



Farfalle and Asparagus with a Lemongrass Caviar Cream Sauce

This is a complete meal in one dish, and the caviar adds a lovely touch of elegance. Here we have infused the cream with lemongrass for an unusual flavor combination. Since the caviar will not stand on its own in this dish, you may use a less expensive roe, such as paddlefish or American sturgeon, and not break the bank. Be sure that whatever you choose is of good quality and not overly salty, as this is usually the sign of a product that is past its prime (and has been further salted to extend its shelflife).

4 servings

Ingredients

1 pound box dried or fresh farfalle (can substitute rotini or other similarly shaped pasta)
Kosher salt
1 pound asparagus, sliced on the bias into ½ inch lengths
2/3 cup heavy cream or crème fraîche
1 stalk lemongrass, white part only (or the zest of 1 lemon)
Salt and white pepper, to taste
2 tablespoons beurre manié (see Chef's Note)

4 ounces caviar

Preparation

Prepare the asparagus:

Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Prepare an ice bath in a separate bowl with ice cubes and very cold water. Blanch the asparagus in the boiling water until crisp tender, about 3-4 minutes. Drain the asparagus and plunge into the ice bath to cool. When totally cooled, drain well.

Make the pasta and sauce:

Remove the top and bottom of the lemongrass stalk and the outer leaves, using only the tender white part. Bruise it with a kitchen mallet or the bottom of a pan, and place in a small saucepan with the cream. Heat gently until warmed through and the lemongrass has infused the cream with flavor.

[Chef's Note: You may substitute the zest of 1 lemon if you can't find lemongrass. The lemon will impart a tarter and less subtle flavor. Be sure to peel the zest in large strips so you can remove it easily from the finished sauce.]

Bring 4-6 quarts of salted water to boil in a large pasta pot. Add olive oil and boil pasta until al dente. Meanwhile, bring the heat up on the cream and bring to a low simmer. Simmer gently for a few minutes, until sauce begins to thicken. Add a little salt and pepper and check for seasoning. Remove the lemongrass stalk, add the asparagus and just heat through. Do not overcook the asparagus. If necessary, thicken the sauce with small amounts of beurre manié until it reaches desired consistency. Remove from the heat.

[Chef's Note: Beurre manié is a French cooking term for "kneaded butter." Mix equal amounts of cold unsalted butter and flour and mix with your fingers until a homogenous paste is formed. (It is essentially an uncooked roux.) This paste can be added in small amounts to a cream sauce to thicken it. Stir very thoroughly with each addition, and continue to cook until desired consistency is reached before adding more.]

Drain the pasta without rinsing and add to the cream sauce, tossing gently to combine. Add half the caviar and gently stir to combine.

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Service

Place one fourth of the pasta mixture onto each serving plate. Be sure to evenly distribute the pasta, asparagus, and cream sauce among the dishes. Top each dish with $\frac{1}{4}$ of the remaining caviar and serve immediately.

[Chef's Note: Caviar should never be exposed to direct heat. It is important that the dish be finished and off the heat before adding the caviar in order to avoid damaging the delicate eggs.]

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