I honestly do measure the flour to the gram for perfect results every time — and almost everyone who tries these cookies is hooked on their flavor. There's just one slight problem: They're not the prettiest cookies.

But give them a shot, and I promise you, they'll disappear fast. And if you share them with friends and family, at least some of them will ask for the recipe, looks be damned.

FUG-LICIOUS CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

- 1 cup (2 sticks) salted butter, softened
- 1 cup dark brown sugar, packed
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla bean paste (or 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract)
- 245 grams (or 2 cups if you don't have a scale) all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons instant coffee granules
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup nuts, such as walnuts or pecans, toasted and chopped
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
- Flaky sea salt, such as Maldon, for sprinkling, optional

Add one stick of butter to a medium skillet over medium heat. Allow it to melt and bubble up for 3 to 4 minutes, swirling the pan to keep the butter moving around. When the butter is a medium golden brown, remove the pan from the heat (it will continue browning in the pan over the next 30 seconds or so.) Pour butter (and any solids in the bottom of the pan) into a heatproof bowl and allow it to cool completely, about 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Cream the other stick of softened butter together with the brown sugar and regular sugar in a stand mixer or with a hand-held mixer at medium speed. Add the eggs and vanilla bean paste and beat until smooth, scraping the bowl if necessary to ensure everything is incorporated.

With the mixer on medium-low, slowly drizzle in the cooled melted butter, making sure to add all the darker brown solids. Scrape the bowl and mix again for 20-30 seconds, until everything is combined.

In a separate bowl, combine the flour, coffee granules, baking soda and salt. Add the dry ingredients in 1/3 increments, mixing on low until totally incorporated. Scrape the bowl and beat for a few more seconds. Stir in the nuts and chocolate chips.

In batches, scoop by heaping teaspoon onto a baking sheet, preferably lined with parchment paper. Bake for 7.5 minutes, or until deep golden brown. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt if desired. Wait a minute or two, then transfer cookies to a cooling rack using a thin, metal spatula.