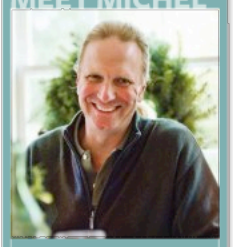
food CHRISTMAS BY HEART RECIPES

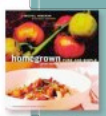
MEET MICHEL



Michel Nischan believes "the food we grow and cook, in the place we call home, defines who we are." He puts this belief into practice at The Dressing Room, his restaurant in Westport, Connecticut, and through his nonprofit, The Wholesome Wave Foundation. The Dressing Room was a collaboration with friend and fellow food lover, the late Paul Newman. Adjacent to the Westport Country Playhouse, the restaurant serves American heirloom recipes prepared with homegrown and local ingredients.

The Wholesome Wave Foundation works to make locally grown, sustainable foods available to home cooks, communities, and college campuses through local farmers' markets, educational programs, and farm support initiatives. Helping Michel carry on traditions are his children: Lauren, 23; Courtney, 21; Chris, 18; Drew, 10; and Ethan, 7.

Michel is the author of two cookbooks: the James Beard award-winning *Taste Pure and Simple* (Chronicle; $35) and *Homegrown, Pure and Simple* (Chronicle; $35).



For more information, visit dressingroom homegrown.com. To learn more about sustainable foods and the Wholesome Wave Foundation, go to wholesomewave.org.

PUMPKIN BREAD PUDDING

Look for fresh chestnuts in the produce section of the supermarket and roast them as instructed, right. Peeled and cooked chestnuts are available online at melissas.com or dartagnan.com. Pumpkins and other hard-skilled winter squashes stretch out the harvest because they can be stored in a cool, dark place up to 2 months. For this dish, take your pick of pumpkin or squashes such as butternut, delicata, golden nugget, acorn, sweet dumpling, or carnival squash. See roasting instructions, right.

PREP: 30 MIN. BAKE: 50 MIN. OVEN: 350°F

- Butter
- 1¼ cups whipping cream
- 1 cup milk
- 4 or 5 large croissants or 10 oz. egg bread, torn (about 6 cups)
- 1½ cups roasted, shelled chestnuts, crumbled, or one 8- to 10-oz. can chestnuts, drained and crumbled
- 3 large eggs
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 lb. roasted pumpkin flesh or hard squash flesh, mashed (2 cups) or one 15-oz. can pumpkin
- 1¼ cups dried currants or golden raisins
- 3 Tbsp. butter, melted
- ½ tsp. ground cardamom
- ½ tsp. ground ginger
- Seeds of one vanilla bean* or 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 recipe Molasses Cream, right
- Fresh thyme (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter a 2½- to 3-quart casserole; set aside. In large bowl combine whipping cream and milk. Add torn croissants and chestnuts. Gently press until everything is covered by the milk mixture. Let stand while preparing custard. **2.** For custard, combine eggs, egg yolk, sugars, pumpkin, currants, melted butter, spices, and vanilla in the top insert of a large double boiler (or in a large heatproof bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water, making sure bowl does not touch water). Place double boiler over medium heat and stir constantly until mixture is warm and sugars have dissolved. Fold into croissant mixture. Pour all into prepared casserole. Bake, uncovered, 50 minutes or until set. Serve warm with Molasses Cream and thyme. Store any remaining bread pudding in refrigerator up to 2 days. **MAKES 12 SERVINGS.**

MOLASSES CREAM In large bowl whisk 1 cup whipping cream until it starts to thicken. Gradually whisk in 1 tablespoon molasses, sorghum, or honey. Serve at once.

ROASTING CHESTNUTS Cut an X on flat side of each chestnut. Place in baking pan. Roast at 400°F for 15 minutes, tossing occasionally. Peel chestnuts while still warm.

ROASTING PUMPKIN OR SQUASH Wash, halve lengthwise, and remove seeds of pie pumpkin or hard (winter) squash. Place halves, cut sides down, in baking dish. Bake at 350°F for 45 to 55 minutes or until tender; cool. Scrape flesh from shell with a spoon.

***KITCHEN TIP** To remove seeds from vanilla bean, use small knife to split bean in half lengthwise. Using tip of knife, scrape out the small black seeds from each half; discard pod, or add to Vanilla Bean-Verbena Sugar, page 189.

EACH SERVING *320 cal, 26 g fat (15 g sat. fat), 154 mg chol, 213 mg sodium, 69 g carbo, 3 g fiber, 6 g pro. Daily Values: 76% vit. A, 8% vit. C, 13% calcium, 10% iron.*

HOW TO GO LOCAL

To find local producers, begin here:

- **USDA AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE** Find farmers' markets, farmstands, community-supported agriculture organizations (usually abbreviated as CSAs), and pick-your-own farms at ams.usda.gov.
- **LOCAL HARVEST** Through the Web site localharvest.org you can find local growers and farmers' markets in or around your ZIP code; the site also sells products from farmers.
- **MEAT SOURCES** Michel recommends Niman Ranch, nimanranch.com, and Heritage Foods USA, heritagefoodsusa.com.
- **TO LEARN MORE ABOUT** sustainable agriculture, go to The Wholesome Wave Foundation at wholesomewave.org or The 100 Mile Diet, 100milediet.org.