

Crespelle with Kale and Guanciale

Crespelle – the Italian word for crepes – are delicate little things that suddenly become rich and decadent when you stuff them with a guanciale-kale filling and cover them with bechamel. If you're over kale, we hear you, swap sauteed mushrooms or roasted vegetables instead. Either way, it's a stunning veggie-centric dish that has just enough porkiness to impress the meat eater in your world.

Ingredients

crepes

3 large eggs
1½ cups milk
1½ cups all-purpose flour
5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

bechamel

1½ cups milk, heated
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
Several gratings of nutmeg
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

filling and topping

2 ounces thinly sliced guanciale
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 (10-ounce) bunch lacinato (dinosaur) kale, or other kale variety, washed, stemmed and chopped (about 6 cups chopped)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup grated Parmigiano Reggiano

special equipment

blender
10-inch nonstick skillet or crepe pan
Grater for cheese
Heatproof brush for buttering hot skillet
Small heatproof rubber spatula or small offset spatula for flipping the crespelle (optional)

Directions

for the crepes

Put the eggs, milk, flour, 3 tablespoons of the butter and the salt into a blender. Blend until well combined, stopping and scraping the sides with a rubber spatula once or twice. If there are little clumps of flour in the batter, pulse a couple more times until smooth or pour the mixture through a fine mesh sieve into a bowl. Cover and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour, then give it a stir once again. The batter should be about the thickness of heavy cream, just thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Add more milk to the batter if it's too thick.

Heat a 10-inch nonstick skillet or crepe pan over moderate heat until hot. Brush lightly with some of the remaining melted butter. Pour 1/4 cup of the batter into the center of the skillet, lift it off the heat and tilt and rotate the skillet so that the batter evenly coats the pan's bottom. You need to be speedy here because the batter sets up quickly in the hot pan. Set the skillet back on the burner and cook undisturbed until the edges set up and get a little lacy, the top looks almost dry, and the bottom side of crepe is lightly browned, 1½ to 2 minutes. Gently lift the far edge of the crepe with the tip of an offset spatula or small heatproof spatula and, using your fingers, carefully flip the crepe. Cook until other side is just set and lightly browned, about 30 seconds, then slide onto a wax paper-lined baking sheet or plate. Repeat making crepes with the remaining batter, brushing butter onto skillet for each to help make them lacy. (The crepes may cook faster as the pan gets hotter. Adjust the heat if the pan is too hot.) Stack the crepes on top of each other as done. Even if you lose the first couple, you should get about 12.

for the bechamel

Heat the milk in a small saucepan over medium heat until steaming, then set aside and keep warm. Melt the butter in a separate small saucepan over medium heat. Stir in the flour with a heatproof spatula to form a loose paste. Cook, stirring constantly, for 2 minutes without letting the mixture brown. Whisk in the hot milk in a steady stream, continuing to whisk constantly, until smooth. Bring to a boil, still whisking, then reduce the heat to maintain a simmer. Season with nutmeg, salt and pepper and continue to cook, whisking often, until smooth and thick, about 5 minutes. Adjust seasonings. Transfer the bechamel to a heatproof bowl and cover with plastic wrap, pressing the wrap directly on the surface of the sauce, while you make the filling. You should get about 1¼ cups.

for the filling

Cook the guanciale in a large skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until golden and crisp, about 5 minutes. Remove the guanciale from the pan to a paper-towel-lined plate, set aside to let cool, then chop. Add the garlic to the fat left in the pan and cook over medium heat, stirring often, for 30 seconds – do not allow it to brown. Add the kale to the pan in handfuls, turning to coat in the drippings and allowing the leaves to wilt a bit before you add more. (Adding a splash of water here is useful to help steam.) Season with salt and pepper and cook, covered, until soft but still green, 4 to 5 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has evaporated, about 30 seconds. Stir the chopped guanciale and 3/4 cup bechamel into the kale and adjust seasonings.

for assembly

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Butter the bottom and sides of a 9-by-13-inch baking pan and set aside.

Place a crepe on a flat surface with the presentation side down – that would be the first, and prettiest, side that was cooked – and the speckled second side facing up. Spread about 1½ tablespoons filling on the bottom half of the crepe, then fold the top half down over the filling. Fold in half again to form a pie-wedge shape. Put the crepe into the prepared baking pan. Repeat assembly with the remaining 11 crepes and filling and arrange in the pan, forming two shingled rows. Spoon the remaining 1/2 cup bechamel over the crepes and sprinkle with cheese. Bake until the edges of the crepes and the cheese are browned, 15 to 20 minutes. Throw under the broiler for a minute or 2 to brown the béchamel sauce, if desired.

total time: 2 hours 15 minutes plus resting time

active prep: 1½ hours

serves: 4 to 6

difficulty: *medium*