



Where Stylish Moms Meet

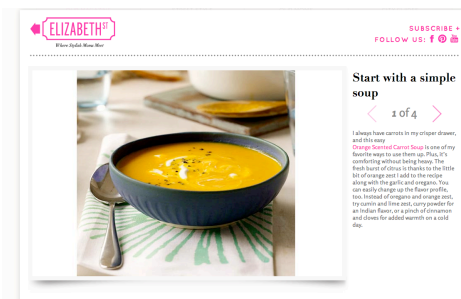
Melissa d'Arabian Saves Money with These Double-Duty Ingredients

By Gaia Guidi Filippi
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For so many of us, especially if we've been married or with our partners for a long while, celebrating Valentine's Day is no big whoop. Rather than spend a lot of money on gifts or an expensive dinner out, we would much rather put it towards that upcoming romantic weekend getaway, a great new dress, catching up on those post-holiday credit card bills, or generally sticking to our cost-cutting resolutions for the year.

Still, it's nice to have an excuse to do a little something nice to mark the day, or enjoy an extra special meal with our better halves on February 14th.

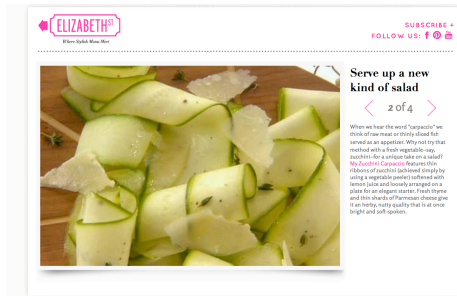
Melissa d'Arabian, our go-to celebrity chef and budget expert, has some great tips and recipes for a great meal you can prepare in under an hour and for far less than the cost of a pricey restaurant date. So you can focus less on being in the kitchen and more on connecting with your special someone.



Start with a simple soup

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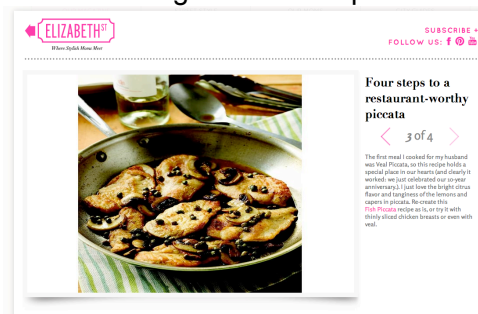
I always have carrots in my crisper drawer, and this easy **Orange Scented Carrot Soup** is one of my favorite ways to use them up. Plus, it's comforting without being heavy. The fresh burst of citrus is thanks to the little bit of orange zest I add to the recipe along with the garlic and oregano. You can easily change up the flavor profile, too. Instead of oregano and orange zest, try cumin and lime zest, curry powder for an Indian flavor, or a pinch of cinnamon and cloves for added warmth on a cold day.



Serve Up a New Kind of Salad

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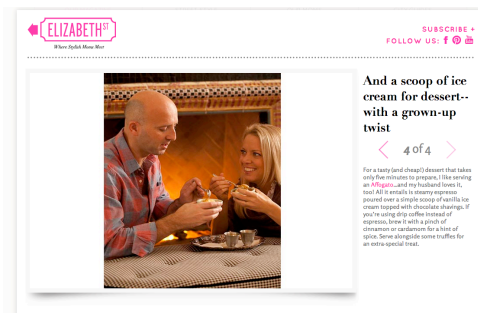
When we hear the word "carpaccio" we think of raw meat or thinly sliced fish served as an appetizer. Why not try that method with a fresh vegetable--say, zucchini--for a unique take on a salad? My Zucchini Carpaccio features thin ribbons of zucchini (achieved simply by using a vegetable peeler) softened with lemon juice and loosely arranged on a plate for an elegant starter. Fresh thyme and thin shards of Parmesan cheese give it an herby, nutty quality that is at once bright and soft-spoken.



Four Steps to a Restaurant-Worthy Piccata

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The first meal I cooked for my husband was Veal Piccata, so this recipe holds a special place in our hearts (and clearly it worked: we just celebrated our 10-year anniversary.). I just love the bright citrus flavor and tanginess of the lemons and capers in piccata. Re-create this Fish Piccata recipe as is, or try it with thinly sliced chicken breasts or even with veal.



And A Scoop of Ice Cream for Dessert—with a Grown-Up Twist

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For a tasty (and cheap!) dessert that takes only five minutes to prepare, I like serving an Affogato...and my husband loves it, too! All it entails is steamy espresso poured over a simple scoop of vanilla ice cream topped with chocolate shavings. If you're using drip coffee instead of espresso, brew it with a pinch of cinnamon or cardamom for a hint of spice. Serve alongside some truffles for an extra-special treat.