A luscious year's top 10

How to choose the best of 384 recipes? One dish at a time (and then back for seconds).
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LOOKING back on the hundreds of recipes published in Food this year (384, to be exact), we're wondering: How do we stay so thin?

OK, so we don't. Or not all of us, anyway. How could we, when there are so many wonderful dishes to sample week after week?

It wasn't easy to choose the 10 best. There were a few we knew had to be included. The Italian-style slow-roasted shoulder of pork that we perfected by testing it no fewer than nine times, from Laurie Winer's March story about *porchetta*. Nancy Silverton's burgers, which forever changed the way we think about hamburgers, from Emily Green's August cover story.

Then it gets tougher.

We went crazy for Russ Parsons' brilliant snap pea soup with Parmesan cream, from his April story on snap peas. But back in February, when he showed us a completely new way to look at quiche, those recipes were life-changingly great too.

The lentil and duck salad from Regina Schrambling's January story about lentils was outstanding. But didn't we love her petrale sole with lentils and rosemary cream just as much?

Donna Deane gave us amazing slow-scrambled eggs on toast with prosciutto. But wait — what about her mom's lemon meringue pie?

Fortunately, you can find all 374 of those we couldn't include in the archive at latimes.com.

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Lentil and duck salad with hazelnut dressing

**Total time:** About 40 minutes (may vary, depending on lentils)
Servings: 4

Note: In Regina Schrambling's article about the diverse varieties of lentils now available, this warm salad recipe showcased the unique texture and color of French green lentils. Confit duck legs are available at Surfas in Culver City, Nicole's in South Pasadena and select Whole Foods stores.

1 cup French green lentils
1 leek, white part only, cleaned well and diced
4 cloves garlic, peeled
2 bay leaves
1 teaspoon salt, plus additional to taste
1 carrot, peeled
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons Champagne vinegar or white wine vinegar
1/4 cup hazelnut oil
2 confit duck legs
1/4 cup chopped chives
1 tablespoon chopped tarragon
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 small head frisée, washed, dried well and torn into 1-inch pieces
1/4 cup toasted, skinned and coarsely chopped hazelnuts

1. Pick over the lentils to remove any stones. Rinse well in a fine sieve under cold running water. Place in a medium saucepan. Add the leek, garlic, bay leaves and 1 teaspoon salt.

2. Cut the carrot in half crosswise, then lengthwise and add to the pot. Add cold water to cover by 2 inches.

3. Bring to a boil, stirring often. Reduce the heat to very low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are just tender but still firm, 17 to 20 minutes. Do not overcook. Remove from heat and drain well.

4. While the lentils cook, heat the oven to 500 degrees. Whisk together the mustard and vinegar in a small bowl. Whisk in the oil to emulsify.

5. Discard the bay leaves, garlic and carrot from the lentils. Combine the lentils and all but 1 tablespoon of the vinaigrette in a shallow bowl, mixing well. Set aside in a warm spot.
6. **Lay the duck legs** on a foil-lined broiler pan. Broil them 6 inches from the heat source, turning once, until the skin is well crisped and the meat is warmed through, about 10 to 15 minutes. Using a fork and knife, shred or chop the meat and skin into rough pieces, trimming excess fat.

7. **Add the meat** to the lentils and mix well. Add the chives and tarragon and salt and pepper to taste.

8. **To serve,** toss the frisée with the remaining 1 tablespoon vinaigrette and distribute it among 4 salad plates. Top with the lentil mixture. Sprinkle with hazelnuts.

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**Each serving:** 480 calories; 28 grams protein; 39 grams carbohydrates; 16 grams fiber; 26 grams fat;

3 grams saturated fat; 52 mg. cholesterol; 863 mg. sodium.

**Slow-roasted shoulder of pork**

**Total time:** 20 minutes plus 8 1/2 to 10 1/2 hours roasting time

**Servings:** 8 to 10

**Note:** This recipe from The Times Test Kitchen used a recipe from London's River Café as a jumping-off point. It ran with Laurie Winer's article about porchetta.

10 garlic cloves, peeled

1/2 cup fennel seeds

2 tablespoons coarse sea salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

5 to 6 small dried red chiles, crumbled, with seeds

1 boneless pork shoulder butt (about 6 to 7 pounds)

4 tablespoons olive oil, divided

1/2 cup hot water

Juice of 1 lemon

1/2 cup chicken broth

1. **Heat the oven** to 450 degrees. Using a mortar and pestle, crush the garlic and fennel seeds and mix them together. Add the salt, pepper and chiles and combine.

2. **Cut 1-inch slits** all over the surface of the meat, including top and bottom. Rub the garlic-seed mixture into the slits.

3. **Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil** in a large, heavy Dutch oven. Sear the meat on all sides over medium-low heat for about 10 to 12 minutes. Do not allow the garlic to burn.
4. **Remove the roast** from the pot and add the hot water, stirring and scraping the bottom to deglaze the pan. Place a rack in the bottom of the pan. Add the meat, fatty side up, and roast in the oven uncovered for 30 minutes.

5. **Pour the lemon juice** and the chicken broth over the meat. Brush with the remaining olive oil.

6. **Reduce the heat** to 250 degrees, cover the pan and roast the meat 8 to 10 hours, occasionally basting with pan juices. The roast will be done when the meat falls apart when barely touched with a fork.

7. **Remove the roast** from the pot and place it on a serving platter. Skim the fat from the pan drippings. Serve pan drippings on the side or drizzled over the meat.

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**Sugar snap pea soup with Parmesan cream**

**Total time:** 1 hour

**Servings:** 6

**Note:** In the spring, when farmers markets were loaded with sugar snap peas, Russ Parsons created this fresh-as-the-moment soup, as fabulous as much more labor-intensive English pea soup. It can also be served cold, with a few leaves of fresh chervil rather than the Parmesan cream.

2 pounds sugar snap peas

2 tablespoons butter, divided

1/4 cup minced shallots

3/4 cup chicken stock

1 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste

Freshly grated nutmeg

1 1/2 teaspoons lemon juice, plus more to taste

Up to 1 teaspoon sugar

1/2 cup cream

1/4 cup grated Parmesan

1. **Add the peas** to a large pot of rapidly boiling, generously salted water. Cover the pot and bring back to a boil. Uncover and cook until the peas are tender but still a vibrant green, 6 to 8 minutes. Do not cook so long that they turn drab. As soon as the peas are done, drain them and place them in an ice water bath to stop the cooking and
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preserve their bright color. Drain them again.

2. While the peas are cooking, melt 1 tablespoon butter in a small skillet over medium-low heat. Add the shallots and cook until they are tender and translucent, about 5 minutes. Set aside.

3. Place half of the peas in a blender and purée until very smooth. Add a tablespoon or two of chicken stock, if necessary, to keep the mixture flowing. Add the remaining peas and the cooked shallots and finish puréeing.

4. Pass the pea purée through a strainer into a bowl, pressing with a flat rubber spatula to work it all through. Rinse the spatula blade to remove any fiber and scrape the thick pea purée that sticks to the outside of the strainer into the bowl. Discard the fiber that is left behind in the strainer.

5. Stir just enough chicken stock into the purée to make it a flowing liquid. It should have the consistency of fairly thin split pea soup. Stir in the salt, a few gratings of nutmeg and lemon juice. Taste, and if the peas aren't bright and sweet, stir in enough sugar to correct. If necessary, add more salt and lemon juice as well. The recipe can be prepared to this point up to 8 hours in advance (any longer and the color will start to fade). Refrigerate in a tightly covered container.

6. Pass the purée through the finest strainer you have into a saucepan. Warm over medium-low heat until the mixture is bubbling. While the purée is warming, cook the cream and Parmesan in a small saucepan over medium heat just until the Parmesan melts and the cream is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.

7. When the purée is hot, stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon butter. Taste once more and adjust the seasoning if needed. Divide the soup evenly among 6 warmed soup plates. Gently shake each plate to distribute the purée in an even layer. Spoon some of the Parmesan cream into the center of the purée in a rough "C" pattern. Serve immediately.

Each serving: 142 calories;

5 grams protein; 10 grams carbohydrates; 3 grams fiber;

10 grams fat; 6 grams saturated fat; 30 mg. cholesterol; 347 mg. sodium.

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Bhel puri (snack mix with vegetables)

Total time: 55 minutes

Servings: 4 to 6

Note: This variation on a traditional Indian snack ran with an April article by Barbara Hansen about Bombay street foods. It's from Raunaq Savur of Rasa Catering. Sev, fine, crisp chickpea flour noodles, and Khatta Meetha, an Indian version of Chex Mix, are available at Indian markets. Serve with red chili chutney, green chutney and date and tamarind chutney. The chutney can be made in advance. To reduce the heat of this spicy dish, use half a jalapeño or less chutney.

Red chili chutney

1/2 cup lemon juice

2 tablespoons water

5 cloves garlic
Combine the lemon juice, water, garlic, chili powder, paprika and sev in a blender and blend until all ingredients are incorporated. Makes two-thirds cup.

Snack mixture

1/2 cup roasted peanuts
1/2 cup sev
3 cups (about 8 ounces)

Khatta Meetha

1 cup chopped onion, divided
1 cup diced seeded Roma tomatoes, divided
1 1/2 cups diced, boiled, peeled russet potatoes, divided
1 jalapeño, finely chopped
1/4 cup lemon juice
3 tablespoons date and tamarind chutney, plus more to pass
3 tablespoons green chutney, plus more to pass
2 tablespoons red chili chutney, plus more to pass
Salt, pepper

1. Mix the peanuts, sev and Khatta Meetha in a baking pan. Bake at 250 degrees for 15 minutes.

2. Place the baked mixture in a large serving bowl. Add one-half cup onions, one-half cup tomatoes, three-fourths cup potatoes, the jalapeño, lemon juice, 3 tablespoons date and tamarind chutney, 3 tablespoons green chutney and 2 tablespoons red chili chutney.

3. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Mix well and serve immediately. Place the remaining onions, tomatoes and potatoes in small bowls and set out with additional amounts of the chutneys for guests to add as desired.

Each of 6 servings: 343 calories;
12 grams protein; 37 grams carbohydrates; 8 grams fiber;
23 grams fat; 1 gram saturated fat;
0 cholesterol; 491 mg. sodium.

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Tortilla Española with shishitos

**Total time:** 1 hour, 10 minutes

**Servings:** 6 to 8

**Note:** In July, Test Kitchen intern Ana Ortiz Longo wrote about Japanese shishito peppers, increasingly available in groceries and farmers markets. They reminded her of pimientos de Padrón from her grandmother's home region, Galicia, so she tried them in a Spanish tortilla.

15 shishito peppers, halved, seeded and stemmed

1 1/2 pounds Yukon Gold
potatoes

1 medium onion

4 cups canola oil

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more if needed

2 teaspoons salt

9 eggs

1 tablespoon chopped parsley

1. **Slice the peppers** lengthwise into one-eighth-inch strips (about 1 1/2 cups). Peel and slice the potatoes into one-eighth-inch slices (about 1 1/2 cups). Thinly slice the onion.

2. **Fill a deep** 11-inch frying pan with canola oil. When it is hot, add the potatoes and onions. The oil should be hot enough to cook the potatoes but not so hot that it will fry and burn them, about 220 degrees. Stir occasionally so the potatoes don't stick. Cook for 7 to 10 minutes.

3. **When the potatoes** are soft and knife-tender, add the sliced peppers. Cook for an additional 2 to 3 minutes. Remove the potatoes, onions and peppers with a slotted spoon to a paper towel-lined bowl. The oil will drain to the bottom. Let the cooking oil cool, then discard.

4. **Whisk the eggs** in a separate bowl. Add the potato-pepper mixture and gently fold to combine. Season with 2 teaspoons of salt.
5. **In a 10-inch** nonstick frying pan, add two tablespoons olive oil. Heat over medium heat. When it is hot, swirl it around so that it coats the pan. Pour in the egg-potato mixture and gently move the pan in a circular motion a few times so that the egg doesn't stick. Smooth out the potatoes on top, if necessary, to make an even surface. Cook on medium heat for 5 minutes, then reduce the heat to low. Cook until the tortilla starts to bubble and the sides are firm and somewhat set, about 20 minutes.

6. **To turn the tortilla,** place a large, flat plate over the frying pan and turn the tortilla onto the plate. If the frying pan is dry, add additional oil as needed. Gently slide the uncooked side of the tortilla back into the pan. Cook 1 to 2 minutes, until golden and set, again moving the pan in circular motions. Remove from the heat, place a large serving plate over the pan and carefully invert onto the plate. Sprinkle with the chopped parsley and serve.

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**Each of 8 servings:** 393 calories; 10 grams protein; 22 grams carbohydrates; 4 grams fiber; 30 grams fat; 4 grams saturated fat; 238 mg. cholesterol; 668 mg. sodium.

**Nancy Silverton's burgers**

**Total time:** 40 minutes

**Servings:** 6

**Note:** This recipe from Nancy Silverton was the centerpiece of a story by Emily Green. According to Silverton, the key to a great hamburger is the meat, which should have ample fat. Ask the butcher to coarsely grind 2 3/4 pounds of prime chuck (10% to 15% fat) with 4 to 6 ounces of prime sirloin fat (the combination should have 20% to 28% fat total). Though she offers three cheeses, she says that from experience, most takers go for Gruyère, 25% might take cheddar and one of a group will want blue. The cheeses should be good quality, such as Point Reyes Blue, aged Gruyère and Grafton cheddar from Vermont or Fiscalini or Straus cheddar from California. The buns should be good-quality soft sesame or poppy seed hamburger buns.

**Toppings**

- 12 strips applewood-smoked bacon
- 2 ripe avocados
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons snipped chives
- Sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 large, ripe heirloom tomato
- 1/2 red onion
- 3 ounces blue cheese
- 3 ounces cheddar
3 ounces Gruyère
6 iceberg lettuce leaves, each about 5 inches wide
Heinz ketchup
Best Foods mayonnaise
(or Hellmann's, east of the Rockies)
Dijon mustard, smooth and coarse-grained
Pepperoncini
Dill pickles, sliced vertically in quarters or eighths

1. **Fry the bacon** in a hot skillet until done but not too crisp, about 8 minutes. Drain on paper towels and set aside.

2. **Cut the avocados** into quarters or sixths. Sprinkle lightly with lemon juice, add the chives and toss. Season with sea salt and pepper. Set aside in a serving dish.

3. **Cut the tomato** into slices about one-fourth-inch thick and season lightly with sea salt and pepper. Set aside. Cut the red onion into very thin (about one-eighth-inch) slices and season lightly with sea salt and pepper. Set aside.

4. **Crumble the blue cheese** and cheddar into separate serving bowls. Slice the Gruyère with a cheese plane onto a serving plate and set aside.

**Burgers and assembly**

6 large sesame or poppy seed hamburger buns

Olive oil

About 3 pounds ground beef (see note)

3 teaspoons kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1. **Brush the cut side** of each bun with olive oil and set aside. Light an outdoor grill or place a seasoned cast-iron skillet over high heat.

2. **Being careful** not to overwork the meat, shape it into 6 patties, about 2 inches thick and 4 inches in diameter. Sprinkle each side of each patty with about one-fourth teaspoon of kosher salt and 4 to 6 grindings of freshly ground black pepper.

3. **Place the burgers** on the hot grill or in the hot skillet. Sear them until they can be turned without sticking, then turn them. For rare, cook about 4 minutes, then flip and cook another 4 minutes (for medium-rare, 5 minutes on each side; for medium, 6 minutes).

4. **As the burgers** are cooking, toast the buns, cut side on grill or pan, for a minute or two. Just before the burgers are done cooking, garnish with a little good-quality sea salt, then top with cheese and let it melt. Have guests place lettuce, onion, tomato, bacon and avocado on the bottom half of their toasted bun. Place the burger on top, then cover with the top of the bun. Serve ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard, pepperoncini and dill pickles with burgers.
Each serving (with 2 slices bacon, 1/6 an avocado and 1/2 ounce of cheese): 794 calories; 50 grams protein; 36 grams carbohydrates; 6 grams fiber; 50 grams fat; 17 grams saturated fat; 160 mg. cholesterol; 1,351 mg. sodium.

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Pear and cardamom upside-down cake

Total time: 1 hour

Serves: 8

Note: A celebration of autumn pears was the occasion for this recipe from Mary Ellen Rae of The Times Test Kitchen. Buy green cardamom pods, then remove and grind the seeds for the freshest cardamom flavor.

1 1/2 cups flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground cardamom (from about 6 to 8 pods)
3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) butter, room temperature, divided
3/4 cup packed golden brown sugar
2 firm-ripe Anjou pears
1 tablespoon lemon juice
3/4 cup sugar
2 eggs, room temperature
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 cup milk, room temperature

1. Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Generously butter a 9-by-1 1/2-inch round cake pan.

2. Sift the flour, salt and baking powder together. Stir in the cardamom and set aside.

3. Melt one-fourth cup butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add the brown sugar and stir for 2 to 3 minutes, until the sugar has melted and combined with the butter. Pour the mixture into the prepared cake pan, spreading it to reach the sides.

4. Peel the pears, cut in half and remove the core and stem. Cut each half crosswise into one-fourth-inch-thick slices. Arrange the pear slices in a slightly overlapping
circle around the cake pan, starting at the outer rim. Finish with several slices in the center. Sprinkle the pears with the lemon juice. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside.

5. **Beat the remaining** one-half cup butter in the bowl of an electric mixer until soft and fluffy. Add the sugar and beat until smooth. Add the eggs one at a time, beating after each addition. Beat in the vanilla, scraping down the sides of the bowl when needed. Alternately add the flour mixture and the milk, beating after each addition just until combined.

6. **Gently spoon** the cake batter on top of the pears, smoothing out to the edge of the pan and making sure the cake batter fills in around the pears.

7. **Bake until the top** is a deep golden brown and a skewer inserted in the center comes out clean, about 40 minutes. Place the cake on a rack to cool for 5 minutes in the pan.

8. **Run a small spatula** or knife around the edge of the pan and invert onto a cake plate, leaving the pan on the cake for 10 minutes. Carefully remove the pan. Serve warm or at room temperature.

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**Each serving:** 447 calories;

5 grams protein; 66 grams carbohydrates; 2 grams fiber;

19 grams fat; 12 grams saturated fat; 100 mg. cholesterol; 230 mg. sodium.

**Slow-scrambled eggs with prosciutto**

**Total time:** 20 to 30 minutes

**Servings:** 4

**Note:** Donna Deane's explication of the technique for making creamy, luxurious, slow-scrambled eggs included this inspired open-face sandwich recipe.

4 slices rustic bread, about 1/2 inch thick

1 tablespoon clarified butter or olive oil

1 clove garlic, cut in half

6 eggs, at room temperature

2 tablespoons butter, divided

1/4 teaspoon salt

Pinch of white pepper

4 slices prosciutto di Parma
1. **Brush the bread slices** with clarified butter or olive oil. Toast the bread in a large skillet over medium-high heat until browned on both sides, 5 to 6 minutes. Rub each slice with the cut garlic clove and set aside.

2. **Whisk together** the eggs, 1 tablespoon butter cut into small pieces, the salt and white pepper.

3. **Melt the remaining** 1 tablespoon butter in a 9-inch nonstick skillet over low heat. Add the eggs and cook, stirring occasionally, until they begin to set on the bottom, about 2 minutes.

4. **Continue to cook**, stirring almost constantly, until the eggs become creamy, with a texture resembling small-curd cottage cheese. Continue cooking and stirring until they begin to thicken and become less glossy but are not quite done, 8 to 15 minutes.

5. **Remove the eggs** from the heat and stir for about a minute to finish the cooking. They should be very creamy, with very small curds.

6. **Divide the eggs** onto the toasted bread and spread over each slice. Top each serving with a slice of prosciutto.

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**Each serving**: 273 calories; 15 grams protein; 11 grams carbohydrates; 1 gram fiber; 19 grams fat; 9 grams saturated fat; 353 mg. cholesterol; 640 mg. sodium.

**Mushroom and winter squash gratin**

**Total time**: 1 hour, 40 minutes

**Servings**: 8 to 10

**Note**: In October, Russ Parsons shared a quick-searing technique for cooking mushrooms that makes even domestic mushrooms taste wild and woodsy. This standout recipe is drawn from that article.

1 (3 1/2 - to 4-pound)
spaghetti squash

1 1/4 pounds mixed
mushrooms (portabello, cremini, white button)

4 tablespoons plus 1 1/2
teaspoons butter, divided

2 3/4 teaspoons salt, divided

2 tablespoons minced
shallots

3 slices prosciutto, cut in thin slivers
2 leeks
1 cup crème fraîche
1 cup cream
1/2 round loaf (about 4 ounces) day-old sourdough
1/3 cup (1 ounce) freshly grated Parmesan

1. Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Cut the squash in half and remove the seeds. Place the squash cut-side down in a roasting pan and add about half an inch of water. Bake until the squash is easily pierced with a knife, about 1 hour.

2. Wipe the mushrooms clean, trim any hard stems and cut them into thick slices. Heat 3 tablespoons of the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat until the foam has subsided and the butter turns a light hazelnut color. Add the mushrooms, sprinkle with three-fourths teaspoon salt, cover tightly and cook, tossing occasionally, until the mushrooms begin to glisten and give up their moisture, about 3 minutes.

3. Remove the cover, add the shallots, raise the heat to high and continue cooking, stirring constantly until the mushrooms are richly aromatic and soft, but not flaccid, about 3 minutes. Transfer the mushrooms to a bowl and set aside.

4. Reduce the heat to low and, without wiping out the pan, add the prosciutto. Cook on low heat for about 5 minutes. Meanwhile, cut away the dark green leaves of each leek, then cut in quarters lengthwise, leaving the leeks attached at the roots. Rinse thoroughly under cold, running water and slice thinly crosswise. Add the leeks to the prosciutto and cover tightly. Let the prosciutto and leeks sweat slowly, stirring occasionally until the leeks are quite tender, about 10 minutes.

5. Add the mushrooms back to the pan along with any liquid that has accumulated in the bottom of the bowl. Stir to combine with the prosciutto and leeks. Add the crème fraîche and continue to cook slowly, stirring occasionally, while you clean the squash.

6. Remove any scorched spots from the cut side of the squash. Hold one squash half over a large bowl, and with a fork, scrape out the strands, separating them as you work from one end of the squash to the other. When there is little left but the skin, empty the squash strands into the bowl. Repeat with the other half, adding it to the same bowl. Season the squash strands with 2 teaspoons salt and stir well to combine.

7. Add the mushroom mixture to the squash and again stir to combine. Transfer the mixture to a 2-quart gratin dish, mounding it slightly in the center. Add the heavy cream, shaking the pan gently to distribute the cream through the squash. The cream should just be visible around the edge of the squash. Bake until the cream is bubbling and beginning to darken around the outside, about 15 minutes.

8. While the gratin is baking, prepare the bread crumbs. Cut away the crusts of the bread and cut the interior into cubes. Process in a blender to make coarse bread crumbs; you should have about 2 1/2 cups. Add the Parmesan and pulse 3 or 4 times to thoroughly combine with the bread crumbs.

9. Scatter the bread crumbs evenly over the gratin, then dot with the rest of the butter. Return to the oven and bake until the top is golden brown, about 15 minutes. Cool slightly before serving.

Each of 10 servings: 292 calories; 7 grams protein; 22 grams carbohydrates; 3 grams fiber; 21 grams fat; 13 grams saturated fat; 62 mg. cholesterol; 245 mg. sodium.
Sage risotto bites

Total time: 45 minutes plus at least 2 hours chilling

Servings: 12 to 16 (makes 64 bites)

Note: When Regina Schrambling wrote about the evolving aperitivo scene in Italy, she shared recipes for snacks to serve with cocktails, including this deliciously clever example.

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus extra for pan
1 medium onion, minced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup Arborio rice
1 teaspoon sea salt
1 cup dry vermouth or white wine
3 cups chicken stock
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper, or to taste
1/2 cup freshly grated Asiago cheese
30 leaves fresh sage (1 large bunch), sliced crosswise into 1/2-inch-wide strips

1. Melt the butter in a deep heavy skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and sauté until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the rice and salt and stir until coated. Stir in the vermouth or wine. Cook, stirring constantly, until all the wine is absorbed.

2. Add 1 cup of the stock and cook, stirring, until all the liquid is absorbed. Repeat with the remaining stock, cooking until the rice is al dente, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the pepper and cheese, blending well. Cool slightly, then stir in the sage, again blending well.

3. Butter an 8-inch-square baking dish. Scrape the rice into it, smoothing the top completely. Chill uncovered until completely set, about 2 hours (or overnight).

4. Just before serving, heat a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Line a platter with parchment paper or waxed paper and set it close by.

5. Using a sharp knife, cut the chilled risotto into 1-inch squares. Using a small spatula, carefully remove each square from the dish and transfer to the hot skillet. Brown on both sides, turning with tongs or a small spatula. Transfer to a serving platter. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Each bite: 24 calories; 1 gram protein; 2 grams carbohydrates; 0 fiber; 1 gram fat; 1 gram saturated fat; 3 mg. cholesterol; 61 mg. sodium.