

Soft Shell Crabs on Wilted Spinach with Warm Tomato Balsamic Vinaigrette

Serves 4:

Ingredients

Warm Tomato Balsamic Vinaigrette:

1 large shallot, finely chopped
1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, julienned
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 pint campari or "cocktail" tomatoes, quartered
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

8 soft shelled crabs, cleaned
1 cup milk
1 cup flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons butter

Wilted Spinach:

2 bunches baby spinach
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 or 3 garlic cloves, sliced
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Preparation

Make Vinaigrette: in a medium bowl, combine shallots, basil, balsamic vinegar, lemon and olive oil. Add quartered campari or "cocktail" tomatoes and season with kosher salt and freshly ground pepper. Cover and let ingredients stand together in refrigerator.

Make sure soft shelled crabs are still alive when purchased; have your fishmonger clean them. Set up dredging station: fill one shallow plate with milk. Fill another plate with flour, seasoned with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper. Heat 2 large skillet, preferably cast iron, over medium heat. Add olive oil and a bit of butter for flavor in each; if using only one skillet, cook the crabs in batches.

Soak crabs first in milk, then dip in flour, shaking off any excess.
When butter foam subsides, add crabs, top side down, to the pan.
Sauté until crispy and golden, about 4 to 5 minutes.
Turn over and cook for another 3 minutes or so, until crabs are cooked through.
Be careful: they may pop while cooking.

Make Wilted Spinach: trim stems from 2 bunches of baby spinach.
Rinse well to remove any dirt and grit and spin in a salad spinner, leaving water clinging to leaves.
Heat olive oil in large sauté pan over medium heat.
Add a few sliced garlic cloves and cook until just translucent, then add spinach leaves to pan.
Cover and cook, turning once or twice, for 3 or 4 minutes, until wilted.
Season with kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper and brighten with fresh lemon juice.

In a small saucepan, heat Tomato Balsamic Vinaigrette until just simmered through, about 2 minutes.

Make a bed of wilted spinach on each plate, topping with 2 soft shelled crabs.
Spoon vinaigrette over crabs and drizzle on plate and serve immediately.

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