

Marvels IN A SHELL

Eggs are a culinary marvel and a workhorse in the kitchen. They turn up on your breakfast plate poached, scrambled, over-easy or sunny-side-up. They help bind burgers and provide structure for baked goods. The yolks produce rich, creamy custards, while the whites can be whipped into light-as-air meringues. And if that isn't enough, they are one of the few food sources that deliver Vitamin D.

While eggs are a familiar sight on our tables, they cause confusion for many consumers. To answer the questions I hear often in my cooking classes, I spoke with Scott Graham, chair of Egg Farmers of Ontario.

Graham, a proud second-generation egg farmer, has seen the industry evolve. "Our food system isn't what's seen on 'Food, Inc.'" Graham says. "The welfare of the birds is the most important thing for the farmer."

He's quick to point out that consumer choice also plays a role. "We will produce whatever type of egg the consumer wants." And consumers want eggs from birds that are allowed to express natural behaviours. Thanks to market changes and consumer demand, Canadian egg farms are phasing out the conventional method, and transitioning to enriched and specialty farms.

Currently, there are four types of housing. Here's Graham's breakdown:

Conventional housing: This is being phased out. In this system, a small number of birds are housed together in a small cage. The cage is off the floor and they perch, but natural behaviour is limited.

Enriched cages: Studies in the United



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States and Europe find this system is the most sustainable. In this system, larger groups of birds are housed in a large cage off the floor. They can perch, scratch, and lay their eggs in a nesting box.

Free-run: In this system, hens are loose and free to move about on the floor within the barn.

Free-range: Like free-run, this system allows for free movement but also allows the hens access to the outside.

Within these systems, you can have regular eggs, omega eggs, which come from hens fed a highly specific diet high in omega-3 content, and organic, which must be free-range and follow organic standards for feed and housing. Regardless of the system, birds are free to eat and drink as they please.

What about egg colour? Unless you're dyeing Easter eggs, the shell colour doesn't matter. Whether an egg is white or brown is determined by the breed of hen and has no impact on nutrition, taste or cooking.

Buying and storing eggs

After you decide which type of egg you want, check the size. Most recipes, especially when baking, call for large eggs. While size might not make a difference to your breakfast, if the eggs are too big or too small, your cake could fail.



Once home, eggs need to be refrigerated. Leave them in their carton to prevent damage. If you find an egg with a cracked shell, throw it out. Cooking won't make it safe to eat.

Many recipes call for room-temperature eggs. This allows them to incorporate seamlessly into a batter. If you need room-temperature eggs in a jiffy, just fill a bowl with warm water and submerge the eggs for a couple of minutes. Then dry them off and proceed with your recipe.

Whipping whites

If whipping egg whites causes you issues, try these simple tips:

- Make sure your beaters and bowl are clean and free from grease. A glass or stainless-steel bowl is better than plastic, which can hold onto grease.
- Eggs separate best when cold, but the whites whip to the highest volume at room temperature. For best results, separate eggs straight from the fridge, then allow the whites to warm up for 15 minutes.
- Whites won't whip if there is any yolk or shell in them. If the shell shatters or a small drop of yolk breaks into the whites, use a piece of shell to scoop out the intruder.
- Don't tempt fate by separating all your eggs into the same bowl. Instead, separate eggs one at a time. Once the yolk has been separated intact, place the whites in the whipping bowl. If the yolk breaks, set the entire egg aside and use it for another purpose.

BY THE NUMBERS

- Egg consumption in Canada has increased by 40 per cent in the past 12 years alone.
- It takes between four and seven days for an egg to go from hen to retail store.
- In the past 50 years, egg production has increased by 50 per cent while the environmental impact has dropped by 50 per cent.
- Although Canada has one-tenth the population of the United States, Ontario alone has 10 times the number of egg-farm families. The U.S. has 50 egg-farming families; Ontario has more than 500. In Canada, there are 1,200 family egg farms.

Source: Scott Graham, Egg Farmers of Ontario



AVGOLEMONO SOUP

This simple classic Greek soup is perfect for using up leftover chicken and rice. Thanks to eggs, the soup is creamy without relying on any dairy.

- 1 litre** (4 cups) chicken stock
- 180 ml** ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) slivered cooked chicken
- 180 ml** ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) cooked rice
- 2 large** eggs, room temperature (3 if using commercial chicken broth*)
- Zest of 1** lemon, finely grated
- 60 ml** ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) freshly squeezed lemon juice (NOT bottled)
- Salt and pepper** to taste

1. In a medium-sized saucepan over medium-high heat, bring the stock to a gentle boil. Add the chicken and rice. Heat until the stock just begins to boil again. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook five minutes.

2. In a medium, heatproof bowl, whisk the eggs with the lemon zest and lemon juice until smooth.

3. Slowly, slowly, slowly pour a ladle of hot stock into the eggs, whisking as you pour. Slowly add a second ladle of hot stock. (This warms the eggs gently. If you add the hot stock too quickly the eggs will curdle.)

4. Remove the saucepan of soup from the heat and slowly pour in the warmed egg mixture, stirring well. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

* A good homemade chicken stock is gelatinous when chilled and produces a full-bodied soup. Commercial broth might have flavour, but it is more watery. I find avgolemono made with homemade stock needs only two eggs, while versions made with commercial stock need a third.

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Servings: 4

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Sweet & Spicy Buttermilk Fried Chicken with Smokey Mac & Cheese

Ingredients for Chicken

- 3 LBS Boneless Skinless Chicken Breast (at Stemmler's)
- 2 Tbsp Montreal Chicken Spice
- 1 Tbsp Garlic Salt
- 1 Tbsp Smoked Paprika
- 2 Tsp Pepper
- 2 Eggs
- 1 L Buttermilk
- ¼ Cup Sriracha
- ¼ Cup Sea Salt Flakes
- Canola Oil for Frying
- 2 Tsp Fresh Thyme Leaves (chopped)
- 2 Cups A/P Flour (or Gluten Free Flour if required)
- ½ Cup Maple Syrup (at Stemmler's)



Ingredients for Pasta

- 1 Cup Dried Penne Noodles
- 2 Shallots (finely chopped)
- ½ LB Butter
- ¼ Cup Yellow Mustard
- 2 Tbsp Worcestershire Sauce
- ½ Cups A/P Flour (or Gluten Free if required)
- 2 Tsp Fresh Thyme Leaves (chopped)
- 1 Tsp Fresh Rosemary Leaves (chopped)
- 1 Tsp Montreal Chicken Spice
- 1 L Milk
- ¼ Cup Oatshine BBQ Sauce (at Stemmler's)
- 1 Cup Smoked Cheddar grated (at Stemmler's)
- 6 Asparagus Spears (grilled then chopped)



Instructions:

1. For the chicken, start by cutting the breasts into 2 or 3 pieces each. Place in a bowl, add half the spices, herbs & seasonings then mix together. Pour half the buttermilk over the chicken, covering it. Mix again then set aside or place in the fridge if you would like to brine it overnight. In separate bowls, add half the flour and the rest of the dry spices, then mix together. In the second bowl, mix the eggs then add the rest of the buttermilk as well as the thyme. In a third bowl add the rest of the flour along with a pinch of salt/pepper.

2. If the chicken has been in the fridge, take it out an hour before you want to begin coating it. Drain the brine and pat dry. Using one hand, lightly dredge the chicken in the flour/spice mix and shake off excess. Then, using the opposite hand (keep one hand for wet and one hand for dry), place it into the buttermilk/egg mixture, again shaking off the excess. Then dredge it one more time in the final flour/salt&pepper mixture. Shake off the excess again then place on a sheet pan.

3. Heat the oil in a heavy pan, about ¼ inch deep. It's hot enough once it gets to 375F (med-hi) *drop some flour into the oil, if it sizzles then the chicken is ready to go in** Carefully place a few pieces in the hot oil, making sure you don't overcrowd the pan. When the chicken gets golden brown and crispy, turn it over. A meat thermometer should read 160F or higher to ensure that it is fully cooked. When done, place chicken on a cooling rack & tray to avoid the bottom getting soggy. Sprinkle with salt flakes and keep warm in low oven.

4. For the pasta, melt the butter in a deep saucepan. Once that's done, add the shallots then let it cook a few minutes longer on low med-low heat until it turns slightly amber. It should start to smell a little nutty too. Add the the spices, mustard, worcestershire & bbq sauces as well as the flour then mix together. It will form a thick paste (roux) so you will need to cook it for a couple more minutes. Slowly whisk in the milk until it turns into a sauce (you may need to add a bit more liquid if it's too thick). Let it cook slowly for a few more minutes, stirring and making sure the bottom of the pot doesn't scorch. The sauce should nicely coat the back of a spoon.

5. Next, while the pasta is cooking, shred the cheese and roast or grill the asparagus then set aside. Once the pasta is drained and rinsed, combine it, the cheese and some chopped asparagus to the sauce, then mix together. If you want, just add some extra cheese on top to along with some toasted bread crumbs or chopped scallions/chives.

6. Finally, mix the maple syrup and sriracha together in bowl, then toss in the warm chicken to coat. Serve immediately with the pasta and your own favourite salad... Enjoy!



For more information on Chef Scott Yates please visit : chefscottcooks.com

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CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉ

Soufflés have a bad reputation for being fussy. In reality, they are easy to make. Just make sure the egg whites are at room temperature before whipping — and have no shell or yolk in them.

225 g (8 ounces) dark chocolate
(70 per cent), chopped

180 ml ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) sugar, divided, plus

30 ml (2 tablespoons) for coating

6 large eggs, separated and at room temperature

2.5 ml ($\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon) cream of tartar

Generous pinch fine salt

5 ml (1 teaspoon) vanilla extract

Icing sugar, for dusting

Preheat oven to 200°C (400°F) with the rack positioned in the lower third of the oven. Generously butter six one-cup (250-ml) ramekins; sprinkle with sugar, and tap out the excess.

1. Place the chocolate and one-half cup (125 ml) sugar in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan filled with an inch of hot, not boiling, water. Stir occasionally until the chocolate has melted. Set aside for five minutes to cool slightly. Whisk in yolks one at a time.

2. In a large bowl using a hand mixer or a stand mixer using a whisk attachment, beat the whites, cream of tartar and salt on medium-high until soft peaks form. Add vanilla and remaining sugar in a slow steady stream, beating until the whites are glossy and form stiff peaks.

3. Fold one quarter of the whites into the chocolate mixture to lighten it. Gently fold in remaining egg whites.

4. Spoon the batter into the prepared ramekins. Place ramekins on a baking sheet. Bake, without opening the oven door, for 12 to 18 minutes. The soufflés should be puffed and a thin knife inserted into the centre should come out clean. Dust with icing sugar. Serve immediately.

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

Servings: 6



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