



Braised Whole Leeks

Leeks, the aristocrat of the onion family, are far more delicate in flavor than their ubiquitous cousins (onions, garlic, chives, scallions). They add great flavor to soups, stews and pasta dishes – but they're also delicious braised whole and served alongside roast chicken, grilled fish or beef dishes. I like to serve them on an oval platter, with the leeks lined up in single file and drizzled with the thickened juices remaining in the pan. Make this with amontillado sherry, which is medium-sweet. Anything dryer than that will not produce the same delectable results.

8	medium-size leeks
1 to 2 tbsp	butter
1/3 cup (or more)	amontillado sherry
1 cup (approx.)	chicken stock, preferably homemade
	Freshly ground pepper

Trim off and discard dark green tops and tough outer leaves from leeks. Cut a thin slice from the root end. Slit down one side of each leek, about halfway through, to within 1 inch of base. Place under cold running water, fanning out leaves, to remove grit. Drain thoroughly.

In sauté pan just large enough to hold leeks in one layer, melt butter over medium-high heat. Add leeks and cook, turning often, until leeks start to brown in a few spots, about 6 to 8 minutes.

Pour in sherry, turn heat to high, and continue cooking for about 1 minute longer. Then pour in chicken stock (use enough chicken stock so liquid comes a little over halfway up sides of leeks) and bring to boil; reduce heat and simmer, covered, until leeks are tender, about 10 to 20 minutes. (Check frequently and turn leeks from time to time. The braising time varies with the diameter and age of the leeks.) If a lot of liquid remains in pan, remove cover and cook for 1 to 2 minutes until sauce is slightly thickened and syrupy. Season with freshly ground pepper to taste.

Arrange leeks on an oval or rectangular serving plate, spoon some of the pan liquid on top and sprinkle with a little more coarsely ground pepper.

Makes 4 servings.

One of Carol's cooking hallmarks is to serve many side dishes with a generous serving of grilled fish, or roasted chicken. Many nights, even for the two of us dining by ourselves, she will make four or five side dishes.

One of her side dishes that has gained notoriety is Braised Whole Leeks. Many guests claim on seeing them, "Oh, I really don't like leeks," or "I've never seen them served this way." These are the same guests who ALWAYS ask for seconds and the recipe!

The secret in the leeks' appeal is a generous splash of just-sweet-enough sherry. -- *Jim White*