

Creamy White Beans over Crispy Polenta

One of my favorite kitchen challenges is to capture the essence of a dish with only my memory of the flavors as a guide. While I may not have captured the exquisite visual appeal, the taste of these creamy white beans over polenta was spot on.

This recipe was inspired by a delightful farm to table experience at Toddy Pond Farm just outside Belfast.

Polenta Base

- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup polenta – note whether you have quick cooking polenta or not and adjust the cooking time.
- 4 cups of water
- Vegan Butter (I love Miyokos brand)

Beans

- Olive Oil
- 1 large or 2 small shallots peeled and chopped fine
- 1 large carrot diced
- A handful of fresh sage and thyme
- 2-3 cups of prepared veggie broth
- 1 can of Cannellini beans washed and drained (or other firm white beans)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of store bought or prepare your own cashew cream
- 1 T Balsamic vinegar
- Salt and Pepper to taste
- Basket of garden fresh cherry tomatoes, about 24

Directions

1. Bring water to a boil in a medium-size heavy saucepan over high heat. Add 1 teaspoon of salt. Pour cornmeal slowly into water, stirring with a wire whisk or wooden spoon. Continue stirring as mixture thickens, 2 to 3 minutes.
2. Cover, reduce heat and allow to simmer until thickened and corn grits are swollen and soft, not gritty. The cooking time can be 5-10 mins for quick cooking versions of 30-40 mins minutes for traditional. Stir every 5 minutes.
3. Prepare a baking sheet or pan with a bit of olive oil or vegan butter. Choose a pan that will allow the polenta to be no thicker than one inch.
4. Pour cooked polenta into the pan, score into rectangles, and set aside to cool while you prepare the beans.
5. Coat a heavy skillet with olive oil and adjust heat to medium. When oil is hot add chopped shallots, reduce heat and saute until soft, careful not to burn the edges. Add carrots, allowing to brown slightly, then add sage leaves and fresh thyme. Pour enough prepared veggie broth to cover and simmer until carrots are tender, adding broth as needed.
6. In the meantime prepare cashew cream and drain white beans.
7. When carrots are tender, adjust liquid so that veggies remain completely covered. Add drained beans and cashew cream, allowing to simmer just long enough to meld the flavors but not break down the shape of the beans. Add balsamic vinegar and set aside, warming gently just before serving.
8. Heat another skillet with a splash of olive oil and saute cherry tomatoes with a handful of sage leaves until they pop and just begin to collapse. Remove to a dish and set aside.
9. The final step is giving the polenta a crispy exterior.

This can be done in a frying pan, heating long enough to slightly brown each side or on a baking sheet, brushing with oil first and browning in an oven set to 450 degrees.

10. Once the polenta is ready it's time to assemble the dish on one serving plate or individually. Polenta layer first, topped with beans and then cherry tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper as desired.

Enjoy!